

Next Parish America: Tradition and Modernity on Great Blasket Island

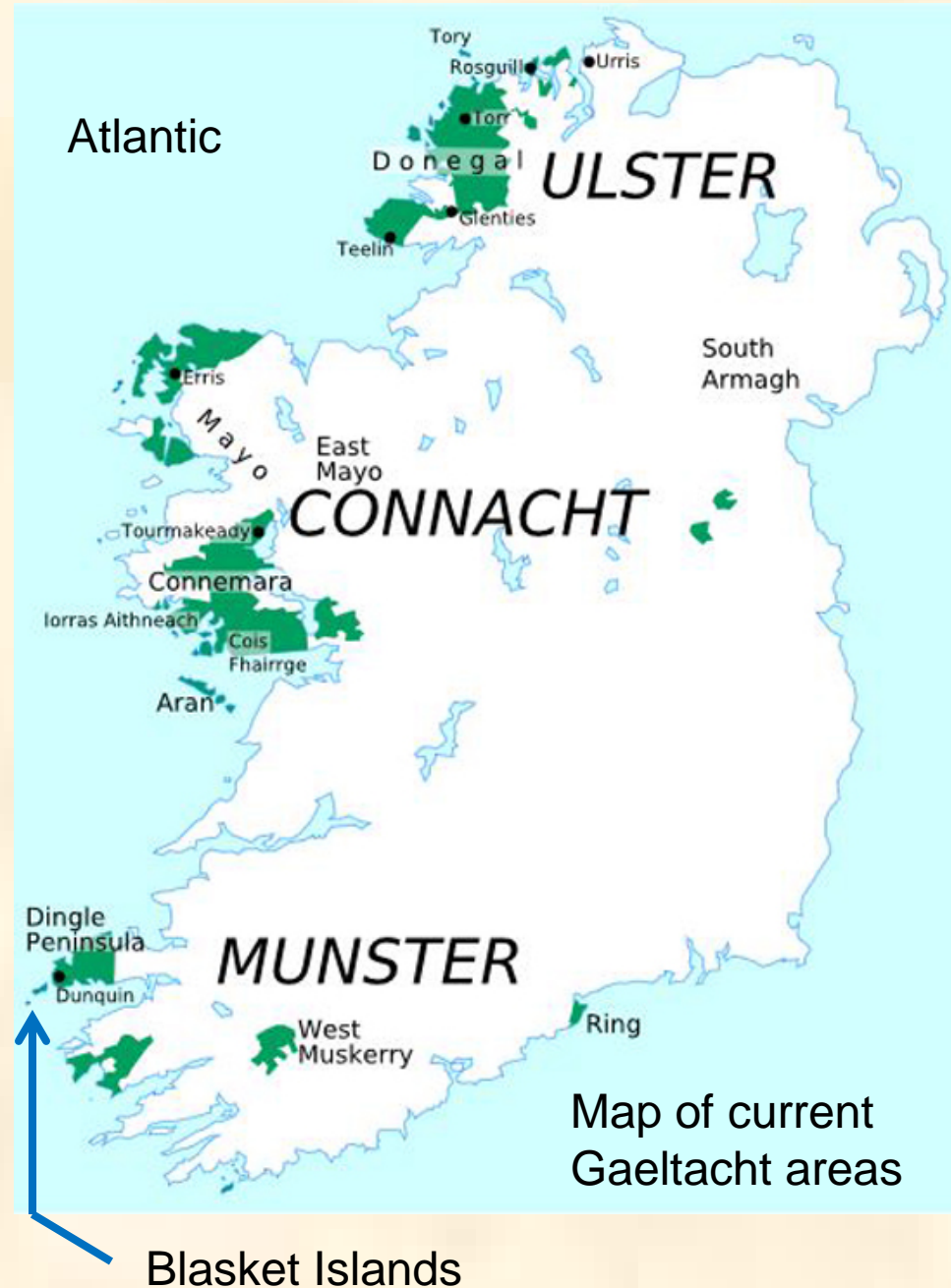
Global Irish Diaspora Congress

Chris Fennell, University of Illinois



“The Irish diaspora, both as an analytical concept and as particular type of community, is **significant far beyond its role in Irish history and its relationship to Ireland. It is something other groups are beginning look to for help in understanding their own experience.**”

