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Writing the History of Women's Programming at Telifís Éireann: A Case Study of *Home for Tea*

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***Abstract**: The history of women's programming at the Irish television station Teilifís Éireann has long been neglected within the historiography of Irish television. Seminal studies within the field have focused quite specifically on the institutional history of the Irish station and have not paid much attention to programming. This is particularly true in regard to women's programmes. This paper addresses this gap in the literature by demonstrating a methodological approach for reconstructing this lost segment of programming using the example of* Home for Tea*, a women's magazine programme that ran on TÉ from 1964 to 1966. It was the network's flagship women's programme during this period but is completely absent from within the scholarship on Irish television. Drawing on the international literature on the history of women's programmes this paper utilises press sources to reconstruct the* Home for Tea*'s content and discourse around it. It argues that, though* Home for Tea *has been neglected, a reconstruction of the programme illuminates wider themes of the everyday at Teilifís Éireann, such as a middle-class bias and the treatment of its actors. As such, its reconstruction, and that of other similar programmes, are exceptionally important in moving towards a more holistic history of the Irish station.*

In 1964, a woman from Rush wrote to the *RTV Guide* with a complaint about Irish national broadcaster Telifís Éireann's schedule. She remarked: "it's nothing but men, men, and more men—we are just sick of looking at them" (From 2). Her comments reflect a wider pattern in Irish television during the 1960s: the visible dearth of women's programmes at the Irish station. At the time of her writing, the only light entertainment programme that could be conceived as being addressed to women was a magazine programme called *Home for Tea*. Due to limited source material, and a tendency within the historiography of Irish television in the 1960s to somewhat neglect programming, *Home for Tea* has been all but lost in both historical accounts and cultural memory. But the programme lends exceptional insight into the ways that Telifís Éireann (TÉ) viewed its female audience during the mid-1960s. The programme presents a quite limited conception of womanhood in the 1960s, thus demonstrating that TÉ's female audience was often underserved both in terms of the amount and types of content that that the station presented. In particular, the programme demonstrates that the network's vision of femininity was that of a middle-class housewife whose place was in the home.

Telifís Éireann was the first Irish television broadcaster in Ireland. In addition, it commenced much later than other national broadcasting systems, being established on New Year's Eve 1961 and with its first full day of programming commencing on 1 January 1962. It was established, after nearly four years of deliberation and planning, as a semi-state body, as opposed to a truly public service broadcaster or commercial entity. The station was therefore overseen by the politically appointed Radio Éireann Authority and funded with a combination of television licenses and advertisements (Savage, *Irish* 8–10).

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The Woman's Programme at Telifís Éireann

Programming has rarely been at the forefront of traditional histories of Telifís Éireann. While historians such as Robert Robert Savage, John John Bowman and John John Horgan have discussed seminal programmes such as *The Late Late Show* and *Radharc*, their studies are primarily institutional histories of the Irish station (Savage, *A Loss* 114–15; Bowman 221; Horgan 88–90). Moreover, a focus on "groundbreaking" programmes has led to the neglect of more everyday programmes, and women's programmes in particular, limited as they were. Some attention has been paid to early serial dramas such as *Tolka Row* and *The Riordans*, which are often perceived as being geared towards the female audience (Gibbons 21–52; McLoone 53–88; O'Connor 123–32; Sheehan 47–52). However, little research has been done on the few light entertainment programmes produced within the period of the 1960s, and particularly the mid-1960s, which were specifically geared towards women, such as *Home for Tea*.

Home for Tea was a magazine programme that ran on Telifís Éireann from January of 1964 to July of 1966.[1] It was a programme of middling popularity. It never reached the top of the TAM ratings—the Television Audience Measurement ratings which the Irish station used to track viewership—but it did scrape the top ten on a few occasions (Doolin, Dowling, and Quinn 60).[2] It was not particularly groundbreaking or progressive and has as such been largely forgotten. But between the years 1964 and 1966 *Home for Tea* was the only programme on Telifís Éireann that could be perceived as a traditional women's programme. Its recovery is as such exceptionally important.

