

THE SOUTHERN QUESTION AND THE IRISH QUESTION: A SOCIAL MOVEMENT PERSPECTIVE¹

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This chapter draws on Gramsci to theorise the specificities of Irish social movements, focusing on migration *out of* Ireland; the role of “outsiders” to the local community within Irish activism; and the recent upsurge in international migration to Ireland. Gramsci offers a powerful point of reference, not as decontextualized theorist but the leader of a severely repressed party on the brink of clandestinity, deeply concerned with regional and national particularity in order to organise more effectively; theorising intellectual activity to explore the classed development of social movements; concerned with hegemony not simply to understand but also to overthrow; and laying the groundwork for the cross-class alliances of the anti-fascist Resistance.

Thinking Social Movement Landscapes

The question of how to characterise a particular movement landscape should be fundamental, but much research on Irish movements sidelines it, whether out of provincialism or the assumption that Ireland is fundamentally similar to the core countries where most research and theory is produced. Such analyses ignore Ireland’s unusual status as an island where peasant struggles succeeded in producing a land reform which transformed rural class relationships and land ownership; the Republic’s situation as a west European state founded by an anti-colonial movement; or the North’s shaping by four decades of social movement conflict. The Republic is one of very few states where popular movements successfully

defeated nuclear power, and the impact of women's, GLBTQ and survivor movements on religious power is equally striking globally (Cox 2010a). The 'Rosspport' struggle against Shell's pipeline stands out for its fifteen-year resistance to one of the world's largest companies, while popular resistance to water charges is the latest in a series of substantial challenges to EU politics.

More formally, the concept of a social movement landscape indicates

- (1) underlying features of *how social movements work* in a particular context, whether city-level (Vester 1993), regional, national or wider (Flesher Fominaya and Cox 2013);
- (2) that movements cannot fully be understood in isolation, but must be seen within a system of characteristic alliances and oppositions – linking different “movement families” but also typical alliances *between* these (solidarity) and with movements from above (collusion). In capitalist societies, *some* degree of the latter is a normal part of hegemony, and crisis consists at least in part of movements disrupting such alliances;
- (3) that as with Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) cleavage structures, which in part reflect these and act back on them, movement landscapes are relatively long-lasting, defining the “business as usual” context within which movements and their opponents operate; only in moments of crisis, when social groups move from passivity to mobilisation, detach themselves from previous alliances and form new ones, are these cards substantially shuffled;
- (4) that understanding movement landscapes requires attention both to prior movement history and to present-day power relationships across the whole society.

Existing analyses

While parallels have been drawn between Irish movements and Mediterranean (Tovey 2007) or Latin American movements, the only sustained analysis of the specificities of Irish social movements is the Marxist tradition initiated by James Connolly (1910) in terms of “labour and nation”, socialism and republicanism, etc. Such analyses of movements in terms of ethnicity and empire have long been central to Marxist writing on Ireland.

This approach explains much about Northern Irish politics and the relationship between southern movements and Irish Catholic identity; these dimensions are key to the best analysis of the Irish women’s movement (Coulter 1993) as well as Tovey (1993) and R. Allen’s (2004) accounts of rural struggles over industrial development – all identifying tensions of social class and ethno-cultural identity. Nonetheless, there is much that this approach does not tell us.

Because of the historical matrix of Connolly’s original formulation and the centrality of the Northern Irish conflict to state-oriented political thought, far less attention has been given to understanding the characteristics of the Republic and southern Catholicism as ‘ethnic’ (rather than religious) identity (Cox 2013). Post-colonial writing does enable recognising that society in the South is in important ways a once-subaltern social movement which has produced a state, a dominant ethnicity, and other key social institutions (a situation common in the majority world) - but has far less to say about contemporary movements.

Understanding movement success, defeat and subordination

My “Gramsci in Mayo” (2011) attempted a critique of “labour and nation” accounts from the perspective of the losers in the construction of present-day Ireland (subsistence farmers, landless labourers, “relatives assisting” and so on), noting the subordination of the labour and women’s movement to Catholic nationalism; the breadth of popular mobilisation until the 1950s in support of the new state and Catholic supremacy, paralleling aspects of the continental fascism admired by De Valera and Blueshirts alike; the use of national-developmentalism to construct hegemonic relationships, paralleling other post-colonial contexts; and the extent of collusion with the vast carceral complex and political conservatism of ‘Dev’s Ireland’.