-- William H. Mulligan, Jr. (2014:95)





Blasket lifeways with diverse resources and Gaelic language

Linguistic and Celtic studies scholars in early 1900s

**Irish nationalism co-ops
Blasket culture as the
“authentic” Irish in early 1900s**

An early editor for Tomás O’Crohan’s *Island Cross-talk* (1928), declared “Tomás is of the Gaeltacht. He knows nothing else in the wide world. . . . He has known nothing of a life of ease or of wealth from the day he was born, only of hard work and of few possessions.”

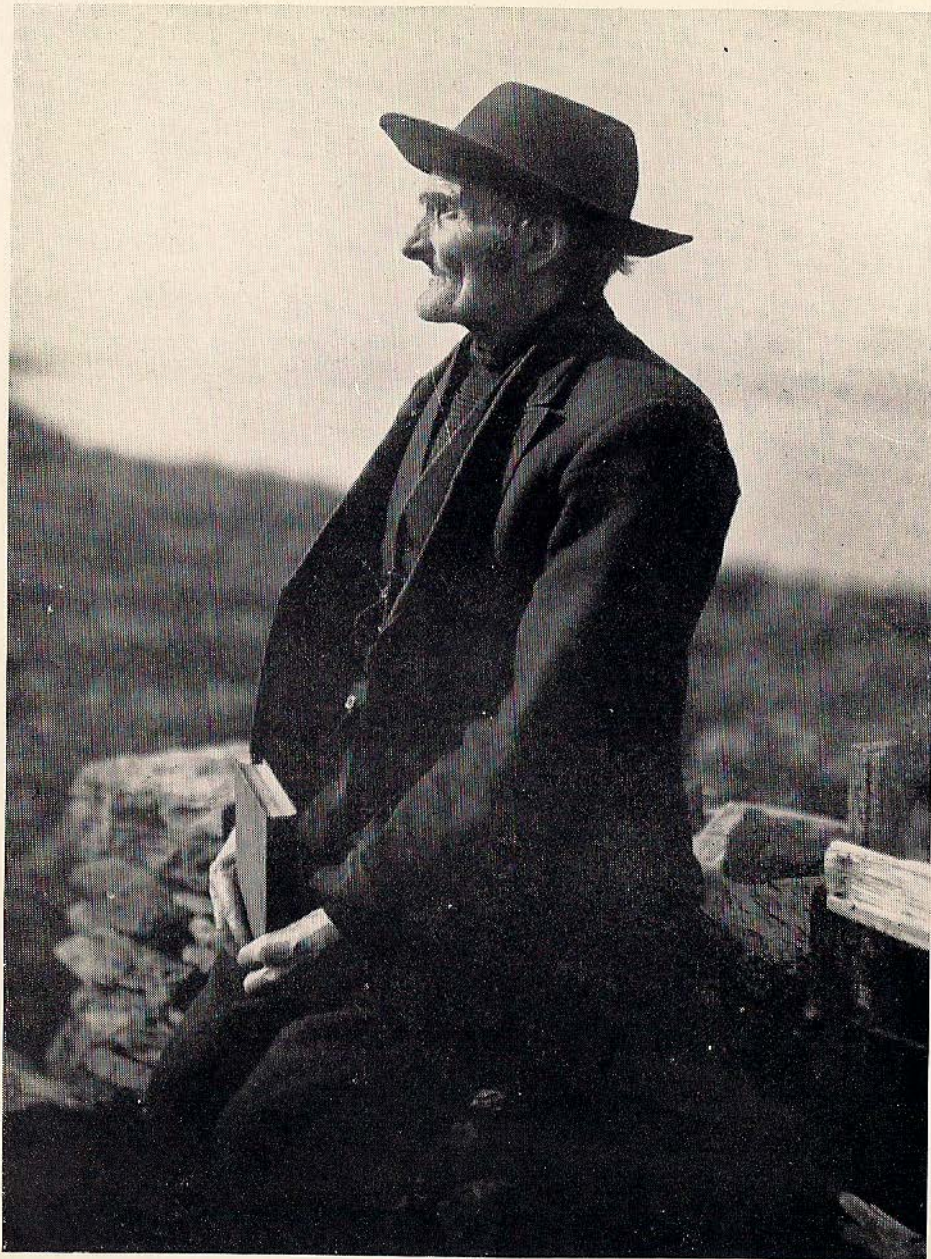
Analyze diasporas across multiple scales of push and pull factors, including large-scale displacements and close-scale, chain migrations of communities.



