

# Introduction

## Telling Identities and the Work of Memory in Northern Ireland



I remember the baker O'Donnell blushing as usual, telling me:

Ye know what they say about Ballybogoin, Bill. “When ye pull down yer zip to piss off’a Elizabeth Street, they’re talkin’ about it up on the square before it touches the ground.”<sup>1</sup>

Back then, in 1985, in the context of a conversation aroused by my surprise at how much of my recent private life the baker and several of his friends knew, this enunciation indicated that I should not be bothered by the local knowledge accumulating about me, that stories moved fast and furiously in Ballybogoin, and that there would be, as one of my interlocutors said, “no harm done” by them.

Now, writing here, having put this statement in a frozen position far away from that pub just off Ballybogoin Square where it was uttered, a place patronized at different times by members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and their declared enemy, the British security forces, a place where local Catholics said “we watch ourselves,” I give this conversation piece a different meaning.<sup>2</sup> There and then I was taught how to “watch myself,” especially how to guard my words; how to disengage myself, by subtle deflections and inflections, from conversations going too far; how to play the game by telling partial truths; how to tell

“wee white ones” (little lies) and not get caught out; how to read and interpret the language and body movements of others; and how to relate words, bodies, and worlds.

Here and now I remember representations of the type of talk that we discussed in the pub that night and reflect upon the anthropological texts that have inscribed Ireland, particularly that of Nancy Scheper-Hughes. She writes:

Yes, the Irish lie and lie they do with admirable touches of wit and ingenuity. Add to the normal defensiveness of the peasant, a folk Catholic moral code that is quite “soft” on lying, and a lack of tolerance for *overt* acts of aggression, and you have a very strong propensity to “cod” (sometimes rather cruelly) the outsider. Beyond cross-checking information, the only safeguard the fieldworker has against “converting the lies of peasants into scientific data” (as one critic of the participant-observation method commented) is simply getting to know the villagers well enough to read the nonverbal cues that signal evasiveness or lying. (Scheper-Hughes 1982, 12)

In Scheper-Hughes’s view, the talk of those Ballybogoin Catholics could not be relied upon. She submitted speakers to her gaze, read them, and distinguished between truth and lying. She realized the world must be read yet readily provided the last word. For Scheper-Hughes, it was the eye of the ethnographer that constituted the ethnographic ground, and she could discern a lie. Arriving on terra firma, she peopled it with composite individuals, a scriptural method that provoked this response from a village reader of Scheper-Hughes’s text.

Nonsense! You know us for better than that. You think we didn’t, each of us, sit down poring over every page until we had recognized the bits and pieces of ourselves strewn about here and there. You turned us into amputees with hooks for fingers and some other black-guard’s heart beating inside our own chest. How do you think I felt reading my words come out of some Tom-O or Pat-O or some publican’s mouth. Recognize ourselves, indeed! I’ve gone on to memorize some of my best lines. (Scheper-Hughes 1982, 10)<sup>3</sup>

Talk, truth, and lying pose problems for the ethnography of modern Ireland. So do places like the other major component of the baker’s

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utterance, “the square.” Often, anthropologists depict such town centers as functional/historical wholes and emphasize their role in the “development” and integration of local economies and public spheres. The organizational pull of towns, especially their nuclei, places like the square, receives emphasis. Development occurs, and center domesticates periphery. Commercial functions change, but they persist and often dominate description.

Through the ethnography in this book I try to trip up these two representations of the “other”: the Irish “other” as liar, a trope of a colonizing narrative, and the “other” as ordered from center to periphery, an element of a modernizing, teleological one. I disagree with Scheper-Hughes’s contention that the ethnographer’s sole or primary job is to differentiate between the true and not true. Instead, I shall argue that the so-called lies must be taken into ethnographic accounts, that their effects ought to be tracked. I prefer to follow the lead of Zora Neale Hurston, who perceives the difficulties of both teller and ethnographer in revealing “that which the soul lives by” (1979, 83), the words that make up worlds.

Hurston understands that the fibs and fabrications that the dominated construct are part and parcel of social relations. She discusses the proclivity of African Americans in 1920s and 1930s Florida to tell more powerfully positioned whites what they believed those people wanted to hear. Hurston calls these practices “a featherbed resistance.” From her threshold position, the inside/outside position of the ethnographer that Hurston’s writing never lets us forget, she imagines the desire that works these so-called lies. She represents her consultants’ wishes with these words: “I’ll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I’ll say my say and sing my song” (1979, 83).

Hurston alludes to the fact that words, signifiers, can deflect the definitions and practices of the dominant and make the places of the powerful subject to resistance. Hurston represents what Michel de Certeau theorizes when he questions the depiction of central places as social centers of gravity. De Certeau differentiates between places and spaces and describes how people make one into the other. In de Certeau’s terms, places are the sites of power, the territories marked out and controlled by subjects of will and power who make them their own.<sup>4</sup> Spaces are those same places submitted to the practices of everyday life—speech, the discourses of family, neighborhood, and commu-

nity—that consume the places and disorder the assumed order. De Certeau calls such cultural practices “tactics.” They utilize time and open up the possibility of resistance (see de Certeau 1984, 29–42).