In cleavage terms, the new state was defined by movements representing the pre-independence ‘periphery’ vis-à-vis those identifying with the one-time ‘core’. Irish movement history is not simply post-colonial history: it is also shaped by popular collusion with authoritarian cultural nationalism. Connolly’s last-instance loyalty to church and nation mirrors this, and offers few resources for breaking with a hegemony grounded in ‘Irish, Catholic, nationalist’ identities and deeply embedded in popular culture.

In terms of (partial and very ambiguous) movement success, we lack serious studies of this first process of movement institutionalisation, the frequent post-colonial outcome of “movement-become-state” (Cox and Nilsen 2014). A Gramscian analysis would ask how the remarkable levels of self-organisation visible in the Land War, the cultural nationalist project and the dual-power structures of the War of Independence were channelled, contained and ultimately demobilised during the long Irish Revolution (say 1879 - 1924), and how rural and urban workers, women and small farmers in the 1910s were split by nationalism and the First World War, used as footsoldiers for the nationalist cause and by the mid-1920s put firmly back into their various boxes.

A key element here would be exploring the “armour of coercion” which protects hegemonic relationships (Gramsci 1999: 532). In the Irish context this means how carceral Catholicism and anti-Republicanism policed the boundaries of acceptability. Anti-republicanism, together with anti-communism and attacks on atheists etc., worked well for much of the 20th century to contain popular movements within a broad framework of loyalty to the established order (including self-policing even while protesting; ní Dhorchaigh and Cox 2011); while carceral Catholicism traumatised those who broke with ethnic norms and rewarded respectability.

Gramsci in Mayo

Understanding the national and regional peculiarities of movement organising was central to Gramsci’s thought. As a radical organiser during the revolutionary years 1919-20 and party leader in a period of European and national defeat and Stalinisation in Russia (Daniele 1999), many questions arose. Why did the revolutionary years produce a socialist state in Russia, a nationalist one in southern Ireland, the fall of the Kaiserreich - but also so many defeats? How should the Italian party respond to rising fascism and repeated insurrectionary failure in Germany? How should its leadership argue their national case in the Comintern’s internal struggles?

Regionally, Gramsci (who had started as a Sardinian nationalist, opposed Northern racism against Southern migrants and argued for alliances between Northern workers and Southern peasants) was interested in the potential for a *nationally* hegemonic party connecting regional and national specificities; the *Prison Notebooks* pay great attention to specificity. In this respect, Gramsci is a more robust thinker than Connolly, who preferred to dismiss these differences (and, perhaps, ultimately fell victim to them).²

*Antonù su gobbu*³

I often explain Sardinia to Irish students as the Mayo of Italy. Gramsci's Sardinia was remote and peripheral, a land of poor tenant farmers with a largely alien ruling class (of which his father formed part until his imprisonment), from which migrant workers such as his brother travelled to the Turin factories, others found work in mining and the occasional bright boy like himself could escape on a scholarship. The South bore a similar relationship to the North as did Ireland to Britain, and his analysis of Southern politics is directly relevant to theorising Irish movements.

Gramsci constantly attempts to understand the "South and islands": his analysis of Italian unification in terms of the extension of Northern political and economic power, for example. His analysis of clientelist power relationships and the ability of "traditional" intellectuals such as the village priest, doctor, lawyer etc. to represent local peasant needs bears directly on Curtin and Varley's (1995) analysis of "consensual" community development in rural Ireland, where local notables are identified with the "community"⁴.

Again unlike Connolly (but both arguing against the mainstream of a core-based, uncritically modernist labour movement), Gramsci does not exclude a *critique* of peasant culture, local particularism and cross-class nationalism in his struggle to build alliances between peripheral peasants and metropolitan workers. In this analogy, the equivalent to Turin would not be Dublin but Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Boston, New York or Chicago. What in Gramsci are internal politics would then be mutually critical and supportive international solidarity, as his wider European politics were.

In the broadest sense, a Gramscian analysis should grasp the peculiarity of Ireland as simultaneously ‘conservative province’ - like Bavaria or northeast Italy, a party system skewed far to the right and rooted in religious and rural conservatism – but also capable of the destruction of an aristocratic land-holding system by popular direct action; the breaking-apart of the core state of the world’s then-largest empire; or the defeat of nuclear power. It would do so by showing how the hegemonic relations constructed in the independence process were not simply repressive but involved co-optation through (partially) meeting some of the needs expressed by movements.

