A personal filmic exploration
of contemporary
Irish-Australian identity

Fig. 1. The Murray family at their home in Drogheda, Republic of Ireland in 1961.

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2013
Dedication

To Seán, Mary, Ciaran, and those who have gone before us.

Where e’er we go, we celebrate the land that makes us refugees
From fear of priests with empty plates, from guilt and weeping effigies.

Phil Chevron, Thousands are sailing, 1988
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who assisted in this research project which has taken six years to complete. Many people, including friends, family, and colleagues, gave willingly of their time and made huge contributions to the film and research, and I would like to thank all of them most sincerely.

Thanks to the many people who gave generously of their expertise: James Coogan, Natalie Viset, Samira Helmy, Glen Rose, Alex Barry, Peter O’Donoghue, Sinéad Ní Sharseáil, Gillian Jordan, Paddy Jordan, Carol Lobo, Mackey Kandarajah, and Julien Chichignoud.

Thanks to John Michael-Maher for his wonderful animations, to Gerald Lee for his design skills, and to Gemma Boyle for her patience and editing.

For the gift of music I am indebted to Adam Hulbert, Dónal Óg Black, Edel Sullivan, Noel ‘Zap’ Cummins, Elish Quinn, Mick Griffin, Johnny Gray, Fran McPhail, The Mahones, Paddy Keenan, Luka Bloom, Sinéad O’Connor, Elefant Traks, and Shannon Kennedy.

For helping out and general support, my thanks go to: Eoin and Niamh at Great Western Films, Dublin; Robert and Sean at Hunting with Pixels, Sydney; and Rosa Corcoran in Drogheda. Thanks to Adrian Rostirolla and Denis Beaubois for helping out with the antique film and video machinery.

Thanks to Ben Corcoran for the archival photos and film footage of Drogheda.

Thanks to Tulika Dubey, Christy Nguy, and all of the staff behind the scenes at the Institute of Culture and Society for making stuff happen.

Thanks to Ian Walker, Rachel Morley, and Milissa Deitz for their advice and feedback on early drafts, and to Adam Hulbert for his editing skills.

Thanks to the Institute of Culture and Society and The School of Humanities and Communication Arts at the University of Western Sydney. I would particularly like to acknowledge the support of Dr Zoe Sofoulis and Professor Bob Hodge.

I would like to thank my supervisor Associate Professor Hart Cohen for his guidance and advice. I would also like to express my special gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Juan Salazar for his inspiration on the topic and for his time and energy in shaping the ideas and supporting the writing process.
Special thanks to Brendan, Kilian, Dermot, Eoin, Sean, Canice, Sile, Mal, Eamonn, Ronan, Mary, Shamie, Molly, and Brigee Murray.

Finally, I would like to extend an extra special thank you to Monique Potts for sharing this—sometimes bumpy—journey with me. Without her patience, love, and support this project would not have been possible.
Statement of authentication

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.
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Abstract

A personal filmic exploration of contemporary Irish-Australian identity

This thesis consists of two parts: a documentary film and a written exegesis. The film, *Secret family recipes*, explores a personal experience of migration and documents issues of personal identity within broader family, community, and intercultural contexts.

The documentary uses the device of cake baking to provide a narrative spine for the journey of exploration. The filmmaker, Enda Murray, journeys from Sydney back to his birthplace in Ireland in 2007 and helps his elderly mother bake her annual Christmas cake. In the course of this journey, he talks to his mother and peers about their memories of growing up and ponders on his own early family life in Ireland. He then returns to Australia and bakes a cake with his two daughters (ages six and four), using this occasion to reflect on his current family situation.

The exegesis provides a background context in Irish-Australian history and culture. It examines the major influences on the author’s work as an artist and draws on a range of literature to critique the production of *Secret family recipes* against the context of Irish documentary, Irish migrant documentary, and Irish-Australian accented cinema. The exegesis argues that *Secret family recipes* uses elements of ‘performative documentary’, defined by Bill Nichols as documentary that includes the author as a performing character in the film. It also argues that the documentary uses elements of ‘domestic ethnography’, a term coined by Michael Renov to describe filmmaking that explores the complexity of communal or blood ties between the subject and his or her family. This is a form of supplementary autobiographical practice where the subject constructs self-knowledge through the familial other.

This research project proposes a new framework of ‘domestic performativity’ within documentary that combines elements of performative documentary and domestic ethnography. This thesis argues that domestic performativity allows a stylised representation of the subject’s voice and combines elements of documentary and ethnography to produce an enhanced autobiographical product.
Introduction

The creative project

This project has come from a very personal place. In 2005, when my second child was born, I had been living outside of Ireland for twenty years. I felt that I was missing something, in terms of bringing up a family.

On a personal level, I realised that I was missing the wealth of experience that my mother had when it came to bringing up kids. This led me to ask several questions: What else was impacting in my life as a result of living half a world away from where I grew up? Where could I find clues to explain the choices that I had made and the person that I had become? What parts of my Irish identity would I pass on to my children, and which parts would they want?

The research question

These questions formed the starting point for an exploration of my personal migrant experience. Thus, my research question is an open interrogation of the nature of my own Irish-Australian identity: What are the elements that shape my Irishness, and how do my connections to family, community, and country affect my identity? I felt that documentary film was a research medium that could go some way toward combining my personal quest with my academic pursuits.

Thus, in 2007 I decided to go back to my birthplace and seek within my family for answers. I focused my search on my mother, who was at that time an elder (at ninety years young). The main narrative device in the film is my experience of making a Christmas cake with her. Following this, I returned to Australia and made a cake with my daughters, thereby continuing the family tradition of cake making.

Although this investigation starts off with my mother’s story, it also becomes my own story and an intergenerational journey of migration, loss, and renewal. The issues that impact on this journey are culture, migration, politics, family, community, and identity. So, although I begin this exploration with a family story, I also shed light on universal themes through the perspective of my personal lens.
Viewing the documentary and reading the exegesis

This thesis consists of two parts: a documentary film and a written exegesis. I recommend viewing the documentary film before reading the exegesis. The film explores a personal experience of migration. The exegesis provides a background context and offers a critique of the production process of the film.

The film can be viewed online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7mj7ttgjSI.

Synopsis of Secret family recipes

For sixty years, Mrs Mary Murray baked Christmas cakes and puddings for her family and relations in Drogheda. As her family expanded to fourteen children (twelve boys and two girls) the number of cakes she baked also grew. Now, as she approaches her ninetieth birthday, she is struggling to carry on this family tradition.

Domiciled in Sydney, her twelfth child, Enda Murray, has become a father for the second time. At forty-six years of age, he is struggling with the issues which face new parents everywhere. In addition, he has a suspicion that emigration has robbed him of the coping mechanisms that close family ties can bring.

So, after twenty-two years abroad, Enda returned to Ireland with his own family (wife Monique and daughters, Molly [aged four] and Brigid [aged two]) to assume the duties of baking the family Christmas cake with his mum.

This film is based around the activity of cake baking, and is a personal essay about the special relationships between mother and son, father and daughter, and emigrant and home.

Technical notes

Secret family recipes is fifty minutes in length. It was shot on HD video, Hi8 video, Apple iPhone, and Super 8 film. It was mastered in HDV onto hard disc.
Personal stories of migration

John O’Carroll (2000, p. 14) has reflected on the importance of personal storytelling from Australia’s migrant past to a cultural understanding of Australian identity:

Migrancy feels personal, but is structurally social. In this sense, I believe it is important to recall aspects of ‘our’ cultural history so that apparently structural givens can be called into question. Essays in cultural memory are, I believe, vital complements to all those demographic studies of Australian society. In this respect, too much has angrily, stoically, sadly been put behind. In the process, we risk forgetting the very grist of our formation: the stories of dispossession and migrancy in a radically changing world.

My doctoral project consists of a feature length documentary, *Secret family recipes*, and an exegesis. These explore a personal story of migration. I have used a documentary approach to explore issues of personal identity within broader family, community, and intercultural contexts. This investigation is situated within the context of relevant theoretical discourses.

Significance of the research

A notable aspect of this research project is the interdisciplinary nature of the exploration. The investigation contains elements of history, anthropology, politics, art, sociology, and film studies.

The primary mode of investigation is documentary. This is the only approach that can effectively combine the visual, the oral, the performative, and the imaginary in order to communicate the gaps that exist in the knowledge of Irish-Australian identity. Documentary filmmaking is not prescriptive in its revelatory nature, and therefore the use of this approach means that the study is—appropriately enough for the inquiry—free to explore issues that arise along the journey. As Estelle Barrett (2007, p. 186) has suggested, it is useful to view the research project as ‘a movement between what is known and what will be revealed’.
The research questions are focussed on the exploration of personal identity in relation to family, community, and intercultural issues. In this research, I explore the nature of migrant identity and the way that this is passed down to following generations. I also examine the role of memory and place in the formation of identity. I examine the challenges of researching within my family to find clues to my vocation and sensibilities.

This research contributes to the debate about the origin of the term ‘Anglo-Celtic’ and explores the impact of this term on current Australian ideas about multiculturalism. One result of the study will be to build on a tradition of Irish-Australian intercultural filmmaking: which is, at present, in its infancy.

**Chapter summaries**

In Chapter 1, I evaluate the relevant methodologies and confirm the value of practice-based research. I outline the filmmaking process from its conception in 2005 to its completion in 2012. I also discuss the challenges of making the film: particularly the difficulties of making a quality product on an almost non-existent budget. I examine my ‘character’ within the film, and identify how this performance developed in order to accommodate the practical and theoretical obstacles that arose. I describe how I concentrated on shaping the project for a specialist audience as opposed to a general audience. I also outline how I wrestled with the material in the edit stage to find the right style and tone for the work.

In Chapter 2, I sketch a picture of the Irish in Australia and show how they rose from a convict class to become a ruling class. I look at the origin of the term Anglo-Celtic and identify how this term impacts on the broader Australian identity. I consider the place of memory and its importance to migrants, but also suggest the concept of a crystallised memory, which can have an inhibiting effect.

In this chapter I outline the history of documentary film in Ireland: ranging from early practitioners, including Sidney Olcott and Robert Flaherty, through to modern exponents, such as Alan Gilsenan and John T. Davis. I also explore the constant presence of political influence on the Irish media. I examine the influence of Irish
filmmakers working in the UK and USA and compare the impact of their migrancy on the content and form of their films with Irish themed filmmaking in Australia. I examine the emergence of intercultural cinema, and make an argument for the recognition of Irish intercultural film as a body of work.

In this chapter I also track the development of my filmmaking style, and identify the major influences and significant artists who have impacted my philosophy and practice.

In Chapter 3, I trace the emergence of documentary styles that emphasise personal experience. I discuss autobiographical and performative styles of filmmaking, and employ writers such as Stella Bruzzi to highlight the advantages of using a subjective approach and of placing the writer at the centre of the documentary exploration.

In this chapter, I explore Michael Renov’s theory of ‘domestic ethnography’, whereby the subject constructs self-knowledge through an interrogation of the familial other. I quote Michelle Citron’s writings about her own documentary work with her family. These show some of the challenges of working within families to investigate a director’s sensibilities and motives. I then compare and contrast these methods and theories against Bill Nichols’ taxonomy of documentary.

I propose a mix of performative documentary and domestic ethnography as a framework for familial investigation, and coin the term ‘domestic performativity’ to describe this new concept.

In Chapter 4, I highlight the significant outcomes of the research project. I outline responses to the research questions and place these within the context of relevant theoretical discourses.
Chapter 1.

*Secret family recipes*: Staging the creative project

In this chapter, I outline the research framework that was developed for exploring contemporary Irish-Australian identity within the realm of documentary film. I describe the filmmaking process, and highlight the challenges encountered in making the film.

**Section 1.1. Researching the film**

*Using mixed methods to investigate identity within contemporary Irish Australia*

The overarching aim of this film project, *Secret family recipes*, was to investigate my personal journey in moving between Ireland and Australia. I want to emphasise the fact that this is not an exploration of Irish-Australian identity within a traditional ethnographic framework. An objective investigation of Irish-Australian identity would need to take into account the history, religion, situation, and bilingual nature of both countries. Add to this the economic, technical, and cultural realities of Ireland’s links with colonialism and capitalism and some idea of the complexities of the issue can be obtained. Such a study is outside the bounds of this project.

My main research strategy was the use of documentary film practice to reveal and demonstrate my personal journey as outlined above. This allowed me to situate my own experiences within the study. This also allowed me to research within my family for clues to my own construction of identity and to explore what would be passed on to my own children. In this way, I planned to produce a hybrid documentary to explore these issues in a creative way. I was interested in exploring elements of performative documentary, such as foregrounding my personal experiences, in this study. This approach is useful, as the research is based on subjective and experiential material, rather than limited to objective facts and statistics.
For this project I borrowed from several disciplines. I found autoethnography to be particularly useful. However, the framework of pure autoethnography does not allow the exploration of the complexities of the familial and intergenerational experience in my project. In order to pursue the issues of comparative study, I needed to interrogate the members of my family on their lives and experiences. Exploring these familial ties has allowed me to reveal the complexity of the experience of migration.

Thus, in terms of methodological approach, this project brings together a series of processes including performative documentary, autobiography, and autoethnography.

**Using documentary as research**

The passing of individual culinary secrets (recipes committed to memory and not to the page) represents an, often unspoken, continuity within the family line. Often taken for granted within close extended families, this is the type of personal contact between generations that is robbed by emigration, and it is a cultural capital that is impossible to quantify.

I found this idea particularly poignant in relation to my own experiences with my mother. She is not verbally or emotionally expressive; she expresses her feelings in non-verbal ways, such as cake baking. My mother baked almost every day, and at Christmas she would bake upwards of ten cakes and puddings to give as presents to her family and friends. This was why I found cake baking to be such a totemic icon in our relationship, and why I felt that a documentary was the perfect vehicle to investigate this phenomenon, given its non-verbal and visual motifs.

In addition to finding expression for my own exploration of identity through an intergenerational family journey, the documentary approach allowed me to preserve the memory of my mother. This sentiment was part of the reason why I first began to film my mother back in 1998. Michael Renov (1993, p. 25) has described ‘preservation’ and ‘expression’ as two of the basic functions of documentary.
The cake recipe seemed to be a perfect example of a piece of social capital: a family secret that is passed down as a slice of oral history. As a visual device, food provided a perfect way to articulate the concrete feelings of caring and nurturing. The cake that features in this documentary is not just any cake: it is a cake to celebrate the feast of Christmas, the primary Irish cultural festival. In her later years, my mother would bake several Christmas cakes and puddings to give as presents to family and friends, and from October to Christmas the aroma of baking filled her kitchen. By electing to bake a cake with my own daughters I would be able to carry on the metaphor to the next generation.

With this in mind, I developed the narrative structure for the film. The film begins with an observational recording of my mother showing me how to bake a cake, interspersed with short anecdotes about some of the incidents from her life. I then bake a cake with my two daughters. Throughout the baking sequences we are conscious of the presence of the camera and ‘perform’ to it. I am very much a character—a performer—in the film. However, I have also written and edited this piece as a meditation on my own perspective on events. At every stage of the production (writing, directing, and editing) I impose my interpretation of the action and the message that is delivered to the audience. These aspects of the film define it as performative documentary.

I intersperse my own experiences with this material, in order to compare and contrast my own story with hers. For example, I compare her experiences of the sex education she received with my experiences of the same topic, fifty years later.

The interviews with my siblings provide another—perhaps more objective—perspective on the family history, and they also provide a prism by which to interrogate the nature of memory within histories. Thus, on several occasions the notion of ‘family stories’ is used to describe stories where truth and myth have become entwined such that the actuality of events has become confused. Again, documentary was an ideal vehicle for research in this context, as it allowed me to place clips of interview footage of various siblings remembering the same episode alongside each other, to show the similarities and discrepancies in individual memories.
Practice-based versus practice-led research

The terms ‘practice-based research’ and ‘practice-led research’ are often confused, and are used interchangeably by those working in the field of cultural studies (Lebow 2008). For this research, I use the definition supplied by Linda Candy (2006, p. 1):

There are two types of practice related research: practice-based and practice-led:
1. If a creative artefact is the basis of the contribution to knowledge, the research is practice-based.
2. If the research leads primarily to new understandings about practice, it is practice-led.

This Doctor of Creative Arts (DCA) project is thus a practice-based exploration, since it results in a new piece of creative work: the documentary Secret family recipes.

The idea that creative practice can lead to research insights through practice-based research is both exciting and innovative. Practice as research:

Not only produces knowledge that may be applied in multiple contexts, but also has the capacity to promote a more profound understanding of how knowledge is revealed, acquired, and expressed (Barrett & Bolt 2007, p. xi).

The innovative and critical potential of practice-based research lies in its capacity to generate personally situated knowledge and new ways of modelling and externalising such knowledge.

In his book, Arts practice as research, Graeme Sullivan (2005, p. xi) noted that, ‘as an area of individual, social and cultural inquiry, the visual arts have, for the most part, remained outside the mainstream of community debate’. Sullivan argued for the arts to be examined using a framework that positions them within the discourse of research:

A framework for theorizing visual arts practice that describes [an] interdependency of interests, issues, and approaches... a framework
for theorising offers the possibility that visual arts practice can be readily translated into other forms of research language if the purpose demands it. In this way the research culture remains grounded in the theories and practices of visual arts, yet the outcomes can be communicated across disciplines (p. xi).

**Appropriate techniques**

The use of a documentary method allowed me to plan a research outline that played to the strengths of the project. For example, I chose an interview technique where I could chat to my mother in an informal way while we were engaged in the task of baking. As well as providing a visual device for the film, this also encouraged my mother (traditionally a nervous and reticent subject) to focus on the practical task at hand. This allowed her to relax and to ignore the camera and microphone. With this approach, I was able to introduce my mother to the apparatus of filming prior to the necessarily formal one-on-one seated interviews. Sarah Pink (2007) has supported this idea of incorporating appropriate technologies in the planning of cultural research.

An advantage of video was that it allowed me to convey a wide range of sensory experiences. Although it is not possible for the audience to taste the cake or smell the aroma of the cake baking, it is possible—as Sarah Pink (2007) has also pointed out—to represent these sensations audio-visually to an audience using video.

The use of video also allowed me to introduce an extensive library of family photographs into the project. My mother’s family has a rich trove of family photographs due to their middle-class background. The abundance of this visual material is accentuated by the fact that my dad’s family, coming from a remote rural background, has next to nothing in comparison. I have always been fascinated by my mother’s family photos and how they provide an almost physical connection with a shared past. Laura Marks (2000, p. xi) has identified a ‘haptic visuality’ within photography: ‘The way vision can be tactile, as though one were touching a film with one’s own eyes’. She extended this metaphor of the photo containing physical memories as follows:
What I wish to examine... is the holding on to artefacts of culture, including photographs and filmic images, in order to coax the memories from them. It is the attempt to translate to an audiovisual medium the knowledges of the body, including the unrecordable memories of the senses (p. xi).

Roland Barthes (1981, p. 45) also alluded to the physicality of memories that can be obtained through the use of photos;

What I see, by means of this ‘thinking eye’ which makes me add something to the photograph, is the dirt road; its texture gives me the certainty of being in Central Europe... I recognize with my whole body, the straggling villages I passed through on my long-ago travels in Hungary and Romania.

With this in mind, I was able to bring the physicality of personal memory to bear on sections of the documentary (such as the life of my mother growing up in rural Ireland) by using archival images from the family album.

I was also able to use stock footage to strengthen the historical stories that emerged. I procured the use of clips from Bridge of the ford (1948), a publicity film commissioned by the Medical Missionaries of Mary (a Catholic religious order who were headquartered in Drogheda).

At the other end of the time spectrum, I was able to commission new animation sequences, which led the production from the realm of straightforward documentation into the realm of fantasy.

Video also allows the use of sound to enliven and colour the tone of the piece. I thus set about commissioning new music and searching existing music libraries to secure audio that could add a rich texture of emotion to the project.
Section 1.2. Producing the film

Secret family recipes: The devising process

My DCA creative project is a filmic exploration of my migration journey both in my heart and in my head, from Ireland to Australia. In asking the overarching question of what defines contemporary Irish-Australian identity, I wanted to focus on the issues that bind me to a family, a place, and an identity. At the beginning of the project I asked myself the following questions: What was it that binds me to family? Is my lifelong quest for achievement part of a wider search for parental approval resulting from a childhood scramble for attention in contest with thirteen peers? What makes a successful family? What is it that binds me to place? What does community mean for me in this day and age? Why is identity such an important aspect of my life? Why do I continue to identify myself as Irish when I have spent more time living in other places?

I decided to make a documentary film about my journey from Ireland to Australia, although this search for answers would also include my wider family. The quest would include a journey to my place of birth, with all of the accompanying issues that such a journey would bring.

Food—or the shortage thereof—was a key element of my family life. I came up with the idea of the Christmas cake, because the cake itself was such an appropriate metaphor: a piece of social capital, a family secret passed down, a slice of oral history. Exploring the topic of food was an ideal way to investigate the feelings of caring and connectedness that would turn out to be central to this story. I was inspired in this choice by a film called *The Christmas cake* (1996) by Katey and David Grusovin: a touching documentary about the entwined lives of their grandmother and grandaunt. This documentary used cake making as a central device to explore the lives of two Australian women brought together by a marriage and kept together by need. I felt that this could also be an effective device around which to build my own film. The observation and recording of mundane events (as opposed to major family events) would help me to work out the dynamics of my family life and would provide some insight into my relationship with my family and my community in Ireland. By revealing the intensely personal, I intended to illustrate the universal. The cake
making would provide the narrative arc to the film, and interviews would punctuate this tale.

**Chronology of the film production**

I began shooting Super 8 film footage of family events in the late 1980s. In 1995, I began shooting formal interviews with my parents in order to make a video for them for their fiftieth wedding anniversary.

In the late 1990s I decided to document my mother’s life story and began to film interviews with her about her life growing up in Drogheda, using the extensive family photo albums that she had as a trigger for her memory. I did this with the vague intention of putting this material together at some stage: although I had yet to determine the shape or form.

After the death of my father in 1996, I began to appreciate the significance of these oral histories. At this time I was living in Coventry in England, and would return home to Ireland at least once a year. I became the unofficial archivist of the family history, buying photo albums and filling the many family photographs out of the shoeboxes and into these albums. I worked through the photo albums, writing down the details of the subjects and the locations. I was conscious that once my elders were gone, this information would be irretrievable.

After moving to Australia in 1996, it seemed as though my distance from home accentuated this interest in documenting the family history and plotting its spread. I made contact with long lost Australian cousins and became a conduit for their introduction to Ireland and the greater family. I joined a genealogical website and traced the connections between the different strands of the family, plotting over 270 family members onto the website (Murray 2002).

In 2003 I returned to Ireland briefly and filmed my mother baking a Christmas cake. I remarked at the time on the importance of baking in her life and on the place of this ritual in marking a major landmark in her year. The footage was usable, but the audio
was not. However, this did provide me with some useful pointers as to what was required for a proper shoot.