Ballyboggin Catholics, almost all of whom called themselves Irish nationalists, juxtaposed such spaces and places, and its people articulated them, joined the differences, and disarticulated them through stories and their moving bodies, signifiers in their social world.<sup>5</sup> For example, Elizabeth Street, the place invoked by the blushing baker, served as a site that transported and transformed meanings. Elizabeth Street connected the Catholic, Irish nationalist, residential side of Ballyboggin, its west side, to Irish Street, the Catholic commercial street that led into the square, a place that inscribed order. The residential units on both sides of Elizabeth Street were razed in 1984 to make way for a proposed commercial development, a project whose plans, never mind concrete structures, failed to appear until the late 1990s. The muddy, unpaved lots that remained functioned as parking lots for the Catholics who left their cars there in crisscrossed patterns and made the easy walk from this disorder to Irish Street or on to the square. On these journeys, from Catholic, Irish nationalist residences to the square, both space and time came into coalition. To the west, Elizabeth Street’s pedestrian path ended at the gateway to an old manse, “the big house” Ballyboggin Catholics called it. At this juncture Drumcoo Road veered off to the northwest and led to the Catholic housing estates and out toward “the hill country” identified by many contemporary Catholic townspeople as their ancestral home places. The names of these “wee places,” anglicized on British maps over 150 years ago and represented in less detail in early-seventeenth-century ones, memorialized the loss of a living language. They also provided an index to what Irish nationalists perceived as their social and political positioning in both their colonial past and their present: the position of excluded outsider.

These social spaces—Cornamucklagh, round hill of the piggeries; Culnagor, hill back of the cranes or herons; Knocknaclogha, the stony hill; Munderrydoe, the bog of the black oak wood; Aughagranna, the ugly or bushy field—were populated in the majority if not wholly by Catholics. They signified not only the poor terrain local Irish nationalists and their ancestors have inhabited but also the events—the sixteenth-century Elizabethan Conquest of Ireland and the seventeenth-century plantation settlement—that led to their settling in those hills. In

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making these places organized by the colonial state into spaces, in vivifying these written places in speech, Catholics in these localities said of their more richly situated, lowland, Protestant neighbors, “They got the land, we got the view.” Then they would add, “We were pushed here over three hundred years ago.”

In similar ways, spatial stories made Ballybogoin, one of the first provincial towns created by the seventeenth-century early modern, colonial state, into a people’s place. A lord who oversaw the area for the English Crown at the end of that century named Elizabeth Street after his daughter. It served as a passageway between the square (the site of managing the “other”—the descendants of the natives) and “bandit country” (the home of the “other”) to its west. But Elizabeth Street domesticated the natives incompletely. The Stewart family, who accumulated its wealth in the area’s nineteenth- and twentieth-century linen industry, owned “the big house” at Elizabeth Street’s western end. Catholics remembered that family, its discriminatory employment practices, and the exclusively Protestant ownership of that industry, through stories of Margaret, the last Stewart heir to people the place.

Margaret’s story was told to me by a group of Catholics who grew up on Irish Street in the 1940s and 1950s. They were trying to tell me what life was like then for Catholics before the civil rights movement and the start of the long-enduring political violence that had marked their lives in more recent years. They remembered that Margaret used to make her daily trip to the square by walking smack dab in the middle of Elizabeth and Irish Streets. Sturdy and staunch, she stared straight ahead, they recalled, not looking either left or right. If a vehicle of any sort trailed her, that car would have to wait. She would not step into the shuck, the gutter that flowed with the refuse from the sidewalk sweepings of these entirely Catholic thoroughfares, nor would she walk on the “pavements,” the sidewalks on which these people’s homes and shops abutted. She certainly would not talk.

In this Catholic, Irish nationalist story, Margaret’s territorial practices represented the whole—the state, the Protestant people, and its institutions. She bore a metonymic relation to that whole, but, more important for the purposes here, the story indicated that these streets were made into the social spaces of the natives, as does a second story attached to memories of Margaret.

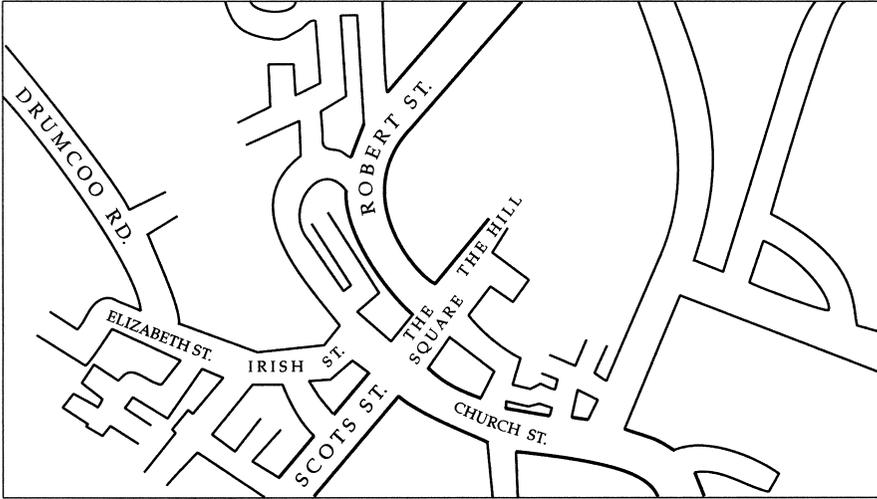
Margaret’s family’s will stipulated that “the big house” be sold only

