

## **Across the Bridge of Hope: Crossing divides in an Irish migration context**

**Dr. Patrick Fitzgerald**

**Lecturer & Development Officer, Mellon Centre for Migration Studies, Ulster American Folk Park, Omagh, Northern Ireland BT 78 5QU**

In 2008 Patrick Fitzgerald & Brian Lambkin authored *Migration in Irish History, 1607-2007* and produced therein a simple model of migration which made reference to the three stages of migration which involved migrants leaving an 'Old World', crossing an intervening obstacle and arriving into a 'New World'. This paper will focus upon the middle stage of this model in terms of exploring the crossing of an intervening obstacle or divide. In an Irish and Northern Irish context crossings can be thought of in both metaphorical and literal terms with regard to the establishment of the border between north and south in 1920 and the idea of transitioning away from the sectarian conflict of the most recent troubles (1969-1998). The poetry of Seamus Heaney, particularly his *The Cure at Troy* (1991), reflects the metaphorical power of bridging divides and healing wounds and his own childhood experience offers insight into the poet's understanding of transecting boundaries between old and new 'worlds'. Within the context of an interrogation of crossing points and boundary negotiation in Ireland and these islands particular focus will be directed towards the powerful symbolism embodied in the construction of the Peace Bridge unveiled in Derry/Londonderry in 2011. Set in a wider historical context the potential capacity for a bridge to represent the potential promise of 'reaching a farther shore' in a post-conflict society will be explored. This paper will also include a brief, illustrated survey of key 'bridging points' (big and small) along the Northern Ireland/Republic of Ireland Border, ranging from the Peace Bridge in Derry-Londonderry to the controversial proposal for a new bridge across Carlingford Lough'.