

# Celtic Tiger Ireland, Irish Cinema and Darragh Byrne's *Parked* (2010)

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## *Abstract*

*Daragh Byrne's first feature-length film is about a man's reintegration into mainstream Irish society following his return from England. Parked (2010) reflects on various social and economic issues that have arisen during the Celtic Tiger period and the first year of the Global Recession. Specifically, the article reviews how the issues of homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, and migration are addressed in the film. In order to contextualise the movie, the article provides a wide-ranging, yet thorough analysis of Ireland's social, economic, and political circumstances at the turn of the millennium, as well as a short, but relevant history of the "returning Irishman" topos in cinematic representations of Ireland during the twentieth century.*

*Keywords: Ireland, Celtic Tiger, Irish cinema, social criticism*

## 1 Ireland during the Celtic Tiger Period

Darragh Byrne's multi-award-winning film, *Parked*, was filmed in three weeks, which meant an intense work schedule for those in the leading parts, Colm Meaney, Colin Morgan, and Milka Alroth. The main setting chosen was a long-abandoned car park in Ireland's capital city, located "on the edge of an area of reclaimed land overlooking Dublin Bay" (*CultBox* 2012). Director Byrne described this place as one "strangely trapped in its own world," "cut off from the busy modern ebb and flow of the nearby city" (*CultBox* 2012). According to Byrne, the location was "a perfect mirror to the central characters dilemma:" they were "stuck in a 'no mans land' [*sic!*] of uncertainty" and were "unable to move back or forward until their shared experience creates the impetus for change" (*CultBox* 2012). This shared experience starts with Fred and Cathal's meeting in the car park, where Fred's car is parked facing the Irish Sea. Their story develops from here until its bittersweet end that involves Fred's reintegration into Irish society after many long years living in England.

The Ireland into which Fred tries to settle back has experienced prosperous years during the Celtic Tiger period, and one that is now facing economic and social problems brought about by the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). Ruth Barton draws attention to the fact that films normally take years to develop (2014: 218); hence, the first films of the recession would have been developed during the last prosperous years of the Celtic Tiger. Taking this into consideration, the present analysis of *Parked* considers the film as a product of the last "boom years" and the first "bust years," using Naomi Klein's terms in *The Shock Doctrine* (2007). During the Celtic Tiger, the Irish economy enjoyed unprecedented levels of growth, with high levels of foreign investment and low levels of unemployment. In *The Celtic Tiger: Ireland's Economic Miracle*, Paul Sweeney wrote that "[o]n every data, Ireland consistently outperformed its partners in the EU" and was considered "one of the unsung success stories" (1998: 5). Edward Shinnick remarks in his economic review of the period, "The rise & fall of the Irish Celtic Tiger: why fiscal policy matters," that Irish living standards had increased dramatically, as had the housing bubble, and the Irish government's tax revenues (2013: 58). Foreign direct investment (FDI) increased exponentially during the millennium years (20% of

GDP in 2000), pouring in mostly from the United States of America and the European Union (Shinnick 2013: 57). Irish banks were operating within a global banking system that was thought to be unshakable prior to 2008 and they were offering a “free flow of cheap credits” to both companies and individuals due to the country’s consistently favourable inflation figures and increasingly positive economic output (Shinnick 2013: 57).