to a Protestant. When Margaret died, her heirs intended to carry that desire out. The trouble was that the Protestant man to whom they sold the place did not intend to keep it. A local Catholic, “part businessman, part gangster, a man who will stick the arm into ye,” Catholics said, had arranged for a Protestant business associate from the Republic of Ireland to make the purchase and then sell it to him. When the heirs had their estate sale, this Catholic man, well known in the area, walked in, announced he was the new homeowner, and said he would buy everything in the place. The inheritors were stunned.

Irish Street is an uphill climb from Elizabeth Street, and when Margaret reached the top, she was at the square (see map 1). Running perpendicular to its center and running due west is Scots Street, duly named by His Lordship to mark a space for the Scots dissenters who came in the seventeenth century to populate the planned settler colony. This street entered the square from the west. Both Catholics and Protestants shopped and drank in establishments on this street. To the southeast lay Church Street, named by the lord because some of the town’s Protestant churches were located on it. Both Catholics and Protestants bestowed their custom on its shops during the daytime. At night, most Catholics did not dare to go there. Only Protestants patronized its Catholic-owned pubs. To the northwest lay Irish Street. Named by the lord and designated as the place for the descendants of the natives, only Catholics shopped and, besides the rare exception, drank in Irish street establishments.

Robert Street, named by the lord after himself, exited to the north. At the corner of Robert Street and the square stood a deserted hotel, previously owned by Catholics. It was the only edifice on the square owned by that “side of the house” until the 1960s, when Catholics purchased one other building.<sup>6</sup> Carved onto the outside window of that hotel were the initials TB. Catholics said Tom Barry, a famous IRA fighter of the 1920s who went on the run for a number of years, had stayed in the hotel while the police and army searched for him. He left his mark there before his escape, people said. He and his exploits were sometimes sung in the pubs on Irish Street.

Like the Catholic-owned pub on Scots Street where the baker uttered the sentences that are the point of departure for this introduction, a place that local Catholics told me had been bombed twenty-eight times since 1971, the square was a place where people watched themselves. It was also a space where people were watched: a control zone.



Ballybogoin Town Square

Drivers could only enter the town's center via one of two roads, and you could not leave your car parked in the few spaces available. Too many car bombs had gone off in emptied vehicles. In the mid-1980s a police car or two usually sat in the square, and heavily armed police sentries manned the checkpoints at the two entries. Yet, for the Catholics, this did not necessarily mean that this territory was under another's control. Their storytelling tactics, some may call them lies, transformed this ground and, if we adhere to de Certeau's terms, made these places into their social spaces.

No Catholic political or religious demonstration had ever penetrated the square. It was considered the place of both the Protestant community and the local state. In the 1960s, a local movement for social justice, entirely Catholic, had tried to organize homeless mothers to march into it, but they were stopped by what one participant remembered as "Orangemen who were off from their lunch hours and spat on us." A few years later, the nonviolent Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), a primarily Catholic group, tried to march into it, but the combination of a police barricade and the rumored threat of a loyalist paramilitary attack kept them on the town's outskirts.<sup>7</sup>

At the east end of the square stands a memorial to local men who

died in the twentieth century's two great wars and to British state struggles in Ireland to keep the island British. It is the ritual center of the local state and its Ulster unionist community. Behind this, farther up the hill, stands the outdated police barracks, over a hundred years old but still used. It was rumored to house a variety of security force members in the 1980s. A light brown, oddly designed building, it looks out of place among the gray sandstone buildings of Ballybogoin town. Local Irish nationalists said, "It's a mistake. It was intended for Bengal, but the plans were mixed up in the colonial office and Bengal got Ballybogoin's building, while Ballybogoin got Bengal's." Official historians and the Protestant people called this story "a lie."

Behind the old police barracks is the modern British army lookout post, cameras clearly visible, high above the square. Local Catholics believe that under the ground on which these two military edifices lie are the remains of Hugh O'Neill's fort.