It is crucial to note that, in comparison to native stations in other English-speaking countries, Telifís Éireann made very few women's programmes and those that were made have been nearly completely lost with regards to both footage and documentation. It is evident that in other English-speaking nations, particularly the United Kingdom and United States, women were to some extent considered a useful and important audience to broadcasters and advertisers (Spigel; Thumim). In the US and the UK, it was assumed that women working in the home would constitute a key television audience. This is especially the case with daytime programming. Thumim posits that network television scheduling in the UK often worked on the assumption that women in the home would set viewing patterns for the whole family (*Inventing* 10). Leman has noted that, from the mid-1950s, the BBC had taken to showing women's programmes during the afternoon up to four times a week (75). This denotes a recognition within the BBC that the female audience, given their status within the home, was one to which the station needed to cater. As noted by both Marsha Cassidy and Lynn Spigel, programming in the United States followed similar patterns (Cassidy 1–3; Spigel 76).

This focus on female viewers was, of course, not unproblematic. In both the United States and Britain, it was often driven by a vision of women, and housewives specifically, as consumers. This meant that, in both places, women were catered to as an audience, but this was often done in a quite limited way that rarely acknowledged the complexity of female experience. In the British case, "women were acknowledged to be central to the project of inserting television into domestic spaces and routines—yet at the same time the female presence on screen was carefully contained" (Thumim, "Mrs. Knight" 91). In the Irish case, however, only the first of these two points is true. Irish female viewers were similarly presented with a limited range of representations of femininity, but their import as viewers was rarely recognised, if we are to take as evidence the relative dearth of programmes created for women on the Irish station.

From the beginnings of the station, small efforts were made to cater to women as an audience. When the station went to air in 1962, it did appoint a Head of Women's Programming, Edith Cusack, who oversaw a specific Women's Programming Department (O'Dwyer, "Irishwomen" 3). The department was responsible for the creation of a handful of programmes in the 1962 and 1963 seasons but, overall, it made very few programmes. In the period between 1 January and 31 March 1962 the station's annual report noted that it made only eleven hours of women's programming (*Radio Éireann Annual Report*, 1962). In that same period, Telifís Éireann made 254 hours of home-produced programming total, which means that home-produced women's programming constituted just 4% of the station's output. Comparatively, Telifís Éireann made three times as much children's programming, at 33 hours and 13% of production. The station also aired 286 hours of imported content, none of which was categorised as "women's", while 33 hours of imported programmes were classified as "children's". Production of women's programmes remained at around 4% between March 1962 and March 1963 (*Radio Éireann Annual Report*, 1963). In the following period, however, between March 1963 and March 1964, production fell by 2% (*Radio Éireann Annual Report*, 1964).

This fall in numbers coincides with the station's move to disband its women's programming department in 1964. At this point, the station stopped tracking "women's programming" in their annual report altogether for the rest of the 1960s and into the 1970s. Interestingly this occurred the same year the BBC disbanded their own women's programming department (Irwin, *What* 115). In the Irish case, it was mainly a result of the resignation in 1963 of Edith Cusack upon her marriage and, in addition, perhaps a general indifference to the department ("Leaves" 1). In response, the station chose simply to not replace Cusack and all mention of a women's programming department and women's programmes disappeared. The station instead began to rebrand programmes that may have previously been described as "for women" as "for the family". *Home for Tea* was, for instance, initially billed as "A programme for all the family" ("Radio" 14).

Thus, many programmes that researchers would now categorise as "women's programmes" during this period in Telifís Éireann's history were not coded that way by the station. Of course, this does not mean that they did not contain all of the hallmarks of a women's programming nor does it mean that these programmes were not decoded as "for women" when they initially aired. Rather, it means that the Irish station was simply hesitant to brand programmes in this way. The possible reason is a combination of scheduling issues and advertising imperatives. That is, the station had a schedule that was significantly more limited than that of other English-speaking networks. It only ran from between 4:45 to 11:30 p.m. in its earliest days and, by 1964, it only ran from 5:30 to 11:05 p.m.[3] The Irish station thus lacked the traditional afternoon programming block for women's programmes (Moseley, Wheatley, and Wood 1–19). These time limitations meant that almost all of TÉ's airtime was primetime. If any of that space was advertised as "for women", it is possible that other audiences would tune out and the Irish station would lose a critical component of its viewership.

