

TROUBLESOME GROUND

*Farming Trees & Green Policy
in Rural Ireland*

JODIE ASSELIN

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Introduction

LOOKING FOR HEN HARRIERS

My first proper encounter with the uplands of northwest County Cork came by way of an invitation a week after I arrived: Would I like to accompany a monitoring team for an afternoon as they searched for an endangered bird, the hen harrier? My arrival at the small farming community had been eased by the friendliness of a local community development organization, and it seemed it had also coincided with the arrival of a distinguished UK visitor who was there to tour the organization's environmental projects. Knowing nothing of the hen harrier or the area we were to visit, I counted myself lucky and gladly tagged along, notebook in hand.

Our field day started with a dawn chorus walk through one of the last remaining deciduous forests in the area. The lush green forest was a popular walking destination for birders, and we had a good-sized group of local enthusiasts with us. Afterward, our small group—consisting of an Irish scientist leading a hen harrier habitat mitigation project, the UK representative with similar project goals, and me, a Canadian anthropologist who wanted to understand upland livelihood—climbed into a car and headed out of town.

The rest of the day found us with gazes drawn to the sky, searching for the rare shapes of hen harriers. I learned that members of the local European Union (EU)–funded project were trying to determine how many active nests were in the area, and a food pass between male and female birds was a good indication. In three-hour

shifts, we spent our time at two sites. The first saw us in a forest cut block, sitting among the debris of cleared trees, looking outward across the heavily forested valley that sloped downhill toward a small stream at the bottom. We sat between ditches dug into the earth, allowing the boggy upland to drain enough for non-native conifer trees to grow. Twice, we saw the silver silhouette of what was apparently a male hen harrier in the distance but failed to see a female. After pushing our vehicle out of a particularly mucky road edge, we moved to our second site, an upland blanket bog with the road at times cut eight feet below the surface. Our chosen watching post rested along a high hill, with the deep green of forests on the opposite hillside and wind turbines visible on its crest. As we walked from our car to the hilltop, I could see the small, tidy squares of farm fields at the valley's distant edge, their margins clearly outlined by thick hedges. Spreading out from our watching spot were the soft white fluff of bog cotton in bloom and the tidy stacks of turf laid out and drying, each brick in piles of three or four, resting upright. Partway into our surveillance, I watched an elderly couple slowly make their way up the hill to our right and begin turning over bricks of turf. Without taking her eyes from the sky, the Irish scientist told me this was their parcel of turf: "They're turning it to better dry out before taking it home to heat their house" (figure 1).

In the following hours, I learned that this region was part of a Special Protected Area (SPA), declared so by the Irish government to appease European regulations that protected endangered birds (Council Directive 2009/147/EC). The designation meant that low-intensity land use was favoured and that new activities needed to go through a review process. Controversially, this included changes in farm field use, such as draining and improving fallow fields or planting fields with trees. My eyes told me that while it was an SPA, the area was also an energy extraction site—in local turf and the wind turbines that dotted the hill across from us. I learned that locals and outsiders alike debate both types of extraction, framing their merits and faults in terms of environmental, economic, and cultural impact. I initially thought the forests on this hillside across from us were unremarkable; however, I was surprised to hear my companions discuss them the most. At one point they referred to the forest as a "green desert," unable to support local biodiversity and largely devoid of upland life. "Yes, it's worrying," the UK representative suggested, "but surely they are also good for carbon sequestration?" This comment was a point of discussion for part of our day: whether planting trees on upland bog had environmental benefits.

At the core of all of this was the farm pasture visible at the end of the valley that kept drawing my eye. Both of my companions felt that farmers in Ireland and the UK needed to be better informed and educated about their land and its ecological potential. Unbeknownst to me at the time, I was sitting at the centre



Figure 1. Community members turn turf to dry on Mount Eagle; bog cotton in the foreground, conifer plantations and wind turbines in the background. Picture taken while surveying for hen harrier. The bog and plantations are part of a Special Protected Area. Author photo.

of the dominant narratives that would shape my time in the region: farms, forests, environmental protection, rural development, and the people who feel they should have a say in the area's future.

THIS BOOK

This book is an ethnographic account of the relationship between land and Irish upland farmers in north County Cork, Ireland. It takes place amid the colliding influences of agricultural professionalization, a global environmental crisis, and the subsequent implementation and rotation of various politically motivated projects meant to spur economic growth and simultaneously better the environment. As such, it is a story about the challenges farmers in one region face in the conflicting worlds of program payments, shifting policy initiatives, and the joint cultural and economic requirements of farming. Consequently, in addition to expected topics like family farms, crops, and livestock, this book spends considerable time on forestry and EU subsidy programs, each an integral component of what it means to farm in Ireland

today. In telling this tale, I have two distinct yet interconnected goals. Foremost, I aim to provide an ethnographic account of what it means to live in these uplands and, in doing so, contribute to an anthropology of rural Ireland. Second, I want to contribute to an understanding of how the ephemeral worlds of green discourse and development plans manifest in rural areas, making a case that ethnographic description can help illuminate and acknowledge the realities of conflicting development and conservation strategies—indeed, that it is imperative that we do so.

Ethnography demands that the messiness and contradictions of life be acknowledged, and this contribution is particularly significant today because, like many so-called marginal regions, the uplands of north County Cork often hold the position of a catch-all geography for others' dreams of nation-building and economic development. I argue in the coming pages that the landscape is conceptually stretched and oversaturated, containing any number of possible futures and the contradictions inherent within those futures. In recent decades, the pressure to address climate change and declining biodiversity has, in many cases, further saturated such areas with even more potential. Many family farms now persist in what Charles J. Godfray and colleagues (2010) have termed the “perfect storm”—that is, the intersection of rising demand for food, an increasing role for farms in energy production, greater demand for water, and a need for the agricultural sector to adapt to and mitigate climate change. Much of this demand has been formalized through the language of multifunctional agriculture, which, as a policy focus, supports and recognises the diverse contributions of farms while simultaneously increasing the expectation of such diversity (Heatherington 2011; O'Rourke et al. 2016). As farmers navigate these competing pressures, their core roles in the nation shift, with farms functioning less and less as purely production-centred spaces and begin filling leisure, recreation, and living space demands for urban areas (McDonagh et al. 2010). In this, the role of farmers has shifted. For example, Jeremy MacClancy (2015) argues that within the EU, once seen as an exploiter of agricultural potential, farmers are now just as often understood as stewards or guardians of the land. I would amend this observation slightly, however, to say that many of today's small European farmers are both agricultural exploiters *and* stewards of the collective environment, and it is increasingly their role to navigate any resultant contradictions.

In Duhallow, where I spent most of my time, I argue that oversaturation or expectation is primarily due to a failure to address the contradictions inherent within and among environmental policy, economic development goals, and land-use regulations that are collectively meant to outline the road to sustainable rural development. While the story provided here is a regional case study and cannot be taken as a stand-in for Ireland as a whole, the experiences many Duhallow farmers

face are not unique. Andrea Rissing and Bradley M. Jones (2022, 195) note in their exploration of landscape value through an anthropological lens that “processes of inscribing landscapes with market value always exist in tension with the diverse values simultaneously ascribed to the same landscapes—in the past, present, and future.” Such colliding values exist in the economic sense—a monetary exchange on the market, for example—and certainly in the sense of a broader sphere of human meaning, including a cultural sense of place, belonging, and obligation. However, more recently, the murky spaces in how species and landscape conservation is valued and by whom have increasingly been entwined with tenuous economic ties to green economic growth, where market value asserts itself in new ways. For instance, many of the opportunities and challenges facing Duhallow farms today result from a broader neoliberal strategy to address climate change and declining biodiversity through mechanisms that can, in theory, also support local economic development. Firmly linking conservation and development is part of a more global emphasis on neoliberal conservation, described by Robert Fletcher (2023, 75) as “an ambitious effort to render the capitalist system as a whole sustainable in the face of increasing skepticism concerning this possibility as well as mounting obstacles to continued accumulation posed by global natural resource depletion and associated pollution buildup including climate change producing greenhouse gas emissions.” Among the concrete contradictions that will be encountered in this book—to plant and not to plant, for instance—is a deeper thread that is the unaddressed tension between growth and sustainable practices and the subsequent misalignment in what economic value means to the orbit of the many individuals who have a stake in small farms.