O'Neill was the last Gaelic leader to oversee the Ballybogoin area. The rule of his lineage ended when he fled Ireland in 1607. O'Neill's Gaelic forces had fallen to Elizabeth I's armies, and he had submitted to Lord Mountjoy, the lord deputy of Ireland in 1603. The prolonged negotiations for a settlement failed: O'Neill and his associates were declared traitors and their lands forfeited. They fled to Spain, and O'Neill died in Rome in 1616.<sup>8</sup> Ballybogoin's Irish nationalist people remembered him when they dreamed of the future. Their talk had it that when Ireland becomes "free," they would erect a historical park at the top of the hill, excavate the old fort and the older druid one that, they believe, is under that one, and tell their history, Irish history.

Ballybogoin's Irish nationalists said that under those forts are the tunnels that their Gaelic forebears used to escape the Elizabethan forces back in that sixteenth-century war. Outgunned by the English soldiers, O'Neill's men would incinerate the fort, and a few of those fighters would stay back as decoys. Once Elizabeth's troops charged, O'Neill's men would escape through the underground tunnels dug for these maneuvers and join their comrades, who would attack the English army from the rear. No one knew, however, if those tunnels really existed. They were said to exit underneath the headquarters of the local Ulster Defense Regiment (the UDR), the almost entirely Protestant, locally recruited unit of the British army whose regional headquarters was located less than a mile from the top of the square. Someday, when they

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became free, many local Catholics believed, their real history would finally be known.

In 1985, however, local Catholics adjusted to living in their fictions, worlds made significant through narratives, not merely made up. They negotiated their social relations through them as they made history. Departing from de Certeau's terms, their talk and their movements through the local landscape transformed the square and the ordered spaces of the town into their own places, interrelational terrains that transformed subordinated subjects into active agents. In deciphering the square, they took up local discourses of Irish nationalism, a powerful agency in contemporary Northern Ireland, and these practices, for better or for worse, made historical agents out of them.

The agency of Irish nationalism did not rule, however. Ulster unionism and British nationalism, more highly institutionalized and powerful social forces, ones organized by the state, entered this social space. Catholics, like Protestants, were made objects in the town, interpellated not only by the forces of the state but also by the force of their own communities' ideologies. Dependent on the relations of time, space, and place, the ground changed under their feet.

Positioned subjects, the spaces of Ballybogoin people changed as they stood still. As the context was transformed, so were their political subjectivities. Violence had much to do with this phenomenon and contributed to this unsteadiness as it solidified the boundaries that divided people on a variety of levels. Actions by the state, the soldiers, and police cemented these internal borders. This book reaches for those forms of writing that can both convey this complexity and undermine the discourses, nationalist and statist, that conceal it.

### *"The Northern Ireland Problem": The Problems of This Book*

The armed conflict in Northern Ireland was waged continuously from 1969 until 1994, when the first IRA cease-fire took hold.<sup>9</sup> That cessation of IRA violence was broken in 1996. In August 1998 "the real IRA," a renegade group of Irish republican militants who disagreed with both the IRA's termination of its war against the British state and the participation of Sinn Féin, the IRA's political allies, in peace negotiations with the British government, committed the worst atrocity of nearly three

decades of fighting, the Omagh bombing. Protestant paramilitary groups have killed Catholics throughout the years of the peace process, but in 2001, as I write this introduction, a relative peace persists. The signs of military occupation—patrolling soldiers, strategic fortifications, checkpoints at the international border, control zones, surveillance cameras, and the cruising of armored vehicles—have decreased enormously. Struggles over a devolved Northern Ireland government that the main antagonists—the British state, the Ulster unionists, and the Irish nationalists—have put in place continue. In 2001 the square in Ballyboggin is a less daunting social space than it was in 1985.

Many of the people consulted in the research that has led to this book called the war they lived with for thirty years “the troubles.” The vast majority of them wholeheartedly support the peace process, but they wonder if their troubles are over. As one local woman, Mary, told me in 1998, “The peace process may be making some things worse.”

The “things” to which Mary referred were the social relationships that intersected her life and the boundaries that enclosed them, especially, but not only, the dividing line between Catholics and Protestants. The partial and tentative peace enabled her to confront some of these enclosures in new ways during the latter half of the 1990s. Those encounters, however, have sometimes led to new social injuries and different sources of pain as she has tried to negotiate social action with people to whom she would not have spoken in the past. Still, like many of Northern Ireland’s people, Mary, a Catholic and an ardent Irish nationalist, has decided to struggle on, to engage those troubled relationships that surround her and, indeed, that she, like all Northern Ireland’s citizens, helped make.

This book examines the boundaries that enclosed those relationships and people’s struggles with them in and around Ballyboggin, a town situated in Ireland’s borderland region. It lies less than fifteen miles from the contested international border between two nation-states—the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, of which it is a part, and the Republic of Ireland to its south, the state to which the vast majority of local Irish nationalists desired to belong.<sup>10</sup> The bulk of the book considers lived events in the mid-1980s, a time of violent conflict in the area, but episodes from the 1990s are interspersed in it. The book elaborates upon the themes presented in the ethnographic vignette that opens this chapter, a story that introduces

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the social spaces of Ballybogoin's geographical center and some of the practices that constitute its version of "the Northern Ireland problem." The Ballybogoin area possesses a particular history and a specific set of social relations that differentiate it from other areas of Northern Ireland. This book keeps those differences in the foreground.