Great Blasket Island is 6.1 km (3.79 miles) long, 1 km (.62 miles) at its widest point. The image above looks west from the **Dingle Peninsula** to the east end of **Great Blasket**. The east end of the Island lies 3.5 km (2.17 miles) from the mainland.

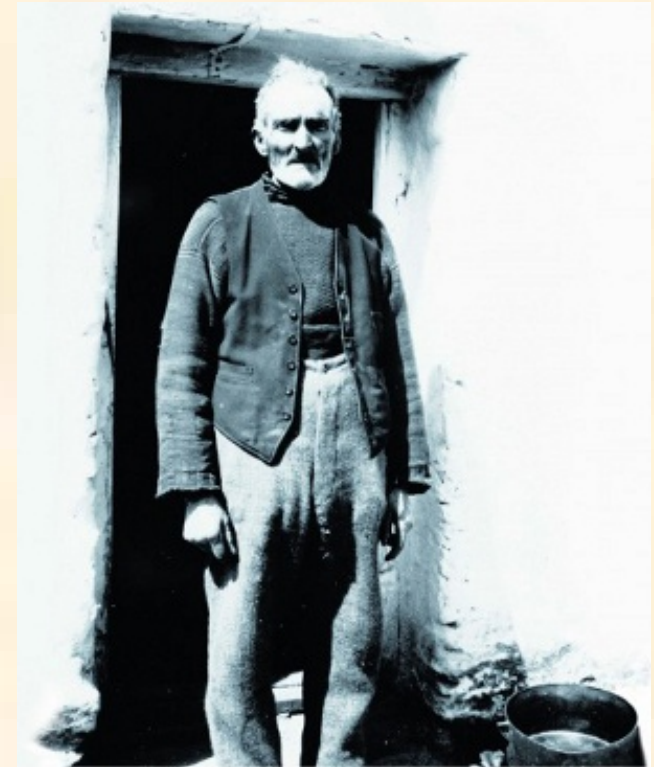


Diaspora of a community -- 19th century house ruins in Lower village



TOMÁS Ó CROHAN WITH HIS BOOK

The Islandman, by **Tomás O’Crohan**, translated from the Irish by Robin Flower. London: Oxford University Press, 1977. **First published in Irish language in 1929.**



O'Yi m'blasesod.

Can... a n'isoi-ficead
2.8.-

Blasóim nuá domus 'Cuzorb' zan M'huairz 'Soosleca
zan eal sa t'ssozjal doorb de Tessbuul Soóse,
Do díor i z'caimrodar leis a n'steme leizemica
zan ubair m'besim aye soime aye an ssozjal-so beo'
A d'iomoin deice aye a n'diuom-so e'lesico.
Zan an t'ecese Osorime dá oleay clo
zo d'Cuzaó Rí na D'soni z'eal doorb y'sid ubair d'táde
Zan easbáó ssozestca aye na d'huairz-Oz.

A'Coim, f'ionzesuca.