Together, the entwined subjects of rural livelihood and green development and discourse provide a rich case study in staying with the trouble (Haraway 2016) of unpacking the lived consequences of today’s competing demands on rural regions. I understand this attention as significant on at least four fronts. First, it is important in itself to refuse to explain away, overlook, or ignore the incompatibility of many rural narratives. The material and discursive over-allocation of what this region can provide and what it symbolizes results in cumulative exhaustion from living in an overstretched and imagined landscape that cannot be all things at once. The tensions that emerge from competing visualizations of place and development are not theoretical quandaries; they manifest *somewhere*. Much as colonial imaginings manifest(ed) in landscapes deemed or cultivated as empty, the merger of economic growth and environmental interventions moves into these same areas—places that are unlikely to meet the shifting visions and requirements of what others hope them to be but where people and their non-human companions exist, persist, and on occasion thrive in unpredictable ways. Failure to critically examine the tension

between the dual pulls of growth and de-growth, green spaces and development, and human spaces and spaces for non-human companions results in people failing to see what is occurring around them and losing track of the everyday facts of life in exchange for high-level data. This potentially undermines programs meant to better our collective futures.

Second, I hope the book's focus contributes to a critical examination of how the proliferation of green language, especially as symbolic rhetoric, can perpetuate unequal power relations and mask exploitative patterns for humans, landscapes, and companion species. This is particularly the case in so-call marginal areas where narratives that position rural regions as empty and comparatively lacking in value justify and even oblige political and economic intervention. Duhallow residents and landscapes are less easily incorporated into scalable enterprises, proving simultaneously vexing for frustrated planners and bureaucrats and providing imaginative fodder for future plans. The land is wet; bogs slide; rain falls in overabundance or not at all; uninvited species spread; and the temporal rhythms of trees, peat, and migratory animals do not always coincide well with human calendars. Local farmers are aware of this precarity, of being vulnerable to others and living without the promise of stability (Tsing 2015), and they respond with flexible economies that have sustained upland regions over centuries. It is this flexibility that is at risk in many of Ireland's green development plans. In particular, among the myriad overlapping influences in this region, forest plantations succeed in rationalizing rural landscapes and people where other ventures have failed. In one swoop, forest plantations have the potential to render land and people compliant (though not completely) by reshaping the farmer-farm relationship while only superficially meeting the designation of forest as a land type. This shift in land meaning has received inadequate attention, mainly because forest discourse, although not its materiality, can strategically meet competing demands in this oversaturated place—economic, environmental, and cultural.

Third, a focus on how conservation and development programs and policies manifest in the space between farmer and land offers an opportunity to see *how* change does or does not occur while prioritizing the position of local actors who might otherwise be seen as isolated case studies, too subjective or poorly informed to be taken seriously. Rather than resting on the often uncritically cited narratives of rural decline and a lack of modernization, a focus on lived realities can position local livelihood as an integral landscape component rather than an isolated economic feature. This book reminds its readers that the ever-shifting theoretical and discursive tension apparent in political strategy manifests in real-world ways, and it is those who are least in control of such rhetoric who must find ways to live with its consequences. Many upland residents I met felt frustrated, powerless, and angry

about living in a complex bureaucratic system where they often could not recognise their land when it was described. Ethnographic detail can help portray the context in which such feelings emerge and support more meaningful discussions about our collective futures.

Finally, such an approach reorients a focus on contested spaces to allow for the less obvious ways place and landscape are redefined. Adrian Peace (2005, 509), in his ethnographic examination of contested landscapes in western Ireland, makes the important point that anthropologists must focus on the processual character of contested space, as irrevocable social change is the most likely substantive outcome. However, while necessary, prioritizing obviously contested areas and clear public disputes can sometimes overshadow the more insidious ways rural areas are reimagined and the everyday and mundane ways people resist and bear the burden of resistance. As such, this book contributes to the chronicling of Irish culture and land, recording and attempting to honour people's ongoing struggles and triumphs in a region that otherwise might go unnoticed by many.

In the remainder of this chapter, I briefly introduce the region; outline the context that shaped this research, including my methods; and situate this work in relation to research in the domains of anthropology, political ecology, and landscape.

WELCOME TO DUHALLOW

Upland Duhallow is a rural region of northwest County Cork in southern Ireland that encompasses 1,800 square kilometres. Off the main track, it seldom sees tourists, although the roads that lead to popular tourist destinations like Killarney National Park and Blarney Castle are not far off. Well-established motorways skirt the region, so most travelers are likely to stick to those main roads unless they are local enough to know the winding routes that might reduce travel time. Less visually arresting than some coastal regions or more northern upland areas, Duhallow's elevation gain is gradual; as a result, its peaks (in the Mullaghareirk Mountains, at a maximum of 451 meters at Knockfeha) are less evident than those in some celebrated upland regions like Wild Nephin National Park to the northwest. To the outsider, the inland area is a typical Irish mix of narrow winding roads bordered by thick hedges, stone walls, small towns scattered 10 to 15 kilometres apart, deep green fields, and small farms that focus on either dairy cattle (lowland areas) or beef (suckler) cattle in the higher elevations. When driving, the primary indication that one is moving upland is the fact that fields become less uniformly green, and the uneven brownish-green of rushes fills in some fields' edges or their entirety. The soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) appears as a cluster of pointy stems, usually over a foot tall, and can look like stiff grass to the outsider. Indicative of wet, acidic soils, rushes reduce

grazing ground for cattle and are often taken as a visual indicator of poor land or a farmer failing to care for their fields. In Duhallow and many other rural Irish areas, the rough and patchy look of bog or rushes, once familiar, has now often given way to the deep green of conifer plantation forests, which are often planted on poor farmland. Overall, the area is often seen as somewhat unremarkable, a place most people except those who live there move through to get somewhere else.

Duhallow is not a name locals use extensively. In fact, much like Carles Salazar's (1996) "Three Districts" in his ethnographic account of farm economies in rural County Galway, Duhallow as a precise location does not really exist. The term refers to the original barony, one known for its wet mountainous land to the north, and it was of little historical interest to the various waves of English development, except insofar as it offered safety to Irish rebels. Largely rural, the broader barony consists of thirty-six small villages and four larger market towns. The region's southern reaches tend to be wealthier, having more lowland fertile ground, with the northern edges that border County Limerick and County Kerry having smaller, less prosperous farms. Locally, the term *Duhallow* differentiates this region from the broader and more prosperous County Cork, and it claims a unique regional landscape and heritage. The northwest part of Duhallow, especially the Mullaghareirk Mountains and surrounding regions straddling the Cork-Kerry-Limerick border where I spent most of my time, is the heartland of Slieve Luachra—a cultural region associated with rich musical, dancing, storytelling, and poetic traditions. These mountains and their surrounding towns and farms are the primary setting of this research, and my choice of this name mimics local organizations that likewise employ it. This regional or landscape-scale approach is an intuitive way to explore the intersection of local ecology, economic exchanges, and cultural and social identities that are not always bound to a single community, and it well suits contemporary anthropologists in Ireland who query political and economic processes beyond the village scale by theorizing the nature of space, place, and territory (Wilson 2013, 24).