## *Telling*

The baker's utterance that opens this introduction points to talk as a valued practice among Ballybogoin's Catholics. Irish nationalists in the area, people like the baker and his friends, talked about talk. They classified it, reflected upon its affects in their divided social world, measured the speed with which it produced effects, and evaluated it. They recognized that they forged connections among themselves and others through talk, that they used it to entertain each other, and that they made memories through it. In the pub that night, those men taught me about talk and how to account for it. When they told me not to worry about the talk building up about me, they were informing me that I, too, was part, albeit an anomalous one, of the portrait they painted of themselves through stories and song. That night the baker and his mates taught me talk's function in making their troubled social world interesting, thought provoking, and fun.

They also tutored me to articulate talk with caution. When they told me that they watched themselves in their everyday lives, they presented me examples from which I could learn about the dangers of social practices. They taught me not only which Protestant and Catholic neighborhoods were safe to enter and which Protestant and Catholic people were dangerous to talk with but also how to read situations and to know when to talk, when to keep silent, and when to extricate myself from social interaction. They instructed me how to tell and reminded me of an utterance commonly used in Northern Ireland: "Whatever you say, say nothing."

Among the first people I met in Ballybogoin, this group of young Catholic men had introduced me to the town and its social life seven months before this meeting. Natives of the town and employed in it, they frequented its pubs and had learned through talk about me that I had widened my networks in the weeks prior to this meeting. People

reported to them that they saw me being frisked by the Northern Ireland police, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), along the motorway. Someone had informed them that I was with people from the town who were known republicans, people who supported the IRA and likely were affiliated with that secret organization (a fact I did not know), and they wanted to let me know that I could put myself in danger. They told me over and over again, “Watch yourself.” And often, after that evening, these men would leave me with the same warning. They said “watch yourself” rather than “good-bye” as we parted.

This practice of watching yourself, these young Catholic men understood, was related not only to observing and being aware of one’s self but also the selves of others. Watching yourself concerned making self/other relationships, making identities, and it proved to be a complicated differentiation process in Ballybogoin. Northern Ireland people have a name for the initial stages of this awareness and the practices of it: they call it “telling.” Telling, a practice carried out by both Catholics and Protestants, refers to reading the bodies of strangers to tell whether they are Catholic or Protestant.<sup>11</sup> Ballybogoin Catholics said their interpretations were correct over 90 percent of the time, and they got a lot of practice at it in their town, one with a slight majority of Catholics.

In Ballybogoin, telling constituted a continual everyday social action that affected interactions and the making of social relations. Through it Catholics and Protestants discerned whether strangers encountered were from their own “side of the house.” If they were perceived as different, no sign of recognition would emerge from an encounter. If they were interpreted as a member of the same side, communication might take place. A nod of the head or information about the weather might pass between strangers. In the course of such exchanges, identifications might have been established beyond the reading of bodies. People might have solidified their identities through verbal exchanges, and, in the process, they made “to tell” a polysemous verb, one that indexed watching and observation as well as talking and participation.

Telling who you were and interpreting others to discover who they were shaped the construction of identity in Ballybogoin. Statements such as “this is who I am,” “I am,” or “who are you?”—whether made through bodily movement such as Margaret’s walks to the square or through language—absorbed the past that was signified by the spaces that contextualized these utterances. Identifying statements were inseparable

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arable from Ballybogoin's beleaguered history: they were not of immediate fact but were historical and biographical, and they still are. As these stories of the town show, identification processes were intimately tied to who occupied the spaces of power that enabled the telling of narratives that gave people senses of place and personhood.

The stories retold about O'Neill's fort and the lack of local knowledge about it revealed that a struggle existed over who told Ballybogoin's history. Many local nationalists said that their true story had been kept from them by the actions of the British state and their Protestant neighbors. These local Catholics represented British state actions as having displaced them in space and in time. The stories tied to the hills and the fort's hidden history exemplified this. They articulated a criticism of the state and connected to nationalist dreams. Local Irish nationalists hoped the future would allow them to explore their past unfettered by British institutions so, among other things, they could better know themselves.

Who told identifying narratives? Who revealed what kind of people Ballybogoin Catholics and Protestants were? Who gave instructions for and formally organized those tellings? Who could tell their stories and who could not? These were and are questions of immense import in the town's life and for this book.

How people told who the people they encountered were also featured prominently in the daily performances that made Ballybogoin's social world. The practice of telling placed emphasis on bodies as social signifiers in Northern Ireland, and such embodiments, especially moving ones, figured prominently in how people told who they and others were. Margaret's posturing and her determined movement typified the bodies Catholics perceived as Protestant.