Yi purb maortl aye na t'asicaipice
D'leimice 7 ssozjal euzot, Cioopiceó na n'ize-beo
o "Óimzom ut Cuse". M'huairz f'ém, m'ye ceay caom
znesim aye a n'duine f'ionzesuca, 7 a eay aneomol
do zuyi m'at leat p'unt size a biez nas m'op.
Tá ssoay f'elúy aye b'apna no b'pope
zo f'huairseic, Cuyiáto siad Usm le f'sunnez.
Is baólaic. Yil a Sp'ud size, Cuan e'ead
p'unt - nus a leat, do C'alesimant leis an
z'cuimespas, an pláye a t'obayic zo p'unt
Tsmall. Is baólaic zo m'beid e'psize smic
ann. Tá na cleairz f'ém i n'lonap'óc'z le'm a e'ade

“Part of a letter, from Tomas Ó
Criomhthain to Brian Kelly,
who more than anyone else
encouraged him as a writer.”
(On an Irish Island, by Robert
Kanigel, 2012:61).

NATIONAL HUMOROUS JOURNAL OF IRELAND

DUBLIN OPINION

PRICE
THREEPENCE.

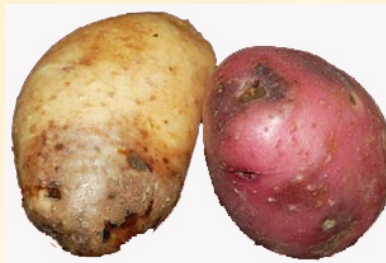


THE LITERARY WAVE
HITS THE ISLANDS

“The cover of *Dublin Opinion*, June 1936. By this time, the Great Blasket, population 150, had produced **three important works of Irish-language literature.**” (*On an Irish Island*, by Robert Kanigel, 2012:187).

Peig Sayers memoirs took a more somber tone –
“**T’would be a bad place that wouldn’t be better for you than this dreadful rock**”





Broad diversity of resources on Blasket, which did **not narrow** their foodways under **colonialism**. Some mainland families moved to the islands **during the famine**.



Men transporting a cow in a **naomhog** (large currach); harbor area of Great Blasket Island, **circa 1930s** (Univ. College of Dublin, Delargy Centre for Irish Folklore, digital archive).

There were no trees on the islands. Most materials were obtained from driftwood and cargo flotsam from shipwrecks.

Cargo from shipwrecks occasionally provided a variety of goods, such as timber, copper, tin and brass items, casks of oil, crates of tea (first used as dye), wine, clothing, cotton bales, packaged foods and fruits.

Fabric was woven from sheep's wool and linen from flax plants.

Peat turf was used for fuel.

A limited number of oil lamps were used, while most relied on peat fires for evening light.

Oil from seal livers could be distilled into candle or lamp oil.

Drinking water was obtained from wells, springs, and rain catchments.







“In the decades before this picture was taken in about 1930, as many as fifty students attended the island school; by 1941, when it was closed down, there were just three.” (*On an Irish Island*, by Robert Kanigel, 2012:113).



Many **clochán** hut remains exist on **Dingle peninsula**. Dingle and the west coast islands were frequented by **monastic pilgrimages in the medieval period**. **Today**, farmers use them to **pen livestock or store turf**.



An “**Island kitchen**” from *The Islandman*, by Tomás O’Crohan, translated from the Irish by Robin Flower (1977:48).

Taoiseach Éamon de Valera lionized an “authentic” Ireland in his 1943 speech *The Ireland That We Dreamed Of*, and issued evacuation orders for the last Blasket residents in 1953.



“The ideal Ireland that we would have, the Ireland that we dreamed of, would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, **satisfied with frugal comfort**, devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit – a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose **fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry**, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the **laughter of happy maidens**, whose **firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age.**”

