Infiltrating History
Structure and Agency in the Irish Independence Struggle, 1916-1921

Donagh Davis

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtaining the degree of Doctor of Political and Social Sciences of the European University Institute

Florence, May, 2015
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**Acknowledgements**

Some of this thesis was written in draughty rooms in Ireland, and more of it was written in sweltering working spaces in the hills overlooking Florence. I thank all the people in both places who made that experience better, and the unsociable hours more sociable - friends, colleagues, fellow travellers, library staff, and mensa and bar staff. I will not mention people by name, because I do not have to.

A special thank you must go to my supervisor, Professor Donatella della Porta, for her unerring patience and support, and constant supply of good advice - as well as to the Department of Political and Social Sciences as a whole.

I must also thank the other members of my thesis jury - Professor Lucy Riall, Professor Jack A. Goldstone, and Doctor Bill Kissane - for their helpful comments and simply their willingness to be involved.

And last but not least, I must thank my family.

I hope it will all have been worth it, and that the thesis will make its own modest contribution. Grazie a tutti.
Thesis Summary

This thesis is a historical-sociological study of the early twentieth-century Irish independence struggle, which culminated in the partition of Ireland in 1920, and the secession of most of the island from the United Kingdom two years later. It asks how the Irish separatist project was able to go from political marginality up to 1916, to the attainment, with widespread popular support, of an essentially independent state covering most of Ireland by 1922.

At the most abstract theoretical level, the starting point for the research lies in long-running debates about the roles of structure and agency in contentious politics. While these debates have often seen splits between scholars more interested in either structure or agency, this thesis aims to follow in the footsteps of recent attempts to better understand how structure and agency relate to each other in practice.

The thesis explores both theoretical and empirical puzzles. The case background is fraught with long-term and basically structural tensions that seemed to point towards some kind of shift or rupture in how Ireland was governed, and in Ireland's relationship with Britain. Existing arrangements were also destabilized by the exogenous shock of the First World War. But when upheaval did eventually occur, it took an extremely unexpected shape. The new cycle of contention was initially driven by a small number of determined, marginal actors. Few predicted the armed conflict of 1916-1923, Irish partition, or a new Irish state.

The thesis explains what happened as a path dependent reactive sequence initiated by a contingent event - the 1916 Easter Rising - and fuelled by slow-burning structural tensions with deep roots in Irish society. Though the 'break-point' event was highly contingent, the thesis emphasizes the agency of the
rebels who made it happen. The reactive sequence that ensued was powered by the strategic interaction of Irish nationalists and the British state, generating a number of powerful causal mechanisms that would take great effort to stop.
1. INTRODUCTION

Introducing the Irish independence struggle

In early 1916, Ireland was as much a part of the United Kingdom as were England, Scotland and Wales, and Dublin was often still regarded as the second city of the British Empire. A majority of the Irish population supported the long-running campaign for self-government, or 'Home Rule'. But this was projected to be a loyal Home Rule, subordinate to Westminster and the Crown, and contained within the United Kingdom. Tens of thousands of Irishmen had signed up to fight for Britain on the battlefields of the First World War - many of them enthusiastically, succumbing to the flag-waving élan of early wartime.

More radical nationalists existed - a bloc indisposed to fighting for 'King and country', and including in its ranks clandestine groups committed to armed struggle for full Irish independence. But the radical nationalists were politically marginal. They were not represented in parliament, and those indisposed to electoral politics struggled to make an impression by other means.

Within a few short years, by the start of 1922, all had changed utterly. Ireland had been partitioned - with the majority of the island forming a new, effectively independent 'Irish Free State', while only a northern sixth or so of the territory remained within the UK as 'Northern Ireland'. The Home Rule nationalists, after decades of political dominance, had been completely sidelined, and a government drawn from the ranks of the previously marginal separatists now ran the new state. After centuries of colonial rule, British Ireland had been all but dismantled - with only a rump surviving intact in the north.

How did this rapid and unexpected change take place?