In the Catholic, Irish nationalist memories of those townspeople who told me about her, Margaret stood straight and did not become distracted. Set on her goal, she proceeded to her destination and avoided any possible detour. Her straight-line path enabled her to avoid matter out of place and the contaminating touch.<sup>12</sup> Margaret made boundaries as she proceeded: she avoided the dirt in the shuck and the metaphoric dirt, the Catholic sidewalk sweepers. Margaret kept her body equidistant from the two shucks.<sup>13</sup> In the stories, nothing disturbs that equipoise. Stronger forces, the cars that trail her, could not move her aside. Catholics, for the most part, traveled on Irish Street, Mar-

garet's itinerary in this story, and that street, like all of the spaces around the square, was morally and politically significant. Those spaces provided the contexts that made those bodies meaningful.

Figures like Margaret referenced Irish nationalist identities in Ballybogoin. In the 1980s, Catholics pointed to their most significant collective others, local Protestants and the British (represented locally by functionaries of the security state), to answer the question, "How do you tell who you are?" Margaret, in the juxtaposition of stories that forms the introductory tale, bears a metonymic relationship to Ballybogoin unionists.

Catholics told who they were through stories that compared themselves to figures like Margaret, narratives of comparative worth. Early in my research, I asked one Catholic, Irish nationalist, middle-class woman, "How do you tell who is Catholic?" She responded, "Their men are bigger and stand straighter. They are more handsome. Catholic men aren't as big, and they slouch and look at the ground. Catholic women are prettier than theirs. Their women are big and strong." Catholics in the Ballybogoin area told who Protestants were through the reading of moving bodies, and these interpretations were often gendered. Catholics, in a variety of tellings, including their own, were feminized.<sup>14</sup> They identified themselves as such through the presentation of their bodies and through the stories, jokes, and songs they shared with each other. This book considers these three moments of telling throughout its pages: who tells identities (who tells who people are?); how people tell if someone is self or other through the contextualized reading of bodily and linguistic signs; and how people tell who they are as an act of telling, a communicative act like the telling of narratives, that relates identity. It reflects upon two additional forms of telling as well. It considers how an anthropologist tells what is going on, how, in this case, I learned to make sense of these actions. And it heeds questions concerning how I tell this complex story. What do I include and exclude from this ethnographic telling? How do I write it to transmit its complexity? I do not tell all.

To tell the tales of learning in the field and writing it up requires a move away from realist ethnography, a form of writing "that seeks to represent the reality of a whole world or form of life" (Marcus and Fischer 1986, 23). In recent years, realist ethnographies have come under criticism for objectifying cultures and for representing them as overly

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bounded wholes without differences within.<sup>15</sup> Such ethnographies have been called to account for presenting ethnographers as omniscient observers, but anthropologists have addressed this criticism with a variety of theoretical and textual innovations that attempt to represent the differentiation inside cultures. Many have depicted the cultural practices and social forces that make difference, and the decentering, global processes that articulate to the local settings typically focused upon by anthropologists.

George E. Marcus classifies these experiments as modernist because they problematize the perspective of the ethnographer, the observer, as they question the textual representations the observer makes of the observed, the people studied (see Marcus 1991). Modernist ethnographies often remake the observer by demonstrating the dialogic processes in the field through which ethnographers produce knowledge and by reflecting on the analytical categories and writing practices they use as they deploy them in their texts. Modernist ethnographers often remake the observed by reorganizing the spatial and temporal dimensions of their studies, a move they accomplish by juxtaposing different spaces and different temporalities in their writing.

These ethnographers, for example, have studied different places within a location to illustrate how people produce different identities from one space to another. Feminist anthropologists studying a wide range of geographic areas have contributed most significantly to this development as they have depicted the gendering of social space and the struggles of women to shatter the silences that have prevented them from telling their stories and asserting their particular senses of self.<sup>16</sup>

Both modernist and feminist ethnographers have moved away from realist ethnographies that represent cultures as determined by historically produced structures. They have shifted the sense of the temporal away from the realist representation that figures the contemporary ethnographic site as determined by grand historical trajectories such as the transition to modernity or the development of the postcolonial nation-state (Marcus 1991, 316). Instead, they juxtapose past and present, often representing histories not as determinants of an essential identity but as producers of signs that people use in contemporary social action.<sup>17</sup>

The opening juxtaposition of this introduction illustrates both the difficulties of realist ethnography and the methods of a modernist one.

Scheper-Hughes writes the characters in her realist work on mental illness in rural Ireland as composite individuals. This practice indicates that she privileges structures as her objects of analysis. The individuals she creates are justified because they are judged to typify the people that the structures, which in her case study are family and psychic ones, produce. This representation, then, abstracts people from space and time while it renders structures as agents: they produce typical individuals.<sup>18</sup>

The modernist ethnographic representation I begin with enfolded Scheper-Hughes's statements and the people with whom she consulted in order to foreground the multiple practices of telling that form the subject matter of this ethnography.<sup>19</sup> This beginning tries to evoke the question of who tells. It attempts to put the baker's utterance into complex spatial and temporal relationships, including the history of anthropological representations of "the Irish" that have often focused on their talk and their sensitivity to representations about them, particularly those made by outsiders. Adding the response of one of Scheper-Hughes's informants reacting to her award-winning book invites associations among that person's outrage at being bodily deformed by an ethnographic description, the disfiguring of physical space by British colonial inscriptions of Ballyboggin, and the contests over representation that have been an enduring social struggle in Ireland. It tries to relate the baker's perception about the speed of gossip to the need for Catholics to watch themselves not only with regard to the British security forces, local Protestants, and those on their own "side of the house" who may be dangerous but also with regard to a visiting ethnographer.

