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The Troubles in Ballybogoin (a pseudonym) is predominantly a study of identity among nationalists in a town in the southwestern part of Northern Ireland, not far from the border with the Republic of Ireland. Based on fieldwork carried out mainly in the mid-1980s, the author explains that he “developed ties with both communities but had the opportunity to engage Catholics to a far greater extent” (p.x). Whether or not this was an inevitable consequence of the divisions between the communities he does not make clear, though “much of the fieldwork...was done in moments of extreme violence and danger” (p.215).

The term *Ballybogoin people* had two meanings, depending on whether the speaker was Catholic or Protestant; it excluded the group other than the speaker's. Each group had its own foundational narrative, the “two firsts,” as the author calls them. Catholics claimed that they inhabited the land first, from which stemmed their right to national self-determination; Protestants believed “that they bought rational social arrangements to the area, made the landscape productive, and set the region on the road to modernity” (pp.20-21). From these beliefs derived the naming of practices of “natives” versus “planters” or “settlers”. Although recognizing these as important categories – “the two sides struggle violently to institute these distinctions” (p.86) – part of Kelleher's goal is to work against polarizing terms, such as the “tired binary of the colonizer and the colonized,” which “oversimplify Ballybogoin's divisions, obscuring their complexity and variety” (p.20).

That said, colonialism “remains a social force in Northern Ireland” (p.59), although he suggests that the term *postcolonial* might be “the more apt phrase to characterize these Northern Ireland 1980's and 1990s cultural practices if we maintain the sense of postcolonial as the simultaneous operation of colonizing and decolonizing processes” (p.207). If the hegemonic Protestant-unionist discourse sees Catholics as premodern, superstitious, lazy, and unsuited to work, Catholics exerted some energy in attempting to organise against stereotypes (“organising against history”) by casting themselves in a modern idiom, in their campaigns for civil rights and jobs, for example.

The past is very much present in the consciousness of both “sides of the house” in Ballbogoin, and it is remembered in a variety of contexts: in the Gaelic townland names in the hills outside the town; in the ritual of Orange Order parades; in “bodily practices”, the way people move around town and countryside, recognizing boundaries, and restricted in a range of ways. “Those moves,” writes the author, “were acts of memorization, forms of practical consciousness, and they elicited narration” (p.56).

Narrative and discourse are central to the book, not only for their importance in the author's theoretical approach but also because talk is a key identity marker for the Catholic community. “Talk and having *craic* – demonstrating wit in conversation and having a good time- was an important marker of nationalist identity in Ballybogoin” (p.100). People talked about talk, analyzed it, forged relationships, entertained, and made memories through it (p.11). “Telling,” by contrast, involved the practice of “reading the bodies of strangers to tell whether they are Catholic or Protestant” (p.11).

If talk concerned communication, telling had to do with barriers to communication, leading to the lack of talk or silence, with Protestant neighbors or the security forces.

In Northern Ireland, the idea of “nationality” is the dominant identity component for both communities; it “saturates the field of subject formation” (p.79). Yet, given the author’s “strategic and positional” (p.19) approach to identity, he is at pains to avoid characterizing Ballybogoin culture as homogeneous and presents ambiguities, split subjectivities, and hybrid practices. Particularly valuable are his sketches of those who live “at the limit,” individuals who have formed friendships across the divide yet are subject to the pressures of their own side. In these examples, and elsewhere, he searches for the potential for transformation.

The focus of the book is not on institutions, representative structures or groups of people. Rather, it “pays attention to practices of representation and systems of representation at a variety of levels and through a number of sites – the western region of Northern Ireland, the town in its relationship to its hinterland, the ritual spaces of the Oranges Order, Ballybogoin’s town square, the space of ethnographic writing, a factory shop floor, and a picket line” (pp.20-21). Kelleher talks of the need for “a commitment to theory” (p.154), a commitment that is in evidence throughout, in his approach to discourse and narrative, colonialism and post colonialism, theories of identity (including class and gender), memory and history, and much more. It is also evident in his critique of earlier representations of the Irish in anthropology, and in his self-conscious experiment with a more adequate form of representation. The book is a rich, complexly structured, and sustained set of reflections on the mind-set and practices of Ballybogoin Catholics.