Several years of violent struggle interceded between 1916 and 1922, with separatist guerrillas fighting the British government to the negotiating table by
late 1921. Traditionally, the developments of these tumultuous years have been compartmentalised by observers into a series of umbilically linked but discrete episodes that rocked the foundations of the British state in Ireland. From this perspective, the 'Rising' of 1916 led to the 'War of Independence' of 1919-1921 - which, following a 'Truce' and a 'Treaty' with the British government, birthing the Irish Free State in 1922, found a bloody epilogue in the 'Civil War' fought between rival nationalist elements from 1922 to 1923. Remarkably, no standard term ever emerged to describe the 1916-1923 period as a whole.

More recently, some observers have questioned the usefulness of the traditional paradigm through which these years were understood, and proposed that the entire 1916-1923 period be thought of as an 'Irish Revolution' (Fitzpatrick 1987). Others have suggested that while it is the intra-nationalist hostilities of 1922-23 that are conventionally known as the 'Irish Civil War', the term could just as easily be applied to the years 1916-1923 as a whole (Hart 2004).

For reasons that will become clear later, the 1916-1923 period will be referred to here simply as the 'Irish independence struggle', and it is the 1916-1921 period that will be in focus in this dissertation. But whether the upheaval is understood in terms of revolution, civil war or war of independence, the question remains: how did all of this come to pass? How did the radical separatists go in a few short years from marginality, to leading a largely successful independence struggle against the might of the British Empire?

This is a classic empirical puzzle of modern Irish history, and this thesis will argue that the answer can lie only in a fine-grained understanding of the complex relations between long-term structural changes in Irish society, the medium-term political conjunctures of Irish-British politics leading up to 1916, and, in the short-term, certain crucial contingent events and strategic initiatives from 1916 onwards.

Picking over the finer points of Irish history is all very well. But this leaves the question: why would a social scientist in the early twenty-first century wish to
study early twentieth-century Ireland?

**Why study the Irish independence struggle? Problems in contentious politics studies today**

Besides any utility in helping to solve the empirical historiographical problem at hand, such an exercise also connects powerfully to recent theoretical debates within historical sociology and political science - and particularly to the field of research concerned with contentious politics, revolutions and social movements. Scholars have been attempting for years to meaningfully tie together structure, agency and contingency in their accounts of contentious politics - making much progress, but leaving many questions unanswered in the process. This study of the Irish independence struggle will attempt to speak to this literature, and to contribute to it in so far as possible.

The problems in the background to this project, then, are both theoretical and empirical. But even at their most theoretical and most historical, these concerns connect to some of the major 'real-world' issues facing the study of contentious politics in recent times – problems that are only becoming starker. In the early 2000s, scholars of revolution were wondering loudly about the future of revolutions (Foran 2003, Goodwin 2001) – and, in particular, about whether revolutions had a future: whether they could still be expected to play a role in the contemporary world, or whether, given changing global conditions, as a 'species' they were hurtling from twentieth century vitality towards twenty-first century extinction (see Chapter 3).

The later 2000s brought the jarring dislocations of the global financial crisis. Initially the social movement response was muted, underscoring suspicions that the kind of mass popular mobilisation seen in the twentieth century was now moribund. But by 2011 - several years after the outbreak of the crisis - the world was told that rebellion and revolution were suddenly everywhere, from Wall Street to the Arab street. By 2014, however, the hopefulness of 2011 looked like...
black humour. The effervescence of protest movements in North America and Western Europe had largely fizzled out. Struggles for rights and democracy in the Middle East and North Africa had given way to savage and protracted bloodletting - still ongoing at time of writing.

Social scientists, then, have developed many useful tools for understanding the causation and dynamics of contentious politics, from social movements to revolutions to waves of nationalism. But in many ways these subjects remain just as much a mystery as ever. In particular, the 'structure-agency problem' in contentious politics is far from solved. The early twentieth century historical subject matter of this thesis is a far cry from the social movements and revolutions of a hundred years later. But on a basic level it is the same theoretical problems that vex both moments in time.

What is the relationship between structure and agency in the causation of political contention? Why do revolutions happen when they do? Why is it so hard to predict them? Why do they happen in some states and not in others? Why do some succeed and some fail? The list of questions goes on.