In 2005 I made an application to the Australian Film Commission and received a seed development grant of $5,000 with which to try to secure further funding. I submitted the idea to Documart at the Australian International Documentary Festival in 2005 and 2006 but was unsuccessful. The then title of the film was *Mrs Murray’s Christmas cake* and the script focussed on the story of my mother and how that story contrasted with my own story.

In 2006 I took part in a digital storytelling workshop at Metro Screen in Sydney, led by Dr Gregory Dolgopolov. This workshop was valuable, as it helped me to focus my ideas and complete a two-minute piece, which became a ‘proof of concept’ for the idea (*Mrs Murray’s Christmas cake* 2006).

In 2006 I applied for, and was successful in procuring, a Fellowship from the Community Cultural Development Board (now defunct) of the Australia Council for the Arts. My proposal was to travel to Ireland with my family and make a documentary about the ritual of baking the Christmas cake. By this time the ideas around the cake recipe as cultural capital had begun to crystallise. I saw the potential of the cake making as a narrative spine around which I could build a wider story about identity and belonging.

The script for the film developed from brief outlines and sketches in 2005, to the first draft in November 2006. In deciding my approach to the material I had plenty of possibilities. The creative challenge was to find a filmic language for the emotional ties that bound me to family, community, and identity. I focussed on telling the story with a note of humour. This was to be a lyrical essay—part visual portrait, part meditative reflection on loss and the dilemma of emigration—on the process of living with the duality of a life that could have been.

I travelled to Ireland in July 2007 and set about making contacts with local filmmakers and artists in Drogheda, who could help me with the task of making a film without any substantial budget. The lack of a significant production budget proved to be a major obstacle. I found it frustrating to return to ‘no-budget’
production values having grown accustomed to working at a regular broadcast standard of technical filmmaking.

I did possess my own camera, but without sufficient budget to pay a cinematographer (or to fund even the basics of lighting, sound, or grip equipment) the quality of the sound and image suffered.

Fig. 2. Mrs Mary Murray and cameraman Paddy Jordan during the Secret family recipes documentary shoot in Drogheda in March 2008.

While in Ireland, I made a substantial (and very time consuming) application to the Sound and Vision fund of the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland. I was most disappointed when this application was unsuccessful. I was shortlisted for the Reality Bites strand of the Irish Film Board but was again unsuccessful. I eventually paid for a cinematographer out of my own pocket and finished shooting the material that I wanted in Ireland.

I was interested in exploring the developing world of social media and started accounts on Facebook (Murray, 2007c), Bebo (Murray, 2007a), and MySpace (Murray, 2007d). I also initiated a blog on Blogspot (Murray, 2007b): this was active
while I was in Ireland, but I did not have the energy to continue with it on my return to Australia. On these social media sites I wrote about my experience of returning to my place of birth. I found the diarising a very useful way of committing to paper what was going through my mind as I negotiated the year at home (Murray, 2007b).

I left Ireland in July 2008, and in September 2008 my mother passed away.

I was successful in my application to my Doctor of Creative Arts course and began in 2009. After enrolling at the University of Western Sydney, I was able to use my candidature funds to pay meagre amounts for ongoing costs on the film, such as hiring a cinematographer, transcribing interviews, and hiring an editor. This gave me the confidence to press ahead with the project, and I conducted shoots with my daughters at Christmas 2009 and 2010.

In writing a new script, it became apparent to me that there were gaps in the story that I wanted to tell. I received feedback from script readers, who advised me on ways to improve the program. I was grateful for these comments because they gave some new perspectives on the script: up to then this had been very much my own creation and without any objective external evaluation. Ian Walker, an experienced documentary filmmaker, was especially helpful in advising me to widen the scope of the film to include interviews with my family.

Although I knew that it would be difficult, I decided to approach my siblings to appear in the film. My siblings share my reticence for appearing in front of the camera; one of them almost knocked the camera out of my hand on a previous occasion. Of the eleven siblings I asked, four declined and seven agreed to be interviewed for the film. This process was more straightforward than I had anticipated. I proceeded to interview those who agreed, having given them the questions in advance.

The edit

In writing the script I felt I had to walk a fine line between honesty and narcissism. My experience as a filmmaker had told me that audiences relish intimacy and
conflict. However, there were limits to what I was prepared to do in terms of revealing my private life for the titillation of an audience.

I had explained my objectives in making the film to my mother prior to the commencement of the principal photography, and she agreed to take part in the project. Her pleasant and good-humoured storytelling was a delight to behold, particularly when she was lost in the moment of the story. I myself got ‘into character’ for my time in front of the camera. By default, I struck a kind of jocular presence for the performance, which enabled me to create a sheen of artifice. Strangely enough, this ‘slipping into roles’ was reminiscent, for me, of the relationship that I had with my mother for many years. Ours was more than a superficial relationship; but yet it had a definite—but often undefined—boundary, beyond which I was not to cross. Some of these boundaries were to emerge in the course of creating the work.

The scenes in which I did push the boundaries were, for this reason, some of the most interesting for me. Questions that required her to reveal details of her medical history (for example, when her waters broke at the time she had her first child) she found difficult and at first she responded to them with a weighty and uncomfortable silence. Some of the people I showed the material to were shocked at the intrusive nature of the interview, and they questioned the value of me putting my mother through such obvious discomfort for a limited onscreen outcome. I suppose that I found the camera to be a tool that allowed me to ask questions that I was curious to know the answers to, but had been unable to find an occasion—or a reason—to ask.

In particular, many who viewed my question as to whether she enjoyed sex (this was deleted from the final cut) considered the cut to be cumbersome and uncomfortable for an audience. Nevertheless, this was a question that had been asked of me on numerous occasions and one that I came to ponder on when I myself became a parent. I am reminded of Stella Bruzzi’s (2000, p. 180) analysis that ‘the documentary as prescribed by advocates of observational realism is an unrealisable fantasy’; there were simply too many layers of difference between myself and my mother for us to find common ground on what was acceptable to discuss on camera.
At times, my mother became irritated by the presence of the camera. At these moments the artifice fell away and she was dismissive of my attempts to film. An example was when I attempted to remove the tinfoil lining from the pudding bowl. This was peculiar in that we immediately adopted the respective roles of mother and son, even though it had been more than thirty years since we had experienced such a relationship. I considered these moments to be movie ‘gold’, but the subtleties are difficult to communicate to a documentary audience. In this, I am reminded of the following quote from Damasio, as cited in Siobhan McHugh’s (2010, p. 125) work on orality:

Feelings, along with the emotions they come from, are not a luxury... feelings are just as cognitive as other precepts. They are the result of a most curious physiological arrangement that has turned the brain into the body’s captive audience.

These moments presented difficulties in the editing stage. Many of the early problems in the editing evolved from decisions about the tone of the film. In order to show these subtleties I would need to linger for long periods on tiny fragments of time, stretching out real time on camera in order to show the minutiae of the delicate moment. This could work for a specialist audience, but it would not work for a general audience: particularly as my amateur camera operator in Ireland was simply unable to achieve either the quality of shot or the basic coverage to pull this off.

I filmed the cake-making material in Sydney in December 2009 with the help of Alex Barry and Peter O’Donoghue. This involved filming my two girls Molly (age six) and Brige (age four), as I attempted to instruct them in the making and subsequent icing of a Christmas cake. The baking action descended into near farce, with most of the focus on preventing the two girls from beating the living daylights out of each other. Happily, this mood fitted nicely with the jocular tone of the film to that point, and so I was satisfied with the result.

I also had the good fortune to return to Ireland on another job in September 2010, which gave me the opportunity to shoot interview material with my siblings.

In editing the material I was able to enlist the services of Gemma Boyle, a recent graduate and a fast and competent editor. I trained myself in the operation of Final
Cut Pro editing software and was able to carry out some of the rough cut editing myself, relying on Gemma Boyle to help out with the technical issues.

A major issue for the edit was the fact that some of the video material dated back to 1994 and was recorded on (now defunct) Hi8 tape. In total, there were more than sixty hours of video material, which was transcribed in full. I also had ten reels of Super 8 mm film which I home telecined. More than three hundred photos were scanned onto computer for the project.

As time went on, I became increasingly interested in the landscape and how frequently I was using landscape shots to frame the developing conversation. The contrast between the green and pithy browns of Ireland and the blue skies, white surf, and red earth of Australia became visual shorthand for the differences and the distance between these two locations. Landscape shots of Drogheda and the Boyne Valley provided visual pauses in the flow of spoken information, the silences that provide an essential part of a coherent filmic conversation.

I completed a ninety-five minute rough cut of the program in June 2011 and distributed it to a number of academics and filmmakers for feedback. The feedback on the cut threw up some interesting issues. Due to the poor quality of some of the material, I realised that although this film was suitable for a specialised audience (such as academic and festival audiences) it was not going to be suitable for television broadcast to a general viewing audience. This helped me to focus on the themes, without having to worry about what intermediaries (such as commissioning editors or program acquisition executives) might think about the film. I was able to make the film for myself and was not beholden to the whims of audiences.

I used home movies, archival material, and personal photos to illustrate the unfolding family back-story. The animations were drawn in Ireland by my nephew, John Michael Maher. For the animations, I focussed on several stories from my mother’s past that illustrate the colour of her life and the contradictions of her situation as a mother of fourteen children. Humorous tales of forgotten toddlers on family trips or perilous childbirths illustrate a view of family life that was chaotic yet endearing. I attempted an aesthetic that was simple and that suited the limited budget approach of the rest of the film. I used a simple stop-frame drawn animation style, which is
similar to the type of drawings that a six year old might produce. They evoke a feeling of childhood innocence, even though some of the subjects are deeply serious (such as waters breaking at birth). These animations could be my daughters’ interpretation of my family memories. The style of animation is deliberately ambiguous, as I hoped to communicate the delicate nature of memory. I availed myself of the compositing skills of Gerald Lee to layer the different visual components of the piece and to digitally treat the photographs to bring them to life.

**Narration, music, and soundscape**

I wrote and recorded a first person narration for the film.

The music that I was drawn to became intensely localised in origin. As such, much of the music was specifically from the local Drogheda area, and with a style and identity that is unique to this location. Thus, there are pieces from musicians such as Fran McPhail, Wally Murphy, Donal Óg Black, and Elish Quinn. I also included the whimsical *Crispy Boyne Duck* from Zap Cummins and the beautiful fiddle tunes of Edel Sullivan. In addition, I was lucky to be gifted tunes from Paddy Keenan, master uileann piper and also Luka Bloom (with Sinéad Ó Connor). The inclusion of the music from these international artists has added much to the production values and the atmosphere of the piece.

I used samples of recorded sound (church bells and football chants) to build a soundscape for the project. I enlisted the services of composer Adam Hulbert for this role. Styles of music span from traditional a cappella ‘sean-nós’ styles, through to contemporary dance and techno. I wanted to dispel the notion of Irish culture as a museum-based and backward looking form, and instead reinforce the idea of mutability and renewal that typifies the best of a living culture. The opening track is therefore techno influenced. I was also particularly happy when Shannon Kennedy (recording under the name Ozi Batla) of the band the Herd gave me a very contemporary mix of the iconic *Wild Colonial Boy*, which I used for the closing credits. This track embodies the idea of a culture with tradition and history being reinvented and mutated as time evolves.
Budget and funding

The project had a total cash budget of $12,000: $5,000 in seed funding from the Australian Film Commission and $7,000 in funding for wages and costs from my student candidature funds.

The limited budget presented problems; but also provided opportunities. Obviously, some items that would have been beneficial were impossible to obtain, given the limited budget. The presence of a story editor, for example, would have provided an opposing voice to temper any subjective excesses that may have emerged as a result of my role as lone filmmaker.

An unforeseen benefit of working within a limited budget was that the documentary process was non-prescriptive in nature. This freed me from the necessity of writing a script in order to comply with the needs of a commissioning editor, and allowed the documentary to take whatever route seemed most interesting and appropriate as elements of the story revealed themselves over time. For example, the observations on memory emerged out of the different responses that my mother and siblings gave to a simple question about a trip to the seaside (where one of my siblings was left home alone).

This non-prescriptive aspect is rare in modern documentary filmmaking, as most contemporary documentaries are tightly scripted prior to shooting because of the demands of funding bodies and the need for projects to deliver on promised outcomes. It was, therefore, a luxury and a pleasure to embark on a voyage of discovery without knowing where that journey would end. This mirrors the suggestion of O’Brien (2004) that the purpose of documentary is to start a conversation with the audience, without necessarily knowing where that debate will end up.

Summary of Chapter 1

In this chapter I outlined the research framework that was developed for exploring contemporary Irish-Australian identity within the realm of documentary film. I
confirmed the importance of practice-based research and discussed the techniques that I employed in the project.

I also traced the genesis of the film project from its conception in 2005 and identified the elements that I had proposed for inclusion. I embarked on a chronology of the making of the film, outlining the major landmarks along the way. I commented upon some of the challenges in the making of the film, particularly the difficulties of making a quality film on a limited budget. I examined my own character within the film and explored how this performance developed in order to accommodate the practical and theoretical obstacles that arose.

This chapter has chronicled my decision to dispense with the idea of making the film for a general audience and instead concentrate on shaping it for a specialist audience. In it, I detailed the difficulties of choosing the most appropriate material to include in the film in order to find the correct balance between revealing my soul to the world and lurching into self-indulgence.
Chapter 2.

Ireland and Australia: Literature and film practice review

In this chapter, I examine the links between Ireland and Australia from four perspectives. The first is a brief historical perspective on the unfolding story of Irish migration to Australia, which provides a context for the subsequent discussions about culture and identity. The second perspective looks at Irish Australia through the prism of cultural studies, with particular focus on the work of Bob Hodge and John O’Carroll. The third perspective examines filmic treatments of Irish-Australian identity. This perspective begins with an examination of the development of Irish documentary traditions and then focuses on documentary filmmaking among the Irish diaspora. Irish-Australian documentary traditions are explored and intercultural cinema is introduced. For the final perspective, I track the development of my own directorial style over the course of my personal journey from Ireland to Australia, and describe how this informs Secret family recipes, the film project that forms the basis of this exegesis.

Section 2.1. Irish-Australian identity: An historical perspective

In order to understand the complexity of the ties between Ireland and Australia, it is useful to make a brief study of the history of Irish migration to Australia. This history is long and colourful. Edmund Campion, Robert Hughes, and Michael Hogan have all spoken of the Irish as the first ethnic minority in Australia (see McHugh 2009), and yet the place of the Irish within a broader Australian identity remains problematic.

Patrick O’Farrell (1986, p. 22) noted that the Irish have been in Australia since the very beginning of colonisation:

Some of the first arrivals in Australia in 1788 were Irish-born. They made up members of the crew, the convict cargo and the officers.
and guards of the first and second fleets. The first convict ship to come to Australia directly from Ireland left from Cobh in Cork in 1791.

O’Farrell (1986) wrote that Irish migration to Australia began with the first fleet, and that up to a quarter of the convicts transported to Australia up to the middle of the nineteenth century were transported either for crimes committed in Ireland or as Irish political prisoners from the conflicts in 1798 (the United Irishmen Rebellion), 1848 (the Young Irelander Rebellion), and 1857 (the Fenian Rebellion).

The largest proportion of Irish free settlers came to Australia following the discovery of gold in Victoria in 1852. O’Farrell (1986) made the claim that, contrary to popular opinion, this upsurge was not a result of the famine in 1847, which produced a huge wave of emigration of paupers from Ireland to the USA; In his opinion, Irish migration to Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century was mostly composed of people with sufficient financial means at their disposal (O’Farrell 1986).

Discrimination against the (Catholic) Irish continued until the end of the nineteenth century, when the rise of the Labour Party provided a political platform and respectability for Catholics (O’Farrell 1986). The foundation of the first Ancient Order of Hibernian club (a Catholic fraternity society) in 1868 was a milestone for the colonies. The practice of Catholicism had first been proscribed by law and was subsequently frowned upon, even after the arrival of the first Catholic priest, Irishman Father John Therry, in 1820.

The Catholic religion provided a powerbase for the Irish. This was most evident in 1918, when Albert Dryer and six others from the Irish Republican Brotherhood were arrested and charged with sedition. These ‘IRB Seven’ became pawns in the game between the then Prime Minister William Morris Hughes and Archbishop Mannix (who opposed Hughes’ drive for wartime conscription).

The majority of the Irish who came to Australia during convict transportations did not come of their own accord. However, by the time of the gold rush in 1852 the number of Irish voluntary migrants had overtaken the number of those who had been transported to the country by force. There were still isolated incidents of forced transports, such as 4,000 orphan girls transported to Australia between 1848 and 1852.
The Hougoumont, the last prison transport carrying Irish convicts and political prisoners, reached Australia in 1868 (Amos 1988).

Irish settlers in Australia—both voluntary and forced—were, in terms of their labour and industry, crucial to the survival and prosperity of the early colony. O’Farrell (1986, p. 66) contended that ‘the Irish were the only significant “ethnic” group until after 1947, and thus could devote all their energies to relating to the majority culture’.

It is therefore apparent that since 1788 the Irish had been a part of the underclass in Australia. However, since Federation they have increasingly been a part of the ascendancy. Although the numbers of arriving Irish have dwindled (in proportion to other nationalities) since 1945, the Irish influence is still considerable. This could be due to the fact that the Irish as a percentage of the population were proportionally very numerous in the latter part of the nineteenth century, when Australian myth-making came into its own (from the birth of the legend of Ned Kelly in 1880 to Federation in 1901). These formative years of Australia’s myth making were also the period when the Irish influence was at its height. This paradox (of being part of an ethnic minority but considered by some to be a part of the Anglo-Celtic ascendancy) continues to inform the debate around modern Irish-Australian identity. Much depends on the definition of ‘ethnic’, as shall be seen in the next section.

Current Irish communities in Australia

The Community Relations Commission (CRC) seems to be an appropriate resource to determine if the Irish are an ethnic minority in Australia, as it is the leading government agency supporting multicultural communities in NSW. Notably, an examination of the CRC website revealed no Irish organisations amongst its registered communities (Community Relations Commission n. d.). This is despite the fact that the 2006 census of Australia acknowledged the Irish as a significant ethnic cohort within Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). One explanation for this discrepancy could be that in recent times the descriptors of ethnic difference in Australia have become more related to skin colour. According to Lalich (2003), the term *ethnicity*, in the Australian context, is generally only applied to first- and second-generation immigrants of non-English speaking origin. Ghassan Hage (2002,
p. 417) made the point that ‘whiteness’ has increasingly become a factor in Australian society, and that the 1980s saw ‘white colonial paranoia’ return to the fore as a potent political force.

The Australian embassy in Dublin made the claim that ‘up to thirty percent of Australians claim some degree of Irish ancestry’ (Australian Embassy in Ireland n.d.). In fact, although the 2006 census recorded 50,256 (0.25%) Australian residents as having been born in Ireland, more than 1.8 million Australians (just over 9% of the population) declared that they had Irish ancestry (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). The central point here is that although 9% of Australians declare Irish ancestry, there is anecdotal evidence (such as the Australian embassy Dublin website) that a much greater proportion of Australians have some degree of Irish ancestry. This might explain the anomaly that a large proportion of those Australians with Irish heritage consider themselves a part of the Anglo-Celtic establishment with an accompanying claim on ‘Australian’ values, as opposed to being a part of the ethnic ‘other’. Vertovec (1999) approached diaspora as a form of consciousness, which goes some way to explaining this contradiction.

The term ‘Anglo-Celtic’ is highly contested, especially within discussions about Irish identity in Australia. Siobhan McHugh (2010, p. 23) has traced the popular use of the term ‘Anglo-Celtic’ to 1947. The first mention of the term in official government literature was in 1989, when it was used by demographer Charles Price to denote the ethnic composition of the Australian people (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, n. d.). Anglo-Celtic is not a category in the Australian census.

McHugh (2010, p. 25) criticized the conflation of the Irish and English populations under the term Anglo-Celtic. She cited Patrick O’Farrell, who problematised the notion of an homogenous Anglo-Celtic identity that fails to reflect the level of difference and history of conflict between the English and the Irish in a colonial context:

It [the term Anglo-Celtic] is a grossly misleading, false and patronising contemporary convenience, one crassly present-oriented. Its use removes from consciousness and recognition a major conflict
fundamental to any comprehension, not only of Australian history but of our present core culture.

I propose that this interpretation of the term Anglo-Celtic within Australia conflates the Celtic populations of Welsh, Scottish, and Irish with the English, thereby representing them all under one banner. The most significant aspect of the Anglo-Irish relationship in recent history is the ongoing postcolonial conflict in Ireland, which has no parallel in the relationship between England and these other territories. For this reason, I find merit in MacHugh and O'Farrell’s problematisation of the term Anglo-Celtic in Australia. Arguably, to ignore this aspect of Anglo-Irish relations in Australia is to deny the obvious evidence as to the widespread existence of these relations.

Section 2.2. Irish-Australian identity: A cultural perspective

In February 1995, the former president of Ireland, Mary Robinson (Robinson 1995, p. 1) delivered an address to both Houses of the Oireactais (Irish Parliament) entitled ‘Cherishing the Irish diaspora’. She promoted the need for the Irish to engage with the diaspora:

If we expect that the mirror held up to us by Irish communities abroad will show us a single familiar identity, or a pure strain of Irishness, we will be disappointed. We will overlook the fascinating diversity of culture and choice which looks back at us. Above all we miss the chance to have that dialogue with our own diversity which this reflection offers us.

Robinson’s idea of Irish identity is supported in the work of other scholars. For example, Ian Bryson (1998) agreed with Mary Robinson, and presented an argument that Irishness is not created in Ireland and that there is no single Irish identity.
Crystallised memory

John O’Carroll (2000, p. 10) has noted that the concept that modern Irishness owes more to the memories of the approximately seventy million people around the world who claim Irish descent, than to the activities of the five million who live on the island of Ireland:

The Dublin of the ‘Rare old times’ is gone, but not to memory. For migrants, the city exists only in memory: to return is no longer possible because the city that has been left behind is no longer there. Yet this imaginary city is precisely the one that is preserved in song. Again, perhaps, the sense ratios of Ireland are determined by the outer circle, the emigrants.

Thus, the Ireland that survives in the minds of migrants (and that has been passed down to their children) is the Ireland that is crystallised in the memories of the migrants on the day that they left the country. My own version of Australian Irishness may well contain memories that preserve my Irishness; but they may also be locked in a particular time and place. This poses some questions: Will this memory change with time? How will this memory be passed on to the next generation?

Katie Holmes and Stuart Ward (2011, p. 2) have asserted that Ireland and Australia are both countries where memory is important:

Ireland and Australia represent two case studies that are often singled out for their particular brand of bitterly disputed remembrance. The Irish in particular have long been branded a people mired in their primordial rivalries.

Collective memory is a contentious field, and Holmes and Ward (2011, p. 3) have further discussed the pressure of the past in Ireland and Australia:

The very notion of ‘collective memory’ is as contested as it is problematic, raising long-standing theoretical debates about how groups remember. The field is vast, unwieldy and marked by a
conceptual looseness about how the range of social phenomena that might fall within its ambit.

