

Patrick Doyle

Civilising Rural Ireland: The Co-Operative Movement, Development and the Nation-State, 1889-1939

Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2019, 248 pp.

Patrick Doyle's survey of the development of the early Irish co-operative movement considers its formative days, the foothold co-operative creameries secured in the commercial dairying counties (with particular reference to Kerry), the practice of co-operation in the years before and during the First World War, the challenges it faced during the Anglo-Irish War (1919-21), and its fortunes during the first decade of native rule. Doyle argues that the movement made major strides not just in modernising rural Ireland but also in influencing processes of nation- and state-building during the momentous decades of transition from British to Irish rule. Much is made of how such co-operative notions as self-reliance, self-rule, and the co-operative commonwealth appealed to many cultural and separatist nationalists (including Michael Collins and Eamon de Valera) at different junctures before, during

and after the Irish revolution (1916-23).

Such co-operative values as *community ownership and economic democracy*, and the desire to generate a *political economy of communalism*, are seen as giving Irish co-operation much of its ideological distinctiveness as *a form of modernity*. Even if initiated and led from the top down and associated at first with gentry paternalism—Horace Plunkett, the movement's founder, belonged to the landlord class—, co-operation was never simply foisted on an unreceptive rural public. We hear how the building of a *vibrant network of co-operative creameries, credit societies and other businesses meant that Irish farmers actively participated in directing how their communities were structured*. Co-operative activity, we further hear, *led to a continuous self-disciplining of farmers*.

With *over 1,000 societies and 150,000 members* by 1920, the Irish movement is

seen as gradually emerging as a formidable economic, social and political force. Not only had the organisers of the Irish Agricultural Co-operation Society (IAOS) –the movement’s national co-ordinating body formed in 1894– overseen significant (if spatially uneven) expansion, but they and the co-operative societies *determined the structure of Ireland’s rural economy and helped define the political climate of the early twentieth century*. Under native rule the IAOS was sufficiently powerful to define *the direction of economic developments in the independent Irish Free State*.

How does Doyle see these major advances coming about? Besides paying *fair prices* for milk, the energy and commitment of those leading the way counted for much, as did a learning process in which leaders and activists –working in concert nationally and locally– became adept at framing co-operation in ways that farmers, cultural and separatist nationalists, and visiting foreign observers found attractive. Learning to mobilise a variety of resources, and to exploit different opportunities, proved vital in negotiating the obstacles posed by private butter traders, private creameries and (for a spell) the English Co-operative Wholesale Society creameries operating in Ireland.

None of this is to say that Doyle is blind to certain shortcomings and failings of the Irish co-operative movement. The forms these took, and how the movement coped with them, are topics paid considerable attention. Arguably the most dramatic setback was what befell the project of building a co-operative commonwealth. The title of

Doyle’s book refers to the ambitious ideal of George Russell (Æ) –the movement’s most radical theorist– to use co-operation as a means of constructing a new rural “civilisation” in Ireland. Organised economically and socially along democratic, communitarian and equalitarian lines, and suffused with the enlightening power of reason as well as a deep respect for the wonders of nature, Æ’s co-operative commonwealth imagined a future of civically engaged citizens peacefully building a dynamically modern Ireland in an ever more industrialised and urbanised world.

Æ’s co-operative commonwealth remained a pipe dream whose appeal faded during the deeply troubled interwar years. Why it failed to progress Doyle doesn’t explore in great depth, but its cause wasn’t helped by the post-war slump that discouraged radical social experimentation, by the splitting of the separatist Sinn Féin (We Ourselves) movement over the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921, and by the subsequent slide into a short but bitterly divisive civil war (1922–23) waged between pro- and anti-Treaty forces. The co-operative movement’s top leadership (including Æ) was strongly pro-Treaty, though the same could hardly be said of all the Kerry co-operative milk suppliers. What arguably was also damaging to Æ’s project was the challenge it faced from the Irish labour movement’s version of the co-operative commonwealth. This in significant part emerged during the revolutionary period as a class-versus-class grassroots mobilisation of farm and rural labourers. During and after the civil war the

pro-Treaty Free State authorities moved to crush the militant syndicalist challenge – and the class war it was conducting – by deploying the new state’s coercive apparatus to defeat striking farm workers in south-eastern Ireland.