In the scholarly debates of the late 1990s and early 2000s around these questions, a key sticking point was the charge that approaches to contentious politics prevailing up to the start of the 2000s had been overly 'structuralist' in nature. Leading this challenge, scholars such as Jeff Goodwin and James Jasper (2004; Jasper 2004, 2006) went to considerable lengths to critique the approaches to contentious politics and social movements associated with scholars such as Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, and their many collaborators – approaches revolving in large part around the 'political opportunity' and 'political process' concepts – and indeed subsequently the mechanisms-based approach elaborated in McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly's Dynamics of Contention (2001).1

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1 The latter representing, in large part, the efforts of McAdam et al.’s attempts to amend and make more dynamic their approach in light of critiques by scholars such as Goodwin and Jasper.
In place of this posited overemphasis on 'structure', Goodwin and Jasper were among other scholars in calling for attention to factors such as agency, strategy, culture and emotions (Ganz 2004; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001; Gould 2004; Jasper 2006; Polletta 2004, 2006) in the making of contentious politics episodes and social movements.

This debate was primarily about the sociology of social movements, but overlapped with similar dialogues in related fields. At the interface between sociology and historiography, William H. Sewell, Jr. (1996, 2005) called for attention to the 'transformative event' as the meeting point between structure and agency in his scholarship on the French Revolution, and Sovietologist Mark R. Beissinger (2002) adopted a similar approach to understanding the nationalist and revolutionary 'cycles', 'waves' and 'tides' that suddenly, dramatically and unexpectedly founndered the USSR at the start of the 1990s.

Around a number of poles, then, major ground has been broken in making up for the lack of attention to agency traditionally shown in more structuralist and macro-level accounts of contentious politics episodes. But at certain points, the amended picture of contentious politics emerging against this background – albeit adjusted to account for factors such as agency and strategic action – remains fuzzy.

Indeed, just defining structure and agency is notoriously difficult (Sewell 1992:1) - and when it comes to the really thorny questions about the workings of structure and agency in causal accounts of contentious politics, scholars frequently resort to making observations not very much advanced on what Marx had already summed up in 1852, when he pointed out that "Man makes his own history, but... he does not make it out of conditions chosen by himself" (Marx 2009[1852]:1; paraphrased by Goodwin 2001:25). Such observations should of course be the springboard to ask how, and to what extent people can change the conditions, or 'structures', within which they 'make their histories' – or where the line can be drawn between ‘conditions’ that are malleable to change, and those that are more durable.
Despite some valiant efforts, much more work needs to be done in answering these kinds of questions. A basic premise of this thesis is that one of the best ways to do this is through the theoretically guided empirical analysis of cases of political contention - for the simple reason that they furnish the student of contentious politics with the opportunity to ask how actors negotiated these problems in practice, and how they succeeded - or failed - in 'doing' contentious politics.

Methodology

Two notable features of my research design are its historical-sociological dimension, and its single case study orientation (Rueschemeyer 2003). Both of these raise methodological and epistemological issues, and an important one has to do with the availability of suitable sources and data.

As pointed out by Clemens and Hughes (2002), the historical-sociological study of social movements (and related phenomena) raises practical issues not faced by studies of contemporary movements. One may have excellent questions, theory and hypotheses, but one may struggle to gather the sources necessary to build these into a viable research project. Of course, some version of this dilemma is always conceivable when dealing with historical data, but even so, the study of past social movements brings it own particular historical challenges: depending on the context, social movement actors may leave less of a paper trail than other historical subjects – whether that is down to police surveillance and state repression in the context of, say, the early labour movement, or simply because of the lack of literacy skills among participants, in another more "subaltern" context (Clemens and Hughes 2002, Scott 1990).
Researching the Irish independence struggle

As pointed out by historical sociologists such as Tilly (2000) and Clemens and Hughes (2002:212), the “difficulty of collecting systematic individual-level data” on past movements can often be a strong reason for adopting a quantitative (and according to much of Tilly’s methodological writings, formal) research strategy. However, many of my concerns regarding my case studies are concerned with micro and meso-level dynamics – such as my questions about agency and strategy, culture and ideology, and ‘contentious events’. When it comes to historical cases of clandestine, underground, illegal revolutionary movements, engaged in guerrilla warfare against the state – as in the subject matter of this thesis – some research challenges present themselves. Indeed, while the Irish independence struggle has been written about extensively by historians and others, much of this work will not necessarily have faced the same challenges as mine will. Many histories of the period could be constructed from newspapers and governments records, for instance – this project could not.