Aside from the shifting nature of farming and land consolidation, the most significant land-use change in Duhallow over the last fifty years has been afforestation, planting trees where none have been before, at least in recent history. Some estimates suggest that as much as 45 percent of the region's SPA (called the Stack's to Mullaghareirk SPA) is afforested (National Parks and Wildlife Service Ireland 2015), although the forest officials I spoke to disagreed. Wind turbines have also proliferated in the area over the last ten years. In 2015, there were twelve working wind farms with 152 turbines in the SPA and an additional eleven turbines on wind farms that were only partly inside the SPA. By the end of 2017, there were 317 turbines inside the SPA, including those within 500 metres of its boundary. Aside from the inherent uniqueness of the place and the people themselves—it is a beautiful

countryside with kind and welcoming residents—what is distinctive about this region is the constellation of factors that overlap in these not-quite uplands. An intersection of low-intensity farming, afforestation, wind turbines, and conservation through Ireland's second-largest SPA has led to considerable local debate about what land means, how it should be used, and who should decide.

Economically, the area struggles compared to its southern County Cork neighbours, and it is still grappling with the booms and busts of recent decades. In particular, remnants of the Celtic Tiger economy are scattered across the landscape in the shape of abandoned houses built on speculative development schemes. The Celtic Tiger economy, a time of economic growth in Ireland from the mid-1990s to 2007, saw a dramatic transformation of social and economic life, followed by a massive downturn after the global financial crises of 2008 and the collapse of Ireland's property bubble. In the 1990s—embracing neoliberal policies—Ireland moved toward deregulation, the privatization of public goods, and support of free-market principles, which, among other things, focused on economic integration between states. The Celtic Tiger is understood by many as a period of economic and cultural reinvention wherein a poor and peripheral state rapidly shifted its economy, saw high population growth, reduced the number of long-term unemployed and socially excluded people, and went from having one of the lowest gross domestic products (GDPs) in Western Europe to one of the highest (Clinch et al. 2002; O'Connell et al. 2007; Smith 2005).

This economic and social shift is detailed in David Stead's (2011) account of economic changes in south County Cork from the 1960s onward. He paints a stark picture in which West Cork was an area of extensive economic decline and chronic population reductions for over a century, with more than three-fifths of workers involved in forestry, agriculture, and fishing—with agriculture the dominant practice and a low degree of integration into the market economy. Stead outlines how this region's economy, social structure, and population shifted throughout the Celtic Tiger era. This shift included moving away from the resource sector—which by 2006 accounted for only 14.6 percent of total employment—toward tourism, retail, services, and information and communication technology, transforming the region's economy and social structure.¹ However, the subsequent collapse of the property and banking sectors led to a contraction in the wider economy, with the drying up of credit, markets, and tax receipts. This resulted in a huge hole in the public purse, an extensive bank bailout,² bank recapitalization, massive state

1 During this period, workers also received a smaller share of total profits as the gap between the wealthy, middle, and lower classes widened (Allen 2000).

2 Including the establishment of the National Assets Management Agency (NAMA), which has acquired €74 billion of property debt from Irish banks.

borrowing, rising unemployment, and plummeting house prices (Kitchin et al. 2012)—all of which led to an €85 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF)–EU bailout in 2010 and a precarious Irish economy that is still working its way out of a massive downturn.

This moment was in the not-too-distant past when I began fieldwork, and its economic and ideological ramifications are still present. I was particularly interested in how all this had shaped both the idea of development and the right kind of Irish citizen. For instance, Peadar Kirby and colleagues (2002), writing during the Celtic Tiger era, criticized the way Irish culture was commodified and restrained during the economic boom years. The authors argue that in framing Ireland's past as a form of undeveloped dark ages, recent history is often read as a bogeyman story that directs people toward open market development: "Either you accept the deregulated ruthlessness of the market, or you will be cast back into the eternal night of emigration and high unemployment" (7). The authors observe that through this rhetoric, those who oppose the politics of development are framed as naive, ungrateful, retrograde, or irresponsible, making it very difficult to speak out against neoliberal improvements. Readers will notice this thread throughout the coming pages, in the ways marginal Irish farmers and their sometimes inconsistent attitudes toward development projects are framed.

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL METHOD OF INQUIRY

I came to know Duhallow as the result of a happy juncture of events. My work as an anthropologist had been limited mainly to North America, focusing on rural livelihood, the pulls of place, and how multiple land-use issues manifest in rural residents' lives—especially in forestry, farming, and hunting. Having grown up in a farming and forestry family in rural western Canada, I was drawn to the ways people shape and apply meaning to the non-human world and how the politics of place and rural-ness are expressed in daily life. A short stay in Oulu, Finland, as a visiting scholar and a collaboration with a Polish colleague had introduced me to European forest dynamics and policies (Asselin and Konczal 2014), but I had ventured no further in that direction.

After securing a position at the University of Lethbridge in western Canada as an environmental anthropologist, I had the rare opportunity to rethink my research goals. In doing so, I attended a Canadian conference on rural revitalization that focused on community voices. One of the speakers was a community member from Duhallow who had been working tirelessly to support her region economically and socially. She commented on the uselessness of much rural development advice—"Lord help me if one other person suggests the ladies sell jam" (a nod toward

entrepreneurial crafting as a rural fix-all)—and I was drawn to both her humour and the parallels between our observations on rural development. After the event, we kept in correspondence, and I secured a small grant to spend six weeks in the Duhallow region, collecting preliminary information and establishing the groundwork for a project that might have a small community benefit. A year later, I resided in the area with my family from June through November, and the following year I was able to visit again in the fall to present our co-written land-use report and continue fieldwork. The Covid pandemic enveloped the world that winter and a subsequent field visit was canceled the following year, although I kept up correspondence. This book is a result of these experiences.

Although this project was independent, the community-based organization IRD Duhallow (IRD stands for Integrated Rural Development) offered desk space, and the staff answered my endless questions and regularly let me tag along on various environmental field programs so I could better understand the region. This collaboration eventually resulted in the publication of a local land-use report based in part on a two-year survey with farmers who had SPA land, which I helped conduct and analyze in its second year (Asselin and Mee 2019).

This work also resulted in some community-based conference presentations; partly because of this, preserving the anonymity of the research area—a common tradition in anthropology—is not possible. I am also not sure it would be to Duhallow's benefit to do so. In a reflection on her ethnographic work in Ireland, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2000) has suggested that anonymity protects the researcher more than it does the community members, shading us from the consequences of our own words, and I am inclined to agree. However, I also recognise that ongoing land-use tensions result in considerable frustration among land users, neighbours, and community members. It is not my intention to place anyone in the spotlight, particularly as the activities spoken of in these pages are not always in the spirit of a law or payment scheme requirements. For this reason, most names in this book are pseudonyms, although a few that could not be reasonably anonymized are kept in full. To support this intent, clear identity markers such as some professions, place names, and—where doing so did not change the meaning—family structure (number of siblings, for instance) and farm size were altered to protect speakers' identity. Duhallow is a large area, and I refer only loosely to communities within it. Drafts of the central chapters were shared with key community members, and, where possible, sections pertaining to particular individuals were shared with them in advance for comment and adjustment. These stories are meant to represent the tight weave of humans, non-human species, and the landscape itself. While each thread is significant and unique, the threads cumulatively reveal patterns of import that reach beyond these green fields and cool cement homes.