If Æ’s ambitious co-operative commonwealth never became a guiding ideal, Horace Plunkett’s modernising vision for the movement he founded – summarised in his farmer-centred slogan “better farming, better business and better living” – fared significantly better. For this reason “modernising” rather than “civilising” rural Ireland might have been a more apt title for Doyle’s book. The modernising appeal to commercial dairy farmers rested heavily on Plunkett’s message that to persist with many of their old ways was to fly in the face of reason, especially in view of recent experience of prolonged agricultural depression and accelerating globalisation that was leaving Irish butter struggling to survive in the English market. Survival and progress depended on farmer receptiveness to expert knowledge, new technology as well as on organising business activity along co-operative lines.

Plunkett’s modernising vision may have presented co-operation as the highway to a progressively brighter future for *all* Irish farming families, but in practice the movement’s energies were heavily concentrated on places (fewer than half of Ireland’s 32 counties) with a strong tradition of commercial dairying. The smallholder young cattle raisers and large-scale cattlemen (known as ranchers or graziers) that formed another crucial strand of Ireland’s

cattle economy and export agriculture found themselves in Doyle’s period – with the partial exception of the mostly transient and fragile credit societies and the typically contentious retail stores – firmly outside the co-operativist fold.

For a movement whose leaders thought in terms of bringing people together, Doyle documents once again how the IAOS and many of its affiliated societies seldom lacked for enemies. While Plunkett’s gentry background and his unionist politics aroused suspicion among many Home Rule nationalists, his critique of Catholicism’s negative impact on the Irish character won him no friends among some of the Catholic clergy. It was not just Plunkett himself who could be contentious; many Home Rule nationalists viewed his early movement as part and parcel of the ruling Conservative party’s strategy of “killing Home Rule with kindness”.

How well did the IAOS overcome these challenges as it sought to spearhead *a distinct and radical form of democratic economics* with nation-building implications? In assessing the degree to which the practice of co-operation became a pillar of local democratic political culture, we need to ask how certain normative principles actually guided co-operative practice. At its fullest the co-operative desire to democratise economic and social power draws upon three normative principles. These stipulate that it is the members who should own and control their co-operative societies as well as enjoy the benefits of co-operation. Doyle presents evidence of some revealing departures from these principles. Appar-

ently local notables could be admitted as shareholders in creamery societies. Micheál Ó Fathartaigh has pointed out how co-operative creameries, faced with competition from private creameries, were not insisting on their milk suppliers becoming paid-up shareholders in the 1920s; and how such insistence was a feature of Minister Hogan's plans to restructure the dairy industry in 1927 (Ó Fathartaigh, 2014: 4-5, 17).

Something Doyle further touches on is how the executive power of organisers, and more especially of managers, could regularly trump the principle of membership control. *The involvement of [Catholic] priests in running local societies*, he tells us, *proved a common feature of co-operative activity*. Other writers have suggested that the principle of membership control was especially prone to being more honoured in the breach than in the observance at specific junctures. While Proinnsias Breathnach sees the principle being degraded from the outset, Patrick Bolger, Michael Ward and Hilary Tovey trace its decline to the 1920s or 1930s (Breathnach, 1997; Bolger, 1977: 118; Ward, 2005: 67; Tovey, 2001: 322). The litany of failings Bolger enumerates meant that *many small co-ops had lost all semblance of co-operation* by the early 1930s. Worse still was that attempts at reform were doomed to fail, for *whenever a handful of enthusiastic amateurs attempted to regularise the conduct of the local co-op, they were all too easily repelled by an entrenched committee or manager* (Bolger, 1977: 118).