Clemens and Hughes (2002) point out that, unfortunately, the researcher of past movements cannot conduct interviews with the dead, and since the last surviving participants in the Irish independence struggle died within the last twenty years or so, an oral history cannot be conducted of the Irish rebels at the centre of this research project. It is fortunate, then, that someone else did – or rather, that a number of people have conducted and recorded interviews with what is in fact a rather large proportion of participants in the Irish independence struggle, presenting an unusually rich source of qualitative data for the historian or historical sociologist of contentious politics and social movements. Much of this material has only recently been made available to the public, and it is only in the last number of years that researchers have been unlocking its secrets (Dolan 2006:789; Kostick 2009:viii).

Among the most significant is the archival collection of the Bureau of Military History, held by the Irish Defence Forces at Cathal Brugha army barracks in
Dublin.\(^2\) The Bureau was formed in 1947, with the mission 'to assemble and coordinate material to form the basis for the compilation of the history of the movement for Independence from the formation of the Irish Volunteers on 25th November 1913, to the 11th July 1921.' (Report of the Director, 1957 cited in Irish Defence Forces 2009). Between 1947 and 1957, it collected 1,773 testimonies of participants in the independence struggle, compiled 12 voice recordings, and various other documents, photographs and so forth (Irish Defence Forces 2009). After keeping this treasure trove of personal testimony under lock and key for almost fifty years, the Irish military finally opened the archive in 2003 - having waited for the last respondent to die. A number of historians have drawn on the resource since then, but since most of the historiography of the period was conducted before 2003, there remains much catching up to be done.

To leave aside for a moment the many memoirs of participants and eyewitnesses to the independence struggle, as well as the collections of private papers pertaining to various prominent participants in the struggle (for a list of some of these, see Hart 1998:324-325) scattered around the archives of Ireland and elsewhere – the BMH testimonies on their own represent a phenomenal resource for the qualitative researcher seeking out micro and meso-level dynamics, and the individual-level information mentioned as elusive by Clemens and Hughes (2002).

So, there is a lot of material out there – and much more readily accessible interview material than this researcher could ever amass by his own devices, were the potential interview candidates still alive. What, then, is the best way for a historical sociologist to go about engaging with such material?

\(^2\) In the time since this research project commenced, more important collections of primary sources relating to the period in question have started to emerge from obscurity. Several volumes have been published based on Ernie O'Malley's handwritten (and in their original form barely legible) notes of his interviews with IRA veterans (O'Malley 2012; O'Malley 2013; O'Malley 2014). Even more significantly, the Irish state has started since 2014 to release, on a phased basis, the more than 600,000 pages of paperwork covering claims for military pensions relating to the 1916-1923 period. Much of this material consists of extremely detailed testimonies concerning service in the IRA during this period (O'Halpin 2012, Crowe 2012). These collections are not drawn upon in this research project, but they clearly present tantalising prospects for future research projects utilising various potential methodological approaches.
In fact, practitioners of historical sociology and of comparative historical analysis (CHA) traditionally tended to eschew the extensive use of primary sources - happy to leave the archives to the historians. This was justified by Skocpol on the basis that while some studies “present fresh evidence; others make arguments that urge the reader to see old problems in a new light. This work is decidedly of the latter sort” (Skocpol 1979:x quoted in Ritter 2010:16). However, as pointed out by Amenta (2009), in recent years the expectation has grown that practitioners of CHA will engage in some degree of primary research. Indeed, one of the justifications Skocpol might have used was that she had more cases to worry about than the typical historian - making extensive archival research less practicable. This is less of an argument in the case of the research presented here - which might be described as following in the footsteps of comparative historical analysis in spirit, but not in the sense of being based on a formal multi-case comparison. Similarly to the approach of Ritter (2010), this author hopes to leave his ‘real’ comparative project for the near future.