In writing about his grandmother, the second generation Greek Australian writer Christos Tsiolkas (2011, p. 1) has identified a phenomenon wherein the migrant does not bind with the host nation and so retains the attitudes and values of the birth nation: as though their worldview was crystallised the moment they stepped on the boat. These migrants feel they are remaining true to the attitudes of their birth nation, but they do not realise that the birth nation itself has moved on: this causes them to exist in a kind of cultural bubble, with an increasing disconnection between both host and nation of birth. This phenomenon, which I call ‘crystallised memory’, can cause tensions for the second generation:

One common experience that so many of us who are children of migrants share, is the need to challenge tradition, but also honour the responsibility we feel to our families... to negotiate those questions of honour and obligation.

Laura Marks (2000) identified this duality between memory and actuality within screen culture. I carry this idea a step further, by using it in terms of the tensions the duality creates within the emigrant psyche: the remembered country of birth is loved for providing nurture but hated for pushing one out. I examine this idea in greater detail in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Tsiolkas has pointed out that this crystallised memory has an impact on the Greek diaspora within Australia, and also—by extension—other migrants who have come to this land. O’Carroll (2000, p. 11) stated that the personal memories and experiences of migration make a vital contribution to Australia’s understanding of itself as a nation. Therefore, history and cultural identity might be lost if these are not documented and acknowledged, however painful these memories might be:

These yearning [Dublin] cityscapes are not just part of Irish history: they are part of Australian postcolonial culture. They bear recalling because the value of migrant memory itself comes into view.
It is in the world of the Irish diaspora that these hybrid identities are forged. My creative work, *Secret family recipes*, is informed by my mongrel Irish-Australian identity, which has resulted from time spent within these different cultures. I intentionally use the hyphen within the term ‘Irish-Australian’ to denote a new hybrid group. Undoubtedly, there are benefits to exploring identity through cultural and historical perspectives. Ward and Holmes (2011, p. 2), for example, stated that:

> Creative writers, dramatists and film-makers turn to the past with concerns and preoccupations that transcend the mere ‘historical’, and often with an acute awareness of the blurred distinctions between ‘history’, ‘memory’, and the creative impulse.

Film also has many advantages for exploring personal and subjective stories of identity. Intercultural cinema, in particular, has a history of working between cultures. Laura Marks (2000, p. 24) suggested that intercultural cinema operates ‘at the intersections of two cultural regimes of knowledge’. In my case, those two cultures are Irish and Australian. This work is created at the tipping point between my own experience of being Australian-Irish and my children’s experience of being Irish-Australian. I devote a section to intercultural cinema in Section 2.4 of this dissertation.

*From Irish underclass to Anglo-Celtic ascendancy*

In his book, *The turbulence of migration*, Nikos Papastergiades (2000) spoke of an urgent need to rethink the politics of identity. In particular, he noted the lack of political will to reflect on the process of mixture that emerges whenever two or more cultures meet. This analysis is particularly relevant in Australia, where the last thirteen years has seen much public debate and government intervention around the areas of migration, identity, and belonging. During this time, the migration issue has become a ‘political football’: it is cynically manipulated in order to gain political advantage. The atmosphere has been described by refugee activist group, Boat-People.org (Kelly 2010, p. 1), as ‘border panic encouraged by the current rhetoric of fear’. Although a lively debate continues at the national level, there is still a lack of personal stories that document the complexity of the intercultural experience of migration and the ramifications of this.
Recent flashpoints in the Australian multicultural landscape have included anti-Muslim feeling following the events of 11th September 2001 in the US (known as 9/11) and the associated anti-Lebanese riot in Cronulla in 2005. However, the xenophobia that threatens Australia today has a precedent. The 1918 trial of Albert Dryer of the Irish Republican Brotherhood for sedition prefigures many of today’s issues: sectarian division, the right of dissent, the politics of fear, censorship, and sedition, and support for a foreign war. Of course, an exception is that those on the receiving end were Irish, rather than Islamic.

In the book *Bin Laden in the suburbs*, Poynting et al. (2004) identified the emergence of the Arab other as the pre-eminent folk devil of the present time. Filmmaker Richard Dennison (2006) noted a cyclical aspect to the demonisation of newly arrived migrants. Muslims were the suspect community in 2005, whereas the Irish suffered similar persecution during World War 1. Throughout the post-war years, the Greeks and Italians endured suspicion and ridicule; while in the 1970s the focus turned to the Asian migrants. Dennison argued that examination of these historical experiences could shed light on present day situations. In this sense, looking at the Irish experience can shed light on today’s problems: particularly, identifying how the Irish travelled from being an underclass in 1916 to become a part of the Anglo-Celtic ascendancy by the 1990s.

John O’Carroll (2000, p. 10) identified the hyphenated Anglo-Celtic link as important in the construction of the idea of ‘mateship’, which is so often cited as integral to modern day Australian identity. He cited the origins of mateship as a product of Australia’s colonial history: ‘The shiftiness inherent in “mateship” cannot be understood outside the colonial context which engendered it’.

The reduction of the Irish and British populations from mainstream to ‘ethnic minority’ has been criticised for a different reason by journalist Allan Wood (2007). Writing in the Australian newspaper, Wood quoted historian John Hirst from 1994 as saying that ‘mainstream Australian society was reduced to an ethnic group and given an ethnic name: Anglo-Celt’; Wood’s distaste for the label of ‘ethnic’ is clearly expressed here.
According to Hodge (2006, p. 67), a mainstream without ethnicity is the cause of the problem. The invisibility of the Anglo-Celtic ascendancy within broader multicultural Australia has important consequences: ‘Anglo-Celtic Australians... do not know and value their own roots as deeply as they might’. Hodge suggested that a view that situates white Australians as being without ethnicity and therefore places them at the end of a perceived queue of merit is misplaced:

Anglo-Celtic Australians do not have to be downgraded to make way for Australian multiculture, rather, the contrary should be the case. Understanding Anglo-Celts better is basic to our approach to Australian multiculture.

Section 2.3. A sense of place: Irish documentary at home and abroad

In keeping with the idea that Irish identity is created both in Ireland itself and also among its diaspora, in this section I examine Irish documentary filmmaking in Ireland and overseas. The section begins with an overview of Irish documentary filmmaking in Ireland and then focuses on documentary filmmaking outside of Ireland. This latter examination begins with Irish American filmmaking in the USA and then concentrates on Irish-Australian filmmaking in Australia. I then identify a specific subgenre within this canon of work (namely, ‘Irish intercultural cinema’) and trace its development. I use this discussion as a context for exploring Secret family recipes and for identifying where this fits within the lexicon of Irish film.

Irish documentary traditions

Almost from its inception, filmmaking in Ireland was seen as a political propaganda tool and it was even used by revolutionaries, before being co-opted by the state to preserve the status quo. The turbulent decade of 1910–1920, when Ireland endured a rebellion and then a War of Independence, was marked by a flurry of nationalist films. These were shot in Ireland but financed by—and produced for—Irish American audiences.
In the 1940s, Ireland’s political parties began a period of production of non-fiction films, which—again—were little more than propaganda. It was not until the 1970s that various events conspired to deliver Ireland an indigenous film industry. This period, which coincided with the height of the troubles in Northern Ireland, began a period of innovation and introspection typified by work such as *Atlantean* (1983): Bob Quinn’s landmark television series, which questioned the myth of the Celts which had underpinned modern Irish nationalism since the birth of the nation in 1921.

In this section I outline the development of documentary styles in Ireland that culminated in the performative and personal films of John T. Davis (which mine the family and the emotions for their enigmatic content).

In an article in Brian McIlroy’s (2007, p. 120) book, *Genre and cinema: Ireland and transnationalism*, Cheryl Herr is cited as saying:

> Irish filmmaking looks simultaneously in two directions. Glancing backwards, Irish filmmaking carries the indelible trace of indigenous colonial trauma. Facing ahead, the old emigration stories reach out to engage with the global trauma that today touches people in all countries.

Ireland has a complicated relationship with the moving image, which dates back more than a century. The first screenings in Ireland took place in 1896, only four months after the Lumière Brothers’ first public screenings in Paris (Rockett 1988).

The cultural milieu in Ireland at the turn of the century was dominated by the Celtic revival movement, which encouraged the creation of works written in the spirit of Irish culture (as distinct from English culture). This was driven, in part, by a desire for an individual Irish identity underscored by the political clamour for independence at the time. This difference was kept alive by invoking Ireland’s historic past, and its myths, legends, and folklore: as typified by heroes such as Cúchulainn and Fionn MacCumhaill. This ‘invention’ of a mythic past gives an indication of the contested nature of Irishness:
Since the ground-breaking Abbey theatre was founded in 1904 by William Butler Yeats, Edward Martyn, and Lady Augusta Gregory... it gave Ireland a voice, one that was uncompromising, poetic and soul-searching (Hallet 2011, p. 13).

This act of harnessing art for the ulterior motive of political mythmaking occurs again and again in the Irish cultural landscape.

Documentary film was first produced in Ireland in 1904 with Louis de Clerq’s *Life on the Great Southern and Western Railway* (Rockett 1988, p.5). The early years of the twentieth century were a period of great upheaval in Ireland. The general strike of 1913 and the rebellion of 1916 caused even greater hardship for a population that was already living in abject poverty, with slums that were regarded as the worst in Europe. However, it was not the social situation that dominated filmmaking scripts at the time, but the ongoing nationalist question.

The conflict between the dominant British colonial overview and an emerging Nationalist consciousness became quickly evident. Kevin Rockett (1988) identified Sidney Olcott as one of the most influential filmmakers in Ireland in this period. Born in Canada of Irish parents, Olcott worked for the American production company, Kalem. Rockett (1988, p. 8) described three of his films—namely, *The lad from old Ireland* (1910), *Rory O’Moore* (1911), and *For Ireland’s sake* (1912)—as portraying ‘Irish nationalism in a favourable light... English rule in Ireland is unfavourably contrasted with America which proves to be the escape route from both political oppression and poverty’.

Olcott came to the attention of the British authorities on more than one occasion, and in 1915 his film about Robert Emmett, the leader of the 1803 rebellion, was withdrawn from public screening because the authorities claimed it was ‘interfering with their recruitment drive in Ireland’ (Rockett 1988, p. 9). Thus, the apparatus of the state directly intervened to control film representations of Ireland, even before it gained independence:

By the second decade of the twentieth century, huge numbers of Irish had emigrated to the United States and more than one million,
or one in four of all Irish-born people then alive, were living in America in 1920 (Rockett 1988, p. 13).

There was thus a large commercial incentive for filmmakers to play the Irish nationalist card and Olcott’s films were primarily made for an Irish-American audience. Rockett (1988, p. 12) commented on this:

It is, perhaps, not surprising that Olcott, in common with many contemporary observers, should orientate his films away from the often complex social and economic structures on the land towards a radical nationalist anti-Englishness.

This focus on jingoism became a major selling point in the marketing of these films, and this cemented the place of film as a propaganda tool.

Rockett (1988, p. 13) reported that in 1917 (the year following the Irish Rebellion) an American funded production, Ireland a nation (1914), was banned by the General Officer Commanding in Chief, Sir Bryan Mahon, due to its likelihood to ‘cause disaffection to His Majesty, and to prejudice the recruiting of His Majesty’s forces’. The film featured dramatised events from Irish history and actual newsreel of current activities, and was sympathetic to a republican reading of events. Despite being banned in Ireland, the film was very successful in the USA and had a ‘remarkable run in Chicago, where it was shown for 20 consecutive weeks to huge crowds’ (Rockett 1988, p. 13). Notably, this film combined drama and documentary footage within the same program. Audiences were likely to have been aware of the origins of the forms and able to digest these as part of their consumption of the new ‘moving image’ spectacle, as factual programs—most notably sporting events—were big money-spinners for cinemas at this time.

A landmark documentary film of the subsequent talkies period (post 1930) was Man of Aran (1934), which was made by Robert Flaherty. This was produced with UK funding and directed by an American (albeit of Irish Protestant descent). Arguably, the star of this film is the landscape. In his seminal book, Cinema and Ireland (1988, p. 71), Rockett wrote that Flaherty’s budget for this film was more than any indigenous film until the 1950s:
Not only did he have a flexible time schedule and an indulgent budget but his lifestyle on Aran contrasted rather severely with the island primitivism depicted in his ‘poetic’ documentary.

Rockett (1988, p. 71) identified that in contrast to the work of Grierson and other UK documentary makers (who focused on working-class life), Irish filmmakers:

Made little or no attempt to explore such a reality in the 1930s and chose to reproduce in the main both the ahistorical ethnicity represented in Man of Aran and its economic off-shoots, the tourist–landscape film.

Once again, the use of film as myth making medium is evidenced in this approach.

The sheer number of films that were produced in the USA for Irish American audiences in the period 1915 to 1935 (these are examined in more detail in Section 2.3) guaranteed a view of Ireland that was hackneyed and sentimental. This trend reached its apotheosis with John Ford’s The quiet man (1952), which contributed to a view of the Irish as obsessed with fighting, religion, and alcohol. It is interesting to note that this dominant worldview was produced in Hollywood (John Ford was a second generation member on the fringe of the Irish diaspora) rather than at the centre of that diaspora in Ireland.

Non-fiction film was used for propaganda purposes by the Fianna Fáil party in 1946 with A nation once again (1946) and by Clann na Poblachta with Our country (1948). Several films were made in the 1950s and 1960s by Gael Linn, an Irish language and cultural organisation that was independent although state funded. The most important contributions of this organisation were Mise Éire (I am Ireland) in 1959 and Saoirse? (Freedom?) in 1961. These were the first feature length films made in the Irish language; again, however, they used ‘images of nature to underpin or naturalise a particular nationalist vision of the past’ (Rockett 1988, p. 87). This non-confrontational nature of Irish documentary is symptomatic of the pressures applied by politicians and—as shall be seen later in this chapter—by the church. The function of this cinema was not what Renov has described as the impulse to ‘record, reveal, and preserve’; rather, its purpose was to to ‘persuade or promote’ (O’Brien 2004, p. 183).
A departure from this uncritical approach to documentary making came with the production of *The rocky road to Dublin* (1968), directed by Peter Lennon. This film questioned state and church power in Ireland. Lennon lived in Paris in the mid- to late-1960s and was influenced by events there; both on the streets and in the cinema (*The rocky road to Dublin* was shot by French New Wave cinematographer Raoul Coutard). Harvey O’Brien (2004, p. 170) wrote that this film was ‘an angry and rhetorical attack upon the institutions and attitudes which [had] brought the country to a social and cultural standstill’. He further suggested that the film ‘to this day, remains the standard bearer for the frustrations of a generation of Irish filmmakers and citizens whose voices were never heard’. Lennon’s argument was that Irish society viewed the achievement of independence in 1922 as the apex of the country’s achievement. He asked, in the film: ‘What do you do with your revolution once you’ve got it?’ This ‘freezing of history’, by 1916, had stunted the identity of subsequent Irish citizens. In another line from the film he stated: ‘We were the sons and daughters of revolutionaries and our role was to be one of gratitude’.

**Political interference in the media**

The difficulties in separating media production and politics became apparent once again in 1973 against a background of large-scale civil conflict in Northern Ireland. The Irish government introduced a ban (the Section 31 broadcasting ban) on interviews with members of Sinn Féin and the IRA for the state broadcaster RTÉ. This legislation was introduced by Conor Cruise O’Brien, the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs (Meehan, 2008).

In Northern Ireland also, representations of Ireland were subject to interference from the highest level. Defence Secretary Lord Carrington wrote a letter to BBC Chairman Lord Hill in August 1971. This letter stated that, ‘Everything possible should be done to prevent repetition [of reports] which are unfairly loaded to suggest improper behaviour by British Troops’ (Curtis 1984, p. 6). Throughout the 1970s, numerous programs that offered contrary viewpoints were altered or withdrawn altogether following political interference (Curtis, 1984).
The Irish state broadcaster RTÉ had made numerous challenging documentary programs since its inception in 1961. However, increasing interference from politicians convinced producers that challenging films would no longer be made within the state broadcasting system. For example, an objection by (the future Taoiseach) Mr CJ Haughey to the order of his appearance on the magazine program Division in 1966 spiralled into statements on the floor of parliament where TDs (equivalent to MPs) were assured by the then Taoiseach, Seán Lemass, that RTÉ was ‘responsible to the Government’ (O’Brien 2004, p. 180). The resignation of a number of RTÉ producers in 1969 sheds light on this situation: ‘Programmes which had sought to test the public’s maturity inevitably increased the testiness of national leaders’ (Dowling, Doolan, & Quinn 1969, p. 112). One of the producers, Bob Quinn would later go on to produce several landmark Irish documentaries.

‘Breakthrough’ Irish films

Up until the late 1970s Ireland had no indigenous film industry to speak of. I was thus strongly influenced by my first exposure to indigenous Irish cinema at a do-it-yourself (DIY) screening of Joe Comerford’s Down the corner (1975) in Trinity College in 1977. This film was devised and performed by young people from the working class area of Ballyfermot in Dublin and was a part of an emerging crop of low budget Irish films that were questioning aspects of Irish society—such as the dominance of the Catholic Church, the incidence of child abuse and the invisibility of homosexuality—which up to that point had been taboo. My interest in the films of Joe Comerford and Cathal Black stemmed from the fact that, for the first time in a mainstream art form, I could see my own experiences reflected back at me from the screen. These ‘breakthrough’ films were primarily fiction, but they did deal with the pressing social issues of the time. Notable among these were Thaddeus O’Sullivan’s A pint of plain (1974), Joe Comerford’s Down the corner, (1977) and Cathal Black’s Pigs (1984).

Cathal Black’s docudrama Our boys was made in 1983, but was not screened on Irish television until 1991. This was the first Irish-made film to be openly critical of the Catholic Church. The program featured a drama that was inter-cut with documentary
interviews with former students who attested to the brutal conditions under which their education took place. O’Brien (2004, p. 230) noted that the church had substantial power in Irish society at this time:

Throughout the 1980s, the church had demonstrated the ability to influence social and political events in Ireland, including the referenda on abortion (1983) and divorce (1986 and 1995).

A notorious—albeit in retrospect almost laughable—incident from 1966 illustrates the place of the church in Irish society at the time. *The late late show*, a weekly Saturday night light entertainment show had become a hugely popular platform for many debates around social change in Ireland at the time. When mention was made of an audience member’s ‘nightie’ in a light-hearted segment, the Bishop of Clonfert condemned *The late late show* by telegram and from the pulpit (Corless 2008).

In his book *Moral monopoly: The rise and fall of the Catholic church in modern Ireland*, Tom Inglis (1998, p. 208) cited the major change in Irish society in the late twentieth century as ‘the decline in the symbolic domination of the Catholic Church and the rise of the symbolic domination of the media’.

Bob Quinn was an influential figure in Irish documentary. He made a lasting impression on me when I met him at one of his DIY screenings in London in 1986. Not only did he question the very basis of Irish identity, he also pushed the form of documentary within the films he made. According to Nichols (2001), the participatory mode of documentary is evident when filmmakers foreground their own subjectivity. Quinn often appeared as a character in his own films: for example, dancing a light-hearted jig with a local in Cairo in *Atlantean* (1983). His performances drew attention to the sources of knowledge about Ireland and how they were gathered, allowing the films ‘to restore a measure of rhetorical engagement with social discourse by destroying myths of their “objectivity”’ (O’Brien 2004, p. 196).

Quinn’s first independent film was made in 1975. This was a radical Irish language experimental drama entitled *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoire* (*Lament of Art O’Leary*). This film embraced paradox, juxtaposition, and montage. McLoone (2000, p. 132) noted that it:
Raises issues of cultural representation in general and presents history in particular, not as a given set of irrefutable facts, but as a question of representation itself, a matter of interpretation which it used to meet the ideological needs of the present.

His major work was *Atlantean* (1983), a playful, ironic, and self-effacing series loosely based around the notion that Ireland was a surviving colony of Plato’s lost continent of Atlantis. O’Brien (2004, pp. 195–196) summarised the themes of *Atlantean* as:

One man’s journey to the heart of his own sense of Irishness... An exploratory and speculative journey which eventually dismantles all that he has been taught and deconstructs his ideas of the ‘reality’ of Ireland’s distant past... it is an attempt to articulate on film an idea of culture which is of personal importance to its maker but which is not fixed.


Atlantis is an overblown exemplification of the dislocations of Irishness throughout its history. In its ‘excess’ of logic, its ‘phantasms’ of ‘scientific’ evidence... Ireland is everywhere and nowhere, ‘broken in pieces’, enveloped in a story in which its particularity and therefore its definition will never be resolved.

In *Atlantean*, Quinn questioned the Celtic myths and cultural nationalism (by which the nation had defined itself in the previous half-century). In the film, he elaborates on these themes:

Celticism is an expression of Catholic and nationalist ideology which has been artificially accorded the status of racial authenticity to legitimise orthodoxy... His concern was that, in Ireland, the recourse to a mythic pre-colonial past (Celticism) was a form of Aryanism (O’Brien 2004, p. 230).
By 1988 I had left Ireland as part of a huge wave of youth emigration due to dire economic circumstances. For this reason, I strongly identified with Alan Gilsenan’s film *The road to God knows where* (1988). This film articulated the sense of anger and betrayal of the migrants who were forced to leave. It also highlighted the hypocrisy and complacency of those in power, who allowed (and possibly encouraged) this migration to take place. The film features empty shots of urban decay, juxtaposed with sloganeering title cards spouting empty platitudes and absurdist tableau. In one memorable scene, a smartly dressed man standing in a dismal council housing estate proudly delivers romantic nationalist poetry to the camera, whilst behind him a mob of urchins roll the burnt out chassis of a car from left to right across the back of the frame. The film is thus:

A response not only to decades of social and political conformity, but to both the image of Ireland proffered by uncritical documentaries and to the form with which it has been represented (O’Brien 2004, p. 210).

I conclude this summary of Irish documentary by looking at the work of John T. Davis, who placed himself and his family in front of the lens for his film *The Uncle Jack* (1996). I was interested in the performative nature of his work and his exploration of his family situation for his quest. John T. Davis’ first film, *Shellshock rock* (1978), was a low budget expose of the punk rock scene in Northern Ireland at the time. In 1996, after spending time in the USA, Davis returned to Northern Ireland to make *The Uncle Jack*, which attempted to explore his sense of self, the meaning of his life and art, and what it meant to be part of an Irish culture.

In *The Uncle Jack* (1996) Davis mixes home movies with constructed scenes, and delivers a first person narration. He builds a narrative spine through the building and flying of a model aeroplane (as a young boy he was encouraged to participate in this process by his uncle). In the film, Davis describes the past as a ‘treacherous’ and ‘haunted’ landscape where reality and nostalgia become entwined and it becomes difficult to separate memory from lived experience. O’Brien (2004, p. 222) variously described the film as a ‘meditation’ and ‘less a documentary’ as this is normally understood (at least in Ireland) than a shadowy and ephemeral journey through the ‘haunted landscapes’ of memory and perception. He asked: ‘The question is, what
story is he telling? What precisely is he trying to get to the heart of and what meaning does this have for the viewer?’ O’Brien (2004, p. 225) further stated that:

The film acknowledges that people are both influenced by others and defined by the forces of social and political determination that surround them... it expresses a concern for a spiritual search, and though for Davis it has reached an important juncture, the audience must now act upon what they have seen and question themselves and their own worlds in similar terms. And this is what all autobiographical documentaries do, while delving into Yeats’ ‘foul rag and bone shop of the heart’. It argues that non-fiction film is a medium of philosophical enquiry through which questions about society on the whole can be addressed, and though resolution is impossible, the debate goes on.