Without question co-operation made a positive difference to the lives of many dairy

farmers, but how evenly were the benefits of co-operation spread among them? Doyle has more to say about this matter at the national than at the local level. Within the IAOS he detects a shift towards prioritising the needs of *larger farmers* over smallholders during the early interwar years. At local level the *pooling* of resources – a defining process of many forms of co-operation – tends to reflect (and reproduce) rather than eliminate existing inequalities. Those who milk more cows and pool more milk always stand to do better therefore from co-operative dairying than those with fewer cows and less milk to pool. Excluded entirely from the pooling process and its benefits (as well as co-operative membership) were the waged employees of the creamery societies. Women, as Doyle and others show, lost out especially with the appearance of the co-operative creameries.

What can we say about the movement's state-building influence? Undoubtedly Horace Plunkett, as the central figure behind the formation of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) in 1899 and who served as its first chief secretary (or vice-president) until 1907, did contribute massively to Irish state building in the agricultural sphere. Yet the co-operative movement's relationship with the pre- and post-independence states didn't always run smoothly. Plunkett's preference for having DATI and the co-operative movement work in tandem to *stimulate and strengthen the self-reliance of the people* didn't appeal to his successor as vice-president, T.W. Russell, who turned against co-operation and gradually (and damagingly)

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cut off the IAOS's public funding. With relations turning increasingly sour, and senior DATI officials (such as Professor Campbell) viewing the co-operative movement as a mere instrument of public policy, some IAOS officials and activists (such as Robert Anderson, Æ and Fr. Finlay) had occasion to reflect on the ins and outs of partnership with the state. Their fear was that the more the instrumentalist tendency prevailed the greater the risk that the co-operative movement would be co-opted by the state to the point of losing its autonomy and its defining identity.

Was such a fear to be realised in the 1920s? Following a series of milk wars between the co-operative and private creameries in the 1920s, the state intervened to purchase some of the major private milk companies. A state corporation (the Dairy Disposal Company, DDC) was created in 1927 to manage their assets and to organise creameries in places where dairying co-operatives had yet to appear or where they had recently failed. The initial idea was that DDC creameries would speedily be converted into co-operatives, but in the event this process took decades to complete.

Doyle's account of co-operation in the 1920s suggests that co-operative movement leaders, as influential *political insiders*, were well positioned to influence the new state's agricultural policy. Apparently Henry Kennedy, who had replaced Anderson as the IAOS's general secretary in 1926, was broadly at one with Minister Hogan (his brother-in-law) as to the need to restructure the dairy industry and was happy to have the IAOS and its co-operative cream-

eries become central elements of the minister's restructuring plans. An alternative reading would see the IAOS's acceptance of its role as an instrument of public policy delivery in the 1920s as confirming the old fear that the IAOS and its creameries risked being co-opted and regulated via a state-led modernising process of "integration through subordination". *Relations between Kennedy and Hogan*, Patrick Bolger reveals, *were anything but cordial in the later days of Hogan's ministry* (Bolger, 1977: 118, footnote 20). The partition of Ireland in 1920 was another reason for the power of the state to loom large in the history of Irish co-operation. At the Free State's insistence the national movement was directed to divide into separate northern and southern sections in 1922.

There is much of interest and value in Doyle's book and he is to be commended for his bold contentions that the Irish co-operative movement was both a significant modernising and democratising force as well as politically influential where Irish nation- and state-building were concerned. Some brief analytical discussion of what the author understands by such key terms as *democracy*, *nation*, and *state* would have been useful.

My own reading of how democratising the Irish movement was, and how influential it was politically, wouldn't be as sanguine as Doyle's. The movement, as I see it, was insufficiently inclusive spatially, socially and politically to have had a really powerful impact in forging Irish national identities. Far from being incrementally cumulative and giving rise to a strong and

enduring co-operative tradition, the local democratising impulse was frequently faltering (if not collapsing) in the 1920s and '30s. There is no doubt that the preferred image many nationalists had of the Irish nation was rural, but was this image based on a vibrant Irish co-operative tradition? Co-operative communitarianism may have contributed something very minor to the shaping of Irish national identities, but this surely pales into insignificance when compared in particular with the power of possessive individualism (and familism) so recently bolstered by the transfer of land ownership from landlord to tenant.