Though TÉ may have been hesitant to code programmes as "for women", it nonetheless continued to make a small number of programmes that could certainly be perceived in this way. These same programmes also presented a quite limited view of femininity and domesticity. Helena Sheehan has explored this limited range of these representations in regard to the serial drama *Tolka Row*. Sheehan notes that, within this serial, the gender dynamics represented were "unquestioningly traditional" at a time when there was certainly an undercurrent of an early feminist movement that would question these ideals (49). Moreover, the absence of

nondomestic sets within *Tolka Row* meant that the women within the programme were physically confined to the domestic sphere (49). Both Sheehan and Luke Gibbons argue that *Tolka Row*'s rural counterpart *The Riordans* had significantly more edge in terms of dealing with social issues, but neither of them makes the case that this could extend to its representation of gender roles (Sheehan 50–2; Gibbons, 34–6). Barbra O'Connor does argue that *The Riordans* centred women and their experiences and asserts that the programme's practice of showcasing important social issues broadened the range of acceptable topics of discussion among women in Ireland, but she concedes that "resolutions to the problems and issues raised in *The Riordans* […] were not particularly radical or feminist" (127). The programme, thus, tended to rely on traditional ideals of domesticity and femininity. Importantly, Wesley Burrowes, head writer of the *The Riordans*, was himself, puzzled about what to do with Mary Riordan when her children grew up, and viewed her central role as that of wife and mother (Sheedy 6).

Of course, in Ireland during this period women were generally relegated to the domestic sphere culturally and, to some extent, by law. This position existed in part as a result of the marriage bar in the civil service, which remained until 1973. It was also evident in the de facto expectation that women would remain at home to mind their children, which was enshrined in the constitution at the time and remains today (Article 41.2.1). The lack of access to contraception ensured that there would be many children to rear, and a lack of access to childcare made it all the more unlikely for women to move outside of the home (Clear 9; Hill 152). The tendency of women's programmes, therefore, to portray women as confined within the domestic sphere was at some level reflective of the circumstances of the period, though, to a certain extent, it could be said that television worked as another piece within a system that relegated women to these circumstances.

Methodology

Due to a dearth of both women's programmes during this period and documentation on these programmes, recovering a programme like *Home for Tea* can be exceptionally difficult. This has undoubtedly contributed to *Home for Tea*'s absence within the historiography. The main problem which presents itself when attempting to reconstruct any Irish programme is that there is a near complete lack of footage available for native content created in the 1960s. This means that an approach that could contain a meaningful textual analysis of any programme is almost impossible.

This is, of course, not a problem which is entirely unique to Ireland. Scholars such as Lynn Spigel, Mary Irwin ("BBC") and Jaimie Medhurst have illuminated the difficulties of dealing with lost programmes in the US and UK. Irwin in particular has demonstrated the ways that programmes can be reconstructed in her study of *Wednesday Magazine*. Irwin managed to reconstruct the programme almost entirely using only three surviving episodes combined with the written sources. The lack of footage in the Irish situation is, however, particularly acute as no coordinated effort to preserve programmes existed before 1967, ensuring that programmes before this period were lost at quite high rates (Sweeney). Another major issue in dealing with Irish programmes is that written records of programmes are nearly as sparse as visual records. Though the RTÉ Archive is an invaluable resource, the station simply did not have the resources to maintain it for most of its history. While their counterparts at the BBC were able to establish a network archive as early as 1970, and began keeping historical records from 1957, RTÉ did not have an established archive or an archivist on staff until 2014 (Byrne).[4] This led

to a significant loss of material, as in "the absence of professional policy and procedures record creators maintain/destroy records according to workflow requirements and potential archives are lost" (Byrne). Some programme files for later, and higher profile, programmes remain, but the records of everyday programmes such as *Home for Tea* have been lost.

As such, one cannot rely entirely on methodologies used for networks in larger markets such as the BBC. A closer analogue to the Irish case might be work done on ITV, which retained significantly fewer records than the national broadcaster. Jaime Medhurst utilised programme journals in order to reconstruct programmes at Teledu Cymru, the ITV network in Wales. The Welsh network's footage retention practices were similar to those of the Irish station's, leaving Medhurst with only one minute and twenty-five seconds of programming with which to work. The methodology used throughout this article is similar to Medhurst's as it deploys some programme journals held in the National Library of Ireland. However, it supplements this with other press sources and uses this press discourse surrounding the programme to attain a better sense of its overall content.