Some historians, economists, and social commentators were concerned about the nature and the speed of Ireland’s economic growth even back then. Many found the rate of economic growth and the ways in which the development was generated unsustainable. These commentators were proven right when, following the collapse of the US banking system in 2008, the Irish banking sector was not able to survive without substantial government intervention. Shinnick notes that the Irish government took out an incredible loan to save the Irish banking sector: “€67.5bn in bailout funds from the IMF/EU/ECB were required for the banking and fiscal crises” (2013: 61). “Three decades of financialisation, Europeanisation and worldwide experiments in economic governance” came to an end, writes Seán Ó Riain in *The Rise and Fall of Ireland’s Celtic Tiger: Liberalism, Boom and Bust*, when “Ireland entered the bailout programme in November 2010” (2014: 3 and 2). Following the “boom years,” there was “general disillusionment with the Celtic Tiger,” as Eamon Maher and Eugene O’Brien write in *From Prosperity to Austerity: A Socio-cultural Critique of the Celtic Tiger and its Aftermath* (2014: 7). As a direct consequence of agreeing to the bailout package of the “Troika,” the Irish government had to increase taxes and drastically cut its expenditures. This was happening in a country where unemployment figures were on the rise and economic production was seriously on the decrease (Maher and O’Brien 2014: 4). Maher and O’Brien note that, interestingly, during the Celtic Tiger period, Irish novelists seemed to have avoided exposing certain societal and economic problems for fear of losing funding (2014: 6). Therefore, it is even more interesting that director Byrne decided to engage with some of the pressing social issues of the times: homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse and migration.

## 2 Irish Cinema during the Celtic Tiger Period

Debbie Ging makes a compelling case for cinema being a form of social criticism. In “Screening the Green: Cinema under the Celtic Tiger,” she traces the trait of social-sensitivity back to the 1970s and early 1980s. Ging argues that a main characteristic of First Wave Irish Cinema was an interest in marginalised characters, who lived on the outskirts of mainstream society (2002: 178–179). Joe Comerford’s documentarist-style films, for instance, portrayed characters who were experiencing social exclusion, as witnessed in *Withdrawal* (1973), *Down the Corner* (1978), and *Traveller* (1982) (2002: 180). Second Wave Cinema (i.e., cinema after 1987) “moved steadily toward easy, globally-digestible narratives” but characters and storylines became “increasingly stereotypical and bland,” argues Ging (2002: 185). Gerard Stembridge’s romantic comedy, *About Adam* (2001), for example, steered clear of the socio-realism of documentarist cinema. This film is rich in images of wealthy, modern life: the title character is owner of a light-blue Jaguar, and lives in a busy, modern Dublin. Hugh Linehan notes that Second Wave Cinema presented a new image of Ireland as a “modern, dynamic society ideal for investment by multinational conglomerates” (1999: 46). There were economic factors behind the change of outlook that were consequences of the Irish government’s Programme for National Recovery, introduced in 1987. This programme stabilized the

economy and laid the foundations of the new economic growth of the Celtic Tiger era (Ní Mháille Battel 2003: 99). The country's new-found confidence as an emerging economic power on the European and the global scene was emphasised in the representation of a new kind of masculinity in *About Adam*. Ireland's Third Wave Cinema of the late 2000s and early 2010s found a balance between domestic concerns and global appeal. This bore fruit in films that have brought national and international success: *Once* (Carney 2006), *Garage* (Abrahamson 2007), *What Richard Did* (Abrahamson 2012), *Brooklyn* (Crowley 2015), and *Room* (Abrahamson 2015). These films have won recognition in the Academy Awards, Irish Film & Television Awards, Critics' Choice Awards, Golden Globe Awards, and British Academy Film Awards, and have produced positive financial returns on initial government, EU, and private sector investments. Finally, the film mentioned above promoted the country in a way that was envisioned in the *Final Report of the Film Industry Strategic Review Group (FRFISRG)* and their "Vision of the Future" published in 1999.