At its heart, the ethnographic method is simple enough: Engage as fully as possible in community life, wherever that might be, for as long as feasible while asking questions that ideally emerge from locals themselves and reflect their priorities, concerns, and experiences. This process fixed my research focus on the lived yet highly political experience of landscape in all its variations. While my original idea had been to explore the relationship between farmers and water, the dominance of concerns over the intensely bureaucratic nature of the land and the expansion of upland forestry quickly reshaped my queries. My first visit in 2017 resulted in collecting, summarizing, and analyzing relevant land-use policies as the environmental team within IRD Duhallow sought clarification on apparent contradictions community members had cited (Asselin 2022; Asselin et al. 2022). I also monitored hen harriers and volunteered my labour with local farmers in Ireland's rural development scheme. During this time, I began to conduct open-ended interviews with community members, primarily focusing on the experiences of local farming, forestry, and land-use policy.

In 2018, ethnographic fieldwork resulted in thirty-five interviews with farmers, forest and agriculture officials, farm advisers, park wardens, and others, in addition to countless informal conversations with residents that were equally, if not more, important. Interviews often occurred in people's homes or while walking in farm fields, driving through the region, or moving through forests. While I interviewed most professionals in their offices, conducting interviews while on the land whenever possible was a deliberate strategy because the meaning and feel of what land meant were easier to share and experience. My interview questions were loosely outlined, asking people about their farm and field history and their thoughts on land-use trends in the area—most often forestry, the SPA, and the schemes or programs they were involved in. However, for the most part, once we began to talk, I followed the farmers' leads. Living in the community allowed me to follow up with interviewees later if I still had questions or to go out on the land with them again, helping out if I could. I did not deliberately seek out information on political or religious leanings, which is perhaps a failing of this book. However, the land itself was the focus, and I chose to follow those topics farmers most often raised; overwhelmingly, the topics involved family, what it meant to farm, and the specific choices and policy tensions that shaped their days. While the specifics of local politics seldom came up, where farmers stood in relation to national and EU-level decisions as they related to land policy was a common topic of discussion.

Landscape invariably stretches outward, and I therefore often found myself in larger centres—Dublin, Cork, and elsewhere—talking to people about the various policies, laws, and material flows that extend inward and outward from this region. But most of my time was spent in Duhallow, where I helped build fences, walked

fields with farmers and inspectors, monitored hen harriers with local biologists, pulled and sprayed invasive species as part of an EU-funded community development program, helped move and transport cattle among fields, farms, and markets, attended livestock auctions, and, as much as possible, fully engaged with the daily life and community events on which this book is grounded. That engagement also meant I had the pleasure of attending music sessions at the local pub, attending a Slieve Luachra culture night, and participating in céilí dance (pronounced kay-lee); in addition, my children, who had accompanied me for a portion of this work, could take advantage of local sports teams and events. In all of this, I had the pleasure of the friendship and support of Maeve, a tireless local advocate and rural dweller I met in my first days in Duhallow who was kind enough to take me and eventually my family under her wing. The openness of this community toward myself and my family touched us all, and I am grateful for the kindness we were shown. Above all, I hope its residents can see themselves in these pages.

AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF IRELAND

Rural and community-based research has deep roots in Ireland, as it lays claim to one of the first European ethnographies with the seminal study of a western Irish community by Conrad M. Arensberg and Solon T. Kimball in the 1930s (1968). The structural-functionalist examination of poor farmers was remarkably detailed in presenting a community-based, kinship-centric account of rural life. While influential in shaping the decades of social research in Ireland that followed, the waves of subsequent critique of that literature have been equally significant, so much so that Keith M. Egan and Fiona E. Murphy (2015) have argued that rehashing, responding to, and addressing these roots have stymied attempts to reimagine national anthropologies. Despite the warning, I briefly present this research arc below to better position my argument that a more fulsome return to the rural in Irish anthropology is necessary to address and acknowledge the significant role of green discourse and programs in shaping rural livelihood, property systems, and the reach of environmental policy more generally.

Many early Irish anthropologists built off Arensberg and Kimball's work, taking their case study as representative of a wider Ireland; in doing so, they emphasized crumbling tradition and decline set against the apparent stability of earlier years. Although some argue that this was a misinterpretation of the Arensberg and Kimball study (see Wilson 1984; Wilson and Donnan 2006), this research cumulatively produces what Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan call the prevalent theme of the dying peasant community in southern Irish research. For example, Hugh Brody's (1973) study of a rural parish in western Ireland focused on what

he saw as rural demoralization, as locals lost belief in the social advantages and moral worth of their society when faced with drastic economic change. Robin Fox (1978), in his ethnographic account of island life off the coast of Donegal, detailed romantic and exotic people clinging to the rubble of change surrounding that area. Scheper-Hughes (1979), in her study of mental illness in a small western Irish community, painted a picture of crumbling familialism and social decline in the face of economic change. In such works, modernity and the quick pace of change were understood to have undermined peasant culture, resulting in a socially unhealthy rural populace. While focusing less on decline, others built on the Arensberg and Kimball legacy that examined kinship and stability at the core of community life. For example, Rosemary Harris's (1972) examination of farming and faith in the small market town of Ballybeg in Northern Ireland emphasized the endurance of long-standing tradition. In another Northern Ireland example, Elliott Leyton (1975) traced kinship and labor patters in a small coastal village of fishing trawlers and small farms, again emphasizing the stability of village life. Yet, by the last third of the twentieth century, this tendency to focus on stability and decline was already being critiqued.

Examples of such critics include Peter Gibbon (1973), who directly critiqued the Arensberg and Kimball study and those since for a tendency to measure decline from a prior point of stability that never existed in the first place, arguing that what many saw as stability was a single moment within centuries of change. Similarly, anthropologist Adrian Peace (1989) has been a strong critic of the primitivism and romanticism common in much twentieth-century Irish writing, particularly the ever-elusive vanishing Gael (citing, among others, Fox [1962, 1975]), or what he referred to as "thatched cottage primitivism" (Peace 2001, 137). Peace (1989, 104) argues that many of the negative assessments of rural Irishness are set against the apparently healthy economy and society of urban centres, particularly the modern and urban West. Anthropologist Mark T. Shutes (1991), who has worked extensively in western Ireland on the topics of farm culture and economy since Ireland's first incorporation into the European Community, has offered a similar critique of early to mid-twentieth-century ethnographies and their tendency to focus on isolated and unchanging village life. Both Shutes's and Peace's works were part of a swelling criticism in Ireland of the failure to examine the power structures that shape the dominant discourse around rural or so-called marginal areas, a critique expanded on and extended through Egan and Murphy's (2015) more recent review of the anthropology of Ireland. The authors trace this representation, arguing that the Irish played the role of the "savage slot" for Europe in which they were discursively othered through reliance on a series of tropes, including representations as an edge people; a stable, homogeneous national community; a society marked by

repressed sexuality; and a pathological nation. The authors note that “what makes this early anthropology of Ireland truly spectral are the forms of Irish identity it produced for so long” (137). Despite these criticisms, twentieth-century Irish ethnography did produce extensive and detailed case studies of people and communities that would have otherwise often been overlooked, particularly, as others have pointed out (Wilson 1984; Wilson and Donnan 2006), because anthropologists tend to ask different questions and speak to different people than do those in many other disciplines.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, these criticisms and broader disciplinary shifts opened ethnography to new subject areas. Those still focusing on rural areas began to take on a different tone, particularly as they dealt with political structures rather than kinship systems. For example, both Paul Martin Sacks (1976) and Mart Bax (1976) addressed the formation of machine-style politics in Ireland. Each provided detailed accounts of constituency-level politics and found a particular political culture stemming from a rural/peasant heritage that allowed machine-style politics to take hold. Other rural ethnography, such as Peace’s (1986) manuscript on an Irish village through three cultural domains (village, farm, and sea), emphasized resilient and diverse research subjects in contrast to the Irish homogeneity found in earlier ethnography. All three of these sources exemplify how this ethnographic shift opened an inquiry into rural Irish culture beyond the narrow village model that had dominated prior research.