This article, thus, draws mainly upon press sources, accentuated by some documentation at the RTÉ Archives. The reliance on press sources is necessitated by the absence of archival material on the programme *Home for Tea*. Though the programme ran for two years the RTÉ Document Archives retains no record of it. Further, no footage of this programme remains. *Home for Tea* also goes unmentioned in the main remaining records of those who worked at the station at this time, such as the papers of T. W. Moody, Ernest Blythe, Maura Laverty, and C. S. Andrews.[5] In addition, the programme is not mentioned in the major sources for this period contained with the RTÉ Document Archives, such as the Minutes of the Radio Éireann Authority Meetings.[6] And while this may seem to indicate that the programme was unremarkable on a wider scale, discussions in the press, among both commentators and the public, show that the programme was certainly not disregarded in its own time.

In terms of press sources this article draws upon two main databases, the Irish Newspaper Archive (INA) and *The Irish Times* online archive (ITA), which together represent the majority of contemporaneous Irish newspapers during the period under scrutiny. The article also utilises the *RTV Guide*. The *Guide* was the point of entry for the identification of *Home for Tea*. The publication was examined for each January—when the new winter schedule was announced—from 1962 to 1970.[7] The schedules within the *Guide* were used to identify programmes of interest which were then researched further using the INA and ITA. While over the full period a number of programmes were identified, *Home for Tea* was the programme most clearly directed towards women during the period 1964–1966. Research within the INA and the ITA entailed searching the key words "Home for Tea", in both databases between 1964, when the show aired, and the present along with the names of the programme's main stars. These searches turned up commentary from television columnists, long form schedules, profiles of the programme's presenters, and letters to the editor from viewers. Administrative material within the RTÉ Document Archives was used for more general information on women's programmes in Ireland.

Reconstructing *Home for Tea*

As noted above, *Home for Tea* was a magazine programme that ran on Telifís Éireann from January of 1964 to May of 1966.[8] In its first year it aired at 6:45 p.m. on Fridays. It was accompanied by *Tolka Row* and *The Donna Reed Show* in its first season in a line-up that could

be described as woman-centric but which the station dubbed a "family night" (Doolan, Dowling, and Quinn 38).[9] It was moved to Wednesday at 6:45 p.m. in 1965 and remained there for the rest of its run.[10] The station first introduced *Home for Tea* in a feature in the *RTV Guide* that took the form of a profile of the programme's host Al Byrne. The article gives few clues about *Home for Tea's* exact composition, but it does lend insight into the way that the station envisioned the new programme. The profile begins by explaining that Al Byrne would be hosting "T.E.'s new family programme" and notes that the host himself insisted that the show contained "something for everybody" ("Home" 27). This demonstrates that, from the outset, Telifís Éireann was uninterested in actually branding their hallmark women's programme as a programme *for* women. It did nonetheless contain many of the hallmarks of women's programming.

This is evidenced by certain statements made by Geraldine Hannigan who joined Al Byrne as hostess on *Home for Tea*. She was likely adept in her role, with the women's pages of the *Independent* once claiming that much of "the credit […] for making the show live up to its title" should be given to her (O'Reilly 9). Hannigan garnered her own profile in the *RTV Guide* a few weeks after Byrne. The piece is significantly shorter than the one on Byrne but tells us much more about the dynamics of the programme. It notes that, on *Home for Tea*, Hannigan "plays the part of a model housewife" ("Teatime" 3). This reveals that within the programme Hannigan and Byrne were constructed as a married couple playing host and hostess to the audience and guests. This placed the programme fully within the context of the domestic sphere and highlights the presentation of Byrne and Hannigan as an "ideal couple".



Figure 1: Presenter Geraldine Hannigan with a floor manager (centre) and an unidentified guest, possibly Dr Maurice Holly or Holley, on the Telefís Éireann (RTÉ Television) weekly magazine show, *Home for Tea*, during studio recording in January 1964. © RTÉ Archives.