As Ruth Barton argues in *Irish National Cinema*, Irish cinema needed to be aware of both its national and international audience, especially during the Celtic Tiger. There was the question of the indigenous, the diasporic, and the international audiences, and the means of financing Irish films through American, European, and local investments (Barton 2004: 4–5 and 7–8). In *Irish Cinema in the Twenty-first Century* (2019), she devotes further attention to the debate around the global and the local as she summarises the economic, social, and political changes in Ireland. She details the changes in Ireland's economic circumstances, in its population through political and economic migration, and in its relation to the Catholic Church, which, for centuries, had provided a social and moral framework for Irish society (2019: 4–5). She remarks on the decline in the number of socially conscious films and the almost complete abandonment of the social-realist documentaries (2019: 15–16). Irish society was coming to terms with its own past and with the political and religious scandals of the past decades, while at the same time, it was welcoming increasing amounts of political and economic migrants from inside and outside the European Union. On the level of the economy, it was embracing modern-day consumer capitalism as it was witnessing growing differences between the wealthy and the poor. Among the results of these developments was a marked indifference to historical narratives, like that of *Michael Collins* (Jordan 1996). As Barton writes in "Between Modernity and Marginality: Celtic Tiger Cinema" (2014), films of the period "have shown themselves to be largely unconcerned with history, locating their narratives firmly in the present, and most often in present-day Dublin" (2014: 222). Those interested in socially charged themes tried their hands at genre films, such as the crime/caper movies, for example, being Lenny Abrahamson's *Adam and Paul* (2004) and *Garage* (2007) (Barton 2014: 227). The mainstream film industry of a now prosperous, multicultural country promoted films that reflected the new social and economic circumstances. Barton asks the following questions concerning this: can mainstream Irish cinema still function as a "social mirror;" and is it still possible for it to reflect on Irish society, as opposed to embracing the changes wholeheartedly? (2019: 6). Barton was not alone in asking these questions; a decade earlier, similar issues had been raised about modern Irish drama in Christopher Murray's seminal critical work *Twentieth-Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation* (1997).

### 3 *Parked* and the Irish Cinematic Tradition

Documentarist Darragh Byrne brought out his first feature-length film in 2010. *Parked* is a good example of the transnational cooperations that create cinema in Ireland in the twenty-first century: the film was made by Ripple World Pictures, Helsinki Filmi, Bord Scannán na hÉireann/Irish Film Board, Suomen Elokuvasäätiö/Finnish Film Foundation, and Radio Teilifis Éireann (RTÉ). As a work of transnational collaboration, it was financially supported by the MEDIA Programme of the European Union. *Parked* had its roots in First Wave Irish Cinema in that it is indebted to the tradition of portraying marginalised characters. Its concept was not dissimilar to that of Joe Comerford's realist short films from the 1970s and 1980s in its representation of the "underground" world of substance abuse that is presented as a direct consequence of a series of societal failures and personal mistakes. *Withdrawal* was intended to be an unabashed representation of "institutional confinement" to which heroin addicts were subjected in psychiatric wards (Finn 2012: 21). When it came to cinematography, Comerford used a string of close-ups to emphasise the anguish and hopelessness of those who suffered from heroin addiction. Byrne uses a similar technique to highlight Cathal's never-ending struggle with heroin and other chemical substances. Besides *Withdrawal*, *Parked* has a thematic link to Lenny Abrahamson's multi-award-winning *Adam and Paul* (2004), a cult film of Second Wave Irish Cinema that portrayed two heroin addicts from inner-city Dublin. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is called into analyses of the film (Monahan 2006), as it traces two junkies' journey through Dublin until one of them dies of overdose in Dublin Bay. Darragh Byrne's *Parked* picks up on the theme but adjusts it to the demands of Third Wave Irish Cinema. *Parked* was to divert from the gruesome realism of Comerford's *Withdrawal* and Abrahamson's *Adam and Paul*, as indicated by Byrne: in an interview with *CultBox* (2012), he said that *Parked* was to have a "warm and engaging story with integrity and charm." This embrace of the audience-friendly style of mainstream Third Wave Cinema was in line with the recommendations of the *Final Report of the Film Industry Strategic Review Group (FRFISRG)* and their "Vision of the Future" mentioned earlier. *Parked* engages with the long-standing cinematic tradition of representing the marginalised, but it reinvents this tradition to meet the needs of commercial cinema that was successful at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The *Final Report of the Film Industry Strategic Review Group* (1999) outlined the strategies for the development of the Irish film industry between 2000 and 2010, the height of the Celtic Tiger period. Some of the elements of these new strategies were a government-funded script and project development scheme, increased support for the building of indigenous film companies and production environments, and better product management on the global market. Barton writes that, by the end of the Celtic Tiger period, some £17 million a year was spent on indigenous film production (2014: 220), sourced mostly by direct funds from the Irish Film Board and tax incentives offered by the Irish government under Section 481 of the Finance Act (FRFISRG 1999: 14). The Irish Film Board (Bord Scannán na hÉireann) took an active role in the funding and promoting indigenous films, successfully drawing on public, private and European funds (MEDIA Programme). The Irish government offered direct support to small and medium sized Irish firms (SMEs) to assist their growth and their entering the globalised market economy through the Irish film industry (FRFISRG 1999: 31). This amount of money was poured into the Irish film industry because, as the SRG put it, "a substantial and vibrant Irish film and television industry [was] critical to a full realisation of Ireland's cultural and economic potential in the world" (FRFISRG 1999: 13). Ireland, it was suggested, was to