Thus, the methodology employed here has taken the middle ground between the classical CHA approach, and those of the historian or other social scientist. While it is expected that the main significance of the research will lie in fresh interpretations rather than in uncovering new evidence, and while secondary literature is drawn upon widely, archival research has also been carried out directly, and primary sources - particularly from the BMH collection - are drawn upon throughout the thesis.

Drawing effectively upon such a vast collection of primary sources in a piece of qualitative research such as this one presents its own challenges. While there is clearly great scope for other methodological approaches to mining such an ample resource, the approach taken in this research project was influenced by considerations of time and other practicalities. Thus, after the initial research design stages of question-and-hypothesis-formation, and following a systematic trawl through the secondary literature relating to the historical episode in question, the BMH testimonies were read and analysed in large numbers, and
extensive notes taken. It was on the basis of these combined exercises that the
general outlines of the dissertation, and the general thrust of the arguments
contained therein, were sketched out. Having done this, the assembled material
drawn from the BMH testimonies was whittled down so as to select the richest
and most representative parts - those that illustrated the arguments of the
dissertation most effectively or most evocatively.

Historiography and historically oriented social science tend to be written in very
different ways, reflecting their different priorities - and the nature of this project
is such that it was a constant challenge not to lapse into a historiographical
register. To do so could mean expending tens of thousands of words picking
through rich archival detail in a way that might be intriguing from a historian's
point of view - but that could well be barely relevant, to the point of spelling
methodological disaster, from the point of view of the social scientist. The
compromise adopted here was to limit the primary archival research to just one
archive, and to limit the testimonies cited within that to a few dozen. Every
methodological approach is a compromise, and it is hoped that the tack taken in
this research project will not be judged a compromise too far.

**Overview of analytical approach**

The analytical approach of this thesis is guided by the sense that while important
advances have been made by scholars endeavouring to tie together structure and
agency in their accounts of political contention, significant gaps remain between
many of the concepts and theoretical tools that have emerged. Thus, the
analytical framework will seek to build on some of the most important tools
emerging from this field in recent years, and to help fill in some of the gaps
between them.

Despite significant differences of opinion that still linger in this area, some
shared understandings have emerged between scholars associated with different schools of thought. Even among the more structuralist scholars, few would now quibble with the idea that agency matters. As does structure. Contingency matters too. Time and temporality matter. And so do exceptional and ‘game-changing’ events (Amenta 2008, Moore 2011).]

Yet there is still much that scholars do not know - or do not agree upon - regarding what lies in the cracks between these understandings, and regarding how they ought to relate to one another. This thesis will address a number of these lacunae. In particular, it will build on the insights of what some scholars have called the 'eventful' approach within the study of contentious politics (Sewell 1996, 2005; Sewell and McAdam 2001) - and attempt to develop our knowledge of how transformative events happen, and of how they relate to structure, agency and contingency.

It will also go beyond the eventful approach - identifying some shortcomings in the ways that it has previously been employed, and articulating it with insights drawn from other strands of theory, in the hope of making up for some of those shortcomings. In particular, the thesis will suggest that the eventful approach can be strengthened by reference to the literatures on path dependence and on mechanisms.

Why is this a useful framework for understanding the Irish independence struggle?

The emphasis on key transformative events pioneered by scholars such as Sewell (1996, 2005) has yielded important insights into how apparently durable structures can be ruptured in moments of political contention. However, 'eventful' studies have left many issues still unclear. The concept of the transformative event is widely seen as a contribution to the debate about structure and agency; but while the eventful approach has yielded a compelling 'non-structuralist' account of structural change - hinging on the role of contingent and unpredictable events in that process - it has said less about
certain other matters. Where do transformative events come from in the first place? What are their causes? What kind of agency lies behind them? And perhaps most importantly, what makes transformative events so transformative anyway? If transformative events initiate new cycles of contention like revolutions or nationalist episodes of state breakdown or state building, how does this happen in practice?