In an interview with the *Irish Independent* Hannigan revealed the effort that was made within the programme to give the illusion of a home environment. She noted that "the whole spirit of the programme is to be as informal as you would be in your own home". She and Byrne were, as such, expected to speak in a "casual" and "chatty" manner (O'Reilly 9). This homey illusion extended to Hannigan's wardrobe. The profile explained that "a simple dress or separates is preferred to anything too elegant" (9). Moreover, the article explained, Hannigan would soon be clad in a specially designed line of leisure wear. Hannigan was thus constructed as an average housewife lounging in her home and casually dispensing information with her husband. This casual style, designed to foster intimacy with the audience, closely mirrored the approach taken in early British women's programmes such as *Wednesday Magazine* (Irwin, "BBC" 169). This style of "direct address" itself had been taken from the women's magazines of the 1940s and 50s (Lehman 78). The choice of Al Byrne as compere speaks further to this point as he had established himself as a voice in women's magazines for many years before his first appearance on *Home for Tea* (Clear 46). This meant that he would already be known to many Irish women, thus furthering the construction of familiarity. As such, the Irish station was utilising elements of women's programmes abroad and applying them to a programme which that was not readily described as "for women".

Newspaper commentary shows that the set of *Home for Tea* itself was constructed to look like a middle-class home. Brian Devenney, the television commentator for the *Irish Independent*, described the programme's set in 1966 as having "recently acquired resemblance to the gracious living standards of the imported glossy mags for women and that flattering way they have when they are about to treat the readers as morons" (15). Here, Devenney draws out the overlap between *Home for Tea* and women's magazines. His reportage also places the programme not only within a firmly domestic space but within an affluent domestic space. Devenney also singled out *Home for Tea* as the worst offender in what he called Telifís Éireann's "affluential settings of suburban cosiness" which, he asserted, were likely not in line with the standards of a normal Irish home. He noted that the programme's set lacked only a television in its presentation of the ideal middle-class home (15). The set seems to have taken on the nature of an aspirational home not unlike that which was shown on TE's broadcast of American sitcoms, which the station bought and aired in relatively high volumes (Flynn 66).

The cast, and the illusion of middle-class domesticity, was rounded out by Monica Sheridan. Sheridan headed the cookery segment of the programme and is probably worthy of a study in her own right. She could be best described as Ireland's first celebrity chef and was quite well known before her stint on *Home for Tea*. Sheridan had already spent a year on television in 1963 on her own programme *Monica Sheridan's Kitchen*.[11] The programme was extremely popular and elicited significant praise throughout its run. Sheridan had her own cookery programme on Radio Éireann in the 1950s as well called *It's Fun to Cook*.[12] She was regarded as a somewhat irreverent figure, known for licking her fingers and regularly dismissing the traditional rules of Irish cooking (Long). Sheridan was also an exceptionally popular figure and hers was the most consistent segment on the programme. Though presenters on *Home for Tea* were often different from week to week or month to month, one constant was Monica Sheridan's cooking demonstration with which the show ended. In fact, even when *Home for Tea* went off the air for two weeks during the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, the show went on for Sheridan. Long form schedules note that in the first week of the Olympics she prepared cream of fish with rice for her audience. The station interpreted the rice as a nod to Japan and a tie-in to the world games ("Television", 14 Oct. 1964, 17).

Long form programme descriptions also lend insight into the gendered dynamics of the duties of the two hosts on *Home for Tea*. It can be seen from these descriptions that Byrne and Hannigan's domestic roles were thoroughly separate. For example, in one episode, which aired in early January, Hannigan was tasked with discussing holiday shopping with viewers while Byrne headed the segment entitled "Buying a Home". While Hannigan discussed the prices of various items and ways to save, Byrne explained how heating systems worked (Wednesday Programme Schedule, 22 Jan. 1964, 18). In this case, Hannigan handled a task clearly associated with women and Byrne handled a task associated with men. This trend carried over throughout the series wherein Byrne was tasked with presenting the programme's more "serious" topics while Hannigan presented "lighter" fare. That the segment "Buying a Home" existed at all is important in that it indicates that those making *Home for Tea* believed that women had interests that were not limited to cookery and beauty. However, the topic of home buying still falls within the configuration of an ideal of domesticity.

Other segments reflected this willingness to expand the boundaries of perceived "women's interests" while still remaining grounded within normative ideas of femininity and domesticity. This was apparent in amateur historian and journalist Des Moore's periodic appearances on the programme. Moore was sometimes invited on the show in order to discuss topics of historical importance. These tended to centre on historical romances. He appeared in one programme to discuss the relationship between Irish revolutionary Robert Emmet and Sarah Curran (Wednesday Programme Schedule, 5 Jan. 1966, 18) and, in another, the romance between Johnathan Swift and Esther Van Homrigh ("Television", 11 Mar. 1965, 18). This would indicate an assumption among producers that women would have some interest in history, though not necessarily the more "masculine", military and political history showcased in other programmes. Rather, *Home for Tea* offered a feminised romantic history. Moreover, the emphasis on romance further elevated ideals of a domestic space centred around one man and one woman.