The Southern Question

Characteristically, the *Lyons Theses* (adopted at a Party congress in exile just prior to full-blown fascist dictatorship) and *Some Aspects of the Southern Question*, which Gramsci was working on up to his arrest, tackle these theoretical and strategic issues through concrete proposals and examples (Gramsci 1978)⁵.

Two of these, in the *Southern Question*, concern the politics of migrant Sardinian workers in Turin. In one case communists scuppered the attempts of emigrant middle classes to lead a cultural nationalist association and won poor migrants to a socialist education circle. In the other, more dramatically, migrants fraternised so effectively with a Sardinian regiment sent to put down a strike that it was withdrawn under cover of darkness. While the first story sets class above nation or region, the second recognises how these combine in practical identities: the soldiers had understood the workers they came to shoot as ‘gentry’, and it was the strikers’ Sardinian origin that led the soldiers to recognise their common situation.

Gramsci's third example highlights the developmental character of his Southern politics. Bitterly hostile to Northern racism, which saw Southern peasants and migrant workers as simply backward, he argued for building alliances of the poor, by supporting Southern peasants' efforts towards organising independently of from local elites. In the face of rigged Southern, the Turin communists offered to elect the radical (but anti-communist) Gaetano Salvemini to their own constituency, with no strings attached, as a peasant representative. This is practical solidarity with a peripheral movement whose problems are acknowledged, but treated as something to be overcome.

The *Southern Question* bears reading in full as Gramsci's most systematic attempt to theorise the relationship between metropolitan and peripheral *movements* in developing alliances geared towards emancipating both. If the Italian Resistance struck deep roots in rural areas and cities alike, and if the post-war left built genuine alliances of workers and peasants, this was partly due to Gramsci's earlier efforts to demolish Northern workers' role as modernist allies of Northern capital at the expense of the Southern poor (Magri 2011).

Thus a Gramscian analysis of Ireland has to analyse 'Sardinia' (Mayo, but more broadly the then-periphery, today's Republic) in relation to 'Turin' (Birmingham or Boston, but more broadly the then-core). Irish activists often note that extraordinarily high levels of migration over the past 175 years⁶ have disproportionately exported social discontent – emptying local politics of the poorest sections of society, the losers of the construction of a society dominated by small property-owners⁷. These were also the groups with the most radical traditions of struggle – landless labourers (Dunne 2014), subsistence farmers and urban workers. Ireland's present-day movement landscape can hardly be explained without these (literally) absent struggles. It is no accident that one of today's anti-austerity groups is called "We're Not Leaving".

If one country's emigrants are another country's immigrants, we cannot read the politics of migrant groups purely in terms of their new situation. We have to ask who people are *before they migrate*: what is their politics and how have they learned to organise? As with Sardinians in Turin, the politics of the Irish diaspora have been contradictory. Organising skills often enabled ethnic closure geared to monopolising jobs, with attendant racism (Ignatiev 1995) and right-wing religious politics. Chicago's Mayor Daley, or the NYPD, inherited the organising traditions of Catholic Emancipation. Conversely, many chose *not* to identify in these terms and rejected racism, religion and / or "Irish" community structures (MacVeigh 1996).

At times this politics was contested in dialectically transformative ways. Irish Catholic immigrants in late 19th century London held pitched battles with free-thinking English workers over the conflict between the Papal States and Italian nationalism. These conflicts were eventually resolved (after the Paris Commune ended French involvement) in joint opposition to British imperialism further afield (Cox 2010b). More broadly, Irish-identifying activists played individually radical roles on the left and in the labour movement abroad.

A Processual Theory of Irish Movements

Central to Gramsci's historical work is exploring the changing forms of state power. Gramsci (1966) offers us some important tools here, albeit often misread. Firstly, his intellectuals are *organisers* as much as *theorists*, exercising 'directive' as well as theoretical activity (Barker and Cox 2011). Thus the organic intellectuals with whom he hoped to form the new communist party were local trade union activists, peasant leaders and so on. The educational task of supporting this development (with Freirean overtones: Mayo 1999) was thus

inseparable from organising. The traditional intellectuals of village life are the local priest, doctor or lawyer - those formed by previous social formations.