A major irony in assessing the movement's modernising and state-building contributions is that the successor to Plunkett's DATI ended up effectively using the IAOS and its creameries as instruments in the drive to achieve its version of interwar agricultural modernisation. The IAOS faced new obstacles (not explored by Doyle) once the anti-Treaty Fianna Fáil party commenced its sixteen-year long period in office in 1932. Bolger informs us that Henry Kennedy became *politically isolated* with the change of government and that he had *clearly...lost direct influence on the shaping of government policy* (Bolger, 1977: 118).

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Ana Cristina Roque, Cristina Brito y Cecilia Veracini (Eds.)
Peoples, Nature and Environments: Learning to Live Together
 Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholar Publishings, 2020, 304 pp.

Este libro, que contiene más de veinte capítulos, estructurados en cinco partes («Learning to live together»; «Climate and Environmental Changes»; «Policies, Management and Conservation»; «Landscape and Heritage»; «Science and Natural History»), nos ofrece un panorama amplio e interdisciplinar para el abordaje de las relaciones entre comunidades humanas y medio ambiente a lo largo de la Historia.

Como bien indican sus editoras desde las primeras páginas, el interés se focaliza en las formas de adaptación de la convivencia de humanos y no humanos –volveré sobre este tema a posteriori–, y las condiciones-constricciones medioambientales en las que se enmarcan los procesos de desenvolvimiento técnico y científico en el mundo contemporáneo.

Interdisciplinariedad e interhumanidad son entretrejidas como un cruce de caminos en los que humanos y no humanos interactúan sobre un futuro en común, en el marco de un proceso de *re-learning* para (con)vivir con la naturaleza.

Este cruce de caminos y de interdisciplinariedades atiende de forma especial a las tendencias de apropiación/acaparamiento humano de recursos, y los impactos y externalidades negativas sobre los ecosistemas de los sures territoriales y epistemológicos del conjunto de toma de decisiones humanas.

Con una suma de perspectivas tradicionales y otras más innovadoras atrave-

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El libro tiene tres elementos centrales que se convierten en ejes fuerza del mismo. El primero de ellos es la atención a la relación entre humanos y no humanos que impregna varios de los textos. Historia de mares, ballenas, océanos como espacios de intercambio y flujo de conocimientos, así como la interacción entre humanos y no humanos en cuanto a la creación de transferencias materiales y simbólicas, son descritas con una perspectiva antropocéntrica de fuerte matriz.

A modo de explicación, considero que la principal aportación radica en la inserción de estas líneas de investigación en diálogo con perspectivas más tradicionales, relacionadas ambas tanto con el proceso histórico de construcción antrópica del paisaje como de la interacción metabólica del conjunto de especies. Pero ello no es óbice para considerar que se están abriendo caminos, y en ello las apuestas interdisciplinares siempre resultan complejas, tanto en la construcción argumental como en la consolidación de trabajos, que desde una perspectiva global, por la que este volumen apuesta, permitan la facilitación de respuestas más allá de territorios ya explorados.

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diseño como en su vertebración en ejes y capítulos, que abordaré después. Desde la centralidad relacional que construyen sus investigaciones, los equipos o investigadores individuales participantes y la aproximación a transformaciones socioambientales desde los sures globales, dotan al texto de una potencialidad, de caleidoscopio afroamericano y asiático en cuanto a las miradas aportadas a la convivencialidad entre humanos y nos humanos en los territorios explorados.

El tercer elemento relevante a destacar es su diálogo interdisciplinar. Esta apuesta que vertebra, penetra e impregna los dos ejes antes citados, permite considerarlo como texto de referencia en el momento de consolidar las praxis epistemológicas y metodológicas para la consolidación en el campo de la historia ambiental de diálogos que conduzcan a nuevos caminos en el campo de los estudios decoloniales.