**Slí Chorca Dhuibhne
THE DINGLE WAY**



An tAigéan
Atlantach



Leaving challenges of
rough seas isolation
for mainland towns to
the east

Dwindling population
followed by final
“evacuation” in 1953



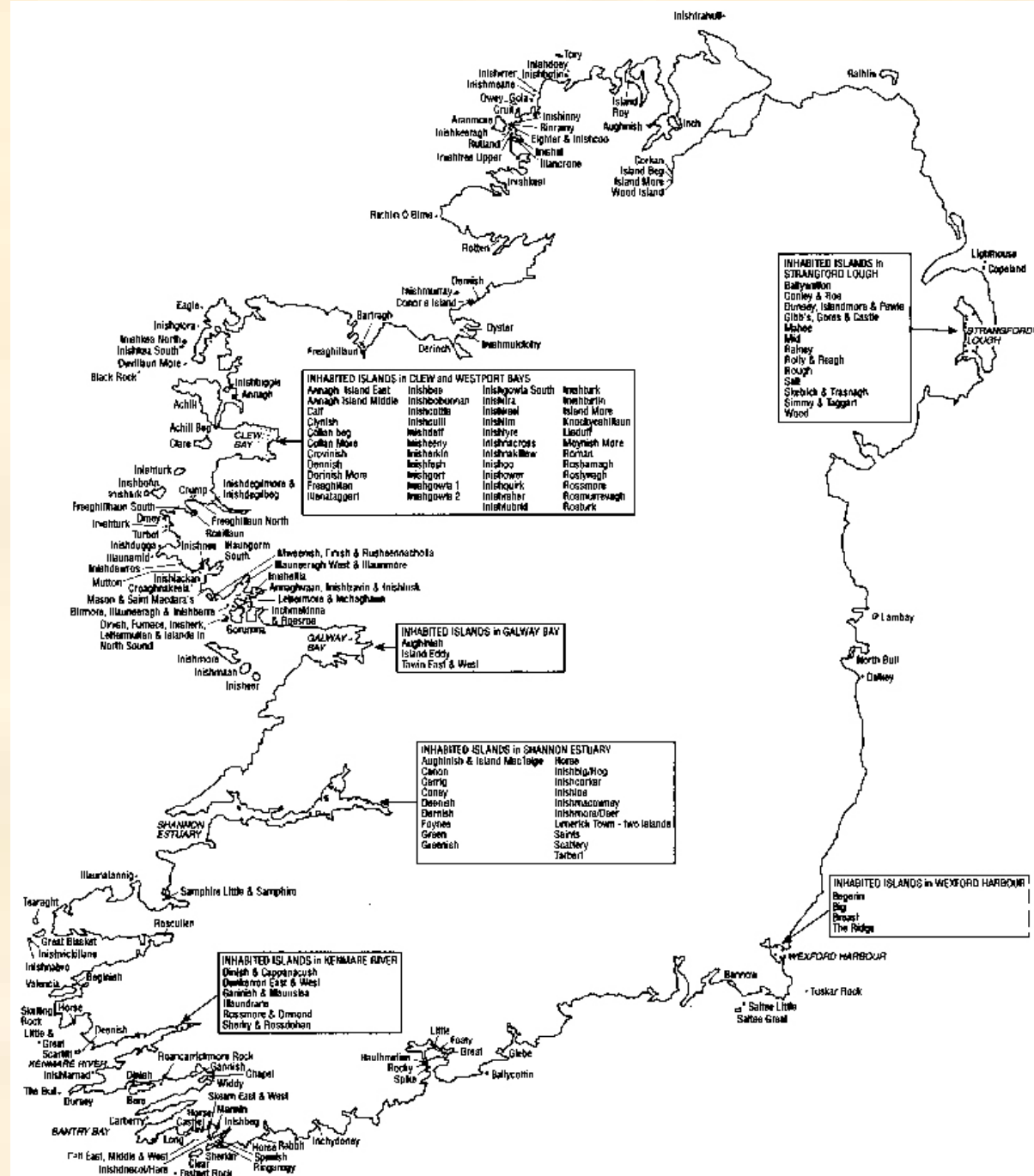
For example, among 47
“unlinked” islands
off Ireland coast