Thus, it is apparent that politics and ideology have had a major impact on the development of documentary filmmaking in Ireland. The emergence of an Irish tradition of critical documentary in the 1970s and 1980s was in direct response to the demands of a society that was emerging from ‘decades of social and political conformity’ (O’Brien 2004, p. 210).

The question about what it means to be Irish is foregrounded by the place of emigration within Irish society and the Irish consciousness. It is thus fitting that the next area of investigation is around diasporic filmmaking and looks at the work of the Irish who left Ireland, and their descendants. The following section examines the work of Irish filmmakers and filmmakers of Irish descent in the USA, Britain, and Australia.

Irish diasporic filmmaking in the USA

I found that the Irish-American filmmaking tradition provided a very useful contrast to Irish-Australian filmmaking. Irish American and Irish-Australian communities are similar in that they were both primarily established in the latter part of the nineteenth century and both make distinct and substantial contributions to the wider cultural life of their adopted countries. Both populations also diminished substantially in their
proportional significance in the early- to mid-twentieth century. I thus found it useful to make comparisons between the cultural production outputs of both populations and use this as an entry point into a discussion of intercultural cinema.

Ruth Barton (2009, p. 1) cited Werner Sollors as defining two models of cultural and ethnic identification: ‘descent’ and ‘consent’. Barton commented on this distinction:

[Descent] is best understood by the practice of hereditary privilege, so derided in the United States, but still relevant to its formation, and the latter, its antithesis, the process of choosing who to marry, and how to position yourself within society.

Barton (2009, p. 2) was interested in deconstructing the term ‘Irish-American’. She suggested that the hyphen in Irish-American could be seen as symbolic of the tension between the ‘desire to retain a notion of descent, of “pure” Irishness, and a pleasure in hybridity, of being Irish and not-Irish’. It is interesting to compare Barton’s understanding of the term Irish-American with MacHugh’s (2010) views on the Australian term Anglo-Celtic; in both key terms there is more than a little ambiguity in the use of the hyphen (I examine the term Anglo-Celtic in more detail in Chapter 2.2).

As Barton (2009) pointed out, the Irish have played a significant role in the Hollywood film industry from its early beginnings. Many directors were of Irish descent: including Herbert Brenon, Rex Ingram, and Raoul Walsh. Mary Pickford, the Talmadge Sisters, William Desmond Taylor, as well as John Ford and his brother Francis were of Irish heritage, as was John Ford’s best-known lead actor, John Wayne. Claiming Irish heritage was often seen to be a strategic career move, as can be evidenced by the experience of Errol Flynn who did nothing to disavow the notion that he was Irish and not Australian (Barton, 2009). Although the Irish constituted a large migrant audience for film, they were also well organised and, as Barton (2009) pointed out, were able to mobilise the public. An example of this is the withdrawal of MGM’s 1927 film, *The Callahans and the Murphys* through the intercession of the Catholic press.

The success of the Irish films was largely due to the large Irish population in America at this time:
During the silent period there were about five million Irish in America, one-fifth of whom were Irish-born. Though only accounting for about 6 percent of the American population, they were apparently concentrated in urban areas, and being overwhelmingly working class, were proportionately more important to film exhibitors than their numbers might suggest... During the almost thirty-five years of the silent period before 1929 as many as 500 American films were made which had identifiable Irish themes or prominent Irish characters (Rockett 2009, p. 18).

Rockett (2009) made the point that, although active early on in the management of filmmaking, once the studios consolidated in around 1910, the Irish generally lacked the financial ability to play producer roles.

The films of John Ford straddle both the silent period and the talkies. The best known of his Irish American films is The quiet man (1952):

> With its simultaneous celebration and problematisation of the associations between masculinity and violence, the trauma of emigration… [it] challenges audiences and critics alike to respond to what in any other production would be the most excruciating of stereotypes (Barton 2009, p. 8).

Such is the absurdity of the mythical Irish stereotype portrayed in The quiet man, that it has entered the popular lexicon in Ireland as an example of Irish-America’s perceived detachment from the reality of the Irish experience.

Underlying these popular stereotypes of buffoonery is a serious debate around the ideas of being Irish and American. Noel Ignatiev’s How the Irish became white (1996) describes the efforts of early Irish immigrants to distinguish themselves from African-American slaves in order to prosper to the point where they became involved with white supremacists. Rockett (1988) supported Ignatiev’s (1996) notion, when the former noted that early Irish-American films were dominated by the ideological imperative of assimilation.
I find it interesting to compare the overarching mythical narratives of the Irish in America with the Irish in Australia. The mythology surrounding Ned Kelly, for example, focuses on his resistance to British injustice, dovetailing his struggle in Australia with the historical struggle of the Irish against the British. However, although it began as a tale of adversity between the Irish and British, the Ned Kelly narrative is now seen as an important element in the forging of individual Australian identity. Historically, the bush is seen to be the ‘real soul’ of Australia and Ned Kelly is now perceived by many as the quintessential Australian. Perhaps this indicates the symbolic assimilation of the Irish into the Australian fold.

Ruth Barton (2009) maintained that the American situation was more complex for the Irish. She stated that Irish resistance to hegemony has always been expressed in Irish-American cinema through recourse to drink and excessive violence: namely, the inherited ‘old country’ attributes. More recent Irish American films, such as True confessions (1981) and Mystic river (2003), play out these conflicting ethnic traits of purity and innocence versus corruption and brutality.

In recent years, the Irish have also reinforced their position within the ascendancy in the USA. This situation has parallels with their rise to an Anglo-Celtic ascendancy in Australia. The Kennedy dynasty, for example, is anecdotal proof of the ascendancy of the Irish. But in more subtle ways, too, the Irish have become a part of the fabric of US culture. Barton (2009, p. 13) cites Brian McIlroy’s recent characterisations of the Irish in The Simpsons (1989) and Family guy (1998) as supporting this notion of the Irish as—albeit miscreant—insiders:

Drunk, ignorant and obscenely fertile... [they] delight in subverting the tenets of political correctness... [interpolating the] audience into a community of knowingness created out of a shared discourse of media imagery.

Although there is undoubtedly a legacy of work produced in the United States that contains Irish subject matter, the general trend in recent years has been toward representing the Irish in audience-friendly gangster movies, for example Gangs of New York (2002) and Kill the Irishman (2010), which use their Irish connections as
leverage in an increasingly competitive film marketplace. For these producers, the Irish connection is simply one more commercial niche within the American market.

Section 2.4: Irish-Australian identity: A film studies perspective

I now connect the two strands of this discussion: the first is the exploration of Irish-Australian identity and the second is the nature of investigation using documentary as produced by the Irish-Australian community.

Given the large Irish diaspora in Australia, surprisingly few autobiographies or personal documentaries explore the experience of Irish migration and the intercultural and intergenerational issues involved. Only a comparatively small number of productions have been completed to date: these range from low budget travel/tourist shows to history series with high production values.

The series *Echo of a distant drum* (1988) provided a lavish history of the Irish in Australia. This project was made in three parts and was produced by the ABC and RTE as part of the Australian bicentennial celebrations in 1988. As befits a production that was funded as part of that celebratory occasion, it painted a traditional picture of Irish-Australian success, using broad strokes. This project falls into the category of interactive documentary, as defined by Nichols (1994, p. 95): with an emphasis on interview and retrieving history through stock footage.

*The Irish Empire* (1999) was a five part series that explored the history of Irish emigration. It was produced by Hilton Cordell in Australia and Café/Little Bird in the UK and Ireland, and featured some original new angles on the Irish in Australia: for example, concerning the number of Irish Protestants who made the journey. Among the episode directors were Irish iconoclast Alan Gilsenan and newcomer Dearbhla Walsh. This series attempted to uncover previously little known material and adopted an auteur approach to documentary, giving each director more freedom to indulge a personal style. Walsh, for example, examined the contribution of women to the Irish diaspora in one program dedicated to this topic.
Both of the series above were made in a traditional documentary style. They featured an ‘omniscient’ voice-over and relied heavily on interviews and the use of archive material. Although professionally produced, they lacked the personal viewpoint, nuances, and fine detail of stories told at an individual level. As such, I found that they did not create any emotional connection with me.

Positioned in between these series were a number of one-off documentaries about specific incidents or personalities in Irish-Australian history, such as Alexander Pearce (*The last confession of Alexander Pearce*, 2009), Ned Kelly (*Ned Kelly: The true story*, 2003), Robert O’Hara Burke (*Craiceann geal, croí marbh*, [Bright Skin, Dead Heart] 2009) and the story of the Catalpa rescue of the Fenians off Fremantle in 1876 (*The Catalpa rescue*, 2007). These films were quite traditional in their approaches, and used combinations of docudrama, archive footage, and narration. They were presented for a television audience.

Siobhan McHugh’s (2010, p. 221) radio documentary work, on the other hand, actually explored the nature of memory itself. Her radio documentary, *Marrying out* (2010), for example, explored personal experiences of Catholic mixed marriages in Australia. McHugh was brought up in Ireland but now lives in Australia. She made reference to the primacy of oral history within her work (2010, p. 53): this is also a topic of importance for the *Secret family recipes* project.

A final artist of note in the realm of Irish-Australian work is Sydney-based visual artist Kate Murphy. Her *Prayers of a mother* (1999) was a video installation that occupied the borders of contemporary documentary practice. In a five-screen display, Kate’s mother took up the centre screen talking about her eight children and her hopes and prayers that they would come back to their Catholic faith. On the surrounding four screens the (sometimes tearful) reactions of her children fade in and out, reacting to their mother’s invocations. This performative work tapped into a rich vein of Catholic guilt and pity, as exposed through family relationships. It demonstrates the power of the performative in creating a sense of common experience and emotional intensity for an Irish-Australian audience.

Murphy (2012, personal interview) has a strong connection with her Irish heritage. Her self-portrait video *Cry me a future* (2008) focused on discovering and
understanding her Irish background. In the course of producing this work (while on a residency in Ireland) Murphy spoke of the process of closing the geographical distance that had separated her from her Irish ancestors. Murphy is interested in popular culture and television, and she explores how documentary, in its many forms, surrounds and influences the audience. Her work often features her own performances and those of her family and people who are close to her in life (Murphy, 2009). This style of domestic ethnography can convey complex emotional and cultural experiences in ways that are lacking in more traditional documentary forms (for a more in-depth study of domestic ethnography see Section 3.1 of this exegesis). Murphy’s work therefore differs from the above-mentioned Irish-Australian documentaries: not only because it places her character as central to the work, but also because it challenges and critiques the very nature of the documentary form.

The emergence of an Irish intercultural cinema

I now extend this discussion to examine Irish intercultural cinema. This term describes a particular subsection of films that are produced in the space that exists between two overlapping cultural regimes and that counter the Hollywood model of cinema.

Argentinian filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (1970) together created a manifesto, Toward a Third Cinema, which sought to demarcate a space for cinema within developing countries that could support the articulation of issues of gender, identity, and politics. This area of film was dubbed ‘Third Cinema’ to distinguish it from Hollywood (‘First Cinema’) and European art cinema (‘Second Cinema’). This categorisation of films along geographical parameters gained traction as the impacts of globalisation increased, and as a result this developed into theories about ‘national cinema’ (Vitali & Willemen 2006) and ‘transnational cinema’ (Ezra & Rowden 2006).

Laura Marks (2000, p. 24) further delineated a space for films that are produced in the intersecting areas between cultures, when she defined intercultural cinema as:
Operating at the intersections of two or more cultural regimes of knowledge. These films and videos must deal with the issue of where meaningful knowledge is located, in the awareness that it is between cultures and so can never be fully verified in the terms of one regime or the other.

Trinh T Minh-ha (cited in Marks 2000, p. 11) identified that within intercultural cinema cinematic form cultivates a politics and poetics by which to represent the experience of racial minorities and diasporic peoples. Hamid Naficy (2001, p. 4) went a step further when he added the concept of ‘accented cinema’. Naficy made a distinction between dominant cinema (which he considered to be universal and without accent) and accented cinema, where the ‘accent’ emanates not so much by the speech of the characters as from the displacement of the filmmakers and their ‘artisanal production modes’.

I argue that it is important to consider the mode of production in this analysis and submit as evidence the debate around the funding of my DCA film, *Secret family recipes*, which is outlined in Section 1.2 of this dissertation. To ignore the high cost of making film is to ignore the fact that, because of its cost, filmmaking has always been the preserve of the wealthy. By considering the economic aspect of production, the discussion moves into a debate about social production: a debate about access and power.

Artists in the 1970s were conscious of the politics of gender, race, and liberation struggles. Film workshops such as Sankofa and Black Audio Film Collective flourished in London (British Film Institute 2011) and spearheaded a new wave of political and experimental filmmaking to give a voice to the second generation Afro-Caribbean and Asian populations. These workshops set about reclaiming and owning their—often hidden—cultural histories, and would frequently counter the ‘official’ colonial version of their cultural stories. The very structures of their film workshops reflected this new ethos:

Workshops aimed to develop structures radically different from those of the film and broadcasting mainstream. Principles widely shared were collective management, integration of production,
distribution, and exhibition, flexible division of labour as opposed to rigid specialisms, continuity of employment as opposed to freelance working and non-hierarchical working relations, including relations between filmmakers, their subjects and audiences (Dickinson, n.d., p. 1)

The passion of remembrance (1986), directed by Isaac Julien and Maureen Blackwood (from the Sankofa filmmaking collective), dealt with themes such as sexuality, racism, and black history. This film was remarkable for its use of family history onscreen to trace the history of a black British family from the 1950s to the 1980s (Luxonline 2005).

I contend that Irish intercultural filmmaking (i.e. production of films outside of Ireland but with Irish focussed content) also had its origins in the UK in this period. At this time, London was the prime destination for many young Irish forced to emigrate in the 1970s and 1980s. The sons and daughters of earlier migrants (particularly in the 1950s) had received their free education in England, and the 1970s saw a new wave of filmmaking that mirrored the film initiatives of the second generation Afro-Caribbean and Asian populations. The Irish Video Project, which was based in Ladbroke Grove and founded by Ken Lynam and Don McGee, played an important role in supporting new Irish filmmakers at a grassroots level. Their seminal series People to people (1984) looked at the lives of the Irish who had emigrated in the 1950s. Suspect community (1987) examined the impact of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which was very much in use in England at the time. I worked on the production of Suspect community and met some of the Irish who had been wrongly imprisoned by the English courts for terrorist bombings. The lives of some of these innocent people were destroyed by the English tabloid press, and this, for me, was a formative political education.

The British Film Institute was instrumental in contributing funding to many of the important Irish films of this period. One of these films was Thaddeus O’Sullivan’s A pint of plain (1974). O’Sullivan had emigrated from Ireland in 1966 and studied at the Royal College of Art before producing this experimental film about emigration. O’Sullivan continued on this theme of emigration with On a paving stone mounted
(1978), which was notable for its treatment of memory. In this film, images of present day England were mixed with memories of Ireland, mimicking the conflict between the present and the past in the mind of the aged Irish building labourer who was the subject of the piece. Formally experimental, this film managed to capture the tone of the London Irish experience: it gave voice to working class migrants and reflected the concerns of its Irish audience in a time of high emigration. I felt a strong personal connection to this film, given the history of emigration in my immediate family.

A later Irish/UK film, *I could read the sky* (1999) also explored the memories of an Irish labourer in London using poetic voice-over and heavily treated digital images. This mixing of images from Ireland (denoting memory) with images of present day London (denoting reality) is a recurring feature of these films. Marks (2000, p. 40) spoke about two types of images within intercultural cinema:

> What Deleuze, following Bergson, refers to as the actual image and the virtual image are the two aspects of time as it splits. The actual image corresponding to the present that passes, the virtual image to the past that is preserved.

This theory makes sense of the notion of crystallised memory (which I have introduced above in Section 2.2), where the migrants’ view of the world is ‘snap-frozen’ the moment they step on the boat such that they do not bind with the host nation and so retain the attitudes of their birth-nation at the time that they left. Their vision of their homeland is frozen in time, as in Deleuze’s virtual image. They feel they are remaining true to the attitudes of their birth nation, but they do not realise that the birth nation itself has moved on. This brings about an increasing disconnection of the individual from both the host nation and the nation of birth.

I make this point in my film *Secret family recipes*, in the segment about sex education. I use the animated sequence of drawing the ‘dirty picture’ to make the point that my sex education as a young person was woefully inadequate. However, I am aware that circumstances have changed in Ireland since I left in 1985 and I make the point that I have taught my girls the facts of life (while the vision depicts me wearing an apron with a picture of Michelangelo’s David complete with large penis).
I am determined not to be caught in the bubble of crystallised memory, nor to inflict this conservative worldview on my children. I cite this example to make the point that my life experiences flow through into individual artistic choices within the film that I have made. Some of these choices are explicit such as the example above. Other elements of the film are more subtle. For example, the Super 8 film footage of the lone emigrant on the departing ship was filmed by me because, at the time, I recognised it as a key moment in my life story. At the time of filming (in 1994) I did not know where or when I would use this footage, yet my personal experience of emigration dictated that it was worth capturing.

In the following section I conclude the discussion of broader national and migrant film cultures by focusing on my personal directorial style as situated both inside and outside of the above filmmaking traditions. I want to explore the personal and political influences on my filmmaking style. Whilst these influences may not directly affect every individual directorial choice within *Secret family recipes*, they do provide a context and a direction for my work.

**Section 2.5. The development of a personal directorial style: A personal autobiography**

As a director, I have developed a unique approach to making films. This approach has been shaped by both my professional and personal experiences. I will therefore examine the development of my personal directorial style through an exploration of several of my early photographic, film, video, and multimedia works. In this section, I trace the influences of artists who were important to my practice, and I also identify the impact of life forces (such as politics and emigration) on my work. The development of a personal directorial style therefore meshes with my autobiography.

In looking at the ideas that shaped my directorial style I identify specific themes that have risen to the surface over the span of my career. Renov (cited in Austin & de Jong 2008, p. 47) has joined Foucault in declaring that the central question of the present is ‘Who we are?’ For Renov, it is:
Subjectivity—that multilayered construction of selfhood imagined, performed and assigned that matters most... We are not only what we do in a world of images; we are also what we show ourselves to be.

I quote this because I feel that it sums up the various strands of media work in which I have been engaged over the years. These influences flowed in to the production of *Secret family recipes*.

There are three main elements to my work over the years, and I outline below the development of these elements and the influences on their direction. These three elements are filmmaking, education, and activism.

*Filmmaking: Early years*

I came to the visual arts relatively late in life, having completed a primary degree in the biological sciences. I used my first roll of film to document the bohemian squalor of the squatted council flats of London’s docklands, where I stayed when I first moved to England.

![Fig. 3](image-url) Squatted council flats in Rotherhithe, South London, where I lived in 1985. This was the location for my first film, *Rope*.
At that point, I had already taken an interest in the moving image and had produced a video clip for a friend’s punk band, *Exile in the kingdom* (1985), earlier that same year (see Video/Filmography for online links to video). These subject areas of popular culture, community, and social justice were to dominate my audio-visual work for the next twenty-five years.

A major influence on my worldview at the time was the prolonged war in Northern Ireland, which provided a murderous and bloody backdrop to my teenage years. I can vividly remember the television images of a Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) policeman shovelling chunks of a bloodied torso off the pavement into a plastic bin bag on Bloody Friday, on 21st July 1972. At the time, I was eleven years old. My father and ten of my eleven brothers were in the Irish army reserve. I joined up on reaching the age of seventeen and served five years, working for considerable periods of time as a regular soldier in the Irish army.

![Fig. 4. Enda Murray, with brothers Kilian and Malachy in the uniform of the Fórsa Cosanta Áitiúil (FCA), the Irish army reserve, in 1981.](image)

Following completion of my science degree and my subsequent move to London in 1985, I proceeded to educate myself in film production in the Channel 4 network of independent production workshops. I trained at the Albany in New Cross, Four Corners in Bethnal Green, and London Video Arts in Soho. Although I engaged with film art at the London Filmmaker’s co-op in Camden Town I became far more excited about the political possibilities of the new medium of video than I did about the
‘high’ art of experimental film with its inaccessible visual tropes and heavy duty theory. However I was influenced by the experimental work of Stan Brakhage and his use of low budget production techniques such as painting directly onto film [Eye myth 1967; I... dreaming 1988]: a technique that I later used for rave party VJing.

I had left Ireland an angry young man. It seemed my education and my skills were rejected by the country that had brought me up. I found I was able to express these feelings through film and my first drama film, Rope (1986), was a low budget paean to the life of an emigrant. The film followed a day in the life of a depressed unemployed Irish migrant who leads a miserable existence in a grotty run-down squatted council estate. His day is framed by the sounds of daytime television, while the mise en scène provides some clues to his background and the sexual identity problems that were part of the reason for his emigration.

I enrolled in an MA in Independent Filmmaking at St Martin’s School of Art in Covent Garden in 1987, where I was exposed to the work of transgressive filmmakers such as Derek Jarman (Sebastiane 1979 and Caravaggio 1988) and Kenneth Anger (Scorpio rising 1964). The dominant theory at St Martin’s at that time was a combination of Marx, Freud, Lacan, and Gramsci. I found this theory inaccessible and somewhat detached from the reality of my experience growing up in working class Ireland. There was a fondness for the nobility of the working class (as typified by the work of Grierson), which seemed to overlook the reality of the squalor and powerlessness that had been my experience.

As I had not had any formal practical filmmaking education, I proceeded to feel my way toward broadcast productions of better technical quality, making Sound system (1992) in Coventry in the English Midlands. Again, the vitality of the topic (underground Afro Caribbean reggae sound systems) provided the imperative for this fifteen-minute documentary. Although the short film did have a distinctive stylistic imprint, it was the political strength of the content that carried the film, rather than its attention to style; for the first time on film, black musicians were talking about the role of British dub reggae music in politicising their community.

The film featured observational footage of a sound system as it plays a gig in Handsworth, Birmingham, which was intercut with talking head interviews with
major players in the sound system scene. I was drawn to this topic, having an
awareness of the use of music by Jamaican people to create and cement a sense of
community within their scattered UK diaspora. An added bonus for me was that
sound systems were hitherto not considered to be ‘high art’, but were seen as a
subversive drug-ridden subculture. Filmmaking in this context was thus a political
act: an attempt to give agency to those who society regarded as an underclass. This
echoes a statement by Tony Dowmunt (2005, p. 171) of his work at that time:

In community video our idea was that people (particularly the socially
excluded and mis-represented) should speak for and represent themselves, to
express their/our own embodied perspectives, to counter the ‘view from
above’ of mainstream television at the time.

Despite the traditional documentary process of production, I felt that Sound system
was performing this role.