Increasingly, however, anthropological inquiry has focused on urban areas and underrepresented communities, opening ethnographic research to largely unexplored areas, including gender and unemployment (McLaughlin 1989), religion (Taylor 1989, 1995), political violence (Vincent 1989), nationalism (Shanks 1994), immigration and racism (Maguire and Murphy 2012), and the arts (Wulff 2017). In much of this research, the increasing influence of globalization also became a growing topic of interest, with a focus on flows of people, goods, capital, and ideas—flows that had intensified when Ireland joined the European Community in 1973, further strengthened in the economic boom of the Celtic Tiger era, and continued well after its decline.

While less dominant than urban-focused research, rural ethnography continued to make significant contributions to our understanding of Irish society and culture during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, particularly at the intersection of the rural and the global. For example, Salazar’s (1996) study of rural economic systems traced the connection between farming communities and the external world through commodity exchanges. Wilson (2013) built on his 1970s County Meath research to trace the impacts of European Economic Community (EEC) membership on the political workings of a large farming community. Peace

(2001) continued his work to emphasize community heterogeneity and relations between community and state. Adam R. Kaul (2009) worked in the west coast village of Doolin to provide an account of the intersection of tourism, traditional Irish music, and the rapid social change resulting from constant intercultural interactions. Irene Ketonen (2019) worked among farmers in Northern Ireland, exploring Brexit through the lens of faith and cultural value.

Despite the ongoing contribution of such works, the decline in rural ethnography in Ireland and throughout Europe eventually became a noted concern. Jeremy MacClancy (2015), whose own work examines the role of newcomers, or blow-ins, in a rural west Ireland village, has been particularly critical on this point and notes that the shift toward the urban and the apparently modern has left a concerning gap. Marion Demossier (2011) points to a shift away from the rural in anthropology as a European-wide phenomenon that should be rectified, especially given the increasingly broad role agriculture is supposed to fulfill in multifunctional rhetoric. As evidence of this shift, MacClancy notes, among others, turn-of-the-century texts such as Irène Bellier and Wilson's (2000) *Anthropology of the EU*, John Borneman and Nick Fowler's (1997) review, and Jaro Stacul and colleagues' (2006) review of population movement in the EU—all of which failed to account for rural areas altogether. MacClancy's work argues for a return to the rural and, among others (Gray 2000; Heatherington 2011), highlights the dynamic and changing nature of the countryside as important points of focus.

I see the present book as contributing to an ethnographic discussion of rural Ireland, where rurality is not the emptying home of tired traditionalism (MacClancy 2015) but a site of important processes, including those of Europeanization and globalization, and—important for this manuscript—a space where the broader processes of neoliberal conservation, green development, and green policy manifest. While MacClancy's observations show that rural ethnographies are perhaps less abundant than our time demands, many are still doing this critical work and increasingly do so in the context of environmental change, political change, or both. To this end, Shutes's (2015a) observations of how ecology and economy can jointly produce flexible social relationships on farms will be a thread picked up in upcoming chapters. Likewise, Kirby's (2013) exploration of the nature of capitalism in rural Ireland; Paul Collinson's (2015) research at the intersection of environmental attitudes and local politics; Tony Varley's critical account of agricultural modernization (Moser and Varley 2013), rural populism (Varley and Curtin 2002), and rural partnerships (Varley and Curtin 2006); and Wilson's past and ongoing work on the implications of Europeanization in Ireland and across Europe (Bellier and Wilson 2000; Ilieva and Wilson 2011; Wilson 2013) are central to my understanding of contemporary politics and ecology in rural Ireland.

Building on lessons learned in prior research, I approach community members as resilient, active participants in life, where process rather than a typology of community is my focus and landscape rather than village is the scale. Yet, it is also important to remember that the lure of rural romanticism and crumbling communities in the face of modernity is not a trend bound to mid-twentieth-century anthropology. While critical examination by academics has resulted in fuller portraits of Irish lives, such ideas have remarkable staying power in mainstream and political discourse. The core of such “myths that defined Ireland” (Egan and Murphy 2015, 137) is more insidious and more broadly applicable than can be contained within the bounds of a single discipline and place. Marginality, decline, bounded culture, and backwardness are colonial tools, and they are as common in neoliberal (and green) agendas today as they have been in decades past; subsequently, they demand attention in the coming pages.

Yet, as Wilson and Donnan (2006) point out, it is not because of a recognition that communities are perhaps less stable and identifiable than previously discussed and its inhabitants less uniform that place should not be a focus. In contrast, they remind us that the politics of identity are also the politics of community, and both are about the politics of place (115). In a similar line of thought, MacClancy (2015, 7) writes that “political discourses of rurality are not stable, and it is the job of anthropologists to track and analyze their continuing evolution.” The importance of place is now clearer than ever, particularly in contributing to and informing contemporary policy and understanding how the contradictions inherent in the political are experienced by those living on the land.

THE POLITICS OF ENVIRONMENT

Beyond anthropology, the domain I draw from most for this book is the kaleidoscope of material often understood as political ecology, which, at its broadest, refers to an analytical approach that recognises power and institutions’ role in shaping human-environment relations. The history of political ecology is often traced through two dominant trajectories, the earliest focusing on the material realities of the natural world and the distribution of resources. In this domain, an often-cited definition of political ecology comes from Michael Watts (2000, 257), wherein a political ecology approach aims to understand the complex relationship between humans and their environment by paying particular attention to forms of access and control over resources and their implications for livelihood and environmental health. A second thread of political ecology emerged in the 1990s, emphasizing the capacity for discourse to shape human-environment experiences and increasingly recognizing the contingency of nature as a concept (see Tetreault 2017 for a rich

discussion of these two approaches). Scholars who take this approach pay particular attention to meaning, value, and the epistemological and ontological assumptions inherent in the very idea of nature or resource. The latter approach is what I draw from most, as I am interested in how landscape is discursively constructed and nature more broadly imagined. More generally, while diverse approaches to political ecology are abundant, I'm inclined to agree with Paul Robbins (2019), who argues that a common thread in all political ecology is the rejection of apolitical ecology—that is, the argument that environmental problems can be understood through such lenses as resource scarcity, population pressure, or want of modernization without considering the influence of political structures.