have a ‘strong and distinctive presence’ in the media of film and television, both home and abroad (*FRFISRG* 1999: 13), to boost the country’s image for potential investors. Ireland had been known for its “powerful storytelling tradition” in the field of literature and drama, stated the *FRFISRG*, and Ireland was in a good position to share this tradition with a global audience (1999: 13 and 32). As the document further claimed, a country’s cinematic representation was “the most powerful form of cultural expression [...] at the cutting edge of a global media revolution” (*FRFISRG* 1999: 49).

*Parked* resonated with the audience and was welcomed by the film industry. It won awards in Boston, Paris, Brussels, Mannheim-Heidelberg, and it bagged the coveted Best First Feature Award at the Galway Film Fleadh, Ireland’s most prestigious film festival. *Parked* was well received internationally and domestically, as were other films in the past that used the topos of the “returning Irishman.” Around the time of the release of *Parked*, there were at least three other feature-length films that used it: *Leap Year* (Tucker 2010), *Jimmy’s Hall* (Loach 2014), and *Brooklyn* (Crowley 2015). The topos itself dates back to the first decades of the twentieth century, to Kalem Brothers’ silent, black-and-white film, *The Lad from Old Ireland* (Olcott 1910). This film tells the story of Terry (Sydney Olcott), the newly elected mayor of New York, who returns to Ireland to save his childhood sweetheart’s family from being evicted from their property. John Ford’s *The Quiet Man* (1952) recounted the story of the re-integration of renowned Irish American boxer Sean Thornton (John Wayne). In this Oscar-winning movie, the title character successfully reclaims his childhood home and marries his Irish sweetheart, Kate Danaher (Maureen O’Hara). Another version of the “returning Irishman” character appears in Alan Parker’s *The Commitments* (1991), a BAFTA-winning adaptation of Roddy Doyle’s novel of the same title from 1987. Saxophonist Joey “the Lips” Fagan (Johnny Murphy) comes back to Ireland to partake in the formation of a new Dublin Motown band, *The Commitments*. Of these iconic films, Alan Parker’s *The Commitments* seems to be the closest to Byrne’s *Parked* in that it represents serious social issues: its main characters are living on the dole or working in poorly paid jobs; they are rehearsing in the shabby backstreets of the northside Dublin, and Ireland’s capital looks dirty and rundown, very different from the modern *chic* of Celtic Tiger Dublin in Stemberge’s *About Adam* (2001). Within this cinematic tradition, the Irish community tended to look upon the “returning Irishman” character as someone successful, especially because they were returning from the prosperous and powerful United States. Byrne’s *Parked* offered a new take on the topos: the main character is broken, homeless, and unemployed. He is unable to save his friend from drug-related violence and heroin overdose. However, his reintegration seems to succeed eventually, with the help of a female character, called Jules. This variation of the topos allowed the filmmakers to reflect on consumer-driven capitalism, while at the same time offering a heartwarming story that audiences would still care to watch.