Fig. 5. Karl Irving from the Quaker City Sound System in Birmingham, England during the filming
Filmmaking and performance

During this period, I had begun to film protest marches against the impending Criminal Justice Bill, and this activism led me to work with the emerging alternative news service, *Small world*, who were shooting social justice actions on Hi8 cameras and compiling a news magazine, *Undercurrents* (1994) which was distributed on VHS tape. I was fascinated by the possibilities of the new modes of distribution. I had also begun live VJing at raves and clubs (particularly illegal outdoor free parties) throughout the UK (Healy 2004). I began to use the platform of rave VJing to screen activist footage interspersed with Disney films and soft porn in order to use the medium like a bush telegraph. My major influence in this work was the DJ and VJ Matt Black from the band Coldcut. For example, in his work, *Timber* (1998), he used Greenpeace video archive footage to build an audio-visual cutup, forging a thumping soundtrack from the chainsaws and other found sounds. I enjoyed this idea of breaking down the barriers between film, music, clubbing, and news. I became convinced that the best creative work was that which could communicate to a wide and diverse audience. It is for this reason that I choose to work in an accessible medium such as documentary and employ audience pleasers like animation, comedy and music in my work.

Education

Between 1990 and 1996 I lived and worked in Coventry, a rundown industrial city in the English Midlands, fifty kilometres south of Birmingham. I worked as a video maker and teacher for the local city council in a council-funded arts centre. The centre had been set up to cater for young disadvantaged people in response to the riots that had occurred in Coventry and many other English cities in 1985. Although the work was stimulating, I became increasingly convinced that I was merely—as I would have said at the time—‘wiping the arse of Tory Britain’, by providing some light relief at the coalface while behind the scenes the core reasons for the poverty and social injustice were continuing to operate unabated.
I became interested in the work of Augusto Boal (1973) and the possibilities of forum theatre to intervene in the social dialogue. In particular, I was influenced by the work of Andy Porter and Jonnie Turpie at Hi8us in London, who were taking some of the ideas of Boal and using them to create community-sourced video drama. This work was devised within communities, produced with broadcast production values, and screened on TV to a substantial nationwide audience. Augusto Boal (1973) has stated that, for him, theatre is more than Hamlet’s image of the mirror, where participants can see their virtues and vices. Rather, it is about reaching in to the mirror to change the powerlessness in participants’ lives: theatre as a form of empowerment. This idea, that my art could create social and political change, drove my passion for filmmaking and, in particular, for participatory filmmaking, which I describe in the next section.

Education and participatory filmmaking

I worked with Hi8us in Coventry on a production called Blazed (1994), which introduced me to their style of working with communities, which they termed participatory filmmaking. Jerry Rothwell (2008, p. 155) defined this as a process whereby the professional filmmaker enables a subject ‘to articulate their experience through a filmmaking process in which [the subject] has as much control as possible’. In essence, the process involves finding a community with something to say. A dramaturge works with the young people within that community using conventional play-building drama exercises to develop ideas around real issues in their lives. Professional filmmakers are then brought in to shoot and edit a film that can then be screened on broadcast television. The young people who contribute the ideas in the devising process go on to become the acting talent in the television drama.

When I moved to Australia in 1996, I used this format for my next project, which was the half-hour long award-winning drama Road (2000). Road was made in the Redfern area of Sydney with young Aboriginal people. The young people brought life experiences to the devising process and then became the acting talent in the finished film (O’Hara 2002). Road screened on SBS TV and at several international film festivals, including those in Dublin and Rotterdam.
Although this was strictly a social realist drama film, I view this work as being close to documentary: in that it depicts life stories that are based on fact and acted out by the young people themselves. The devising workshops contained drama and writing elements, as well as an element of ‘forum theatre’. Forum theatre is a method developed by Augusto Boal (1973) to break down the barriers between the theatre performers and the audience. It encourages audiences to participate in the theatre performance, particularly for educational and social change purposes. In the case of *Road*, the young people were encouraged to imagine solutions to their life problems during the devising process and these ideas were then incorporated into the film script (Mansfield 2000). I resolved to learn more about the work of Augusto Boal, and took part in a workshop that was organised by Sydney University. This workshop explored some of the practical elements of forum theatre, which I then incorporated into my work.

I decided to address these issues with the next project, *Jammin’ in the Middle E* (2006), which was created with the Arab community in Bankstown in southwest
Sydney. This film was directed by Kim Mordaunt and played on SBS and at a number of national and international festivals (including Mumbai). The short feature project used comedy to portray the lives of young people living between two cultures and was a resounding critical success. An article in *The Australian* stated:

> Although it can be construed as an anthropological project of sorts, *Jammin’* works somewhere in the margins between documentary and fiction, the scripted and the genuine, scrutinising and celebrating a diverse, sophisticated culture (Blundell, 2006).

![Image](image.jpg)

Fig. 7  Masure, Elissar Mukhtar, and NomisE during the filming of *Jammin’ in the Middle E* in Bankstown, western Sydney in 2005.

I approached these projects each time with the intention of creating a document that would allow the communities involved to express themselves, and as such I felt that the cinematic style was secondary to the experience of the young people involved (Murray 2003). I felt that the act of placing the sensibilities of the community in front of a national audience was a major part in the success of these projects. Once again the tactical aspect of producing popular material for a broad audience showed itself to be important in my work.
In addition to pursuing my interests in filmmaking, I continued to work in multimedia and—especially where my activist work was concerned—in any medium that would help get a social change message across.

**Activism**

While in England I was active in the early ‘Reclaim the Streets’ events in London, which closed down areas of the city to cars and set up spaces for parties to take place (Reclaim the streets, 1997). I called these actions ‘utopian gestures of defiance’. Following my move to Sydney in 1996, I became involved with the eco activist movement that had its foundation in the Wilderness Society base on Wilson St., Newtown, NSW.

A Reclaim the Streets event took place in Sydney in November 1997 and was followed by several more in the following years (Nicholson 1999). A feature of the anti-corporate/eco activist protests of 1998 and 1999 was their synchronisation with world events: a progression that was facilitated by the evolution of the internet and its early adoption by tech savvy protestors. In May 1998, I was a member of the Community Activist TV (Catalyst) collective, who used secondhand computers and a donated power source to broadcast images and sounds of the Glebe Point Road Reclaim the Streets protest to the world, in a synchronised anti-globalisation event. Naomi Klein (2001) commented on the networked nature of the Sydney protest in her book *No logo*.

The accessibility of the internet made it possible to synchronise global protest, and similarly well co-ordinated days of protest took place on 18th June 1999 (J18) and November 30th 1999 (at the same time as the N30 Seattle WTO meeting). At last it seemed possible, through clever use of technology, for the ragtag groups of environmental and social change activists around the globe to have an impact and, through unity, to achieve strength.

I had been active in *Undercurrents* in the UK and became involved in setting up a similar type of video news magazine in Sydney, entitled *News unlimited*. *News unlimited* produced three editions between 1996 and 2001, each containing eight to
ten short video pieces recorded at environment and social justice protests from around Australia. I attended and recorded many of these grassroots political carnivals in my role as videographer. I screened the videos of these at clubs and raves where I continued to VJ. In April 1999 I played live onstage at the Metro in Sydney as a guest of seminal UK masters of cut-up, Coldcut (Poole 2001). These ideas about art, communication, and social change that were developed and fine-tuned within activist political circles flowed into my professional arts work.

Activism online

Prior to the Sydney Olympics in 2000 I was active in setting up an *Indymedia* (2000) portal for Sydney. This portal aimed to challenge the orthodoxy of the commercial side of the Olympic Games, which was having a negative impact on sections of Sydney’s more vulnerable communities including the low rent sector and the homeless. Excited by the possibilities to use this new medium I set about developing the ACTIVE software from the Indymedia network to set up a virtual art gallery for the Palestinian diaspora. This project, *Virtual Palestine* (2001), received funding from the Australia Council for the Arts and the NSW Ministry for the Arts. It involved working with young people from the Arabic community to train them in web skills to build the network and then encourage content creation. This was the first time that it was possible to post on to a central website remotely from anywhere in the world and, although this now seems positively pedestrian in the era of Facebook and related social media, this was the opening up of a whole new world of possibilities for me. Sean Bridgeman (2004) wrote that the project was ground breaking in its aims and use of new media technologies for community development.

Activism and Boat-people.org

In 1995 I attended a gathering at the French embassy in London to protest the nuclear bomb tests in Mururoa in French Polynesia. As part of the protest, activists used a projector to place images of the atomic blasts onto the clean white stucco of the embassy wall. Using the embassy itself as a place of inscription was a brilliant use of
the medium and a very effective protest: the embassy’s own real estate was being
used as part of the fabric of the offending image.

In October 2001, John Howard was refusing to acknowledge that his claim of
‘children overboard’ in relation to asylum seekers was a lie that had been deliberately
used in the run-up to federal election that was due to take place the following month.
I was attending the Trading International Lateral Tactics (TILT) conference of
tactical media in Sydney when a group of participants in a workshop suggested an
intervention into the debate. We acquired a 35 mm slide projector and generator and
projected a seven metre image of a sailing ship with the words ‘Boat People’
underneath onto the sails of the Sydney Opera House (Taylor 2001). The image
received national and international attention and convinced me of the power of
tactical media interventions into public debate.

I continued to work with the other artists involved in this action, a loose co-operative
of ten artists named Boat-people.org, and we have continued to make public art
around ‘race, nation, history, and borders’ (Kelly 2011). Much of the art we create
fits the description of ‘culture jamming’: described by Klein (2001) as a process akin
to t’ai chi: insofar as powerful brands and logos are turned on their head by a weaker
but more skilful opponent. For example, by putting our message onto the Sydney
Opera House, we used its international prestige to elevate the gravitas and impact of
our message.

The output of Boat-people.org involves public and participatory art works made with
humour, creativity and style. Throughout eleven years, these projects have taken the
form of projections, photography, flash-mobs, post-cards, performance, and beer
brewing. We are giving ourselves permission to engage the national dialogue on the
issues that matter. Throughout these adventures in filmmaking, education, and
activism it has been clear that an overriding aspect of my practice has been to
produce art that communicates. Art that effects social and political change, rather
than art for art’s sake. The medium is unimportant, whereas the message is vital.
Summary of Chapter 2

This chapter has provided a context for this research project by outlining historical, cultural, and filmic approaches to Irish-Australian identity. I examined the origin of the term Anglo-Celtic, and its impact on the broader Australian identity. In this chapter I have considered the place of memory and its importance to migrants, but have also suggested that memory can have an inhibiting effect, causing migrants to live in the past.

I also examined the history of documentary film in Ireland: ranging from early practitioners like Sidney Olcott and Robert Flaherty, through to modern exponents like Alan Gilsenan and John T. Davis. I also explored the constant presence of political influence on the Irish media.
I examined the influence of Irish filmmakers working in the UK and USA and compared the impact of their migrancy on the content and form of their films with Irish themed filmmaking in Australia. I outlined the emergence of intercultural cinema, and presented an argument for the recognition for a strand of work termed Irish intercultural film.

Over the last twenty-five years, I have developed a personal style of work, which combines my interests in community, broadcast, and tactical media. I have moved between video, multimedia, and performance to explore ways of involving audiences in the production experience. In this chapter, I have traced a line through my work within the areas of film production, live VJing, and activist work, and have identified the influence of music, politics and art on developing my ideas about film.

I noted that from 1996 I became involved in participatory drama with disadvantaged communities within Sydney. I combined this work with activist art work around issues of borders, history, and race. The success of my film projects at national and international festivals and the critical praise that my arts activism work has achieved have confirmed the quality of my work in the eyes of my peers. I bring all of these influences to bear on the development of my film Secret family recipes, choosing to turn to my family background to investigate the links that I have with my community and my place of birth.

In the next chapter, I look at the role of the personal in documentary cinema.
Chapter 3.

The personal in documentary filmmaking: A literature and film practice review

In this chapter, I trace the emergence of a style of documentary filmmaking that emphasises personal experience. In the previous chapter, I examined the historical, cultural, and individual filmic links between Ireland and Australia in order to give context to the discussion that now follows. In the present chapter I explore the practice of filmmaking within families and from an autobiographical point of view. I explore how a documentary style that foregrounds performance can be useful within an exploration of a personal or subjective viewpoint. Finally, in this chapter I propose a new term, ‘domestic performativity’, for the purpose of analysing the meanings contained in the film Secret family recipes.

Section 3.1. Screening the personal story

Autobiographical fiction

Technical developments in recording equipment that have occurred since the development of the camcorder in the 1980s have placed broadcast quality video cameras within reach of the individual. These developments have enabled the emergence of a cohort of films where the filmmaker turns the camera onto themselves. In the words of documentary filmmaker Tony Dowmunt (2005, p. 171):

The arrival of the camcorder enabled an explosion of a new kind of work in which the video camera became an analogous tool to the pen or computer of the diarist or ‘life-writer’.

The reasons people give for producing this autobiographical material are many and varied.

Towards the end of Andrew Jarecki’s documentary film Capturing the Friedmans (2003), David Friedman commented on why he shot home video at specific points
Jerry Rothwell (2008, p. 154), commented on this same aspect of the film, and he suggested that recording secrets is the first step in revealing these secrets to the world: ‘Secrets are a burden and recording them begins a process of exposure, over which the subject’s control is bound to be precarious’.

By working with my family’s memories and with stories that photographs inspire, I am not only working with autobiographical fact but also dealing with the area of autobiographical fiction. Hart Cohen (1997, p. 68) described autobiographical fiction as an attempt to, ‘construct a presence within the margin between the experiences of the filmmaker and the film he has made about those experiences’. He termed this ‘the fiction of autobiography or autobiographical fiction’. Cohen cited Walter Benjamin to support this argument:

Reminiscences, even extensive ones, do not always amount to an autobiography... For autobiography has to do with time, with sequences and what makes up the continuous flow of life. Here, I am talking of space, of moments and discontinuities.

Michelle Citron (1999), in her essay about autobiographical film, also referred to the fiction within documentary film. She suggested that a taxonomy of images existed within film, ranging from fact to fiction. Likewise, in Secret family recipes, the visual material can be viewed as variously inhabiting a range between fact and fiction. The family photos are fact and lie at one end of the spectrum; whereas the observational footage of the cake making could be termed a performative fiction and sits in the middle of the range. The animation sequences are at the other end of the scale and constitute a pure fiction. However, as Citron (1999, p. 277) has conceded, this, in itself, does not fully describe the essence of autobiographical film. She introduced the idea of ‘emotional texture’, which is the glue that binds the elements of the film into
its impactful whole. Citron (Citron 1999, p. 275) perhaps identified what makes up this emotional texture when she spoke of the following:

Love, guilt, desire to help—all the convoluted feelings that infuse familiar relationships— influence the maker-subject dynamics in most autobiographical films... This is because the film enters into the already preexisting relationship between the artist and her family subjects.

Bill Nichols (2001, pp. 99–138) developed a typology for understanding the representation of reality in documentary film. He proposed that documentary films could be classified as using one or more of the following modes of representation: poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, or performative.

The styles of documentary produced since the 1940s in Ireland concur with the typology of documentary as proposed by Nichols (2001), in their approach to charting the Irish experience. Thus, early films are of the expositional mode, with the ‘voice of God’ narration; whereas later films incorporate what Bruzzi (2000 p. 74) has described as: ‘many of the tactics and devices of its so-called interactive, reflexive, and performative successors’. However, as Bruzzi has pointed out, it is an oversimplification of the emergence of documentary to simply see Nichols’ evolution as a simple chronological development. Of course, lyrical and expositional documentaries are still being produced, so perhaps it would be more appropriate to see Nichols evolution as a guide to developments in documentary, but not a rule.

Before moving on to examine performative documentary in detail, it is worth noting that Nichols’ typography is but one system of categorisation. Trish Fitzsimons (2011, p. 29), in her book on Australian documentary, emphasised the location of documentary practice within a social and institutional context. She used this system to understand the development of documentary in Australia where government funding institutions played a major role in documentary production in the period up to the early 1980s. She placed emphasis on the voice of documentary ‘as braided, with many influences typically forming a finished film’. This theory accurately echoes the various influences of different parties on the development of the documentary project, such as the funding body or the commissioning editor. In my
case, the influencers were my PhD supervisors and, particularly, the sensitivities of the subjects within my family circle. The final piece in the jigsaw is the audience, which, according to Fitzsimons, ‘contributes to an overall “event”, of which a documentary forms a part’.

Performative documentary

Performative documentaries stress subjective experience and emotional responses to the world. They are strongly personal, unconventional, and often poetic and/or experimental. I see the film I have made as using performative devices. Given that I am a character in the film and interact with my subjects throughout the cake baking lessons, I am very much an actor within the narrative, performing a distinct role for the camera. This approach reflects the idea of performative documentary, as described by Bill Nichols (1994, p. 101):

Performative documentary seeks to evoke not the quality of a people’s worldview but the specific qualities that surround particular people, discrete events, social subjectivities, and historically situated encounters between filmmakers and their subjects.

I endorse this idea of drawing out meaning from particular events within lives of characters, based on the development of my directorial practice. Stella Bruzzi (2000, p. 180) supported the notion that performative documentary is, indeed, the apogee of documentary practice:

The performance documentary is the clearest contemporary exponent of this book’s underpinning thesis that the documentary as prescribed by advocates of observational realism is an unrealisable fantasy, that documentary will forever be circumscribed by the fact that it is a mode of representation and thus can never elide the distance between image and event.
She used the examples of Nick Broomfield (*The leader, his driver and the driver’s wife*, 1991) and Molly Dineen (*Geri*, 1999) to make the point that the ‘very notion of a complete, finite documentary is continually challenged and reassessed’.

However, this project is also an investigation that travels not just between countries, but also within the classic triadic structure of diasporic culture encompassing subject, host country, and place of origin. I—as subject of the film—am making comparisons and studies of my host country, Australia, against the context of my family’s experiences of growing up in Ireland. This film compares my family life in the twenty-first century with family life in the early twentieth century, using oral histories and the mining of memory, family photographs, and home movies to illustrate the piece. I have thus moved closer to Renov’s (2004, p. 176) endorsement of personal histories:

> Any chronicler of documentary history would note the growing prominence of work by women and men of diverse cultural backgrounds in which the representation of the historical world is inextricably bound up with self-inscription.

However, a defining factor of my documentary is that it concerns my family and is ultimately a search for clues about my own identity and the light that this can throw on my own culture, family, and creative work. This self-reflective aspect of the production locates it close to the realm of autoethnography. Autoethnography is usually a term used in creative writing and has been defined by Maréchal (2010) as a form of autobiographical personal narrative that explores the writer’s experience of life. Autoethnography differs fundamentally from ethnography (a qualitative research method in which a researcher uses participant observation and interviews in order to gain a deeper understanding of a group’s culture) in that it focuses on the writer’s subjective experience rather than the beliefs and practices of others. Belinda Smaill (2010, p. 142) has supported this description of a canon of work within documentary that, ‘seek ways of narrating present experience through the lens of formative events facilitated by childhood relationships.’ She included Michelle Citron’s *Daughter rite* (1980), Su Friedrich’s *Sink or swim* (1990), and Jonathan Caouette’s *Tarnation* (2003) in this body of work.
Michelle Citron’s *Daughter rite* (1980) used home movie footage to question the director’s relationship with her mother. The publicity for the film stated that it is the missing link between the direct cinema documentaries and the later hybrids that acknowledged truth could not always be found in front of a camera lens. The film is experimental in style: featuring, for example, digitally treated home movie sequences that were filmed on Super 8 mm.

Su Friedrich’s film *Sink or swim* (1990) evoked the artist’s family history as, in adulthood, she struggled to come to terms with her relationship with her father. The film title comes from an incident when, as a child, she asked her father to teach her to swim. He took her to a pool, explained the theory, and then threw her into the deep end. The stylistic approach is formally experimental. The story is told through a succession of twenty-six segments, each beginning with a letter of the alphabet. The letters are in reverse order (starting with ‘z’ for ‘zygote’), which equates in the timeline of the film to the artist’s conception.

In *Tarnation* (2003), Caouette turned the camera onto himself and his mentally ill mother, Renée. Caouette uses a pop sensibility to chop his mix of family photographs, super 8 mm movie, and family interviews to excavate the layers of history within his dysfunctional family. His story revolves around significant moments within his mother’s life—most importantly, her experiences of abuse and mental institutions—to draw out meaning for himself and his choices in life.

These films share a common theme, where the filmmaker, as an adult, revisits their childhood to explore—often dysfunctional—relationships within their family. These films mine home movie footage and photos to make sense of the director’s present situation. Michael Renov (1999, p. 141) described this practice as ‘domestic ethnography’.
Domestic ethnography

Renov (1999, p. 141) coined the term domestic ethnography within documentary studies to describe a new departure that he identified as occurring in the 1980s. He described it as a way to explore the complexity of communal or blood ties between the subject and his or her family or a form of ‘supplementary autobiographical practice’ where the subject constructs self-knowledge through the familial other:

Familial investigation... is a kind of identity sleuthing in which family-bound figures—progenitors and progeny—are mined for clues to the artist’s vocation, sensibility or pathology. Domestic ethnographies tend to be highly charged investigations brimming with a curious brand of epistephilia, a brew of affection, resentment, even self-loathing... a kind of inter-subjective reciprocity in which the representations of self and other are simultaneously if unequally at stake (p. 142).

This approach allows the filmmaker to bring to the screen some of the more complicated and confusing aspects of their family relationships and explore how these have affected their experiences. Renov also touched on a characteristic of the canon of films that fall under his definition of domestic ethnography by alluding to the cathartic quality of these films. He described the filmmaking process of Su Friedrich’s film *Sink or swim* (1990; described above) as ‘therapeutic discourse, like analysis’ (p. 143). This search within the private sphere for clues to the public sphere is supported by the writing of Leo Berkeley (2007, p. 4) who quoted an interview with Alexander Kluge: ‘Therefore, you have to examine paths within the sphere of intimacy, family politics, for example, to understand what public life means.’ I support this line of argument: given the evidence that Michelle Citron’s *Daughter rite* (1980) and Jonathan Caouette’s *Tarnation* (2003) each serve this function.

In Australia, Janet Merewether’s *Maverick mother* (2008) used the event of the birth of her son Arlo to question the role of her parents in shaping her own views on life and personal politics. This film uses the highly stylised dramatisations that are a feature of Merewether’s films to illustrate the dilemmas she faces as she treads her own path toward procreation. Most telling are the interviews with her father, who
comes across as a male chauvinist as he reveals his lack of involvement in Janet’s
domestic upbringing and his shame about her status as unmarried mother.
Merewether’s use of the occasion of her son’s birth to investigate her inherited views
echo my own experience. Her performance shines a light on her own experiences as
well as that of her extended family.

Section 3.2. Domestic performativity and Secret family recipes

In establishing a conceptual framework, I wanted to bring together both
documentary and ethnographic practice. In particular, I wanted to test the hypothesis
that performative documentary and domestic ethnography could be effectively
combined to investigate my own personal experience of Irish-Australian identity
within an intergenerational and intercultural framework. This study is about context
and relationships, and as such fits within a framework of domestic ethnography as
defined by Renov (1999, p. 41). This study also displays elements of performative
documentary, as defined by Nichols (1994; see above).