Many Ballyboggin area Catholics told me that they watched me and subjected me to the kind of inspection that Scheper-Hughes applied to her informants. They, at different times, said, "I've tried to catch you out" or "We've tried to catch you out." They tried to discover me lying and wanted to discern if I was the interlocutor I claimed to be. In time, they believed that I was. With trust established, they taught me how to tell "wee white ones" and to play a language game in which they tried to pull the wool over my eyes while I strove to recognize the fibs and return some of my own. Such practices created social networks and cultural intimacy in Ballyboggin's politically divided world. When it comes to Ballyboggin, ethnographers, for intellectual, moral, and political reasons, must watch themselves both during fieldwork and in the act of writing.

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### *Identities*

We live in a time and space in which borders, both literal and figurative, exist everywhere. . . . A border maps limits; it keeps people in and out of an area; it marks the ending of a safe zone and the beginning of an unsafe zone. To confront a border and, more so, to cross a border presumes great risk. In general people fear and are afraid to cross borders. (Morales 1996, 23)

People associate different social spaces with distinct identities in Ballybogoin, and they produce those differences through the invocation of complexly related historical signs. The story of Margaret and that of the fort(s) exemplify how Ballybogoin Catholics used physical spaces to “reinscribe, relocate, reactivate and resignify” the past (Bhabha 1996, 59). Through such retrospection, Ballybogoin’s marginalized Catholic citizens mapped out their social terrain, emplotted social action, and worked through the present. They connected those memories to the future and its possibilities.

Sometimes the futures perceived and the actions taken were (and still are) utopian. Utopias “present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down” (Foucault 1986, 24), and they are unreal places. The many bombings that marked Ballybogoin serve as signs that “People cling to the dream of utopia and fail to recognize that they create and live in heterotopia” (Morales 1996, 23). Those bombings were done in the name of perfection, creating either a British or an Irish homogeneity. Violent acts—whether the bombings of the IRA, the sectarian assassinations of local Catholics by the loyalist paramilitary groups, or the ambushes of the British army that sometimes took the lives of innocent civilians—abort the creation and possibility of heterotopias, real places. In heterotopias, a number of possible social orders coexist, and people may transform a social order by interweaving fragments of established orders to make heterogeneous ones. In heterotopias, people transgress boundaries.

Although relatively rare because of the violence that kept people in their places in the 1980s, the transgression of even Ballybogoin’s most heavily marked social border, the one between Catholics and Protestants, did sometimes take place. One day in a mixed pub on Scots Street, some Catholic and Protestant businessmen told me the stories of

the forts and the barracks at the top of the square. They brought that history up because they were speculating the possibility of an economic boom should the troubles ever end. They imagined that when the British army left, they would be able to accrue knowledge about O'Neill's fort and the secret tunnels. Yet, they were not so interested in knowing "the truth" about that history and connecting the armed struggle to it as their "republican-minded" fellow townspeople were. Instead, they desired to sell that history.

These businessmen desired to market two histories, the Irish history that belonged to the Catholics and the British history that belonged to the Protestants. They asked me, "Do you think we could sell it to the Yanks?" They laughed at the possibility of selling the two histories together, uniting the high-tech British surveillance center, the barracks intended for Bengal, and the Gaelic and Druid forts buried below them. This dreamed up business venture, one that provoked a Rabelaisian laughter, signified the possibility that these Protestant and Catholic small businessmen could make a new history, one that recognized their mutual constitution of each other.<sup>20</sup> The buried and marginalized histories of the Irish were central to the controlling identities of the Ulster unionists and the British state, and, in turn, those identities of will and power were central to Irish nationalists, their sense of displacement, and the need to fight back.

In Ballybogoin, Catholic identities were constituted in relation to Protestants, and Protestant ones were made in relation to Catholics. This book tells identities by examining the considerable social border that divides these two groups but does not hold that studying it will get to the bottom of the identity question in this Northern Ireland town. Other social borders besides that between Irish nationalists and Ulster unionists are explored in this book. The Ballybogoin area, a region that extends to an international border that brings with it the territorializing machinery of the British state, is characterized by an everyday life "crisscrossed by border zones, pockets and eruptions of all kinds" (Rosaldo 1989, 207). These other borders within the Ballybogoin region's social space include those revolving around place, "race," class, and gender. Each will be explored at a number of different sites in the chapters that follow.