Moreso, these approaches need not be exclusive of each other. Instead, I see an emphasis on the materialities of resource access, control, and risk or on discourse and meaning to be threads in the broader attempt to understand how systems of power shape the non-human environment and people's relation to it. As Arturo Escobar (1999) outlines succinctly, the crisis of nature is also the crisis of nature's identity, a truth that does not dispute nature's biophysical reality but emphasizes that what we perceive as natural is also cultural and social. The power of this recognition is seen in the examples offered by scholars working to dissect contemporary understandings of landscape and insist on the fundamental importance of diachronic readings of land and people, regardless of their placement as political ecology or not. For example, James Fairhead and Melissa Leach's (1995) groundbreaking study of forest dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa, Raymond Williams's (1975) examination of the countryside in Britain, and Roderick Frazier Nash's (2001 [1967]) exploration of wilderness in the United States critically examine what is natural or material; from that, they build in-depth detail of the cultural priorities and anxieties of their chosen communities over time. My inclusion of the historical perspective of power and environment in parallel with the more contemporary-oriented political ecology is deliberate. In Ireland, there is no escaping history; furthermore, neither the material truths of resource distribution and state power nor the interpretive and cultural value of land should be sidestepped or neatly disentangled from each other. Still, we are left with the simple truth, as Robbins (2019) aptly points out, that there is no ecology without politics and no politics without ecology.

A valuable tool in understanding this entanglement is recognizing that individuals live with the ongoing process of statecraft and, increasingly, modern environmental statehood. Statecraft is the making of the modern state, a recognition that nations do not exist as isolated, unchanging entities but are continuously made through processes, one of which, as James C. Scott (1998) argues, is the administrative simplification of nature and space. Statecraft, as Scott outlines, is devoted to rationalizing and standardizing what was a social hieroglyph into a legible

and administrability more convenient format. The term *legibility* is central to my study—that is, paying particular attention to how the state creates space, nature, and people as legible items to be tracked, ordered, profited from, and managed. Scott's work has been important for many scholars who work with the debris of social and environmental simplification, a process that never fully represents reality and tends to leave a host of problems in its wake. Throughout this account of upland farming, I draw from Scott, exploring how simplified narratives of nature (or resources) ease the state's conflicting goals for development and conservation. This political exploration is done less with a focus on specific political actors or parties and more through attention to policies, schemes, and regulations that turn agriculture into a bureaucratic exercise.

As environmental problems increasingly demand organized interventions, however, the ongoing work of statecraft also involves environmental statehood, that is, the combination of discursive, ideological, and material efforts by the state to deal with socioecological problems (Ioris 2014). Antonio Ioris argues that the search for sound environmental management by many states constitutes a strategy to preserve existing economic activities, often those that depend on appropriating and exploiting common resources (4). While many states increasingly address a wide range of environmental problems through policy, laws, and programs, the state plays the role of mediator of socioecological conflict and a driver of additional environmental change. Ioris's work lays out the long process of bringing the commons into mainstream socioeconomic activities, including how the language of environmental governance and its associated concepts of green economy, ecological modernization, and sustainable development (98) fit well within the neoliberal model—which emphasizes the importance of private property, rational management, individualistic values, and short-term economic priorities. Ioris (100) lays out the contradictions inherent in the neoliberalization of socio-nature as follows: "On the one hand, the neoliberal state has had to react to pressing demands to resolve environmental degradation and related conflicts, which has required some level of state independence from the groups involved in disputes. On the other hand, the advance of neoliberalism by the state has been an integral driving-force behind the reinvigoration of capitalist social relations, which makes it permeable to hegemonic political interests and undermines its ability to contain the environmental degradation caused by capital accumulation pressures."

An Irish example of this process is provided by Mark Boyle (2002), who explores this tendency of statehood through the political application of scale in Ireland around waste management, arguing that by scaling ecological problems or potential fixes in a certain way—that is, central or local—the Irish state can ensure the legitimacy of its own regime of accumulation while promoting certain kinds of

interventions and foreclosing others. Boyle argues that the Irish state appears to be more concerned about organizing consent around acceptable pollution levels rather than radically attacking the root of the problem in the first place, suggesting that waste itself is a threat to the Irish state—a material manifestation of the cracks in its own logic. In a different example, Ireland's commitment to the importance of private property and rational management is laid out in Patricia Wood's (2017) work with Irish Travellers. Wood argues that the policing of Travellers, particularly those who keep horses, is part of a landscape transformation led by the Irish state that aims to modernize rural landscapes toward intensive dairy and beef production. Wood argues that through this process, land came to have new and lucrative potential for development, and state actors had an increased aversion toward "disorderly" land that did not fully benefit the state. Much like my own argument, both Boyle and Wood illuminate how state-led visions and narratives of what land and people should be have material consequences for local human-environment relations.

Of course, environmental statehood tends to extend beyond the borders of a single nation. Extensive anthropological work has taken place in the domain of European integration, the process of bringing member states together in an "ever closer union," and Europeanization, the complex processes of making people, ideas, practices, and institutions more cohesively European (Ilieva and Wilson 2011). These twin processes materially shape people's lives across Europe, but they are also transformative for society as a whole. Wilson in particular has been building an anthropology of Europeanization for some time (Bellier and Wilson 2000; Ilieva and Wilson 2011; Wilson 1993, 2013) and has emphasized the relevance of anthropological models in understanding what the EU may mean in citizens' everyday lives (1993, 3). Most anthropologists today would be hard-pressed not to incorporate European influences into even the most site-specific work. Shutes's (2015b) examination of decision-making and control in an Irish farming community, for example, is grounded in a query of how individual farmers respond to the programs and incentives available to them through EU priorities. Europeanization, as "spirit, vision, and process" (Borneman and Fowler 1997, 510), is part of people's lives at almost every scale, shaping political systems, economic opportunities, education, identities, and so on. As Cris Shore's (2000) ethnography of the work of Europeanization shows, it is also a deliberate strategy that aims to shape European identity, cultural heritage, symbols, and ideas of citizenship through practices and discourses that weave their way into the lives of Europeans in multiple ways. In such a way and in the Irish context more broadly, concern with statecraft and environmental statehood must inherently also consider the influence of EU policies and priorities.

Of particular relevance for this project are the ways Europeanization through environmental policy has led to significant changes within the state, moving

environmental concerns to the foreground of state development and supporting a constellation of shifting programs that subsidize small upland farms. Many of these programs require farmers to adjust their farm activities to receive payment. Despite the impact of such programs on farm viability, many have argued that such changes have not led to a paradigm shift in Irish planning. For example, Bernadette Connaughton (2010) argues that Ireland is generally slow to change, with drawn-out implementation processes and reprimands from Europe needed before concrete action is taken. Likewise, others have suggested that EU environmental plans are met with delays, politicking, and general mismanagement in Ireland. For example, Brendan Flynn (2009) traces the implementation of the Birds Directive (a piece of legislation that directly led to the SPA in upland Duhallow), suggesting that its application was half-hearted and minimalist and that it gave in to the demands of “lobby groups.” Flynn goes so far as to suggest that farmers who want compensation for lost value because of designation (many of the farmers I was working with) were “rent-seeking” lobby groups who needed to be “bought off.” While Duhallow and most marginal Irish regions more generally are seldom the direct focus of such broad-level discussion, they are nevertheless often the subjects of its articulation, the material manifestation of such discursive and legislative volleying.

My intent in this brief summary is to emphasize that the processes and tensions that are part of statecraft and environmental statehood are woven into upland livelihood. The physical making and unmaking of places, together with the discursive construction of resources, political initiatives, and history, are part of residents’ everyday lives. Anthropology’s focus on the everyday, mundane aspects of life and its commitment to engaged methods that prioritize local values have a critical role in telling this story. In particular, contemporary anthropologists can articulate the context within which people live their lives, not through romanticizing and narrowing such features into unchanging constructs of place and community but through leaning into the tension inherent within them.