Intellectuals are *organic* in that they are formed in the making of a new class (or, as with peasants, a class finally becoming a class-for-itself). It is not about people from particular backgrounds going to college, but how far the institutions, ideas and practices organisers draw on are *of the class, of the movement* rather than assimilating official ways of behaving. Orienting migrant activists towards the official pieties of constitutional politics, or education for individual social mobility, does not create organic intellectuals.

Organic intellectuals, in Gramsci, are equally often the intellectuals of the newly dominant class: managers, time-and-motion men - or today consultants, marketers, policy workers and so on. The massive formation of a new class who *believed in* the national-developmental project, and forged careers in the process, is such a development - as is the subsequent construction of the new private-sector service class which has yoked Ireland to multinational corporations and international financial institutions.

Movement, then, is practically expressed by the development of new organising groups - from above and below - and their alliances with old ('traditional') leadership groups, together with the infrastructure of social classes, class fractions or other social groups coming to self-consciousness, entering into political struggle and 'making themselves'. This is the problem with the 'betrayal by leaders' theory (K. Allen 1997) of the Irish working class; while there were contending intellectual groups, the consistent victory after 1913 of those who spoke for subordination and practiced co-option relied on popular reflexes of respectability, acceptance of the national economic project and a strong desire for 'mainstreaming' working-class institutions (Peillon 1982). The importance of the present is that not for a century has that leadership had such a fragile infrastructural base, because of state-driven austerity politics

and the breakdown of partnership. However the ‘ethnic’ identification which underpins subalternity remains powerful.

Hegemony in Ireland

Much Irish writing reads hegemony in disabling ways that present its success as inevitable and exclude effective popular agency, whether colluding with or breaking up hegemonic relations. However, a social group only becomes hegemonic to the extent that it succeeds in leading other groups, entailing subordinating some of its own corporate (particularist) interests and (partially) meeting its allies’ needs. It competes with other fractions within its own class, and employs coercion as well as consent: neither among the elite nor the wider population does it have or seek universal support. Hegemony is not permanent, but a fragile and temporary achievement measured in decades not centuries (Cox and Nilsen 2014).

Gramsci’s analysis of ‘common sense’ as a terrain of struggle against ‘good sense’ (grounded in practical, situated knowledge; Ytterstad 2011) is helpful here, explaining Ireland’s peculiar post-independence combination of practical cooperation with local power and *sotto voce* critique - contrasting with the dramatic ruptures of the independence movement.⁸

Reading the Republic as movement-become-state – land war underpinning independence – helps understand its subsequent politics. The postcolonial state claims a popular legitimacy, initially from these struggles and subsequently from the national-developmental project, even once replaced by neoliberalism. Radical movements struggle to be heard while significant popular groups accept this practical and intellectual leadership (and when the most

visible institutions of popular self-organisation, in labour, farming, women's or environmental movements, are constantly drawn on to renew national elites).

The process of Irish independence constructed an ethnic identity deeply bound up in the state and its characteristic forms of class and gendered power, and embedded in the structures of everyday life – family and friendship, the pub and the GAA, the priest and the schoolteacher, the policeman and the local politician. This is central to understanding the historical conservatism of rural Ireland. It also explains why 'blow-ins' (outsiders) have so often played a strategic role in movement struggles – and why the autonomous organisation of migrants who do *not* identify, or seek integration within, this conservative sense of 'Irishness' holds particular political potential.⁹

The 1960s and 70s saw a clear shift from the hegemonic alliance of 'Dev's Ireland' (national capital, large farming, and the church with the subordinate support of small farmers, small business, organised labour and women) to the beginnings of neo-liberalism: a shift to an IBEC led by multinational interests, with national capital and small business definitely subaltern; a long-term ditching of clerical power in favour of a 'liberal', modernising alliance with the new service class and women; two decades of conflict with labour and working-class communities followed by two decades of partnership. Thus even within the newer, modernising alliance there are a series of shifts: we are currently living through another one.

From below, proto-hegemony is a more Gramscian construct than counter-hegemony. A broad social alliance, around women's rights, Carnsore, more recently Rosspoint or water charges, is an aspect of the "war of position": creating a social coalition which *may* be able to fight a "war of manoeuvre" that actually shifts the main structures of power. Nuclear power was defeated and church power was at least partially dislodged. Such alliances - developing links between the working-class left, poorer rural interests and culturally radical movements -

hold significant *potential* which may or may not translate further. Among the internal opponents of such moves today are elite-oriented organisational leaderships seeking professionalization, access to policy-makers, funding, legal and media influence – but also cultural conservatives nervous about the effect on ‘people’ of significant challenges to everyday ethnic culture.