## **4 *Parked* as Reflection on Celtic Tiger Ireland**

### *4.1 Homelessness and Unemployment*

Fred Daly (Colm Meaney), the “returning Irishman,” is re-engaging Irish society, having spent time in England. He seems to have worked a few manual jobs there, but not much is revealed about his life abroad. He lived in England during the “Cool Britannia” period, when Britain

was “riding the tiger of economic progress” (Kramer 2003: 78).<sup>1</sup> Kramer (2003) explains that during the New Labour Era of Prime Minister Tony Blair (between 1997 and 2007), the UK government prided itself on currency stability, revenue increase, rising employment rates, increasing consumption and interest in communication technologies. Fred’s failure is epitomised in the fact that Fred could not avail of any of the opportunities in Britain, despite New Labour’s minimal wage scheme and programmes of social inclusion. He returns to Ireland only with some cash and starts living in an abandoned car park in Dublin Bay. His weekly visits to the Social Welfare Office lead him nowhere. Fred has no fixed abode; therefore, he is not entitled to social benefits, and the welfare officer does not seem to be able to find work for him. According to Irish law, in order to fulfil the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) that would have qualified him for social welfare benefits, such as Jobseeker’s Allowance, he would have needed permanent residency in Ireland. Fred returns to Ireland at a challenging time: the country is on the onset of the Global Recession and in talks with the “Troika” of EU/IMF/ECB to agree to the bailout package, as Shinnick explains (2008: 61). Finding work during this time was not easy. While unemployment “was virtually eliminated” in Ireland during the Celtic Tiger, as Peadar Kirby notes in *Celtic Tiger in Collapse: Explaining the Weaknesses of the Irish Model* (2010: 2), there was a sharp rise in unemployment figures in the subsequent years. Predictions for 2010 were reaching 17 per cent of the Irish labour force (Kirby 2010: 2). Kirby further notes another important aspect: “the ratio of social security spending to GDP fell markedly” in a country that had already given “priority to economic growth over social equity” (2010: 8). Neglecting the Irish work force at this important time significantly contributed to the increased unemployment figures post-Celtic Tiger. Unlike *The Commitments*, there are no long queues waiting for news of employment. However, the fact that the welfare officer shuts down all conversation with Fred points out the difficulties that Director Byrne intended to address in the post-Celtic Tiger Ireland of his time.

Apart from unemployment, homelessness, and the housing crisis, are also addresses in *Parked*. Fred’s first trip to Dublin takes him to his childhood home, now occupied by a young family who had bought the house from Fred’s father. Fred is too ashamed to have a long conversation with the family and lies about his current situation. Close-up shots convey Fred’s inner turmoil as he sees his childhood home and his favourite tree now belong to someone else. As sad and devastating as this moment is for Fred, the close-ups director Byrne uses accentuates the film’s message that Fred needs to move away from the memories of the past (*CultBox* 2012). Fred then returns to his worn car in Dublin Bay and sets to work mending watches, an appropriate metaphor for fixing lost time. Fred practically *lives* in his car and is entirely self-sustained: he has water to make a cup of coffee, a table to use for his dinners, a plant to look after, and a notebook that he uses as a diary. He has tools for mending clocks and watches, and warm clothes to wear in the cold weather. His circumstances indicate that he had not moved onto the property ladder in England, and it does not seem likely that the circumstances would be different in Dublin. Denis O’Hearn explains the situation with housing during the Celtic Tiger in “Macroeconomic Policy in the Celtic Tiger: A Critical Reassessment:” house ownership and affordable housing had become largely unattainable by the mid-2000s, with the lack of social housing being an even bigger issue (2003: 49). In *The Celtic Tiger? The Myth of Social Partnership in Ireland*, Kieran Allen states that those in need of appropriate housing at

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<sup>1</sup> For further details on the social and economic policies of the “New Labour” government of Prime Minister Tony Blair, see Michael Kitson and Frank Wilkinson’s “The Economics of New Labour: Policy and Performance” (2007), and Martin Powell (eds.), *Modernising the Welfare State: The Blair Legacy* (2008).

the height of the Celtic Tiger was somewhere around 135 000 (2000: 95). As data shows, Ireland's "social provision legged badly behind that of many European countries" (Kirby 2010: 7) and homeless figures doubled between 1996 and 2006 (McVerry 2008: 371). *Parked* prioritises the issue of homelessness, which strongly suggests that Third Wave Irish Cinema was well able to tell stories of social engagement, if filmmakers' will had been there. As the *Final Report of the Film Industry Strategic Review Group* and their "Vision of the Future" recommended, those were the stories that "societies need[ed] to hear" (1999: 49).