A modo de corolario de esta primera parte de la reseña, considero que este libro nos avanza en el camino de los procesos de apropiación biofísica de recursos naturales, en la matriz antropocéntrica de la historia ambiental tal y como se ha ido consolidando como apuesta disciplinar. Seguimos caminando en la consideración de la naturaleza como un tropo de enunciación de las formas en que las sociedades humanas han apropiado los paisajes, los territorios y los seres vivos.

Este marco tiene en la matriz histórica una mirada abierta hacia cómo los flujos de saberes, plantas y animales han sido materia prima de los circuitos globales del modelo capitalista, de la economía-mundo.

Pero si esta mirada desde la historia ambiental como narrativa de la apropiación vehicula el texto, las fugas epistémicas que plantea en algunos de los ejes antes citados, así como en la propia atención extrovertida a los territorios eurocéntricos, lo dota de una capacidad envolvente y sugerente para nuevas líneas de investigación emergentes.

La primera sección del libro se estructura sobre cómo son concebidas las relaciones entre humanidad y naturaleza, y sus impactos. Patricia Viviera, en el primer capítulo («Interspecies peace: learning to live together»), se adentra en uno de los aspectos más innovadores de este volumen: las interacciones, desde una perspectiva holística y cosmopolita, alimentan el emergente interés por las relaciones interhumanos-no humanos, y en un lugar de emergencia climática y colapso civilizatorio. Caminamos hacia erigirnos, saliendo del antropocentrismo académico, en la primera especie en autopeligro de extinción, como explican Telmo Pievani y Andra Meneganzin en el segundo capítulo, «Homo sapiens: the first self-endangered species» (pp. 26-41), en el contexto de la crisis del Antropoceno.

El libro se vertebra alrededor de unas serie de conceptos centrales que articulan las relaciones entre seres humanos y no humanos en el contexto de los procesos de cambio socioambiental, que se narran por los autores en varios ejes centrales. Uno de sus elementos constitutivos es la atención a los cambios climáticos y los desastres naturales, desde la sección coordinada por el equipo de Armando Alberola, autor y coautor con Luis A. Arriola, respectivamente,

de los capítulos «Climate, natural threats and disasters in 18th century Spain: notes for a historical study» (pp. 43-54) y «Climatic extremism and crisis on the Iberian Peninsula and New Spain (1770-1800): notes for a comparative study» (pp. 55-66). Una atenta mirada, descriptiva, con profusión de recursos documentales que devienen de una investigación que se sitúa, tanto en contexto español como latinoamericano. La lectura interseccional entre procesos de cambio de sistemas políticos, con la impronta sobre legislaciones forestales, agrarias y ambientales, junto a los disturbios provocados por episodios catastróficos, marcan la adaptabilidad y resiliencia de las sociedades modernas y contemporáneas a los episodios de oscilación climática.

Un segundo eje de intersección en las relaciones sociedades humanas-no humanas-naturaleza se articula sobre las formas de manejo histórico. Este debate se enmarca también en una dimensión amplia y global, al analizar los impactos de los modelos coloniales sobre los espacios del sur global. Como bien indicaba en la primera parte de esta reseña, el libro abre una ventana a los estudios emergentes sobre flujos y circulación material interoceánica, historia de los mares y de los océanos, con especial atención al capítulo aportado por Nina Vieira, Cristina Brito y Ana Cristina Roque, «Aquatic animals, now and then: Appropriation of nature in Portuguese America and early notions of overexploitation and human impacts» (pp. 68-82), estudios en los que el equipo editor del libro son referencia con sus proyectos en curso (incluida la cátedra UNESCO *O Patrimo-*

nio Cultura dos Oceanos, Universidad de Lisboa).

Se atiende al manejo de recursos terrestres y marinos en contextos de ocupación colonial en América, descubrimiento y puesta en valor de fuentes documentales desconocidas para el análisis de los *commodities* de origen marino, y el impacto que las formas de apropiación, manejo y extracción de bienes tiene para los ciclos de contaminación urbana, sobre todo en ciudades ribereñas y portuarias. Estos enfoques, que están presentes en varios de los capítulos de la tercera sección (*Policies, Management and Conservation*), nos apuntan hacia una necesaria atención en cuanto a la evaluación de los procesos sociometabólicos de perfil agroterrestre.