Discussions and segments that more clearly centred on traditional femininity and domesticity were, however, the norm for *Home for Tea*. For instance, the programme once held a discussion between its guests—all male—on whether or not Irish women "let themselves go" after marriage. Some guests in the programme asserted that Irish women only presented themselves nicely until they were able to secure a husband (O'Dwyer, "Do" 3). Based on the reportage of this discussion, it does not seem that alternative perspectives were represented or that this concept was significantly challenged. Some men in the programme did acknowledge that this perceived "decline" in appearance may be attributable to the fact that Irish men did not give their wives enough compliments (3). The debate plays upon a number of tropes that highlight a normative view of both femininity and domestic life. Moreover, the discussion suggests that it is the wife's responsibility to maintain her appearance for her husband and in so doing constructs a woman's appearance as essential to her value.

Regular presentation topics were also mainly centred around the home. From week to week the order of presenters, and the presenters themselves, changed, but, generally, the programme included a knitting demonstration from Cyril Cullen, do-it-yourself advice from Michael Moore, gardening advice John Fanning, and some sort of advice from a special guest.[13]**[13]** Examples of guest topics included "a dissertation on tea" from Tony Butler ("TV", 16 Sep. 1964, 5) a lesson on flower arrangements ("Television", 7 Oct. 1964, 17), and advice on the most economical way to buy meat ("TV", 23 Sep. 1964, 9). Within this line-up, it is clear that the focus of the programme was firmly domestic; each regular segment, and the special guest segments, focused on how to properly keep a home. Interestingly, all regular

segments except for Monica Sheridan's cooking segment were hosted by men. This may indicate that, on *Home for Tea*, female presenters were trusted with only a small range of topics.

The programme also featured segments that would run over a number of weeks such as the home buying series mentioned above. Around the same time, Geraldine Hannigan was in charge of a series that discussed various aspects of wedding planning. This series covered topics such as how much to spend on catering ("Television", 24 Feb. 1965, 17) and how to go about planning for flowers and photography ("Television", 7 Apr. 1965, 15). One can again see from this distribution of duties described here that Hannigan was routinely given more "feminine" topics than Byrne. Moreover, the wedding series contributes further to the programme's representation of a traditional domestic ideal that favoured a household with one man and one woman.

Segments commonly covered health issues and particularly those concerning children. One week, for instance, the show contained a segment that focused on children's immunisations ("Television", 2 Feb. 1965, 15). Another health segment specifically discussed the polio vaccine ("Television", 14 Mar. 1965, 17). In another week, the programme invited a health social worker to speak about the difficulties of a child's first day at school ("Television", 6 Jan. 1965, 15). The same social worker was brought on the programme later to discuss "the problems of feeding the child who does not want to eat" ("Television", 7 Apr. 1965, 15). The presence of the medical segment does complicate the programme's supposed status as a "hotch-potch of home hints", as it was once referred to by Ken Gray, television commentator for the *Irish Times* (8). However, the medical segments were clearly tailored to the interests of mothers. This, as such, continued the programme's focus on the domestic sphere and demonstrates that the programme was addressed to a female audience of both wives and mothers.

As demonstrated by the press sources examined here, *Home for Tea* segments tended to revolve around a specific conception of normative domesticity. Byrne and Hannigan themselves were conceived as a married couple with roles that mirrored traditionally gendered family dynamics. Segments on home buying and weddings relied on the assumption that those watching aspired to the kind of domesticity which Byrne and Hannigan presented in the programme: that is, one of a married couple with means to purchase a home. Though within the programme they lacked children of their own, the programme's consistent focus on child rearing presented the subject as one of the chief goals of the family unit.

