

RESEÑAS

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CONSUMING ST. PATRICK'S DAY¹

In 2006 an academic event –is St. Patrick's day: parades, performers, and promoters– invites a bunch of well-established academicians to theorize on St. Patrick's day. The editors, Johnathan Skinner & Dominic Bryan alert, St's Patrick day is packaged, resisted and negotiated all across the world, reminding not only the Irish diaspora but also the essence of protest. This encounter, doubtless, paves the ways for the formation of an international network, which years later produced this fascinating book. St. Patrick's days should be considered as something else than a local celebration, but as a global event which deserves further attention. This event, which emulates the Irish Spirit, situates as a festival that attracts thousands of tourists in the most important cities worldwide. Originally St. Patrick's Day is celebrated by Irish descendants in the US, England, and Canada. However, over years it captivated the attention of global audiences. Of course, one of the limitations of the books seems to be the diversity of voices that debate –from different angles– on the same issue. This led editors to organize the book into three different parts, each one sharing a common-thread argument respecting the next. The main thesis held by editors is that St. Patrick's day is commoditized as a form of consumption, which offers hybridized landscapes to be resisted, reconciled but never ruined. Starting from this premise, the first part signals to the sociology of consumption in order for readers to be introduced in the intersection of identity and consumed objects. The first chapter, which is authored by M Cronin, explores how the imported food molds the Irish identity outside Ireland. Irishness, in this vein, is not only represented by the food but imposed as a “symbol of identity”. In this respect, as the author reminds, the Irish diaspora is remembered in St. Patrick's Day, but to some extent, the celebration takes different shapes according to local contexts. Though Boston and Belfast are twined in the same

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sentiment, the idea revolving around “being Irish” notably varies.

Moore Quinn in the second chapter discusses critically the legacy of John Crimmins, an amateur ethnologist who developed a pride in Irish culture. While Crimmins opened his collection for the Boston’s Charitable Irish society, he will be marked by the “great famine” that promoted a mass migration from Ireland to America. Quinn centers his analysis on the ritual of toasting, as a cultural residual of the colonial order, which merges the past with the present. Paradoxically the ritual of toast follows the same contradiction of the language. At the time members of the group are united by the same commonality others are systematically segregated. The second section, complementarily, is formed by chapters, which dissect the nature and historical evolution of Irish diaspora. K. Conrad, in the third chapter, centers on the role of Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO) as a vehicle towards a much deeper transformation of urban space. Needless to say that this movement in the 90s decade struggle for some basic rights. St. Patrick’s day reminds their battle taking some hybridized forms of cultural consumption. Two different narratives (like Irishness and gay-friendly culture) merge. The fourth chapter introduces readers in the world of migrants and forced migration. Nunan & Di Domenico hold the thesis that tourism is prone to maximize profits while minimizing costs or risks that may very well place the industry in jeopardy. This is the reason behind the fact that some diverging celebrations may be cloned, commoditized and disseminated as the same heritage-based event. This seems to be the case in New York where Tartan day and St. Patrick Day are offered as a simultaneous cultural product.

Through a series of interviews with key public officials in New York, Dublin and Edinburgh, as well as thematic content analysis of tourism material distributed

around the 2005 St. Patrick’s Day and Tartan Day events in New York, we explore the ways in which Scotland and Ireland use national days to link to their respective Irish and Scottish diasporas in order to encourage tourism from the USA to Ireland and Scotland. (p. 72).

The similar outcomes are obtained by J. Nagle who offers an interesting (fifth) chapter, toying with the belief that celebrations discourage or encourage social conflict. In fact, he argues convincingly though The Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom have kept some autonomy, both developed a strong rivalry over centuries. This polarization was certainly aggravated at the time the national heritage was posed as the touchstone of both societies. Being Irish or British generated a dormant state of violence which has been unleashed in Belfast, but not in other cities. In Northern Ireland, the conflict was given by the imposition of a physical segregation marking the borders of British occupation. As Nagle puts it, it is important not to lose the sight of the fact that St. Patrick’s day offers a good opportunity –as well as tourism– to recreate zones of extreme violence in a climate of mutual understanding. Whatever the answer may be, ethnical rivalry represents a serious challenge for event-management and festival policy makers. However, no less true is that in other cities like Chicago, Buenos Aires, or London, which are dotted with a multicultural character, conflict can be contained and curbed. In this token, ethno-nationalism, as Nagle brilliantly observes, plays a leading role in exacerbated radicalized discourses around ethnicity.

The rest of the chapters –organized in the third section– move complementarily to the political problems in Northern Ireland, which resonated in St. Patrick’s day celebrations. Whatever the case may be, this section reflects how Irishness varied in the time and according to other cultural contexts as in

some Caribbean nations. J. Skinner discusses critically the impacts of Irish culture in the Caribbean nations, which are paradoxically possessed by the British Crown. An hybridized culture resulting from the marriage of Africans and Irish migrants crystalizes a Black Irish ethnicity, which is torn between two worlds. As Skinner reminds, the culture offers an efficient instrument to revitalize social frustration fictionalizing hybridized cultural landscape, which are consumed and internalized by the lay-citizens. To put this in bluntly, the same meaning of Irishness—which is pitted against Britishness—is adopted in British Overseas Territories. These exchanges are part of a globalized world, where the territorial borders are blurred. In perspective, the last chapter, offers a sophisticated explanation about the interplay of global consumption, the class, and the national heritage. While the discourse around “Irishness” takes the form of an idealized community that rests on the heterogeneity, the diaspora—characterized by the physical movement—evokes an ethno-nationalist character, which is enrooted in the territory. Anthropologically speaking, the diaspora not only calls the attention to the

needs of returning to an exemplary centre, in this case Ireland, but nourishes an ethno-national discourse, which ritualistically is constructed in basis of a continual process of marking and unmarking. This led to think that celebrations renews the present offering an “idealized past”, to nuance the day-to-day frustrations.

After further discussion, at least for this reviewer, the present book offers a pungent and interesting discussion about the connection of culture, consumption and heritage. St. Patrick's day shows exactly how a local celebration can be deconstructed and offered as a global form of consumption in the capitalist culture. Most probably, Skinner and Bryan offer a high-quality product, which is of paramount importance for cultural analysts, sociologists and anthropologists interested in tourism and cultural consumption.

Reference

Skinner, J. & Brian, D. (2015). *Consuming St. Patrick's Day*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar Publishing.