De igual manera, varios de los textos nos guían por el camino de la recuperación de los estudios sobre viajeros, científicos y exploradores que, con un enfoque de investigación cualitativa, nos ilustran sobre las prácticas de apropiación, circulación y comercialización de los saberes, bienes, conocimientos y flujos biológicos, de la mano de los trabajos de Judith Carney (2002) y Londa Schiebinger (2004), en territorios ocupados por las metrópolis coloniales. Cientifización de los territorios al servicios de los programas «imperiales» en las viejas-nuevas formas de colonialidad territorial y epistemológica, antes de la independencia o después de ella.

La sección 3 del libro nos adentra, en gran medida, en la narrativa de los procesos de extracción ontológica y física, de los lugares en los que las metrópolis impusieron modelos de «hexacción», con alguna

atención a los episodios conflictuales y de resistencia hacia dichos modelos, como el capítulo de Paulo E. Guimarães, «Environmental conflicts and man-nature representations in the building of the Portuguese European identity» (pp. 162-174).

El tercer eje vertebrador, junto a los anteriores sobre climatología histórica y relaciones humanos-no humanos en el marco de las formas de manejo y gobierno del territorio, presta atención a los procesos históricos de construcción del paisaje y de la memoria del territorio. Se apunta la relevancia de la operatividad conceptual de los paisajes culturales o bioculturales en otros lugares, que devienen en procesos y prácticas en el manejo de la interfase tierra-agua (presente en todo el volumen), con propuestas que provienen desde el campo de la arqueología histórica, los manejos forestales con la introducción de especies alóctonas y la aparición de reflexiones políticas y científicas sobre su «bondad-maldad» para con los modelos de desarrollo, en el marco de las políticas forestales y la creación de los estados-nación.

El último de los vectores que articulan este volumen, ya referenciado en otro apartado de esta reseña, es el de las «complejas relaciones» entre ciencia e historia natural, que atiende a procesos de «descubrimiento» de la naturaleza, mediante una acción de validación antropocéntrica de su valor, reconfigurando los procesos sociales de creación de conocimiento y estimulando interacciones epistémicas entre tecnologías y culturas diferenciadas.

Esta apuesta nos permite *learning to live together*, como matriz tanto del libro en

sí como de la construcción subyacente de un programa de renovación de matrices de trabajo en la historia ambiental latinoamericana. En este apartado, la atención a *naturalia* se focaliza en la circulación de saberes, flujos y materias entre Europa, África y América. Procesos históricos, desde tiempo inmemorial, de *commodification* de los seres no humanos, bien como mascotas o bienes apropiables para destino mercantil, sometidos a sistemas de tráfico e intercambio internacional de materiales biológicos. Pasajeros transnacionales silentes fueron circulados durante el siglo XVI en flujos intercontinentales.

Atienden todas estas propuestas a la lectura atenta y penetrante de textos y archivos sobre la Edad Moderna y Contemporánea de coetáneos que arrojan luz sobre la circulación de saberes biológicos entre Asia y América, desde un sólido trabajo de «minería de datos», en el contexto de la puesta en diálogo de archivos, cartas, correspondencia privada, etc.

En este eje del texto, se nos atisban las complejas formas de construcción «colonial-antrópica y racializada» epistemológica del conocimiento, articulación de saberes y artefactos culturales (jardines botánicos, colecciones privadas reales, taxonomías, etc.) como «depósitos» colonizados y articulados del saqueo de territorios, seres humanos y no humanos desde realidades extraeuropeas.

A modo de conclusión, considero que disponemos de un libro que nutre nuestro trabajo de historiadores agrario-ambientales de perspectivas interdisciplinares, que avanza hacia la generación de nuevos espa-