➔ in 1841 had 18,855
residents

➔ in 1991 only 3,570
residents

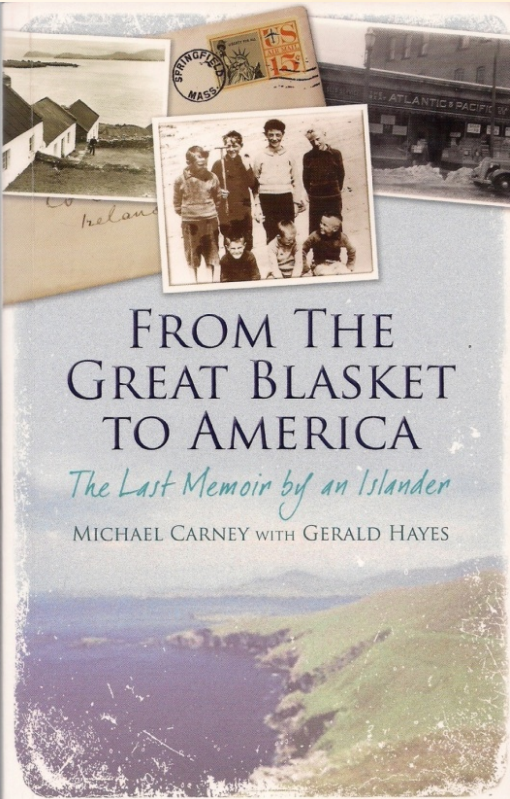
➔ 81% reduction

(Royle & Scott 1996)





Or, looking west, to “next parish America”



An example of the “pull” effects of “chain” migrations and enclave supports

Close-scale studies of diasporas through social networks --

“I got a letter from a relation
Telling me to hasten across the sea,
That gold was to be found in plenty there
And that I'd never have a hard day or
a poor one again.”
-- Séamas Ó Muirheartaigh (1933)



West Kerry Irish was spoken with such frequency in the Hungry Hill neighborhood of Springfield that the community represented an example of what Sarah McMonagle (2014) calls a Gaeltacht diaspora.

O'gh m'blasesad. Cm. s' n'oi-ficad
28.

Blasáin nuá 'Somus 'Cuzorb' zan m'huair 'Soz'leca
Zan 'eal sa 'Sozjal doorb' se. 'Tessóul sóidé.
Do 'd'oir 'z'icup'od'ay leis s' n'osteme léz'es'm'ca
Zan 'u'oir m'besun s'ye soime s'ye an 'Sozjal-so beo'
A 'dis'm'sin 'd'aire s'ye s' n'oiwom-so e'p'es'ca.
Zan an 'e'ce'se 'Soz'p'ne da 'ole's' clo
Zo 'o'Cu'ad 'Rí na 'D'som'z'eal doorb' y's'ad 'ú'oir 'd'á'de
Zan 'eas'ad 'Soz'leca s'ye an 'D'uannaiz-'Oz'.

A 'Co'ra, 'Fon'z'es'ca.

'Yi part' m'oi'll s'ye nuá 'e's'ca'p'es'ca
St'om'ca '7 'Soz'jal 'Cuz'ca, 'C'oi'p'es'ca nuá 'n'z'e-'so
o' 'D'om'z'es'm ut 'C'us'e'. 'M'p'om' y'e'm, m'p' 'e's'ca 'e'om'
z'nes'm s'ye s' n'oiwne 'Fon'z'es'ca, '7 s' 'e'ye m'oi'm's'ad
do z'ye m'oi'll le's' p'ú'ic s'ye s' b'ez' nuá m'oi'll
C'á 'So'oir y'e'l'ú'ye s'ye b'á'p'no no b'p'oi'c
zo y'e'l'ú'ye's'e, 'C'up'ú'ad s'ad 'L'is'm le y'e'l'ú'ye's'e.
Is b'oz'le'c. 'Yil s' 'Sp'ú'ad s'ye, 'C'um 'e'ad
p'ú'ic - nuá s' le's'e, do 'e's'le's'm'om' le's' an
z' 'C'um'p'os, an p'lá'ye s' 'C'ob'á'ye zo p'ú'ic
'C'om'ell. Is b'oz'le'c zo m'be'ad e'p'oi'ze m'oi'll
an. C'á no 'e'le'p'ú'ye y'e'm s' n'oiw'p'ú'ic le'm s' e'le'

Thanks for your time!