#### 4.2 Homelessness and Substance Abuse

Cathal O'Regan's (Colin Morgan) storyline reflects on the issue of substance abuse. Fred and Cathal's scenes on the seashore are shot in greyish-blue colours that emphasise the melancholy of the characters, unsure of their future. Father Peter McVerry, who had been caring for young drug offenders in Dublin for decades, has drawn attention to the correlation between homelessness and drug consumption in Ireland. According to him, during the Celtic Tiger, drug consumption among the young was on the rise due to the increased availability of substances, from heroin and cocaine to cannabis and other chemical substances (2008: 373). Cathal O'Reily is one of those homeless young people who is caught up in Dublin's drug scene. There are scenes in *Parked* when he is being pushed for money, including one in which the drug gang kicks him nearly unconscious. The situation comes to the point where Fred even offers whatever little savings he has to rescue Cathal from the violent gang. He does this in return for Cathal's promise of getting off heroin. Cathal, however, cannot keep this promise; there is a scene in which he is seen rummaging through his father's belongings in search of cash to pay off his dealers. Cathal's return to the family home is fraught with problems as his father blames Cathal and his self-destructive lifestyle for the death of Cathal's mother. The relationship between the father and the estranged son is portrayed sensitively in the film, and the father now sadly succumbed to the inevitable fate of his son. Father Peter McVerry explains that it was not uncommon for families to be giving up on their young as they had no means to change their behaviour, nor their dangerous and violent social circle. McVerry correlates homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health issues in Irish society: "some people became homeless because their families were unable to cope with the behaviour that their mental health problems created; being homeless then intensified their mental health problem" (2008: 372).

Cathal builds a new father-son relationship with Fred. He channels all his boyish affections towards a father figure into his mission to help Fred settle back into Ireland. He assists the older men in his quest for social housing and welfare benefits and encourages them to seek a partner in Jules, the widowed Finnish piano teacher, whom Fred meets regularly in the local swimming pool. Cathal is successful in Fred's social reintegration, but he cannot find a way back to mainstream society. To emphasize this fact, director Byrne uses a modern paraphrase of the first lines of Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* from *La Divina Commedia*: "In the middle of the journey of life, I was in a dark wood, for I had lost the true path, and so we came forth and once again beheld the stars" (1:18:51–1:19:32). Fred quotes these lines while himself and Cathal are sitting in the car on the hilltop, looking down on the "city of fireworks," as Cathal describes night-time Dublin that sparkles with its lights. Cathal indeed seems to have lost "the true path" and was living in his *inferno*. Fred quotes the lines again—this time in full—at Cathal's coffin as he gently lays his notebook with the quotation on Cathal's corpse. Dante's words connect various threads of the story: Fred, too, used to be in the "dark woods"