This thesis contends that these questions are in many ways still unanswered, and that they point to significant holes in the eventful account of structural change. These we would do well to fill - lest we allow transformative events to become yet another 'magic wand', like that wielded by the 'hidden hand of history' in teleological accounts of structural change; or like the magic wand of the 'exogenous shocks' that are used to explain moments of rupture within theoretical frameworks that have difficulty accounting for endogenous causes of change (Goldstone and Useem 2011).

Up to this point, events have been used to explain causation in contentious politics - that is, how transformation happens (Beissinger 2002; della Porta 2009; Flacks 2004; Ganz 2000; Hess and Martin 2006; McAdam and Sewell 2001; Moore 2011; Morris 2004; Moyer; Finley and Soifer 2001; Ramos 2008; Rasler 1996; Rohlinger 2009; Staggenborg 1993;). This thesis goes back a step, to ask: what causes transformative events? It suggests that in the Irish independence struggle, key transformative events did not 'just happen', but rather were the product of agency, and of the sustained strategic initiative and interaction of political actors. It also contends that the eventful account of how transformation happens could stand to be developed, and that the specific mechanisms by which transformative events cause transformation have not always been well elucidated. Indeed, as the phrasing here suggests, the thesis calls for a more explicit and systematic articulation between the eventful approach and theoretical approaches centring on the role of causal mechanisms in social and political life. It is suggested that transformative events can be viewed as crux moments when certain critical causal mechanisms conjoin. This does not mean that the category of the event is superfluous, nor that events are just 'normal'
causal mechanisms by another name. Rather, it is to suggest that events may comprise particularly dense concentrations of such mechanisms, unfolding in particularly rapid succession, and that this can be what makes them such exceptional happenings. Beissinger (2002) has referred to periods when the pace of events seems to speed up as "thickened history". Following this logic, we might say that transformative events are the thickest coagulations within this.

However, the thesis recognises that events and agency make up only part of the story. While the thesis holds that the events in question would not have happened without the agency of the movement actors, it also posits that these actors had little control over what happened next. The Irish independence struggle was a cycle of contention touched off by the contingent event of the 1916 Easter Rising, but the basic character of the new cycle - the themes, meanings and grievances that fuelled it - had much more to do with prevailing structural circumstances, or 'initial conditions', than with the agency of the strategic actors behind the Easter Rising.

This is considered here as a paradox of the relationship between structure and agency to be seen around the transformative events at the centre of the episode: the pattern of conflict seen in the Irish independence struggle expressed antagonisms that were deeply woven into the social, political and economic fabric of the island of Ireland over the course of the longue durée. This was a 'structural' conflict - but it was not 'structurally determined'. That is, although it reflected fundamental structural tensions built into Irish society over centuries, it might never have come to pass had it not been for the catalysing effect of contingent and transformative events - which in turn would certainly never have happened without the agency and strategic initiative of the rebels. Though in hindsight, pre-Easter Rising Ireland looks like a tinderbox waiting to catch fire, it is impossible to say what might have happened - or not happened - had the crucial sparks never landed in its midst. The structural tensions could have simmered down and returned to dormancy, or could have been resolved in different ways. Ireland might well have stayed within the United Kingdom - an eventuality that was entirely possible, given the initial conditions present just
prior to the 1916 Rising - and Ireland might have stayed intact.

Unravelling this kind of structure-agency paradox in its entirety is quite beyond the scope of the thesis. However, some propositions will be made as to how to approach this problem. This is where the literature on path dependence (Goldstone 1998; Mahoney 2000) comes in: as in the eventful approach associated with scholars such as Sewell, this literature emphasizes the role of contingent events in initiating historical episodes - in this case, path dependent sequences. The thesis presents the Irish independence struggle in these terms: as a path dependent episode of the type known in the literature as a "reactive sequence" (Mahoney 2000), initiated by the contingent event of the 1916 Rising. Whereas eventful accounts à la Sewell's tend to impute the transformative power of events to their capacity to open up new possibilities, reactive sequences allow for a more fine-grained analysis of cause and effect, emphasizing the complex reverberations contingent events can have - including backlash and unintended consequences, as well as the closing off of certain possibilities - factors all too relevant between 1916 and 1923. Surprisingly, this path dependent approach has not been extensively employed to explain episodes of contentious politics - an absence it is hoped that this thesis can go some small way towards addressing. In turn, it is hoped to contribute to this literature.