Our ‘lost revolutions’

The shift in hegemonic relations started from above, with the Lemass - Whitaker shift to foreign direct investment in the late 1950s, followed by the feminist challenge to religious and gendered power structures, union struggles and the massive local assertions of urban working-class communities in the 1970s and 1980s, along with the ecological confrontation with developmentalism at Carnsore and radical political experiments (Hanley and Millar 2009). These movements broke the localist, religious and mobilising aspects of earlier state policy – in interaction with the new hegemony.

The cultural radicalism of this period was resisted because of fears of fragmenting the broader “national-popular” consensus on which the power of the modernisers ultimately rested, but elites were forced to abandon the alliance with the church and offer limited policy gains (and, crucially, funding) to the women’s, gay and lesbian, environmental and community movements, while ex-activists took up positions of respectability in the liberal wings of mainstream political parties, state committees, academia and the media.

We need an *overall* analysis of this second wave of movement institutionalisation from the 1960s to the 1990s: how the slow retreat of church power (but not of Catholic self-

identification) in the face of the women's movement, GLBTQ activism and survivor organisations worked; how EEC membership led movement elites towards strategies of legal and media activism (hence professionalization) rather than popular struggle and alliance-building; more recent attempts to capture the capitalist high ground (the pink pound, green consumerism, fair trade and organic food); social partnership co-opting union leaderships, demobilising community struggle into state-driven service delivery and assimilating other movements; and the *rhetoric* of civil society, 'consultation' etc. (CAP 2000) in which participation became an end in itself.

Irish social partnership from the later 1980s thus seems less a late outlier from the continental pattern of *Keynesian* neo-corporatism and rather a holding pattern like the limited 'democratisations' of post-dictatorship Latin America: a national agreement not to rock the boat and to seek class harmony in the 'national interest', in some ways a 'passive revolution' taming these movements after a series of successful struggles, symbolised by the 1990 election of Mary Robinson – and the real power-holders' scramble to adapt. Now, once-radical 'outsider movements' found themselves currying favour with of the same petty-minded, provincial bureaucrats who had always opposed them, to gain or retain funding - entailing a retreat from radical politics. While this period also saw radical movements outside this consensus, their mobilising power was constrained by the broader pattern of co-optation. Since the mid-2000s, the state's repudiation of partnership, and subsequent austerity politics, are creating another situation. NGO and union leaderships are desperate to retain elements of the partnership they depend on. More radical forces find that the state's attack on partnership is widening discontent, but often lack the organisational capacity to make the necessary connections.

Eppur si muove, and this is the real theoretical problem: theories of movement often stop short when movements succeed, are absorbed within the state, become subaltern parts of dominant coalitions, etc. - while theories of state and society (still) minimise movements' role, even where the existence of Northern or Southern society and state can hardly be understood without movements: which are duly referenced, but not thought about. But the reality of movement finds ways to break through.

In particular, the 1970s and 1980s saw a strong development of international solidarity movements, including Cuba, South Africa, Nicaragua, Palestine and Mexico. These involved a mixture of returned migrants (often religious, radicalised in liberation theology), political refugees, long-distance nationalisms and 'blow-ins'. International solidarity is deeply complex (Aiken et al. 2014; Landy et al. 2014; Trott 2014; Waterman and Cox 2014); in Ireland, the bases for solidarity ranged (often within groups: Landy 2014) from a simplistic identification between 'oppressed nations' via democratic / human rights and Catholic social justice orientations to conscious support for popular revolutions.

The category of 'blow-ins' deserves particular attention. Because of intense ethnic closure, Irish community structure meant that outsiders, whether from elsewhere in Ireland or from other *Northern* societies (in a still semi-peripheral context) played a disproportionate role in most movements, NGOs and community organising. This often remains true today. Reasons include biographical availability: particularly in rural contexts, family and friendship obligations and social control placed particular constraints on 'locals', while 'blow-ins', if they did not marry in, found themselves constructing groups, events, projects and organisations of all kinds to combat isolation and make connections.