TURNING TO LANDSCAPE

I stated earlier that this book is an ethnographic account of the relationship between land and Irish upland farmers. Through this relationship, I see most clearly the conflicting aspirations of various powerful others downloaded onto the shoulders of people who must navigate resulting tensions through everyday decisions. As Anu Lounela and colleagues (2019, 9) point out, in the context of the massive environmental challenges facing us all, what is increasingly at issue “are landscapes as meaningful social and material entanglements and relations”—relations among institutions, neighbours, and nations but also extending to spirits, ancestors, winds,

daylight, and so on. This approach is also apparent in Ethel Crowley's (2006) *Land Matters*, a sociological examination of how the Irish countryside is subject to several competing constructions that discursively zone land for production or ecological purposes. For Crowley, like me, landscape is the intersection of intimate and specific lived realities with broader, often global, processes. Landscape is both physical description (topography) and emotional experience, both of which incorporate the collective presence of people and the non-human world, the past and the present, physical attributes and associative values (McGrath 2013).

Duhallow as landscape and landscape as social and material entanglement determine the parameters of this inquiry. I understand environments as the consequence of continuous human and non-human entanglements, and the idea of socio-nature is a recognition of this entanglement—of the political, ecological, social, and natural, which co-produce any given place. In this way, I ground this work in the engagement of farmers who dwell in this region, at once sensed, lived, and imagined—not as something separate from themselves but, drawing from Tim Ingold (2000) and others who have followed his suit, as organisms in their environment co-creating the world in which they live.

However, while this is my starting point, many of the following pages describe conversations that occurred not in fields but in offices. In the last few decades, it has become apparent that humans want increasingly more from their environments. Subsequently, greener energy production and consumable products often add to human demands rather than replace or lessen them (Hughes 2021). Likewise, as my early discussion of environmental statehood indicates, conservation efforts increasingly add onto, rather than genuinely shift, the kinds of engagements people have with the other-than-human. As a local example, chapter 4 introduces a bureaucrat who tells me that “we [various government departments] are all chasing the same marginal land.” He said this while discussing the unrealistic land-use goals set before him and his colleagues and how each of them desires something different from the same scarce resource. In this context, I discuss the curation of landscapes—that is, how places can be discursively cultivated through emphasizing, rationalizing, or simplifying landscape features and inhabitants in language, *combined* with policy and regulation that materially shape livelihoods.

Landscape as a concept foregrounds places, scales, processes, and the links between them. Increasingly freed from tight geographic boundaries, it helps visualize international flows that are a part of people's lives. For example, while most of the residents I spoke to framed the European Union as somewhere “over there” rather than “right here,” all were in agreement that European policy, especially such things as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), is a central component of upland farming and livelihood. The European Union is a major agent of social change within

its member states. Indeed, Collinson (2005), in his work in County Donegal, has argued that the influence of the EU—particularly through various funding schemes that are built off of such central concepts as subsidiarity, partnership, participation, social exclusion, and community—can go so far as to reshape local power relations. But what exactly is the EU? As Bellier and Wilson (2000) pointed out twenty-five years ago, the EU is many things at once—a formal institutional integration of economic and political structures based on international treaties, to be sure, but also the institutions within those treaties, as well as the wider evolving social systems of its member states within which nearly everything is impacted. More so perhaps, the EU is an arena of cultural relations set in almost continuous redefinition. However you define it, the EU is undoubtedly a part of Duhallow, although residents might not always feel the inverse is true. A phenomenological approach to landscape does not need to exclude such political aspects; instead, it is in full bodily engagement with all around us, including people, animals, and soil, where politics manifest.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

Between each pair of main chapters of this book, readers will find short stories that invite an examination of the various relationships that co-occur with those described in this book. These stories explore the world-making activities of non-human companions alongside the logic and impact of decision-making processes that alternatively welcome or discourage particular types of residents, both human and otherwise. I have borrowed this presentation of a brief rush of stories from Anna Tsing (2015), who deftly urges us all to lean into messy multi-species entanglements. In presenting such stories, I mean to counter the ontological flattening present within the legislative meanderings that dominate these chapters. By ontological flattening, I mean the ways the heterogeneity of life-worlds is translated into one-dimensional categories of market exchange (Fitz-Henry 2017), wherein the natural world is fragmented and flattened into exchangeable units dominant in the green economy and where non-human natures become legible as natural capital (Sullivan 2014)—farms and farmers as firms, forests as carbon and raw material production centres, fields measured in outputs.

In contrast, these stories are about landscape as gatherings in the making: gatherings of humans, non-humans, animate and inanimate features, at once engaging in collaborative and precarious survival, resulting in heterogeneous patches of activity and weedy configurations (Tsing 2019). Existing within different timelines, scales, and entangled relations, such features are collectively the essence of the Duhallow landscape, and they disrupt, or perhaps even contradict, the book's primary chapters. These stories introduce several of the simultaneous gatherings I became aware

of during fieldwork and are perhaps more likely to confuse than clarify. It is not my intent to clean them up and produce legibility but instead to hint at the cacophony of relations, processes, and beings that are part of upland livelihood.

Chapter 2 examines the marginal land narrative over time. The idea that this area is “poor land,” “marginal,” “wet,” and “shit” in comparison to the green fields of the lowlands is established by sharing local stories from both farmers and officials. The chapter then moves on to a concise genealogy of marginal land in Ireland, which undoes this accepted truth by locating the concept within ever-shifting national goals of development and progress. Recent praise of high nature value farming for its ecological benefits—which, at its core, is an acknowledgment of non-intensive and less productive land use—completes this discussion as farmers and bureaucrats struggle to see such land through a new lens. In taking this trajectory, this chapter establishes the connection between shifting definitions of marginal and changing national development priorities. Rather than a material descriptor of land type, the idea of marginal lands and communities is grounded in the failure of locals (human and non-human) to cooperate with attempts to produce scalable and homogeneous outputs.

In the following chapter I explore the connection among inheritance, work, land, and gender. The family farm model is an important part of Irish farm structure and decision-making. In acknowledging that the rural demise narrative—a straightforward and simplified approach to rural history—fails to account for why rural communities continue to exist, this chapter casts a wide net to examine the work of community building in part by extending farm labour to the community more generally.

Chapter 4 is grounded in farmers’ experiences with regulation changes and “farming to scheme” (conducting the minimum amount of work necessary to benefit from payment schemes). This chapter explores how bureaucracy is materially, discursively, and conceptually woven throughout farming and lived as a series of specific rules attached to various payment schemes and land designations. The sense and absurdity of intersecting regulations is told through local experiences. For instance, small fields are painstakingly cut in strips to cultivate biodiverse habitats set within a sea of dense monoculture forests. Much of this chapter also focuses on interviews with various government workers and their perception of interdepartmental uncertainty regarding jurisdiction, regulatory confusion, and access points for land users. The chapter concludes by arguing that Duhallow, as told through government mechanisms such as policy, and the fields and hills themselves cultivate two separate places—one as told on paper and one as lived by farmers.