Adherents of path dependent approaches have struggled with the problem of "breakpoints" (Mahoney 2000:527) - that is, with the question of how path dependent sequences start, and of how to approach the contingency involved in such moments. It is hoped that the thesis' emphasis on the agency and contingency lying behind contingent events can shed light on one potential route to the instigation of a path dependent sequence. Likewise, it will be hoped to shed light on how path dependent sequences are sustained, and how they are ultimately stopped.

Thus, the Irish independence struggle will be viewed as a path dependent "reactive sequence" expressing a paradoxical yet striking relationship between
structure and agency. Initial conditions present prior to the Easter Rising made a
clash over the question of Irish self-government more or less inevitable - but it
took the agency and contingency of the 1916 Easter Rising to set the course for
the armed conflict that would lead to the settlement of 1922 and the intranationalist fighting of 1922-1923. But this course was not inevitably inscribed in
the actions taken by the rebels of 1916: it also depended on the choices and
decisions of the British state in responding to those actions. The provocative
action of the rebels of 1916, and the fateful choices made by the British state in
its response to that action, militarised the struggle over Irish self-government,
and pushed that contest towards a "reactive sequence" of violent action and
reaction - a cycle of violence that would be hard to break.

The thesis argues that this was a path dependent process - that is, that once a
number of decisive contingent events had taken place, and a number of powerful
causal mechanisms were in train, developments had a logic of their own that was
difficult to escape from. But this must not be confused with a 'hard determinist'
argument: the path dependent dynamic had a logic of its own, that shaped what
parties to the conflict did, and that is quite compelling in explaining these actions
in retrospect. But these dynamics needed also to be reproduced, by further
contingent acts undertaken by parties to the conflict between 1916 and 1923.
Exogenous shocks (such as those related to World War I, and to the international
context in general) also played a role in shaping the path dependent sequence.

And, of course, path dependent sequences, however difficult to escape from, can
and do get reversed, and come to an end (Mahoney 2000:526). Though its logic
was hard to escape from once the conflict had passed a certain 'point of no
return', the Irish independence struggle could have been brought to a close
sooner, given better leadership and decision-making. However, it could also have
gone on for considerably longer, and indeed looks mercifully short compared to
the next great outbreak of violence over the Irish 'national question' fifty years
later - the Northern Ireland Troubles, which saw the unfinished business of the
Irish independence struggle provide the germ for a renewal of armed conflict on
the island of Ireland that would last several decades. Thus, the thesis will
examine how the path dependent sequence of 1916-1923 started, how it was reproduced, and how it ended.

**Mechanisms**

Despite the best efforts of McAdam, Tattow and Tilly (2001) and others, there is no scholarly consensus as to a finite list of causal mechanisms to be found in social life, and as a result, students of contentious politics have no definitive 'periodic table' of relevant mechanisms to draw upon. Thus, the thesis will suggest that many different mechanisms can potentially be read into the story of the independence struggle in Ireland - but it will also argue that the episode can best be understood in terms of a handful of key mechanisms. It will contend that it was the interaction of these mechanisms, duly set in train by a number of contingent events, which drove the reactive sequence that was the Irish independence struggle.

More specifically, it will argue that from 1916 onwards, two key causal mechanisms were in operation, and in powerful interaction with one another. One of those had already been swinging into motion prior to the great contingent event upon which that year pivoted - the Rising of Easter 1916. This mechanism is referred to in this thesis as that of 'reversal of expectations', and denotes the widespread sense of betrayal and breach of trust experienced by the nationalist majority in Ireland as they came to the conclusion that their hopes and expectations of Home Rule were being skewered by the bad faith of the British government.

This was the direct result of British policy decisions made from 1914 (or even 1912) on, and for some Irish nationalists, this sense had already started to set in before the 1916 Rising. But that event - along with another particular causal mechanism it set in motion - was key in crystallising this breakdown of hopes, expectations and trust for the majority.