Another explanation is the strong 'taken-for-granted' characteristics of Irish social life, in which even returned migrants often leave their culturally radical experiences abroad behind

them on returning home (ní Laoire 2007). Ireland can be like Tolkien's Shire: political and cultural adventures happen elsewhere, while 'reality' means fitting back into an everyday life defined by a closed ethnic culture. Hence those who can never fully fit in have a constant need to explore alternative possibilities and, as Landy (2015) puts it, import an external habitus into the field of struggle; conversely, conservatives seek to delegitimise them as 'not really Irish'.

Gramsci in Turin

'The Southern Question' is shaped by Gramsci's own experience of chain migration to Turin and the politics of the Southern diaspora. What can we say, today, about the politics of immigrant organising in Ireland? Most immigration has taken place within the last two decades, with significant life choices for labour migrants at the start of the crisis (those who understand themselves as short-term visitors are less likely to organise). As Scharbrodt et al. observe (2015: 2), the obvious parallels are Portugal, Finland or Greece, traditionally emigrant countries which have only recently become net immigration countries (in the mid-1990s for Ireland).

As this immigration does not follow previous colonial relationships, migrant populations are extremely heterogeneous and for most individual ethnicities extremely small. Hence much effort goes towards informal support networks, community centres, Saturday language schools, religious venues etc., while political orientations for the first generation are shaped strongly by those acquired prior to migration and long-distance nationalisms are often significant.

In this context the older history of solidarity movements revived, as a widespread if fragmented process of majority-led groups involved in anti-racism, multiculturalism / migrant support and asylum-seeker solidarity / anti-deportation, with roots in grassroots left politics, community organising, religious motives and charity (Moran 2011: 120 – 22). However, the landscape was also shaped by a largely Irish-dominated NGO sector providing services *for* migrants in line with state and EU funding policies (Cullen 2009), by the context of social partnership and the broader clientelist political culture. Migrant activists thus had to decide their political orientation early on: whether to tailor their demands to what mainstream political allies presented as acceptable and attainable goals in a context of widespread racism, or to test the colder waters of self-organising on their own terms, with or without ‘native allies’. Similar choices were faced by majority-led migrant solidarity groups (Moran 2011: 125).

Autonomous migrant movements, then, have to be seen within a wider movement landscape – of movements in Ireland generally and the more immediate landscapes of ‘blow-ins’ in Irish organisations, of multicultural and anti-racist NGOs, international solidarity movements, grassroots asylum-seeker solidarity groups and migrant community networking and institution-building.

The Migrant Networks Project highlighted “lobbying, advocacy, outreach, information, training and support” as features of 436 migrant-led groups (most founded since 2001) which “provide essential services, participate in policy debates, implement strategies of cultural adaptation and resistance, create opportunities for individual and community advancement, and provide a platform [...] to become visible” (Lentin 2013: 77). Thus movement activity – let alone activity *not* primarily structured by state funding and seeking access to policy makers on consensual terms – is only a small part of migrants’ self-organising.¹⁰ As Landy (2014b) shows, migrant groups were deeply constrained in the form and content of their

2006-8 responses to the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill, because they were organised in ways dictated by the need for recognition as interlocutors within ‘partnership lite’ (Boucher 2008).

With small absolute numbers and limited second-generation numbers, the even smaller numbers engaged politically have an uphill battle to shape political identities that can articulate themselves independently. As elsewhere, much of this involves constructing wider identities, and organisations such as AkiDwA (originally for African women but now for migrant women generally) or the migrant-led Anti-Racism Network indicate one kind of identification (Lentin 2012) in sharp contrast to the involvement of African businessmen in the clientelistic Fianna Fáil, or the construction of an ‘Italian community’ led by businesses with embassy support.

The Empire strikes back

In 2004 the ‘racist referendum’ removed the citizenship rights of children born in Ireland, creating a blood-based citizenship and causing entirely foreseen hardship. 79 per cent of the (Irish) population voted in favour, with 63 per cent of yes voters understanding their vote in anti-immigrant terms. This dog-whistle politics marked the culmination of the process whereby the Irish in Ireland ‘became white’, a process also marked by an increasingly pro-NATO foreign policy and other signals of a ‘European’ identity defined against the majority world.