I now describe the process whereby I combine the family documentary exploration
(domestic ethnography) with a performative documentary style. I coined the term
‘domestic performativity’ to describe this process and wish to test the hypothesis
that this framework can deliver results within this study.

Tarnation (2003) and Maverick mother (2008) are notable films in this domestic
performative style, in that the director turns the camera onto themselves, and the
directors become major characters in the evolving narrative of the film. I will make
further comparisons between these films and Secret family recipes in Chapter 4.

The other important feature of Secret family recipes is the transnational aspect of the
film. The experience of migration brings familial and cultural ties to the fore, and in
many cases the impact of a move across borders is the defining feature of the
subjects’ experience. The wrench of migration within families is well documented
and has been featured in several documentaries: similarly, this is a major element in
the narrative of Secret family recipes. Safina Uberoi’s My mother India (2002)
introduced this element of migration into the framework of a film that explores a
family history that spans both India and Australia. In *90 miles* (2001), the director, Juan Carlos Zaldivar, returned to Cuba to investigate the consequences of his family’s journey into exile (and to pursue a personal quest for healing and understanding between his father). I will discuss these films further in Chapter 4.

**Summary of Chapter 3**

In this chapter I traced the emergence of documentary styles that emphasise personal experience. I discussed autobiographical and performative styles and writers (such as Stella Bruzzi) to highlight the advantages of using a subjective approach and of placing the writer at the centre of the documentary exploration. I also explored Michael Renov’s theory of domestic ethnography: whereby the subject constructs self-knowledge through an interrogation of the familial other. I quoted Michelle Citron’s writings about her own documentary work with her family to flag some of the challenges of working within families to investigate a director’s sensibilities and motives. I proposed a mix of performative documentary and domestic ethnography as a framework for investigation, and coined the term domestic performativity to describe this new concept.
Chapter 4.

Reflective critical analysis: The significance and contribution of the film.

In this chapter I examine the significant outcomes of this research project (consisting of the fifty-minute documentary, *Secret family recipes*, and the exegesis that critiques the making of the documentary) and place them within the context of relevant theoretical discourses.

The research questions explore personal stories of migration within the context of family, community, and identity. Within the documentary, the personal search frequently fused with wider cultural questions, in turn broadening the scope of the project.

*Interdisciplinary issues*

The exegesis places the creative work into context and uses a theoretical framework to dissect the production decisions. A major issue that emerged early in the project was the interdisciplinary nature of the research question: the investigation contained elements of history, anthropology, politics, art, sociology, and film studies. From early in the project it was clear that I would need to separate the three main investigative memes of art, film, and cultural studies. I therefore needed to determine which investigative lens would deliver the most appropriate data and sit most comfortably with previous investigations within the same political and emotional landscape.

I approached the making of the documentary without any predetermined stylistic template in mind. My objective was to use an intuitive approach to the material and produce a piece that, according to my gut feeling, would create the best experience for an audience and would reach my highest creative expectations as an artist. I navigated my way through a long and protracted production process and delivered a
product that was the filtration of my original ideas through the technical production process (including the restrictive issues of funding). I now critique the film I have made and see where it fits within the spectrum of research methodologies.

I begin this critical analysis with an examination of intercultural issues and then focus in on community and finally, the familial, and the personal. On the way, I will examine domestic performativity in more detail.

**Intercultural and accented film**

As noted above, Naficy (2001, p. 4) made a distinction between dominant cinema, which he considered to be universal and without accent; and what he coined accented cinema, where the accent emanates not so much from the speech of the characters as from the displacement of the filmmakers and their ‘artisanal production modes’. In particular, I have engaged with the artisanal mode of production in *Secret family recipes*. Naficy (2001, p. 49) stated that, ‘accented filmmakers not only act in their own films but also perform multiple other functions’. Given my multiple roles as writer, producer, director, camera operator, editor, and actor in *Secret family recipes*, I can identify with this statement.

I feel that I have contributed to this discourse around the meeting of cultures with my previous work. In the past, I have made several films that I would categorise as intercultural films. *Reel Irish* (1998), for example, is built around the narrative backbone of a third generation Irish, ten-year-old girl, as she competes in her first Feis (dancing competition) in London. Intercut with this narrative are interviews with dancers, family groups, and individuals: covering four generations of Irish women in Britain. The focus was on the women in the Irish dancing scene and the film emphasised their role in passing on cultural traditions within the family as a counter to the dominant English culture within which they were bringing up their families.
My film *Gaelic girls* (1997) is also relevant in this context. This film looked at the lives of four young Irish women who immigrated to Australia. The women were members of a ladies’ Gaelic (Irish rules) football team and the football season provided a narrative backbone to the film. However, the personal experiences of emigration and the hopes and aspirations of the four subjects provided the main focus of the film. The film has similarities with *Reel Irish* (1998), in that it looks at personal experiences against a background of an Irish cultural pursuit (football and dancing, respectively) in opposition to the dominant cultural codes in order to provide a context for a discussion of ‘otherness’. Naficy (2001, p. 31) suggested that intercultural cinema is evidenced when, ‘every story is both a private story of an individual and a social and public story of exile and diaspora’. Both these films and *Secret family recipes* are part of an ongoing attempt to make sense of where I am and who I am, in relation to the new environments in which I found myself: as such, they are firmly within the canon of intercultural film.
Naficy (2001, p. 283) also introduced a framework by which to examine intercultural cinema by placing the characters along a sliding scale of national consciousness depending on their metaphysical proximity to home. He noted three categories in Atom Egoyan’s film Calendar (1993), for example:

Those who are born in Armenia... those Armenians born in diaspora who have grown up with a strong sense of affiliation and commitment to Armenia... and those born in the diaspora who are assimilated into the host society.

In this film, Egoyan mixes documentary and fiction to examine his own Armenian/Canadian identity. Egoyan (assimilated) physically travels back to his ancestral home of Armenia with his wife (a strong sense of affiliation) where she meets and has an affair with their driver (born in Armenia). Naficy regards this process as a ‘performance of identity’. It is possible to identify the characters in Secret family recipes along the same lines: my mother (born in Ireland), myself (a strong sense of affiliation), and my children (assimilated).

One other aspect of accented cinema, according to Naficy (2001, p. 4), is the ‘inscription of the biographical... (dis)location of the filmmakers’. In Marilu Mallet’s
Unfinished diary (1986), what begins as a film about exile becomes a film about divorce. The Chilean filmmaker was exiled in Canada, and her isolation from her country of birth is embodied in the physical distance that evolves onscreen with her partner. One could interpret my mother’s character in Secret family recipes as representative of the Ireland that I am missing and my children’s characters as Australia, the young country that I am struggling to come to terms with. These aspects of Secret family recipes—I contend—place it very firmly within the definition of intercultural film. As I have noted in Chapter 2, there is currently no tradition of Irish-Australian intercultural cinema, and Secret family recipes thus makes a new contribution to the field of knowledge within Irish and Australian filmmaking.

Home, community, and a sense of place

One of the issues that I wanted to explore in making Secret family recipes was the question of what ‘home’ meant for me. I knew that my hometown of Drogheda held special significance for me, but I wanted to understand more about why this was the case.

Naficy (2001, p. 152) spoke about home as that place that ‘is a segment of space that people imbue with special meanings and value’. David Morley (1999, pp. 152–153) investigated the meaning of home at the junction of the family versus national identity in an essay where he attempted an analysis of the domestic realm ‘that can effectively be integrated with contemporary macro debates about the nation, community, and cultural identities’. To make this connection, it was necessary for him to draw on sources from media studies, cultural geography, and anthropology. He made the point that the notion of home ‘cannot be understood except in relation to its outside(s)’.

Doreen Massey (cited in Morley 1999, p. 156) stated that ‘any search for “a sense of place” must of necessity be reactionary’, and she argued ‘for a sense of place to be progressive, not self-enclosing and defensive, but outward-looking’. Massey’s argument explains some of my own sensitivity to place, having come from a former outpost of the British Empire. Morley quoted Massey further in noting that:
From the point of view of the colonized periphery (for whom ‘the security of the boundaries of the place one called home must have dissolved long ago’ in the wake of imperialism’s conquests of other people’s homes), it is perhaps ‘centuries since time and distance provided much protective insulation from the outside’ (Morley 1999, p. 157).

In *Secret family recipes*, I return to my home in Ireland and to Newgrange, the Neolithic burial site on the banks of the Boyne. I make the point that the site is a constant in my family story: a place I travelled with my father when he was alive; a place that I have visited over the years with friends to witness the winter solstice; and finally a place where I brought my eldest daughter to give her a name and a place in the world.

Newgrange is a place with a long history, and its origins date back to circa 3200 BC (Stout & Stout 2008). Not only is there scientific evidence of its antiquity; the site is named in ancient Irish legends, which clearly makes it a part of a mythical Ireland (Murphy 2012). Newgrange’s winter solstice alignment with the rising sun pre-dates the celebration of the Christian festival of Christmas. The ritual celebration of midwinter has a long history within Irish culture and my mother’s cake baking is only the latest chapter. The inclusion of the image of Newgrange in my film is my attempt to buy into this cache of authenticity. By linking my lineage to this sacred site I am claiming a home that is not only permanent and literally ‘carved in stone’, but is also a part of myth and legend, imparting another layer of legitimacy upon my identity. This is a place that pre-dates the colonial occupation of the British: the same occupation that provided my mother with some of her first living memories, when British soldiers ransacked her town. This linkage explains my strong attachment to the place where I grew up. This attachment has been made stronger through exile.

Turkish writer Pelin Aytemiz (2013, p. 1) commented on this duality between home and exile and stated that stories about home in transnational cinema are usually a way of ‘questioning belonging to a nation, to an identity... in this sense, home is closely linked with displacement, transnational places and therefore to exilic experience’. This tension between home and exile is articulated by use of the hyphen that I discussed earlier in relation to the Anglo-Celtic and Irish-American populations (see
Chapter 2.3). Naficy (2001, p. 15) has spoken of the importance of the ‘politics of the hyphen’ within accented cinema:

Identity cinema’s adoption of the hyphen is seen as a marker of resistance to the homogenizing and hegemonizing power of the American melting pot ideology... the hyphen may also suggest a divided mind, an irrevocably split identity, or a type of paralysis between two cultures or nations.

Here, Naficy is referring to the hyphen in ‘-American’. However, I suggest this analysis of the hyphen could also be applied to other hybridised nationalities, particularly Irish-Australian.

There could, however, be another explanation for this journey home in search of my roots. In Chapter 2.2, I introduced my theory about crystallised memory, which occurs when the migrant’s worldview is frozen at the point at which they leave their country of origin. I believe that Naficy’s mention of paralysis in the above quote could be equated to my idea of crystallised memory. In rereading my blog from 2007, I noticed references to the ways that the Irish community in Ireland had changed and moved on, whereas my ideas on some things remained very much the same as when I had left in 1985. This is what I refer to as a crystallised memory. Nowhere was the experience of crystallised memory more apparent than in my visit to Stormont, the government building of Northern Ireland to attend the launch of singer, Dana’s biography in early 2008. There I witnessed Ian Paisley, the Protestant hardliner, share a stage and a few jokes with Martin McGuinness, the former leader of the IRA. What was particularly notable about this event for me was that the Irish audience seemed to take this remarkable situation in their stride, whereas I found the scenario surreal. I had obviously not been a close witness to the developing situation over the intervening years, where old foes had moved on from their entrenched positions of the past. Experiencing this as someone who had left Ireland in 1985 when the IRA bombing campaign was still in full swing, I found this progress to be remarkable.

Amy Villarejo (2008, p. 89), writing on the use of home movie in cinema, commented on Juan Carlos Zaldívar’s film 90 miles (2001), where the director returns to Cuba to explore personal history and collective identity. Vallarejo wrote of
images ‘with a notion of a time embalmed... it is the life of a collective people whose lives seem halted or frozen at a particular time’. In this case, Villarejo suggested that the director, Zaldivar, sought within the family photos for a mimetic substitute of himself:

In his return to Cuba, then, Zaldivar rediscovers his past as an image, actively produced in the present through composite editing; elements of Cuban life, recorded by his Super 8mm camera, mesh with images of memory supplied through home movies and still photographs.

In Chapter 1.1, I noted Laura Marks’ comments about visual representations of memory: the actual and the virtual image in intercultural film. Zaldivar, for example, used Super 8 mm film and photographs to represent the virtual or crystallised image of the emigrant that is frozen in time. This image is contrasted with the present, as represented by live video images. I propose that this crystallisation or paralysis, the disconnect of the individual from place of birth and place of adoption produces a stasis—a ‘time bubble’—that the emigrant inhabits. This time bubble results in a cultural and political conservatism amongst many older migrants regardless, of where they come from and where they settle. I propose this as new knowledge that has arisen from my research. As mentioned earlier (see Chapter 2.4), I inserted an animated sequence about sex education into Secret family recipes to make the audience aware that I had moved on in time and would not impose a conservative worldview on my children.

*Working with family*

In a personal interview, Zoe Soufoulis (2009) commented that I needed to make a distinction between my personal objectives within this search, and the objectives for an audience who would watch this film. For example, my personal objective might have been to spend time with my aging mother, whereas an audience would have wanted to know more of my mother’s story. Citron (1999, p. 282) referred to this duality as a ‘space of possibility... a place of dialogue between my mother and me that gave a new degree of consciousness to both our relationship and our individual lives’. I wondered if this could be the denouement that I was seeking in setting out to
make this film: to overcome the problem of the mother/son relationship and talk to my mum on an adult-to-adult level. It was certainly the reason why I had asked my mother such frank questions about her sex life, although these scenes were deleted from the final cut of the film because of my mother’s obvious discomfort with the topic. In hindsight, this proved to be a situation where the ethics of ethnographic study and the craft of documentary interviewing conflicted with each other. I should probably have forewarned my mother that I wanted to cover this material, although this would have robbed the film of a possible golden moment. As it was, my mother refused to be drawn on the topic and effectively closed down that avenue of enquiry. Michelle Citron (1999, p. 275) has remarked on the complications present when working within families:

> In autobiography, the maker has a greater responsibility toward her subjects because using family subjects, the artist usually has undue influence... In my most cynical moments I know this tape was easy to make because my mother would do almost anything for me.

This may have been true for Citron but it seems talking about sex was a boundary my Irish Catholic mother was not prepared to cross.

Michelle Citron (1999, p. 282) also commented on a scene in her film Daughter rite (1980) where the mother puts her arm around her daughter and they walk together in an empty landscape:

> The scene hints at a darker desire as well—my murderous competition with my sister for my mother’s affection, a wish I was not consciously aware of at the time. In the words of Adrienne Rich, the film allowed me ‘to remember what it has been forbidden even to mention’.

This competition between the siblings for my mother’s attention is something that I believe exists for me, and is exacerbated by being part of such a large family where all my siblings and I were competing for my mother’s attention.

Another equally valid point made by Citron (1999) is that one cannot simply walk away from an autobiographical film made with family: one has to live with it for the
rest of one’s life. Several of my family members objected to the intrusion of the camera into their personal space and subsequently declined to be interviewed for the project. The negative reaction that I encountered from my siblings to requests for interviews complicated the filming process. This also raised several questions: Who owns this ‘family story’? Where does my right to tell my family story sit with my siblings’ rights to privacy? The romantic view of the ‘big happy family’ portrayed in Secret family recipes was not necessarily the reality I encountered when negotiating the right to tell these stories to a wider audience. This sentiment was echoed by John T. Davis (2011, personal interview) who commented upon the continuing impact that his film The uncle Jack (1996) has upon his family relationships. He noted that he has to continue to relate to the subjects of the film within his personal life, and that this process is often painful. Thus, Renov’s domestic ethnography arguably delivers results: but these come at a price.

Finally, making films with family members about a jointly remembered past is further complicated by the fickle nature of memory. Samuel Beckett (cited in Holmes & Ward 2011, p. 14) defined memory as, ‘a clinical laboratory stocked with poison and remedy, stimulant and sedative’. In Secret family recipes, my brother, Eamonn, comments that he is unable to distinguish whether an incident he has remembered is in fact a memory, or whether it is a family legend; the story had been told so often that he is now unsure if the event actually happened at all, or whether it was a fiction that has, with telling over the years, gained legitimacy in his mind. This echoes the comments of John T. Davis (cited in O’Brien 2004, p. 222) who called the past a “treacherous” and “haunted” landscape where reality and nostalgia become entwined and it becomes difficult to separate memory from lived experience’.

**Domestic performativity**

Stella Bruzi (2000, p. 154) described documentary as ‘a negotiation between filmmaker and reality and, at heart, a performance’. For this reason, she took issue with Nichols’ description of performative documentary as films that ‘stress the subjective aspects of a classically objective discourse’. Bruzi argued for a definition of performative documentary ‘as identified by Butler and others after J. L. Austin—
namely that they function as utterances that simultaneously both describe and perform an action’. *Secret family recipes* does this, insofar as the film explores the elements of cross-cultural identity while engaging in an activity that is itself a cross-cultural pursuit.

Janet Merewether (2009, p. 1) is another filmmaker who has supported the idea of the director’s role as ‘creatively shaping reality, visualising and reframing evidence to form a representation of the figurative subject’. Similarly, although the main subject of *Secret family recipes* is my mother, she is also very conscious of the camera and performs the role of ‘patient parent’ to the camera. I am complicit in this performance as ‘errant son’, but we are both, as Stella Bruzzi (2000) has maintained, performing a version of reality for the documentary.

Keith Beattie (2004, p. 111) analysed Ross McElwee’s film *Sherman’s march* (1986) in which McElwee traces American Civil War general William Sherman’s march through the South. He stated that, ‘McElwee pushes his film towards the realm of performative documentary’. McElwee (cited in Beattie 2004, p. 111) himself stated: ‘I’m creating a persona for the film that’s based upon who I am, but it isn’t exactly me’. In the same way, I create a persona for myself to act out the roles of dutiful student (baking the cake with my mum) in order to provide a device to enter the world of my mother for the purpose of making a film. It is this version of reality that I, as filmmaker, perform, edit, and present to the audience.

Jonathan Caouette brought his acting background into play for his performance in front of the camera making his autobiographical film *Tarnation* (2003). Caouette had begun obsessively filming his family in 1984 when he was aged just eleven years old.

> I was always using the camera as some sort of quasi-defense mechanism or a weapon of some kind to ultimately make sense of everything, just a lot of the stuff that I was being subjected to (Murray 2004, p.2).

Caouette ultimately edited down more than 160 hours of material, shot over twenty years, to present a portrait to the public which was his interpretation of his family’s dysfunctional narrative. One of his observations on screening the film was the tension
arising from his desire to be seen as an objective filmmaker in a situation where his audience was solely preoccupied with the personal story of his family’s wellbeing.

One of my biggest challenges with it, I think, was having to justify myself as a filmmaker while severing my personal emotions and attachments to all the material. Ultimately I think it inevitably became like therapy because it’s not the typical Q&A where it’s like, ‘Why did you use this D.O.P.? What was your choice of casting?’ It was more like, ‘How is your mother doing now?’ (Murray 2004, p. 3).

Caouette’s performance in the actual events and his choice, as editor, to use the performative material in the final film ensure that it is his ‘take’ on reality that will be delivered to audiences. For example, he filmed his end of a tearful phone call to the hospital when he was checking on his mother’s progress. This scene clearly demonstrates how his mother’s condition impacted him. We hear his end of the conversation, but we neither see nor hear his mother or the hospital where she is incarcerated; his viewpoint alone is preserved and presented. Thus, when Caouette talks about holding onto memories, it is clear that it is Caouette’s memories that are under discussion: ‘Because you know documenting things sometimes can enable you to hold onto memories, which I’m really into. I love the idea of holding onto moments’ (Murray 2004, p. 2).

The choice to direct and perform within one’s own family documentary story is an increasingly popular approach to storytelling. John T. Davis’ The Uncle Jack (1996) and Safina Uberoi’s My mother India (2002) are two examples that are examined at length elsewhere in this thesis.

Sarah Polley’s Stories we tell (2012) goes a step further. This is a genre-twisting tale that excavates layers of myth and memory to reveal the ‘truth’ at the core of Polley’s own family of storytellers. Polley cleverly inserts faux family home movies, passing them off as real, to highlight the inconsistency of memory and the difficulty in finding an objective truth when dealing with events in the past. Polley’s onscreen performances as film director as well as primary subject within the film playfully hold up the role of the objective documentary filmmaker to scrutiny. The overall
effect of the film is to highlight the ‘smoke and mirrors’ aspect of modern
documentary storytelling in which Polley is complicit. In doing so, it questions the
form of documentary itself in its ability to find the truth.

In Chapter 3.2 I introduced the notion of domestic performativity to describe the act
of performing in a documentary that explores family for clues to the artist’s
sensibility. The body of work evidenced above is proof that this is now a popular
approach to documentary filmmaking, worthy of classification and analysis. I believe
that the outcomes of Secret family recipes have validated the use of domestic
performativity as a framework for analysis. In the course of the documentary I have
been able to reveal the different experiences between migrant and non-migrant: both
between generations and within families. I have been able to point to the dangers of
subjective memories in making statements about events in the past. I have been able
to identify my connection to place and explore my children’s experiences of their
ancestral home and contrast it with their current reality.

Identity, as expressed within the film, is fluid and relational. The film portrays my
journey from son to father. A healing occurs as I come to terms with my memories of
childhood and being able to move forward into a future where I can effect change
within my own (familial) circle of impact.

Personal and political identity

In the book The history wars, McIntyre (2003, p. 190) made the observation that
‘children... are all our futures... they are also an imaginary conduit for the past’. I found
this quote interesting, in that it articulated for me a purpose to commence the —
sometimes painful—experience of an excavation of the past. For me, becoming a father
was the main impetus for embarking on this project, and it was only in executing the
various stages of this documentary process that it became apparent to me that the real
beneficiaries of this work will be my children, for they will have a clear vision of
where they have come from and can then make the decision as to whether they want to
embrace this identity or reject it.
One of the secondary objectives of spending time in Ireland was to give my two girls a memory of their grandmother (my mother) who was then approaching her ninetieth birthday. I realised after our visit that my girls now had a personal and physical memory of Ireland, which I could refer to in our conversations. The experience has shown me that I value the physicality of the lived experience, which has allowed my daughters to accede to an embodied identity that encompasses both their family and the place. I see Ien Ang’s (2001) writing about embodied identity as supporting this view. There is a value in the physical experience. In Chapter 2.2 I introduced the debate as to whether Irish identity was formed at the centre in Ireland or at the hub of the diaspora. My interpretation of this urge to bring the girls ‘home’—for them to experience the physicality of Ireland—is an affirmation that ‘real’ identity must be formed at the centre, and that anything else is simply mediated and not authentic.