Audience Response to *Home for Tea*

Press sources also highlight the ways that audiences responded to *Home for Tea*. Though RTÉ retained few letters from viewers in the 1960s, letters that viewers wrote to newspapers are readily accessible. And while these may not be fully representative of viewers' reactions, they can provide a glimpse into the ways that portions of the audience reacted to *Home for Tea*. One facet of the programme with which a number of viewers took issue was its middle-class bias. For instance, in 1964 one viewer wrote to the *Evening Herald* to "protest about the scandalous extravagance on *Home for Tea* on T.E." They claimed that "Monica seems to be living it up with pheasants, champagne, claret, etc." and added: "The 'powers that be' might well give a thought to the hardship and poverty around us and decide on cutting down on 'The Kitchen'" ("Living" 25). A Mrs. C. Timmons added to this, writing to the *Evening*

Herald a year later that: "I would like to know if your readers agree with me that Monica on *Home for Tea* is much too wasteful and extravagant" (6).

Viewer reaction quite closely mirrors Brian Devenney's take on the middle-class bias within the programme. It is likely that the programme's bias arose from a misunderstanding about TÉ's audience on the part of the programme's producers. That is, in the late 1950s and somewhat into the early 1960s, television sets were mainly a feature of the middle-class home. As the television set was a new, and expensive, piece of technology the middle classes were by and large its first adopters in Ireland. But as hire purchase television set schemes became more and more common, the presence of televisions in working-class homes followed suit (Brennan 88–91). Thus, by the mid-1960s, much of Telifís Éireann's audience was made up of working-class people, but it seems that the station lagged quite far behind in understanding the evolution of its audience.

Further, viewer reaction to middle-class bias in Monica Sheridan's cookery segment specifically was likely justified by Sheridan's own views. These came to light in 1966 when TÉ chose to replace *Home for Tea* with a programme called *Home Truths*, which would cater to working-class housewives ("*Home*"). Monica Sheridan was initially asked to take up the cooking segment on the new show. The programme makers requested that she cook meals that reflected a home with a weekly food budget of £4. Sheridan asserted that this would be "impossible" and refused to join the programme ("No" 1). The budget was reflective of the average household budget of a working-class family in the period.

Monica Sheridan's refusal to appear on *Home for Tea*'s successor programme was not the first time that she stirred controversy at the network, nor the first time that she disappeared from Irish television sets. In 1965, Sheridan was briefly fired from *Home for Tea* arising from a supposed conflict of interest. This incident drew significant press attention and on multiple occasions even made the front page of *The Irish Times* ("Dropped" 1). It centred around Sheridan's participation in Board Bia's "Bring Home the Bacon" campaign. This campaign was designed to encourage the consumption of pork in Ireland in order to raise revenue in the agricultural sector. Sheridan was asked to be a spokesperson for the campaign and agreed. Her work for the campaign mainly involved giving lectures at various events and putting together pork-based recipes for publication and distribution in grocery stores ("Bring" 4). Telifís Éireann claimed that this represented a conflict of interest as Sheridan may have ended up using Irish pork products in her cookery segment. In response to this concern, and Sheridan's refusal to step out of the campaign, the network fired her ("Dropped" 1).

This incident demonstrates that there was quite a high level of engagement with the programme among viewers as the reaction to Sheridan's firing was swift and intense. Letters were sent into major newspapers in support of Sheridan and these can tell us a great deal about the incident and audience engagement. One woman from Dundalk wrote to the *Irish Press* to express her shock at the decision. She noted that she had written in complaint to the Head of Programmes Gunner Rugheimer for "depriving us women of one of Telifís Éireann's most attractive personalities" (Short 12). A group of housewives also came together to write in protest to the *Evening Herald* about Sheridan's dismissal. They wanted to tell TÉ that "Monica will never be replaced" and ended their letter with a simple call to action: "We want Monica" (Five Housewives 4). Another woman wrote to the *Press* to say that *Home for Tea* had "lost its best personality" when the network fired Sheridan and asked "how crazy" the television executives could be to do such a thing (Monica Fan 11). The volume of letters highlights Sheridan's wide appeal among Irish television viewers and especially female viewers. That

Telifís Éireann let Monica go despite this wide popularity is surprising given that, at this point, the station relied quite heavily on advertising revenue (Flynn 68). Following the audience uproar, however, she was reinstated approximately two weeks after being fired.