In this same period, however, autonomous solidarity activism outside ‘social partnership’ remained significant, notably Palestinian solidarity and anti-war movements, both connecting

members of the majority population and migrants. The February 2003 demonstration against the Iraq war was as large as any Irish protest ever. Meanwhile, direct action against US military use of Shannon airport, while small, included a wide range of Irish-born and migrant activists. Other solidarity activism is less visible: for example, support for Asian movements among Buddhist groups in Ireland, bringing together immigrant and majority members (Cox 2013, ch. 7).

Of particular interest is the solidarity between Irish Traveller organisations and Roma / Sinti movements in Europe, with the small Traveller groups seeking legitimacy, allies and skills from their European allies and extending solidarity to Roma / Sinti in Ireland. One key organisation, Pavee Point, became a 'Traveller and Roma Centre'; in July 2007 they offered solidarity to over 80 Roma left to fend for themselves on a motorway roundabout. This highly public support earned them an instant threat to their funding, underlining the political costs of activism and the difficulty of combining funded service provision with radical politics.

In this period, migrant-led organising autonomous from the state has grown, not least in response to these constraints. Key struggles have challenged 'direct provision' (the segregation of asylum seekers in isolated accommodation with minimal autonomy) and deportation, both striking at the hard core of state racism. Significant groups include the previously-mentioned Anti Racism Network; the migrant-led Anti Deportation Ireland, in alliance with direct provision residents (Lentin 2013: 81); and the more recent Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland (Flood 2014).

Ethnically and culturally outsider activists have consistently played a disproportionate role within Irish movements, and this seems set to continue. If Connolly could distribute election leaflets in Yiddish in 1902, the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign has consistently played a significant role on the Irish left; Irish and Polish anarchists collaborated in the mid-2000s to

produce Polish-language material; while in 2015 the radical wing of the Spanish diaspora joined Irish movements in organising a *Grassroots Strategy Weekend*. More generally, non-local activists (from elsewhere in the Republic, Northern Ireland, other Northern countries or the global South) continue to play a key role in most radical social movements.

Gramsci in West Dublin?

Since the mid-2000s, the combination of the radical alliance politics of the anti-capitalist movement (Cox 2006) and the crisis of partnership has provoked many *simulations* of movement coalitions. Practically, these have consisted of events aimed at elites (geared to publicity, lobbying or funding) and driven by organisational leaderships committed to restoring partnership – often tied to the pro-austerity Labour Party and in at least one case with material support from the employers’ organisation IBEC. Initially such events saw tables packed with bureaucrats horrified at the thought of street protests; more recently, the same basic practice has been rebranded with anti-austerity rhetoric, invocations of revolution, mentions of Latin America etc. Since the response from elites depends on the answer to the question “you and whose army?”, it becomes important to manipulate wider movements into believing that more serious social change is sought.

However, dramatic movements are now taking place *outside* such events, as massive popular resistance to water meter installation across working-class Dublin, rooted in local communities, places the state in crisis (Cox and Nilsen 2015, MacCionnaith 2015). In 2011, I raised the possibility of “an Irish M-15, Icelandic or Tahrir Square experience of mass

popular mobilisation against failed elites”, noting that “Labour and Fine Gael would have to lose all credibility in the way Icelandic politicians and Mubarak did”. I argued that:

“[S]omething more is needed: certainly the radical-democratic experience of mass mobilisation, but also the generalisation of struggle from public space to the compartmentalised worlds of workplace and school, family and church - and a serious settling of accounts with past responsibilities for collusion in corrupt politics and abusive institutions. This may seem impossible, but Ireland is a funny place in terms of social movements. The fear of seeming strange or different means that often movements have to trundle along as minority affairs for years - until apparently all at once those who don’t want to stand out jump the same way (and then often deny that they ever felt any differently)” (Cox 2011).

The second large-scale water charges protest, on 1 November 2014, tackled this problem by organising over 100 *local* protests – enabling people to see that they would not be ridiculed for participating or isolated in refusing to pay, and making visible the potential for direct resistance to meter installation. From that point, despair has increasingly turned into hope.

Beyond the grip of “Irishness”?

In activist and conservative discourse alike, Ireland’s movement landscape is often understood (justifiably) as restricting radical politics and (less plausibly) as an eternal feature

of national character. However, landscapes are not outside history – or, at times, earthquakes. As in the Andes, direct confrontation with specific nexuses of power at Rossport proved hugely generative. It positioned an almost archetypally ‘Irish’ community against the destruction of farming, fishing and tourism: when individuals, families or communities are existentially threatened they can abandon what turns out to have been (long-term) conditional loyalty to ‘ethnic’ ways of doing politics. So too, on a much wider scale, with direct action against water charges, regularly described as ‘the straw that broke the camel’s back’.