of his life, until he “beheld the stars” and “came forth” from the state of stasis, with Cathal’s assistance. Further to this, the quotation makes another poignant connection, the one between the “fireworks of stars” that sparkled over night-time Dublin and the roadside bonfire where homeless addicts gather for the cold and windy night. Cathal dies at this bonfire from an overdose of heroin and other mind-altering substances, having been beaten near unconscious again by his drug dealers. Byrne’s film follows reality closely in its depiction of social exclusion and drug abuse, commenting on contemporary Ireland. In his article “Problem Drug Use and the Political Economy of Urban Restructuring: Heroin, Class and Governance in Dublin” (2005), Michael Punch writes that heroin use among the young had been an issue in Ireland’s capital city for decades and argues that there was a direct link between the increase in heroin consumption and the unaffordability of social housing during the Celtic Tiger era. Punch’s findings align with the experiences of those in daily contact with substance users, such as Father Peter McVerry. Poly-drug addiction also became a serious problem in Celtic Tiger Ireland (Windle et al. 2023: 28), one on which Byrne reflects seriously in *Parked*. As a result of the “hedonism [that] was promoted during the boom years as a core economic activity,” “heavy drinking and drug taking became central to the consumer experience of the night-time economy,” write Windle et al (2023: 29). Actor Colin Morgan, who played Cathal, emphasised that his portrayal of Cathal was based on his experience with young poly-drug users whom he had visited in a Dublin rehabilitation centre when preparing for the role (*Cast Interview* 2010). Cathal’s story of substance abuse would have spoken to a wider audience than its most immediate audience in Ireland. In their study, Windle et al. have found, that the poly-drug addiction was not unique to Irish youth; rather, it was a trend in youth culture around Europe (2023: 28). Darragh Byrne had once again chosen to use the path recommended by the *Final Report of the Film Industry Review Group* in their “Vision of the Future.” Director Byrne told a story that resonated both with the domestic audience and audiences worldwide (*FRFISRG* 1999: 33).

#### 4.3 Migration and “Reversed Migration”

Jules’s (Milka Alroth) story taps into the question of migration and “reversed migration,” reflecting on contemporary social debates. As Dermot McAleese states, “Irish GDP per capita at PPP surpass[e]d the UK level in 1996 and the EU average shortly afterwards,” and in 2000 it stood at “115 per cent of EU’s average GDP, compared with the 58 per cent when Ireland joined the Common Market in 1973” (2000: 47). There was a “huge expansion in job opportunities,” with a “reversal from net emigration to significant net immigration” (McAleese 2000: 47). The Irish economy needed an expanding labour force, which resulted in significant population growth between the mid-1990s and 2008 (Fanning 2014: 128). Brian Fanning notes that the number of non-nationals living in Ireland was over 610,000 in 2006 (2014: 130), this number only slightly declining to over 544,000 by the recession year of 2011 (2014: 130).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In Ireland, the term “non-nationals” is used to include refugees and asylum seekers. Steve Loyal notes that, despite the growing numbers of asylum seekers in Ireland during the Celtic Tiger years, the scale of political migration was still significantly lower than the levels of economic migration. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to analyse the life and prospects of those seeking refuge in Ireland, and the cinematic representation of political migration around the millennium. For the examination of these themes, see Steve Loyal’s “Welcome to the Celtic Tiger: Racism, Immigration and the State” (2003) and Agnes Kakasi’s “Migration and ‘Intercultural’ Cinema in Ireland: A New Direction?” (2011).

This increase generated debates on the long-term status of the new arrivals, resulting in a referendum on the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Bill in 2004, the creation of a new post, Minister of State for Integration, in 2007, and the government's publication of the *Migration Report* in 2008. Not convinced that the social integration of non-national workers could be realised, some feared the ever-increasing levels of migration to Ireland. *Parked* presents the issue of non-nationals living in Ireland in a positive light. Director Byrne makes Jules's character a *facilitator*, a means through which Fred finds his way back to Irish society. Jules is a liminal character, both an insider and an outsider. She was born in Finland, but she has been living in Ireland. Her living room is full of memorabilia of her life with Liam and their travels around the world as members of a chamber orchestra. As a social person, she involves Fred in social activities, such as aquatic classes and church gatherings. She stands for *inclusivity* in the film; hence, her religious affiliation is left rather vague. Religious life in Ireland had been mired in controversy since the publication of The Ryan Report in May 2004, which exposed an alarming number of cases of child abuse in reformatories and industrial schools that had been run by the Catholic Church and the Irish state between 1936 and 1999. *Parked* conveniently glosses over these debates, making Jules a member of the fictional "Holy Day Church," a relatively new, evangelical church. What *Parked* presents as *important* concerning Jules's character is her spirituality and her belonging to a local community, not the institutionalised nature of her religious practice, or the religious dogmatism of the church she attends. Similar to her character, her church is also both inside and outside of mainstream Irish society. What is important for the film is that Jules a free-spirited artist, who is stuck in her life, like Fred and Cathal. Jules needs Fred as much as he needs her to get "unstuck," or "unparked" in the life she was leading in Ireland, as director Byrne explained in his interview with *CultBox* (2012).