I contend that documentary is the ideal medium to facilitate this preservation and transmission of non-verbal cultural capital across generations and across continents. Keith Beattie (2004, p. 107) has supported this notion: ‘the assertion of subjective and personal points of view and the representation of one’s self, family, and culture, forces a significant revision of an objective, externalising, documentary practise’. Siobhán McHugh (2010, p. 8) has also supported the strength of subjective oral documentary. I concur that an added value of this project is the impact of the oral material, which presents subject matter that would be impossible to communicate on paper. For example, early in the documentary I pose the question: ‘What are the secrets to a happy family?’ It is through capturing the images of intimacy, laughter, curiosity, and excitement in the baking sequences with my mother and my girls that I am able to communicate the value of time spent with loved ones. The ‘cute’ pictures and endearing memories convey the joy that can exist even in the most mundane of activities. It is through these pictures and sounds that the holy grail of ‘family success’ can be suggested and, more importantly, communicated to a wider audience. This—undoubtedly subjective—assertion was supported by Portelli (cited in McHugh 2010, p. 57):

Subjectivity is itself a fact, an essential ingredient of our humanity.
Rather than exclude it from our field of observation because it is too
difficult to handle, we need to seek methods and guidelines for its use and interpretation.

Beattie (2004, p. 106) has supported the value of autobiographical documentary, as ‘autobiographical texts attempt to represent, and thereby contribute to the construction of, an author’s identity’. He quoted Paul Eakin in stating the ‘constitution of identity...[to be] the genre’s characteristic, even defining goal’. Canadian Lisa Steele (cited in Citron 1999, p. 281) also shared this view: ‘To convert one’s life into a process is the process of autobiography’. By turning one’s life into such a process, new possibilities for self-understanding open up. Citron (1999, p. 281) noted this when discussing Francoise Lionnet:

The narrator’s process of reflection, narration, and self-integration within [film] is bound to unveil patterns of self-definition... which may seem new and strange and with which we are not always familiar... The narrative text epitomises this duality in its splitting of the subject of discourse into a narrating self and an experience of self which can never coincide exactly. Lionnet calls the gap created by this split a ‘space of possibility’ where the subject of history and the agent of discourse can engage in dialogue with each other.

Safina Uberoi (2009, p. 1) revealed a similar path of discovery in her film My mother India (2002). Uberoi was inspired to make the film after seeing a picture of her mother in the 1960s: tall, blonde, and Australian. Seated next to her, dressed in an immaculate suit and with an Englishman’s pipe in his dark Indian hands, is her father. What began as a family film that was inspired by childhood memories gradually became a political commentary. This commentary was not only about the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, but also about the partition of India in 1947:

When you are away from home you see things differently. Leaving India made me see India and myself in a whole new light. First there was the constant nag of memory—in every part of my heart and mind.

Over the course of her film she embodies her country, giving it a family identity (mother India) so that she can then engage with it in personal dialogue. She extended this metaphor to her grandfather, drawing a parallel between his physical

Papaji had dedicated his whole life to the study and creation of Punjabi history and culture. Now, as he went mad, it seemed as if the whole state of Punjab was mirroring his insanity.

As her grandfather descends into dementia he relives his experience of the partition of India in 1947 in what Naficy (2001, p. 269) would term a ‘performed identity’. Her grandad’s personification of country is an effective device and mirrors Uberoi’s (2009, p. 1) political ideas about the intersection between the political and the personal:

*My mother India* is a film about my family, not only in the deepest and most personal sense, but also in the broadest and most political sense... We must make the most personal statement about the politics around us... There is a time in all our lives, whether we are Indian or Australian, American or Afghan, Serbian, or Malaysian, there is a time when what happens to our nation, what happens to our culture, happens to us personally. The broad sweep of newspaper headlines and Parliamentary politics become the stuff of our everyday lives. It is our neighbors who have been slaughtered, it is we who are ignoring the wailing of women in crowded refugee camps.

I have sought to explore this connection between the personal and political worlds of the migrant in *Secret family recipes*, which is an attempt to find the—often bruised and painful—place where the personal and the political interact. Perhaps it is because migrants embody the pain of the countries that they move between that this connection is so vivid. In the process of exploring and performing this connection I have built an identity for myself that encompasses both the personal and political aspects of my life.
**Anglo-Celtic identity**

Identity and its accompanying baggage of ‘national values’ are hotly contested terms in contemporary Australia. As discussed in Section 2.2 the practice of establishing the recently arrived migrant in Australia as a ‘folk devil’ is a custom with a long history. Although the Irish may have suffered as folk devils in the distant past, my assertion is that Australians with Irish heritage now form part of an Anglo-Celtic ascendancy. To enlarge on this point: although the greatest influx of Irish migrants arrived in the 1850s, it can be argued that the highpoint of Irish separatist influence was during the era of Cardinal Mannix in 1920 (Dennison 2006, p. 1). Since that time, the impact of the Irish in Australia as a separate entity has been on the wane. I support the assertion that in the years since 1945 (following substantial European migration) the most important signifier of identity within Australia became whiteness (Hage 2002). Despite the valid arguments put forward by McHugh (2010) to the contrary (mentioned in Section 2.1), many Irish subsequently became indistinguishable from their Anglo brethren within the nebulous Anglo-Celtic ascendancy.

Citron (1999) has noted the role of autobiographical films in attempting to trace lineages that allow the filmmaker to live in the present. Although I made the point above that current Australian society tends to see the Irish population as part of an Anglo-Celtic ascendancy, this negates the experience of recent arrivals to Australia (including myself) who have to deal with the accompanying problems that every migrant encounters. As I discussed in Section 2.5 the primacy of establishing identity is supported by Renov (cited in Austin & de Jong 2008, p. 48): ‘The assertion of “who we are”...is a vital expression of agency’. In reflecting on the film I’ve made, I can see that it is important for me to identify as an Australian Irish migrant: a part of a long and continuing narrative of Irish migrants to this country. I do not identify as part of the resident Anglo-Celtic ascendancy. This concurs with Naficy’s (2001, p. 283) ‘performance of identity’, where I would be categorised as someone who exhibits a ‘strong sense of affiliation’ to my home country.

My documentary contributes to this field: where domestic ethnography and the exposition of the family history help to express the intercultural and intergenerational experience of migration. Like Uberoi, my personal story of migration also extends to
the broader political and cultural context of my country of origin and the host country. For myself, having thus established my Australian-Irishness, I am now comfortable in raising my children as Irish-Australians.

The final sequence of the film speaks of love as the result of my quest to Ireland and to the heart of my family. I suspect that I needed to heal a part of myself that resented leaving my family in 1985. Bringing my children to Ireland and allowing them to spend time with my mother was a way of introducing them to the happy memories that I recalled from the past. Gone were the memories of disagreements and acrimony that had sometimes been the reality of my time growing up. I gave my children a memory of their granny and redressed the theft of an extended family upbringing that my emigration had wrought on them. Thus, my personal documentary quest was to reconcile with the ghosts of the past. I delved into Yeats’ ‘foul rag and bone shop of the heart’ (cited in O’Brien 2004, p. 225) and found a peace of sorts.

Conclusion

In this research project, the documentary Secret family recipes is used as a vehicle to explore issues around personal experiences of family, community, and identity. The research project includes a written exegesis, which has set the documentary within a theoretical framework and set forth the significant outcomes from the project.

Significance of the research

The project has led to new knowledge in the understanding of the migrant experience. Within the film, the following themes emerged: family exploration, community, and personal identity.

The family exploration of the project confirmed the value of interrogating family for the purpose of revealing the constructed self. However, it also revealed the challenges of working within families: some of which are navigating sibling rivalry, negotiating issues of privacy, and the knowledge that the author will forever have to live in close proximity with the subjects of their film.
The community aspects of the project pointed to the importance of embodied experience and the primacy of physical interaction with one’s place of origin. The film shows that the process of exile accentuates an attachment to place. The importance of memory is emphasised, but the idea of a crystallised memory is also raised as an aspect of experience that can have a negative impact on the migrant psyche.

The project also pointed to the links between the individual’s perception of identity and a broader political or ethnic identity. The discussion of the term Anglo-Celtic was important, as it enabled me to identify where I fit into Australian society. Having an understanding of personal identity helps one to find a place within a new environment. For example, my journey to Ireland to make the film revealed the distance that existed between my mother, myself, and my children (in terms of affinity to Ireland). The journey back did help to close the gap and will hopefully help my children to come to terms with their divided Irish-Australian identities.

Within the exegesis there were contributions to documentary theory: specifically, ideas of intercultural cinema and domestic performativity.

The film *Secret family recipes* constitutes a new addition to the body of work that is termed intercultural Irish-Australian film. The project demonstrated the value of domestic performativity as a new theoretical framework to understand this area of documentary.

*Summary of chapter 4*

In this chapter I have highlighted the significant outcomes of this research project (consisting of the fifty-minute documentary, *Secret family recipes*, and the exegesis that critiques the making of the documentary).

The research questions explored personal stories of migration within the context of family, community, and identity. I have outlined my responses to these research questions and placed them within the context of relevant theoretical discourses.
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Appendix A

Secret Family Recipes  Documentary Script & Credits

Key:
Plain text = Description of vision and camera directions
*Italic Text* = Dialogue and interviews
**Bold Text** = Voice-over

Location: Sydney Harbour, Sydney, Australia
Camera tilts up from wake behind boat in Sydney harbour to Sydney Harbour Bridge
Enda Murray on boat.
Sun sparkles on water
Enda on boat CU

**VO:** This story starts in Sydney, Australia. It’s where I’ve been settled for fifteen years. A couple of years back, when my second child was born, I started to think about my own childhood and my family life in Ireland.

Montage of Murray family photos using ‘photo album’ animation
Pic. B&W Molly with baby Brigee 2005
Pic. B&W Molly snuggled into Enda’s chest 2003

**VO:** I’m from a big family and having two of my own made me appreciate what my own parents had gone through in bringing up so many children. Raising my own kids half a world away in Sydney, I missed my mum’s steady hand and her sound advice.

WS Drogheda, Republic of Ireland
Monique & Brigee & Molly in St. Peter’s Cemetery
Mary, Monique, Enda, Molly and Brigee at front door of family home

**VO:** So I moved back to Drogheda with my Australian wife, Monique and my two girls Molly and Brigee. My mum was about to celebrate her ninetieth birthday and I wanted to get some tips from her on the secrets to success in raising a family.

Tracking shot low over the waves as the camera moves swiftly and tilts up to the landmark Boyne viaduct and the town of Drogheda.

TITLE: Secret Family Recipes

Audio: Boyne Viaduct tune fades

Montage of shots of Enda Murray as a child.
Pic. Enda in Wellington boots in schoolyard
Pic. Enda and Kilo Murray in backyard
Mrs. Mary Murray sits at a table with a decorated Christmas Cake on it and looks down the barrel of the camera.

**VO:** We were never very touchy feely in my family when I was growing up but my mum was always a great woman for baking cakes.

Mix to old B&W photos of Mrs. Murray using ‘photo album’ animation
Pic. 2 shot Wedding pic in 1945
Pic. Lads in a line at Mornington 1953
Pic. Family in back garden at Rope Walk. 1955

**VO:** She’d been baking for her family since her wedding day in 1945. And as the family grew, the number of cakes had grown.

Pic. Family in rose garden, Ronan baby (same day as above) 1955
Pic. Family in front porch, Enda baby  1962
Pic. Colour whole family in front porch 1971

**VO:** Birthday cakes and buttered teacakes, brown bread, Halloween bracks, and fruit flans. And Christmas cakes. Loads of cakes and puddings. To give as presents to her family and friends.

Pic. B&W hippy family in line on front porch, 1975
Pic. B&W hippy family in group on front porch, 1975
Mary at a table loaded with Christmas cakes.

**VO:** By the time the family reached 14 children the Christmas cake production had reached gargantuan proportions: a virtual production line of cakemaking that started in October and ended in Christmas week.

Pic. Textaqueen’s B&W line portrait of Enda
Street scenes of Drogheda

**VO:** I’d never baked a cake in me life. I decided to ask my mum for her special Christmas recipe and also get some answers for the questions that were bugging me.

Tilt up from swans in Boyne river opposite Dominican Church

**VO:** What was it that connected me to the place I left behind 22 years before? What was it that made me Irish, even though I’d spent most of my life in other places?

Enda’s girls eat cake in the garden in Mystery Bay, NSW
Focus pull, Brigee swings on swing and looks round at camera

**VO:** What part of my Irishness would my children in Australia inherit? What parts would they want?
Could I find the secret family recipe for the cake my mum had baked for all these years?

WS Murray family home
WS Mrs. Mary Murray in front of family home

VO: And so we sat down in her kitchen in Drogheda and set about making a Christmas pudding using her ‘special’ recipe.

Location: Murray family home in Drogheda, Co. Louth, Ireland

Enda: And where does this tradition from making a pudding come from? Have you been making one for a while?
Mary: Oh, for all my life, and my mother and grandmother, this is lost in history. Eight ounces of white breadcrumbs, twelve ounces dark brown sugar, where is that?

Animated sequence from photo of whole family to focus in on pic of Síle.

VO: I asked my siblings about their memories of mammy’s cake making? I find interviewing my brothers and sisters difficult. My family are not natural performers. When we were small we were taught to be seen but not heard.

{Síle Murray (sibling) interview in Drogheda:}

Super: Síle….. Murray #8
Síle: I remember she was always baking. Used to bake brown bread most days of the week and make rock cakes sometimes during the week or rhubarb cakes or apple cakes on a Sunday. And Christmas pudding. Christmas cakes at Christmas. And Easter she used to make an Easter cake with a little nest with little eggs in it.

{Mal Murray (sibling) interview in Sydney}

Super: Mal… Murray #14

Mal: Christmas was busy and hectic and mammy was always stuck in the kitchen and she had a list of people she had to do cakes for and puddings for and it was like a business, like a conveyor belt of cakes.

Animation of cake with individual slices disappearing.

Mal: And it used to start somewhere round mid October. And she’d be doing one or maybe two a week.

Murray family kitchen. Enda and Mary chat as they mix ingredients:

E: So was this stuff all very expensive a long time ago.
M: Yes very expensive. Still is.
E: What about during the war?
M: We just didn’t have them.
E: What about the incident with Canice?
M: I managed to get some from... I don’t know where... and I made the pudding and I went downstairs for something and when I came back Canice had emptied the bowl upside down on the floor.
E: What age was he then?
M: About 2.
E: What did you do then?

Pic. Sean and Canice

M: I scraped it up off the floor and put it back in the bowl.
E: And did they taste the difference?
M: No. Best pudding they ever tasted.

{Canice Murray, (sibling) interview in Derry, Northern Ireland}
Animation of family pic focuses on Canice

Super: Canice... Murray #2

Canice: The early fifties to the mid fifties in Ireland were fairly lean. The ma would say ‘That’ll have to do you til your father gets paid on Friday’.

Pic. Boys lying on the ground in front of Morning house c. 1953

Canice: I think we spent most of the time in a permanent state of hunger.

Murray family home, mixing cake ingredients

Enda: Did you ever drink when you were young?
Mary: Not at all! Everybody took their confirmation pledge.
E: Yeah but not everybody kept it.
M: So did you I think.
E: I did indeed*laughs*.
So you’ve never taken a drink then?
M: No.
E: Never ever in your life.
M: Never.
E: But you’ve had the Guinness in the pudding.
M: That’s it.
E: How much Guinness goes in?
M: Uh, I think the whole bottle
E: Uh now, hahahah.
M: Well you see, you don’t know how much is in the bottle: (reads off label) 330mg.
E: It only says a little bit here, I think you’ve been tippling, no, I’m just joking Rum or whiskey?
M: Yeah well, we pour that over it, the day we set it on fire on Christmas day.

Pic. B&W Peter St, Drogheda c. 1895 dissolves into same location in 2008
VO: My mum loved telling stories of the olden days. She had a great memory and a huge knowledge of local history.

E: So what year did your dad come to Drogheda?
M: 1917.

Pic. B&W Whitworth Hall, Drogheda c. 1917; dissolves into same location in 2008

M: He came to open the cinema in the Whitworth Hall.
E: And you were the eldest.
M: Yep.
E: So you were born in 1918.
M: Yeah.

Pic. B&W Mary as a baby c. 1918.

E: What’s your date of birth?
M: 6th of the 5th 1918.
E: So 6th of May.
M: Yep.
E: And were you born in the house in Shop street?
M: No I was born in Dundalk.

Pic. Mary’s family with her dad Jack O’Mahony extreme left in front of Roden Place, Dundalk, c. 1910
Pic. Group in front of Roden Place shop c.1920

M: In my grandmothers house. We had no hospitals in those days, and not many nurses.
E: So how come you were born in Dundalk?
M: Uh, the mother went home to her mother for the first baby cause she didn’t know an awful lot about it.

Pic. British soldiers parading in Millmount barracks, Drogheda c.1890
Pic. Irish Free State soldiers in front of Millmount, showing shell damage, 1922
Pic. English ‘Black and Tan’ paramilitary forces on St. Mary’s Bridge, Drogheda, 1922

VO: My mum’s earliest memories were of the Irish War of Independence and an attack on the town by the drunken rump of the British army known as the Black and Tans in 1922. The Black and Tans were infamous for terrorising the local populations.

M: That was the time the Black and Tans came up in 1922.
E: Yeah and do you remember the Black and Tans?
M: I do, remember them coming up and shooting through the bedroom windows.
E: And where were you?
M: In bed. I was out, out of the bed at that time and in a back bedroom, and we had to get up and run.
B&W view of Shop St. with Tholsel and dark sky. Tilt up from shopfront to top floor of No. 2 Shop St.

**VO:** We visited my mum’s old house in #2 Shop street in the centre of town. It’s now been converted into flats.

Sound effects _______________________________ gunshots and drunks fighting

Slow-motion POV ascending stairs
Fade to black
POV Enters door of bedroom and settles on bed

M: *I was only three, my father grabbed me and ran into a back bedroom, and we heard the noise and the shooting and when it had quietened down, and then we went back into the front bedroom, and there was a bullet hole through the window, and the bullet buried itself in the ceiling, just over where we had been sleeping, and that was how I remember the Black and Tans.*
E: And who were they shooting at?
M: They shot anybody. At random.

Pic. Singer’s sewing machine shop at the junction of Peters street and Lawrence Street c. 1920

M: *They went up to where Singer’s sewing machine shop used to be and they set it on fire, and I remember going out and sticking my head out the window and watching the fire, and someone came in and pulled me out.*

Montage of pics of Mary as a child.

**VO:** This story always had a big impact on me. It tied my mum to the major events in Irish history. It wasn’t until later in life that I realised that she couldn’t have been more than three years old when this event happened. I suppose when you are under the bed saying the rosary with your family in fear of your mortal life you remember these things.

10.00 minutes.

Enda: *Do you have to leave it overnight?*
Mary: *Oh yes. You have to leave the pudding mix overnight to allow the ingredients to soak into each other. When you stir it tomorrow it’s not sloppy like that... it’s a bit drier.*
E: *So we have to come back tomorrow?*
M: *Yes finish it tomorrow and put it in the bowl.*
E: *And how long do you have to cook it for?*
M: *Uh, eight hours.*
E: *And you’ll have to watch that it doesn’t boil away.*
M: *Yeah, Oh you do.*
E: *So you’ll have to watch it the whole day.*
M: *Oh yes, it has to be watched, somebody has to stay here and watch it all day.*
E: *Gee, that’s a lot of work. Grand.*

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M: Oh you need a lot of patience. So now, that’s it so far, how does it taste?

Enda tastes mix.

E: Mmm very nice, lovely.
A cup of tea I think we need after all this work. Grand.

Audio Track

McCarthy’s Waltz:

Montage of shots of Mary growing up:
Pic. Mary on settee with nylon hat and jacket, 1923
Pic. Tom, Esmay, and Mary O’Mahony sitting in surf at seaside, 1925
Pic. Esmay and Mary in front of surf, 1925
Pic. Esmay, Tom, Mary in studio, 1926
Pic. Mary, Esmay sitting on table and Tom (standing) in studio, 1926
Pic. Mary First Communion, 1926
Pic. Mary (black dress) and four friends at burrows, Mornington, c. 1939
Plc. Mary (2nd from left, head bowed) and four friends in front of black Ford, c. 1942
Pic. Mary feeds girl sandwich (at sea-side) c. 1943
Pic. Mary gets water from kettle in her cup beside bike and stone wall c.1942
Pic. Mary (second from right) and Sean Murray (extreme right) on cycling trip to Slane Castle, Co. Meath. C. 1944.

Location: Murray family home 1995

VO: I first interviewed my mum and dad back in 1995.
I asked my mum where she had first met my dad.

M: At a céilí (makes funny face)
I didn’t see him again for a few months. ...there was another Ceili. so he called down.
We agreed to go out. We went on a long walk ...and it began to snow. Yes I remember that.

Shots of Mary and Sean at social function c. 1945
Pic. Sean and Mary (right) at Monasterboice Sports c. 1941

Extract from interview with Sean filmed in 1995

S: When did I first meet Mammy? I’ve an awful feeling it was November 1940, it was
at a Ceili in the Whitworth hall anyway.

Pic. Sean and Mary (right) at Monasterboice Sports c. 1941
Pic. Sean and Mary on Wedding Day, 1945

S: It was like some enchanted evening, you may see a stranger across a crowded room.
E: Do you remember the day you proposed?
S: I can’t say I can pinpoint it exactly. It was nearly an agreed version.
E: What does that mean?
S: We both felt that that’s what we should be doing anyway, getting married.
Cut to conversation with Mary

E: So when did he propose to you?
M: I don’t think he ever DID {makes strange funny face}. No particular time, it just kind of evolved.

B&W montage of pics of Sean.
Pic of wedding group.

VO: So my dad never asked my ma to marry him. No romantic proposal on bended knee. No romance at all. Their experiences were so different to mine. Their expectations were so different to mine.

Location: Kitchen in Murray’s house

E: So I’ll get the girls to come up tomorrow and stir it.
M: Oh everybody needs to stir it.

{Eamonn Murray (sibling) interview in Dublin}
Animation of family pic and focuses on Eamonn

Super: Eamonn... Murray #3

E: Christmas puddings was always a bit of a ritual at home. When the cake was being mixed everybody had to join in. Everybody had to do the stir, and the most important stir of all was from Mal. Because he was the youngest.

Murray family kitchen, Drogheda.
Molly does little dance to “Santa Claus is coming to town” sung by Enda

VO: So I brought the girls up to granny’s house the next day, so that they could take part in the stirring ritual–and make a wish!... And this was where the 3 generations came together–and my girls became a part of the magic of the Christmas Pudding!

E: What are we doing now?
M: We have to stir the pudding, that’s all.
E: And what’s the idea behind stirring the pudding?
M: Oh you stir the pudding and you make a WISH!
E: And everyone in the house has to stir the pudding.
M: Yes.

The girls stir the pudding.

Mary: Did you make a wish? You got to stir the pudding and make a wish. But you don’t tell anyone what your wish is.
Molly: Why?
Mary: That would spoil it. It wouldn’t come through at all then.
They lick spoons and then they lick the spoons again.
Enda dresses girls to leave.

Molly and Brigid argue over who owns the ‘Slippery dip’ song they are singing.

E: How did you manage 14?
M: They managed each other. I just turned them out the front door and the back door.
E: I can’t manage two.

Mary smiles as Enda struggles with the chaos.

E: Ok let’s go. Say bye bye to Granny.

VO: Later, we spooned the pudding mix into the bowl. But not without a few problems... My mum was tiring of the filming and just wanted to get on with the job at hand. I asked my mum to repeat some tasks for the camera but her patience with her tiresome, interfering son was running out.