Secondly, as with the complex alliances around Rossport, the water charges movement involves a very broad social alliance – as any proto-hegemonic struggle must. By definition, this reshaping of routine alliances creates difficulties (cf. Ó Donnabháin 2014 on ethnic tensions within the Rossport Solidarity Camp), but *contra* the Irish addiction to harmony, nuclear power could be defeated with *three* competing campaigns (Dalby 1984). At time of writing, sectarian and sectoral differences are mostly being contained in the water movement, the relationship between the working-class Dublin core and wider participation is holding, and particularism is far weaker than usual.

Third, the attempt to put ‘Rossa’ outside the pale of the ethnic community, through anti-republicanism and state violence, was only partially successful, and for many provoked greater distancing from ‘Irish’ media and police. With the water struggle, the same combination of media hysteria and state thuggery has been experienced far more widely, and the actual violence filmed on phones and shared on social media is readily contrasted to establishment horror at ‘fascist’ atrocities such as ... blocking the deputy prime minister’s car or insulting the president.

All of this, finally, is happening where the state’s attack on partnership, intransigent austerity politics and preference for coercive approaches has undermined ‘Irish consensualism’.

Organisational leaderships tied to funding, lobbying and respectability are less and less able to transmit any of these. Change *within* movements, and within organisations, is part and parcel of what is being fought over.

In the broadest perspective, the hope of challenging the ‘little Ireland’ that exports its poor and radicals, and grounds internal complacency in loyalty to taken-for-granted culture, must involve new forms of solidarity across differences of place and ethnicity. If allegiance to class and gender power relations is structured through an unreflected identity bound up with everyday structures of national and religious affiliation, rising migrant involvement in movements generally might offer a point of fracture for this last-instance loyalty to ethnic culture.

It may provide some of the energy needed to restore the possibility of alliance between the politically-radical but culturally-conservative Irish left, and movements which challenge the socio-cultural bases of oppression and exploitation but avoid direct confrontation with the state (Epstein 1993; Thompson 1976; Rowbotham and Weeks 1977). The *loss* of state funding for SMOs (Lentin 2013: 82) may support more radical trends within migrant activism. As Landy (2013: 73) puts it, “there is nothing inevitable about the current channelling of migrant groups into being service providers” and they have the potential to move outside a restrictive ‘migrant field’ and challenge power relations within the wider society. As with Gramsci’s Sardinian workers in Turin, this is not just about “migrant” movements but equally about the emancipation of “majority” movements from Irishness, remaking the movement landscape.

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¹ This chapter draws on my “Gramsci in Mayo” (2011). I am grateful to the Finnish NGO publisher, Into, for permission to reuse some of this material, now exploring the “outside” of the ethnic “inside” explored there. Thanks are due to David Landy and the editors for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter.

² For biographies of Gramsci see Fiori (1990) and Davidson (1977); for an overview of interpretations see Liguori (1996); for some scholarly approaches see Baratta and Liguori (1999) or Burgio and Santucci (1999).

³ Nairn’s (1982) title underlines the importance of reading Gramsci as *Sardinian*.

⁴ Another analogy lies in how the rural middle classes colonised the national administrative apparatus.

⁵ This discussion concentrates on his analysis of the events, rather than on historical reconstruction.

⁶ For example, in 1891 a full 39 per cent of those born in Ireland were living elsewhere.

⁷ Ireland is a European exception in that women migrants equalled or outnumbered men – understandably considering the sexual politics involved (Hall and Malcolm 2008).

⁸ This is often explained by fear - but the scale of practical repression in Ireland has been far *less* than in most west European countries; the real fear has been of stepping outside clientelist relationships and the narrow bounds of tolerance, ceasing to be part of the “community” as conservatively defined; Cox 2014.

⁹ One of the main responses from church and state is the attempt, prominent in both state multiculturalism and “interfaith” work, to construct an “immigrant community”, a “Buddhist community” (Cox 2013), an “African community” etc. which would adapt itself to a parallel form of this.

¹⁰ I share Landy’s (2013: 67) scepticism of overly-broad celebrations of all migrant activity as by definition resistance even when attempting to integrate on mainstream terms.