Cinematically, Jules's scenes balance out the night scenes of Cathal's substance abuse and the seaside scenes of Fred's loneliness, coloured in greys, blues, and bluish black. In terms of the narrative strands of the film, Jules's storyline brings together three metaphors director Byrne uses throughout the film: the water, the clocks, and the music. At first, Fred does not dare to dive into the swimming pool, but only after his experiences with Fred and Jules does he feel the courage to take that "leap of faith." At the end, Fred is seen in a brown-hued scene, jumping headfirst into the water at its deep end, as a sign of him being ready to leap into his new life. He has moved his life from the open waters of the Irish Sea in Dublin Bay, exposed to a variety of natural elements, into the warmth and comfort of a concrete setting of an indoor swimming pool. Parallel to this, at the end of the film, Fred is seen sitting in the comfort of his new home that the Irish state now provides him. A series of clocks line his windowsill, all of them working. He has mended the non-working clocks in his life, as he had mended Cathal's father's watch and returned to him after Cathal's funeral, and as he had mended Jules's clock that stood on her mantelpiece, next to her pictures of worldwide travels. Following this scene, Jules comes to leave a piece of music for Fred. She had been composing a new piece throughout the film, and that piece is now completed and is ready to be given to Fred. She is doing so in the realisation that both of them had helped the other to move out of a state of stasis, and that they need to go their separate ways to arrive at their final destination. Jules is moving back to her family in Finland. Director Byrne flirts briefly with the theme of "reversed migration." As Pilar Villar-Argáiz and Jason King (2015) and Eleanor O'Leary and Diane Negra (2016) remind us, the issue of "reversed migration" became much-discussed when the Global Recession set in at the end of the 2000s. Consulting censuses, Brian Fanning noted that, between 2006 and 2011, the Irish labour market shrank by almost 13%, with labourers moving

back to their home countries (2014: 130). Previously, it was believed that the labour market would take care of the social integration of the new non-national labour force (Fanning 2014: 130); however, it became clear with the arrival of the recession years that the integration of non-nationals had been successful only to a certain degree and, as a result, some of the new labourers decided to return to their home countries. In *Parked*, Jules's return to Finland highlights the bittersweet ending of the film: she and Fred will continue their lives in different countries. Jules becomes the "returning character," like Fred, which completes the narrative cycle of the movie. Joachim Vogt Isaksen (2019) noted that, to a smaller and lesser degree, migration patterns in all EU countries were responsive to the fluctuation of economic stability. Hence, the themes of migration and "reverse migration" of Darragh Byrne's *Parked* would have resonated not just with Irish audiences but with audiences across Europe. This communication across cultures through the medium of film was also encouraged in the *Final Report of the Film Industry Strategic Review Group (FRFISRG)* (1999) and in the guidelines of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union that co-funded *Parked*.

## 5 Conclusion

Darragh Byrne's *Parked* reflects on a number of issues that preoccupied Irish society at the turn of the new millennium, such as homelessness, substance abuse, and migration. These issues are dealt with excessively in *Parked*, while other topics of social debate, such as religion, are entertained only lightly, to maintain the focus on the story of Fred Daly. *Parked* makes use of the topos of the "returning Irishman," which was used surreptitiously in non-indigenous representations of Ireland throughout the twentieth century. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, however, this topos is modified in *Parked* for several reasons: first, to adhere to the realistic strand of First Wave Irish Cinema; second, to use the realistic European tradition of cinema; third, to secure finances from a wide variety of sources, from the Finnish and Irish film industries to the MEDIA support programme of the European Union. The result is a work of art that sends a socially conscious message to both its Irish and its global audiences, a film that serves as a good example of Third Wave Irish Cinema entertaining audiences at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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