Location: Kitchen, Murray’s house.

Mary: Oh Enda, if you knew how long it took me to get that in there.
E: But we should have been filming you. We have to cheat a little bit. Do you want to pretend that you’re getting the tinfoil out?
M: No the tinfoil has to go in. And the pudding has to go in. It has to be lined with tinfoil.
E: But we’re trying to get it for the documentary. Do you know what I mean?
M: Yeah.
E: You don’t care [laughs]. Right. No cheating. This is bona fide. This is the truth. Never mind objective or subjective. How long did it take you to do this?
M: A LONG time.

Enda and Mary sort out tinfoil lining in tin for pudding.

M: I spent the last hour doing this and you just pull it out and throw it away.
E: Yes, but we should have been filming. Don’t do anything until we are here. That’s the story of your life.
M: Yes but I’m supposed to have a proper thing to put the pudding in not an old tin can.

Enda touches tinfoil.

M: Oh don’t touch it again!
E: Right [removes hands quick-smart].

They tie string onto bowl and put bowl on cooker with sighs of relief.

M: You can put it in ’cos it will go off the boil. Put the lid on.
E: Hurray!
M: Thanks be to God that’s done. A marathon. It always is.
E: *I think we need a cup of tea.*

Animation of Murray family picture c.1961

**VO:** I once asked my mum what it was like to have fourteen babies. She laughed and said after the first five or six they just pop out. I asked her if she could remember when her first baby was born.

Location: Murray family home

Animation of Mary’s waters breaking

E: *Do you remember when your waters broke? Where were you?*  
M: Oh ho, indeed I do, I was in the kitchen one day, and my mother had asked this engineer she knew to come in and have a look at the house, and I was standing there and I didn’t know what had happened, water was pouring down my legs (this all said half laughing). I thought I’d never see the end of this... man. So my mother must have realised something was wrong and she got rid of the man, and then I rushed to the hospital.

E: *So your waters were breaking but you were...*  
M: (laughing) I didn’t know what was happening.  
E: *And the guy was still yapping away to mum.*  
M: *He was and she got rid of him as quickly as she could.*  
E: *And you didn’t say, ’hey stop a minute’?*  
M: Oh no, no I said nothing, I just kept quiet.

**VO:** Later, I asked my mum where she got her sex education when she was young?

E: *I asked you before about where you got your sex education.*  
M: You picked it up here and there, as did everybody in those days.  
E: *Would your mum not have talked to you about it?*  
M: Oh no. It was never mentioned.  
E: *How are you supposed to know?*  
M: Well, everybody knew that you picked it up. You heard all about it from your friends and your pals.

20.00 Minutes.

Animation of ‘dirty picture’ story

**VO:** So where did I get my sex education? I was good at drawing at school and I used to draw horses for the boys in my class. When I was six or seven the boys asked me to draw a dirty picture. I obliged and was busy drawing a naked woman when Martin Carr pointed to the crotch area and said ‘Girls don’t have one of them’. I looked at him in puzzlement and then back down to MY picture of a naked lady complete with large penis. ‘I’m sure of it’ continued Martin Carr, ‘I have baths with my sister’. Damn.

Pic. Enda looking very serious with Michelangelo apron.
VO: I’ve made sure that my girls know all about the facts of life.

Location: Murray family home.

Audio Track Crispy Boyne Duck

VO: The pudding is finally on the boil. It needs to be watched for eight hours.

Pudding boils on stove
Mary checks pudding in kitchen
Mary takes lid off pot
Mary sits at table in living room
Looks out window
View out window
Bird on nut dispenser
WS Steps from Cord Rd. to docks.
Focus pull of St. Peter’s spire from Highfield
Focus pull on Curry’s Hill as couple walk up toward camera
WS of Drogheda from Cromwell’s Mount at dusk
Slow focus pull of green railing in the Dale
Red sky out dining room window
Mary sits by fire writing in diary.
Coals burn in fire

‘Family album’ style montage of family photos

VO: My mother had some more stories about childbirth that made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. She described the birth of my brother Brendan in 1952 when they had moved to the countryside.

M: When I got up in the middle of the night, I knew I had to go, and the place was white with frost, and we had an old car that only started when it was pushed really hard first. There was a little hill in the road outside the house and he pushed the car to the top of the hill, and then he jumped in, put his foot down, and let the car run down the hill and hoped it would start, and it never did, and he had to push it back up the hill again, and I was sitting in the ditch, and I was wondering if I should get up to help him push it, or stay where I was, so eventually it started.
M: And we got in, just in time.
E: Can you remember when I was born.
M: No, I don’t.
E: There was no outstanding characteristics?
M: The band wasn’t out, no.

Pic: Sean (in FCA uniform) and Mary in West St. Drogheda c. 1976.

VO: Did my mum and dad ever have a discussion about how many children they would have?

M: Not at all [laughs]. Things just happened in those days.
VO: I asked the same question of my dad: Why did you have such a big family?

Sean: *We wouldn’t be taking anything like that into consideration, that we should be limiting numbers. New fangled ideas I suppose. The society of today. So what one of them would we be without I wonder?*

VO: Which one of us would we be without? That’s a tough question for me.

Location: Newgrange, Co. Meath

Visitors walk up to monument

Shots of Newgrange

Super 8 film footage of Enda’s mates larking around at gate to Newgrange

Dawn over Drogheda

Shots out window of car on trip to Newgrange December 1994

VO: Newgrange in the Boyne Valley is a place of pilgrimage for me. It’s a megalithic tomb built in 3000 BC, before the pyramids. It has an alignment with the rising sun on the morning of the winter solstice on the 21\textsuperscript{st} December. Myself and a bunch of mates had been going out there every winter solstice since 1982. We salute the rising sun and feel at one with our ancestors who have watched the same scene for generations. In 1994, while I was home from England for Christmas, My dad drove me out to Newgrange for the solstice. We passed the site of the Battle of the Boyne along the way.

Enda and Sean Murray sing \textit{“The Sash” (Sean is badly out of tune)}

Digitised Super 8 film footage of Meath countryside.

VO: My mum said my dad ‘didn’t have a note in his head, God bless him’. She wasn’t wrong.

\textit{Audio} \hspace{1cm} \textit{Paddy Keenan (Mary Bravender, sad slow air)}

Shots of country cottages and windblown country lanes along the Boyne.

VO: As time went by I grew to understand my Da. Too little too late. He had a limited vocabulary when it came to my sort of plain talking. He put the bread on the table. That was what men of his generation were taught to do. My Da was a hard man to love.

Super 8 film footage of man on ship leaving harbour

Headstones from Dowth graveyard

Sunset at Dowth

VO: I last saw my dad when he was in hospital in January of 1996: just before I emigrated to Australia. He rambled slightly but I put my arms around him and hugged him and told him I loved him. It was the first and the last time that I ever hugged him. When he died I came home from Australia and went to see him laid out in the church in Drogheda. As I kissed his forehead I could hear my
two year old niece gurgling away happily outside the mortuary chapel. I looked at my dad and listened to my niece’s happy chatter echoing all around us and realized what he had left behind.

Wintery scenes of Newgrange and Dowth
Sunrise on solstice at Newgrange
Entrance stones to Newgrange

VO: The Celts believed that the rising sun would enter the womb of the earth along the passage way at Newgrange on solstice morning and fertilise the seed of the New Year.

Brigid runs toward the rising sun at Newgrange
Tracking shot along passage with sun shining on menhirs
Track along behind Molly as she emerges into the sunlight
Super 8 shots of sunset at the Hill of Slane

VO: When our eldest daughter was born we brought her to Newgrange. We called her Bóinn after the Boyne river goddess. She may have got her birth cert in Sydney but we named her at Newgrange on a solstice morning with a rainbow over the tomb and tears of joy from me and Monique mixing with the rain to wet her head and give her a place in the world. So my children’s story connects with my dad’s story at this place by the river which is full of history and magic.

Location: Murray family home

Enda: I got it

Enda takes pudding off cooker

Both: Hip Hip Hooray.
M: Turn off camera.
E: You’ll scald yourself.
M: ‘Water won’t scald me, fire won’t burn me’.
Enda: OMG. You got to go someday.
Enda: Here it is.

Ma shows cake to Molly and Brigee

Ma: You know what you do... smell it. But you can’t eat it ’til Christmas day.
Brigee: On Christmas day [very cutely].
M: We got to put it up where no-one can get it.
E: No mice will eat that pudding.

Location: Boyne Valley Hotel, Drogheda.

Audio track Happy Birthday, All singing.

VO: We celebrated my mum’s 90th birthday with a big family celebration. I think she enjoyed being surrounded by her extended family.
Still of decoration on cake.
CU of Mary
WS of waitress with cake as everyone sings Happy Birthday and claps
Still shot of huge family gathering
Fade to black

WS of empty beach. Two small children run across frame.

**VO:** In Sydney when we got back, I put me ma’s baking lessons into practise and set out to make a Christmas cake with my girls.

*Location:* Enda’s kitchen in Marrickville.
Enda, Molly and Brigid are gathered round the table, which is piled high with ingredients. The girls (with great difficulty and much whingeing) help to weigh out the ingredients.

E: *OK, are we ready to go?*
B: *Yes we’re ready to go.*

*Audio track*  
*The volunteer Mulqueens*

Enda puts ingredients onto table  
Molly and Brigee mix and argue  
Enda cracks eggs and adds to mix  
Brigid licks fingers and mixes

30.00 minutes.

Molly protests and hits Brigid  
More fighting and crying over chairs  
Brigid cries  
Enda weighs and puts in currants  
Enda puts in mixed peel  
More fighting over whose turn it is to mix  
Brigee shoves a mouthful of flower into her mouth

**VO:** What are the things that make childhood special? What stories from childhood do my own siblings remember?

*Location:* Phibsboro, Dublin  
Montage of Eamonn in the Christian Brothers c. 1965  
{Eamonn (sibling) interview}:

Eamonn: *You know, I can remember that when I was in the brothers novitiate, which was the first year I wasn’t let home for Christmas and for the three years after that, she sent me a cake every Christmas and that was really the highlight of my Christmas because for most things in the Christian brothers any stuff I got from home was always the cheapest and the least expensive that could be managed because there was no money. But when it came to Christmas cakes, I was in the premier league.*
And, there'd be between forty and seventy people in a refectory, and you sat at tables and every day you moved on one place and the person opposite you moved one place the other way. And you took your goodies with you. And so my Christmas cake came with me all through the Christmas holidays. And I decided who got bits of it. I decided what thickness of slice they got, and I also decided what thickness of slice I got and that was really when I developed my obsession with Christmas cakes. And I still think Christmas cake is the best thing you can eat.

Location: Phibsboro, Dublin

VO: I asked my brother Ronan if he remembered the birthday cakes my mum used to make.

{Ronan Murray (sibling) interview.}
{Animation of family to focus on Ronan}. Super: Ronan... Murray #9

Ronan: Birthday cakes, yeah she used to always make a cake on the oul’ birthdays. Everyone always got a cake. We always had a party on the birthday. With the cake and the red lemonade, yeah.
E: Did you invite your friends to the parties?
R: No I don't think we ever invited friends. I think it was a bit frowned upon, bringing your friends into the house. There were enough of us anyway without bringing friends.

Location: Naas, Co. Kildare, Ireland

{Mary Murray (sibling) interview}

Animation of family to focus on Mary.

Super: Mary... Murray #7

Mary: I think she was very dedicated to minding her children in every sense of the word, in terms of cooking for us and trying to make things special on a very small budget. And I suppose I only realised that as a mother myself and when I had my own children I realised what a lot of effort and work she put in to rearing us and making such a good job of it.

Photos of Mary’s family
Photos of Mary as a girl

M: And not just in baking but in artwork and making puppets out of papier mache and putting them in the oven, where we made little witches for Halloween, and we would tell people in school that our mother had made that and they’d be amazed that she had time to do that considering all the kind of drudgery work that she had to do.

Molly and Brigee sing as they chop cherries

Audio track: The Dingle Regatta
Girls mix dry ingredients
Girls pour wet ingredients into dry ingredients and mix it up
Girls fit grease-proof paper liner into tin
Girls spooning mixture into cake tin
Pours small piece of whiskey on top
Cake is put into oven

Enda: 

Enda washes dishes

E: Children and animals–never work with them.

Molly enters room crying and shows the bite-mark to Enda for evidence.

M: Brigee bit me.
B: But she did hit me.

Brigee gets ‘time out’ for biting Molly.

Photo of Murray family 1975.
Animation of car story

VO: There were some stories in our family that lived on. We all piled into the car one day to go to the beach and there was so many of us that we were half way there before we realised we had left a brother behind. We all remembered it differently. Even the ones who weren’t there remember it–because it’s been a family story for so long.

Photo of Ford Prefect
Animation of car story

M: We all got into the car and sat two or three in a seat, An old, battered Ford car, and when we were nearly in Mornington, somebody said ‘oh, we haven’t got Eoin and we had to turn back and come home, and when we opened the front door Eoin was inside in floods of tears. He had been forgotten.
E: How many would have been in the car that day?
M: I’d say there must have been up to twelve anyway.

Pan across family photo 2008.

VO: I ask the same question of all my siblings... Can you remember whether you were in the car that day? How many of us were actually in the car?

Eamonn: Yes. I think I was. It was one of those stories you heard so often that it becomes unclear whether you were there or whether you’ve heard every last detail that you think you were there.
Canice. You only left Eoin behind? I'm sure I must have been in the car, I don't remember it. There were lots of things happened to people in cars.
Audio Mashup of Drogheda Bells and Drogheda football crowd singing

Montage of B&W of shots of Drogheda from MMM film of 1949 ending with WS of the Boyne viaduct

**VO:** I have many rose-tinted memories of my time growing up. But memory can be a treacherous’ and ‘haunted’ landscape where reality and nostalgia become entwined. Life moves on and our memories take on a life of their own, growing rosier by the year until they bear no resemblance to the reality of the original lived experience. I thought back to the discussion I had with my mum about the origin of her secret pudding recipe.

Mary and Enda mixing ingredients in the kitchen

E: And would you have to refer back to your recipe or do you know it in your head?
M: Well I know now cause I’ve just read it. I’d have to refresh my memory from time to time.
E: And where did you get that recipe from now, is that an old recipe?
M: From the supermarket counter!
E: That’s not an old recipe passed down through the family?
M: No its not, well there’s not much of a difference in what would be passed down...

Mary in Drogheda market talking with egg man and stallholders

**VO:** So there I had it. I thought she used an old recipe passed down through generations. But instead it was something she had picked up from a supermarket counter a few weeks back. I was disappointed that it wasn’t the unique recipe that I thought it would be.

Location: Enda’s kitchen, Sydney.
Enda takes cake out of oven.

Enda: How’s that look? It’s good enough to eat. What do you think, Brigee?
Brigee: Ah no, I hate cake.

40.00 minutes.

Audio track The beauties of Ireland

Enda takes grease-proof paper off cake
Molly and Brigee knead marzipan icing
Molly and Brigee eat icing sugar
Molly rolls icing
Enda puts almond icing on cake and trims excess
Enda asks girls to stop licking dishes
Enda and Brigee break egg and separate yolk
All mix and spoon royal icing onto cake
Enda admonishes Molly for eating balls from cake
Hi-fives’s all round when icing is finished
E: No hospitalization, no arrests. I’d say that’s a success.

Enda cleans table.

Location: Skerries, Co. Dublin, Ireland
{Seamus Murray (sibling) interview}

Animation from family group to focus on Seamus.

Super: Seamus... Murray #5

Seamus: When you're looking back on it, it's not so much on the making and how nice her cakes were and everything, it's more got to do with the smells around the house coming in from school, the nice smells around the house. For kids growing up, especially in the 50s where people weren't very demonstrative, and whereas nowadays there's all expressions of love between kids and their parents. In those days there wasn't, there was always a kind of distance. But you still had to kind of feel secure, when you're in the house.

Photos of Seamus as a boy

S: There's lots of things, and baking was one of them, that actually replaced what's there now, it was part and parcel of the home... growing up, feeling secure, you know. Your parents are there for you. Yeh, it was good.

Montage of shots of Mary
Pic. with apron on sewing
Pic. with headscarf at Newgrange
Pic. picnic in backyard with Mahers
Pic. in evening sun in dining room reading book with kids and Brendan
Pic. Enda and Mary and children holding cake in 2007
Pic. Enda and Mary on Baltray beach c. 1995

VO: My mum found it hard to say I love you. For a woman who was big on love but not good with the words of love, the cakes said what words couldn’t express. A slow invisible language of love. Can I find a language somewhere between her baking of cakes and my clunky think tongued mumble to say what I’m feeling?

Location: Murray family home.
Sitting at table at Christmas dinner in Drogheda.

VO: At Christmas in Drogheda we finally sat down to eat the pudding.

Mary: Now, where’s the whiskey?

Ronan lights match and sets the pudding alight.

VO: Lighting the flame on the pudding was the highlight of the Christmas dinner.
Fire goes out to disappointed sighs from the gathered diners.

**VO:** After all the blood, sweat and tears of the cake-making this was the big moment.

The pudding is finally lit to the cheers of the assembled family.

**VO:** My mum often cried when she finally sat down to say grace at Christmas dinner. In the past I thought this was because she was sad but I now suspect that these may have been tears of happiness. Her work was done.

Enda (sitting at table with Mary): *Was it worth it?*
M: *Indeed it was.*
E: *And was it as you hoped?*
M: *Oh yes.*
E: *Marks out of ten?*
M: *Oh ten out of ten [laughs].*

**VO:** And this time her work was indeed done. For this was the last Christmas cake she would ever make.

Audio track ___________________________ Love is a Place I dream of.

Photo portrait of Mary 2008

**VO:** We returned to Australia in July 2008 and two months later she passed away peacefully surrounded by her family.

Montage of shots of Mary digging garden set to music. Fade to black.

Location: Mystery Bay, far South coast NSW, Australia
Exterior shots of Mystery Bay house
Still shot of cake on table outdoors

**VO:** In Australia, of course, Christmas falls in the middle of Summer. The sun shines down as we eat our Christmas cake outdoors on the deck.

Kids run out the door onto the deck and start to eat cake.

Enda: *Molly, what do you think of the cake?*
Molly: *This is the best bit. It’s called the icing and the decorations.*
Enda: *Brigee, what you think of the cake.*
Brigee: *Yuch.*

Brigee runs away.

Location: Ferncourt school, Marrickville, Sydney.
[Mahones at School Fete singing *My brother Sylvest*.]

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Brigee and Molly sing on stage.

Audio track

My brother Sylvester

**VO:** Our girls seem happy and confident. They know their own minds and have the freedom and the wisdom to make their own memories.

Brigee in green screen studio in front of projected scenes of Ireland

Brigee: *The thing that I remember most about Ireland is that I made a snowman that was called Rachel. I like Australia better than Ireland because my home is in Australia.*

Molly in front of projected scenes of Ireland

Molly: *When Ireland is playing Australia I go for both because I'm half Irish and half Australian. What I can say in Irish is I can say ‘Dún an doras’ which means ‘shut the door’ and ‘Póg mo thóin’ which means ‘kiss my butt’ [giggles].*

Two girls stare down barrel of camera

Photo montage of Molly and Brigee in Ireland

**VO:** I thought I could pass on my memories during my cake baking escapade but my story is starting to fade here and theirs is just coming alive. This is what I am passing on. Irish or Australian? They’ve got the best of both worlds.

Girls laugh and giggle.

Location: Mystery Bay, far South coast NSW, Australia.

Molly ‘presses’ button on camera.

Audio

**Dooley Gate**

Monique, Molly, Brigid and their cousin, Luka, walk down the road in Mystery Bay and disappear into the bush.

Monique and kids on Mystery Bay beach.

Location: St. Peter’s cemetery, Drogheda

Silhouette of gravestones

WS Enda at Mary’s graveside

Camera picks out inscription on gravestone ‘Mary (nee O’Mahony) died 20th September 2008 age 90 years’.

CU Enda at grave

**VO:** My Cake baking shone a light on the relationship between me and my mum, between emigrant and home, between me and my family. It filled in the blanks on some unanswered questions. And now I had some answers.
VO: Family and community, identity and belonging, they all have a part to play in the big cake mix of life. The secret ingredient is love, the wish that stirs the pudding and keeps the whole warm mess bound together. At least I got that answer right.

Credit Roll
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*Mary Bravender*
Composed by Paddy Keenan
Performed by Paddy Keenan, Cillian O'Briain, Triona Ní Dhomhnaill, Pearse Dunne.
From the album *The Long Grazing Acre*
Published by Compass Records.
By kind permission of Paddy Keenan

*The Volunteer Mulqueens*
Traditional
Arranged by Elish Quinn
Performed by Elish Quinn and Mick Griffin
From the album *Carberry's Sessions*

*The Dingle Regatta*
Traditional
Performed by Dónal Óg Black
From the album *Carberry's Sessions*

*The Beauties of Ireland*
Traditional
Performed by Johnny Gray
From the album *Carberry's Sessions*

*Love is a Place I Dream Of*
Written and composed by Luka Bloom
Performed by Luka Bloom and Sinéad O’Connor
Published by Universal Music
By kind permission of Luka Bloom

*My Brother Sylvest*
Traditional
Performed by the Mahones

*Duleek Gate*
Traditional
Performed by Fran McPhail
Wild Colonial
Traditional
Arranged and performed by Ozi Batla
From the album Wild Colonial
Courtesy of Elefant Traks
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Drunks fighting.aif by tigersound
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Doorslam by Geoff Barkman

Old Photographs of Drogheda courtesy of Ben Corcoran and Buvinda Historical Publications
Footage from Bridge of the Ford courtesy of Ben Corcoran and the Medical Missionaries of Mary, Drogheda.
Thanks to those whose images appear in the film and to those who took the photos.

Thanks to Juan Salazar and Hart Cohen for their guidance and advice

Thanks to:
Chris Kreis
Arlene Textaqueen,
Eoin and Niamh at Great Western Films, Dublin
Robert and Sean at Hunting with Pixels, Sydney
Rosa Corcoran
Ben Corcoran
Adrian Rostirolla
Denis Beaubois
Ally Duffy
Kieron Murphy and the Buccaneers Sub Aqua Club, Drogheda
Sally, Tulika, Christy and all the staff at the Institute for Culture and Society at UWS
Ian Walker
Rachel Morley
Milissa Deitz
Karin Altmann

Static frame #1
Thanks to my extended family and wonderful friends whose kind support made this film possible.

Static frame #2
Special Thanks to Brendan, Kilian, Dermot, Eoin, Sean, Canice,
Síle, Mal, Eamonn, Ronan, Mary, Shamie, Molly and Brigee Murray.

Static frame #3
Extra Special Thanks to Monique Potts for her patience, love and support.

Static frame #4
Produced with the support of the The Institute for Culture and Society and The School of Humanities and Communication Arts at the University of Western Sydney.

Developed with the support of the Australian Film Commission.

Static frame #5
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Appendix B

*Secret Family Recipes DVD* (see pocket inside thesis back cover)

The film can also be viewed online at

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7mj7ttgjSI