Both the case of Monica Sheridan and the case of middle-class bias on *Home for Tea* demonstrate that, though TÉ did not explicitly market the programme to women, their female audience still engaged with the programme. The Monica Sheridan incident in particular shows that women were tuned into *Home for Tea*. Moreover, reactions to *Home for Tea* in press sources to a certain extent demonstrate a general dissatisfaction with the way that producers were constructing the programme. It seems that the programme's construction of a middle-class ideal did not ring true to at least some portion of *Home for Tea*'s female audience. This is therefore likely a further example of the ways in which TÉ underserved its female viewers.

Conclusion

Though much of the footage and archival material from the earliest days of Telifís Éireann has been lost, there is still a means to determine the content of programmes and the messages which they transmitted. For the period between 1962 and 1967 the only evidence that many Telifís Éireann programmes were made at all exists within contemporaneous press sources. This article has demonstrated the ways that these sources can be excavated to determine the content of these lost programmes in the absence of archival footage or written records. Moreover, it shows how this excavation can be used to expand our understanding of Telifís Éireann's programming and choices during this period. In the case of *Home for Tea*, it can be seen that, during this period, the programme's producers constructed a very specific vision of womanhood that centred around middle-class domesticity. This is evidenced through press sources which discuss the programme's sets, presenters and presentation topics. Further, press sources reveal the ways that some members of *Home for Tea*'s audience interacted with the programme. Importantly, these show that some members of the programme's female audience took issue with the programme's presentation of a middle-class domestic ideal.

While it may be possible to gain similar insights from focusing on programmes for which more documentary evidence exists, this approach would be problematic. During the period under scrutiny Telifís Éireann aired between 42 and 45 hours of programming a week.[14] Of this, a little under 50% was generally native programming (Flynn 76). To date, the historiography has focused on just a small proportion of these hours, likely due to the absence of archival sources. This article demonstrates that significantly more of this programming can be recovered through the method outlined throughout. Further, it demonstrates the importance of doing so and the range of information that can be excavated from alternative sources.

Notes

[1] The first mention of *Home for Tea* in schedules within the *RTV Guide* was on 3 January 1964. The last mention was 27 July 1966.

[2] Within an examination of TAM ratings as published in the *RTV Guide* between 1964 and 1966 it can be seen that *Home for Tea* entered the TAM top ten twice. It reached number nine

in the ratings for the week of 26 December 1965 and tied with *Teen Talk* for number seven in the week of the 23 January 1966.

[3] This information has been ascertained from an extensive survey of television schedules in the *Irish Times* from 1962–1970.

[4] It's worth noting that oral history could be a viable option for reconstruction and has been used elsewhere. However, for *Home for Tea* from the perspective of production there are not enough people living who worked on the programme for this to be a useful method of reconstruction. From an audience perspective, everyday programmes such as *Home for Tea* are significantly less likely to be remembered than other more well-known offerings. This is likely why the foremost oral history on this subject, Edward Brennan's *A Post-Nationalist History of Television in Ireland*, does not include a mention of the programme or any of those like it.

[5] This information has been ascertained from an extensive search within the RTÉ Archives and within the named archival records.

[6] This information has been ascertained from an extensive search within the RTÉ Archives and within these records.

[7] This was determined from an earlier random survey of the *RTV Guide* in which the author examined the *Guide* for two randomly selected months per year between 1962 and 1970.

[8] The first mention of *Home for Tea* in schedules within the *Irish Times* was on 3 January 1964. The last mention was 27 July 1966.

[9] Information on this line-up has been derived from a survey of schedules in *The Irish Times* for the year 1964.

[10] This information is derived from a survey of schedules in the *Irish Times* between 1965 and 1966.

[11] *Monica Sheridan's Kitchen* ran from October of 1962 to July of 1963 as determined from a survey of schedules in the *Irish Times*. It was a product of the Women's Programming Department.

[12] *It's Fun to Cook* ran from September of 1954 to August of 1955, as determined from a survey of schedules in the *Irish Times*.

[13] This information is derived from an examination of long-form programme descriptions in *The Irish Examiner* and the *Irish Press* from 1964–1965.

[14] Determined from a survey of schedules in the *RTV Guide* between 1962 and 1970. In 1962, when the station went to air, programmes normally began at 4:45 p.m. on weekdays and ended at 11:30 p.m. By the following year, this had proved too ambitious and programmes began at 5:30 p.m. on weekdays for the rest of the period.

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