Both detested and celebrated, at the centre of Duhallow landscape and discourse are conifer plantations, and chapter 5 focuses on this forest model. In parts of Duhallow, plantations cover a significant portion of the landscape, a number that would be higher if the Special Protected Area had not placed a temporary

moratorium on planting. Dense, linear, and dark, these near-monocultures have come to dominate most hillsides. This chapter explores the intense debate currently unfolding in Ireland about the core nature of such forests. I argue that far from economic machines that support biodiversity, they are more akin to green illusions whose economic and environmental impact discourages people from remaining in the countryside. The discursive techniques of borrowing from the broad cultural capital of forests as fundamentally beneficial are traced through regional, national, and European Union–level policies, which shift the meaning of plantations on paper while the material form remains unchanged. This story is then further confused by introducing upland farmers who dislike forests and see them as “community killers” but who work to regain their right to plant trees within their Special Protected farming areas. This contradiction is unpacked by outlining the entwined nature of land prices, farming, wind turbines, and forest plantations with flexible upland livelihoods. The facts that forest must remain so in perpetuity and that farmers themselves are responsible for the costs of replanting and maintenance after the first harvest and state-funded fifteen-year annual payments emphasize the degree to which national priorities materially and symbolically shape local landscapes. The labour of keeping up such narratives falls on the shoulders of local residents who navigate the tensions between creating the desired landscapes and benefiting from the brief economic opportunities that are possible on poor land. This chapter concludes that the widespread upland afforestation has made advances in making land productively cooperative while simultaneously severing the ties between farmer and farm.

Chapter 6 outlines Duhallow residents’ creative engagements with the local and global economies. Rather than development-oriented policies wiping out the small farm as predicted, farms and farming families have changed their shape, output, and structure while firmly remaining tied to the idea of inherited farms. When you encounter a resident in Duhallow, you are likely speaking to a farmer even if the person is foremost the local doctor, plumber, office worker, or schoolteacher. Each person, or their children or siblings, is likely to live on a small family farm. If married, each also probably has a spouse with similar connections. In addition to farming to scheme, most farmers have several income-generating methods, including renting out farm equipment, transporting local cattle, or receiving monies from children or siblings abroad or in the city. Peri-capitalism is an acknowledgment of those income-making activities that occur outside of the regularly sanctioned work and wage system and that may fall more within the domestic economy. Rather than failed projects, peri-capitalist activities are central to the functioning of an economic system that can never entirely provide for the needs of all actors. This chapter points to the reality that flexible, adaptive economies are central to upland livelihoods and have always been important to the cultural and economic systems

of marginal rural areas more generally. Moreover, this flexibility is part of the core thread that connects farm and farmer in areas where the land itself can be seen as a burden even to those who work tirelessly to keep it. I argue that an unanticipated consequence of the Special Protected Area in Duhallow is how it has limited such flexible opportunities, including wind energy and afforestation.

The concluding chapter places the book's central arguments within a discussion of upland futures more generally. Collectively, these arguments act as a material reminder that the enticing futures brought into view through the shallow rhetoric of green development are not innocent. Real landscapes and residents are forced to navigate their consequences while often simultaneously labouring to produce them. However, the flexible nature of rural livelihood likewise incorporates or obfuscates the cyclical opportunities and limits that come with shifting bureaucratic landscape management. What farming, rural living, and land ownership mean has historically been adaptable and continues to be so. For the moment, EU efforts to support the link between small farmers and farms through basic farm payments are, at least in some cases, having the desired effect. Yet until the ideas of productivity and marginality themselves are challenged as core assumptions of what it means to have good land and to be a good farmer, efforts to reshape the human-environment relationship will remain conceptual rather than material, adding yet another layer of symbolic meaning onto an already overburdened region.

Elusive Characters

Non-human species and processes are important parts of world making. In recognition of this simple truth, many people are directly concerned with the minutiae of non-human agency. For example, land-use planners, conservation biologists, or farmers might work to cultivate certain species and processes, track small bodies as they move across the fields and sky, plant trees with roots that will, it is hoped, hold soil still, or attempt through other means to hold soil still when given to the embrace of water. As much as these moments represent the attempted containment of environmental processes, they likewise emphasize how much is unknown and how things like movement—of water, dirt, animals, and time—remain outside human control. While most of my time in Duhallow was human-centric, I still found myself engaged in counting (birds and plucking posts), containing (plants and germs), moving (cows and plants), shaping (forests, fields, and rivers), and talking about these activities and the various creatures that fill human lives.

For instance, one day I had the opportunity to spend an afternoon with a local scientist and summer student who were working to assess the types and numbers of predators of ground-nesting birds. The site we visited was at the source of the Blackwater River, Ireland's second-largest river. This area would have been indistinguishable from others I had been exploring with farmers if not for the presence of a bench and a few signs indicating the water source (figure 2). The Blackwater River begins in a boggy upland area with a trickling of water too small to call a stream



Figure 2. A sign leading to a short walkway into bog indicates the source of the Blackwater River. Author photo.

seeping out from dense grasses. The water gathers at the base of a shallow valley and eventually heads downhill to welcome similar flows into its body until it is recognizable as a river.

We were there to move mammal traps and spent roughly one-and-a-half hours walking bog to pick up cages baited with raw chicken. Each cage had a



Figure 3. Four predator traps freshly baited and waiting to be placed. Author photo.

motion-activated camera that would take an image if an animal tried to steal the bait, and the camera cards needed to be downloaded or swapped out at regular intervals. The team was tracking mammals that were in the area of potential hen harrier nests. The summer student, who had spent months moving traps and reviewing the data, told me they primarily saw fox and other bird species in the photos, although marten and mink made a rare appearance. With each trap, we picked up the stinky cage, brought it back to the truck, downloaded the images, re-baited, and then walked to a different area and set it up again. Each transect had five cages, 100 metres apart. They would stay with a transect for two weeks and then move to another (figure 3).

Small mammals are tricky to track in Ireland, particularly the fox—an animal I heard about in casual conversations with farmers and scientists. It was often on the edge of our discussions although seldom a focus, much as in real life. The red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) is common in rural and urban areas throughout Ireland. Elusive and nocturnal, foxes tend to stay where cover is abundant, particularly along forest edges. For this reason, many farmers feel that tree plantations increase fox predation of chickens, farmed mink, and pets. Fox predation of hen harrier nests is a concern of conservationists (McMillan 2014); however, tracking exact instances is

tricky. On two occasions, I learned of predated hen harrier nests from scientists monitoring the bird; the monitoring team thought it was likely a fox, and I could tell they felt the setback strongly. Because foxes are opportunistic champions, their numbers are high throughout the country, and many farmers target the species when seen on their property.

I later learned that the red fox is of interest for other reasons beyond its problematic appetite. It is also an easy host for a wide variety of other organisms that make worlds within the fox and, as a vector, other species. For example, *Angiostrongylus vasorum* is a nematode (an insect with a smooth, unsegmented body, sometimes referred to as roundworm) that can infect dogs and lead to life-threatening illness. A recent study of samples across Ireland found a 39.9 percent positivity rate for *Angiostrongylus vasorum* among foxes, the second-highest rate in Europe (McCarthy et al. 2016). Other studies have also explored the fox as host for *Alaria alata*, an intestinal parasite (Murphy et al. 2012), and hookworm (*U. stenocephala*), among others (Wolfe et al. 2001). In the local survey I helped conduct concerning hen harriers, numerous farmers stated that they felt the fox was a problematic species, although none expanded on their concerns of predation to include the fox as a host.

All of the above research, including the project I briefly engaged in, acknowledged non-human species' capacity to shape or create a landscape. If there are landscapes on a leaf and a continent (Tsing 2019), surely there are landscapes within a fox. Yet the details of these entanglements are murky; for scientists and farmers alike, the fox is an elusive, ever-present companion, and I (unsurprisingly) did not come across a fox myself—although perhaps one encountered me.