Ballybogoin's Ulster unionists and Irish nationalists, despite that they had been mired in political violence for nearly thirty years and

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appear to possess identities that correspond to those made in their seventeenth-century encounters, negotiated their identities through everyday practices in the varied social spaces they occupied. Those identities may become fixed at moments, but they always concern “questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being” (Hall 1996b, 4).<sup>21</sup> People articulate those cultural resources differently in different locations at different historical moments. So, the concept of identity I use in this book focuses attention on problems of “who we are” in relationship to representation, its uses, its history, and the memories of it in specific locations and at particular historical moments. In particular, it examines how Catholics have been represented and tries to discern how the effects of those representations influence Ballybogoin Catholics’ struggles over the divisions and visions of their social world.

A strategic and positional concept of identity, then, one that works against the stable concept of the self that conceives it as moving through history unchanged, grounds this ethnography. This does not mean that I reject notions of cultural coherence and systems of cultural meaning. I try to trace “the powerful institutional nodes” (Sewell 1999, 55) that organize cultural difference and give it coherence, especially the state. Ballybogoin’s Roman Catholic community, “the natives,” as many of its members called themselves from time to time, reproduced itself through one set of social and cultural institutions and took advantage of the services of a state that it saw as alien. The Protestant community, “the planters” or “the settlers,” as they sometimes called themselves, made its way through a different set of organizations and pointed to the state as an embodiment of its enlightened ways and as a justification of its privileged position.<sup>22</sup>

These naming practices—“natives” versus “planters” or “natives” versus “settlers”—and the contrary orientations to the state that they implied indexed different narratives of the past and clashing claims upon the future. Many Catholics proclaimed that they inhabited the land first and, on the basis of the value that distinction created for them, they demanded the right to national self-determination. They desired to be part of an Irish nation-state.

The Protestants, through a variety of cultural events, particularly through Orange Order marches and associated celebrations, declared that they brought rational social arrangements to the area, made the

landscape productive, and set the region on the road to modernity. Their ancestors, Protestants say, put British institutions in place. They first established the modern state and developed civil society. Protestants used those historical facts to justify their right to keep the north-east corner of Ireland, the area in which they are the majority, part of the British nation-state, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

These two firsts, “native” as first occupant and “planter” as first maker of modernity and civil society, have functioned as crude indexical signs.<sup>23</sup> In the tired binary of the colonizer and the colonized, they have reproduced stereotypes that oversimplify Ballybogoin’s divisions, obscuring their complexity and variety. “Native,” “planter,” and “settler” are not useful categories for social analysis, but in Northern Ireland they, as colonial categories, have exerted social force. They have effected at least two fairly coherent cultural orders so ethnographers must track them.

In the Ballybogoin region, the categories colonizer, “planter,” and colonized, “native,” produced the dominant narrative in which ancestors of local Protestants were the makers of modern industrial society while the more traditional Catholics resisted modernity through violence.<sup>24</sup> The British state as an authoritative cultural and political actor has much to do with the development of this dominant form and the cultural hierarchies it produced. State practices, particularly their production of representations, were dispersed into the sites of cultural and material contest presented in this book, and they will be treated here as working “to give a certain focus to the production and consumption of meaning” (Sewell 1999, 57) in Ballybogoin’s social spaces.

By analyzing such state practices, this book addresses what Alejandro Lugo calls culture’s “double life,” its existence as “the simultaneous play of order and disorder, coherence and incoherence, chaos and antichaos, contestation and shareability, practice and structure, culture and history, culture and capitalism, and, finally, patterns and borderlands” (Lugo 1997, 59–60). It tracks the state’s efforts to sustain coherence and the practices of Catholics that both mimic the state’s social and cultural forms and contest them. The book 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

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the Orange Order, Ballybogoin's town square, the space of ethnographic writing, a factory shop floor, and a picket line.

Telling identities requires a complex set of processes for Ballybogoin people. It requires that people understand that past events are effective in the present, that they are "not really past" (Boyarin 1994, 2). This does not mean that people live in the past. It suggests, instead, that contemporary people in Ballybogoin, and I do not understand them in this book as "traditional" persons, use the meanings of the past to organize the present while they deploy present meanings to organize the past. Ballybogoin's Irish nationalists and Ulster unionists use the past to represent themselves, to speak for their named social groups. When they do this work of representation "they attempt to create alliances," and when Irish nationalists question the state they try "to alter the contours of the cognitive maps on which society is represented" (Stark and Bruszt 1998, 193).<sup>25</sup>

The British map that Irish nationalists encounter is very powerful. The Northern Ireland state and the subjects it has saturated have invested enormously in it, and fashioning new associative ties in the province, as this book shows, is a difficult and prodigious undertaking. The knowledge entailed in established modes of telling identities articulated to matters of life and death. Transformations of them engender great risk.

This book attempts to show the interplay of cultural practices, the continuation of old associative ties in Ballybogoin and its region, the transformation of some social relations, and the difficulty, although not impossibility, of crossing those internal and invisible borders that constitute Ballybogoin's version of the Northern Ireland troubles.