The Rising set in motion the single most central mechanism of the Irish
independence struggle - referred to in this thesis as the mechanism of 'provocation-repression-backlash'. The armed insurrection of the 1916 rebels was calculated as the most provocative action possible to take against the British state, and the British state responded by terminating the Rising 'with extreme prejudice'. Through its harsh response to the Rising - executing rebel leaders, internment thousands, and exacting heavy collateral damage on the city and its inhabitants - the British state cast itself in the role of brutal oppressor in the eyes of the Irish nationalist majority watching the devastation of Easter 1916 unfold. The Home Rule project - already on life support by 1916 - now looked dead on arrival, and its sponsors, the moderate constitutional politicians of the Nationalist Party, looked suddenly irrelevant. The rebels, meanwhile, looked like rash but brave upstarts in a David and Goliath struggle against the might of the British Empire - and, given the now superfluous appearance of the Nationalist Party in a newly militarised situation, the rebels also looked like the only show in town.

The thesis will suggest that these two mechanisms were related, but distinct. To be more precise: while one of them, the mechanism of 'reversal of expectations', was already incubating prior to the 1916 Rising, that contingent event - and the further mechanism of 'provocation-repression-backlash' that it unleashed - accentuated the former mechanism exponentially. Thus, the two mechanisms intertwined and catalysed one another, with explosive effect. As suggested above, this is what made the Easter Rising a transformative event: the conjuncture of a number of particularly powerful causal mechanisms, reacting upon one another with force.

McAdam et al. suggest that groups of mechanisms can combine to form processes - phenomena that are simply too 'big' to be usefully conceptualised as individual mechanisms (McAdam et al. 2001:27). In this thesis, the mechanisms of 'reversal of expectations' and 'provocation-repression-backlash' are both seen as feeding, along with some other mechanisms, into a wider process - that of 'regime delegitimization' - itself a double-edged and relational process, in that the other side of its coin was the 'legitimization' of the separatist bloc as an alternative
proto-state.

And crucially, the mechanisms are seen as feeding off of and reproducing one another, fuelling a path dependent reactive sequence that would last for five to seven years (how best to periodise this is debatable). The 'War of Independence' phase of the independence struggle would see the 'provocation-repression-backlash' mechanism spiral into a cycle of violence that would see thousands killed. Further policy decisions of the British government would drive the 'reversal of expectations' mechanism to become even more pronounced - as well as other related mechanisms that underlined the sense of grievance and betrayal of the Irish nationalist majority. Further missteps on the part of the British state - such as the wholesale retreat of key state institutions from large swathes of the Irish countryside - further played into the hands of the rebels, as institutions of the separatist shadow state filled the vacuum they left in their wake. The thesis refers to this as a mechanism of 'state withdrawal-state usurpation'. Again, along with the festering grievances associated with 'reversal of expectations' and other mechanisms - and along with increasingly epidemic defection and desertion from the side of the British state - the wider process of 'state delegitimization' gained apace, as what was left of popular consent to British rule was hollowed out over most of Ireland.

**The way forward**

Thus, the thesis aims to make both a theoretical and an empirical contribution. Theoretically, it is hoped to develop the eventful perspective on the structure-agency relation in contentious politics, connecting this more explicitly with path dependence and causal mechanisms - attempting in the process to answer what it sees as neglected questions such as 'What causes transformative events?' and 'What makes transformative events transformative?'

Empirically, it is hoped to address certain weaknesses in our understanding of a case that has hitherto been the almost exclusive preserve of historians.
Historians have produced fine and illuminating work on the Irish independence struggle, but when it comes to the thorny questions favoured by social scientists, they have tended to be vague (Townshend 2002). Historians have sometimes fudged questions about why the Irish independence struggle happened when it did, and whether its emergence and outcome were inevitable or matters of sheer fluke.3

And while there may be a certain amount of common ground historians can agree upon when it comes to explaining what happened in these years - in the sense of various causal factors thought to be somehow important - it is hard to boil this melange down to a coherent, parsimonious explanation of the episode and its causes - the kind of thing that is highly prized by social scientists.

Another thing that is highly prized by social scientists is precision on a conceptual and theoretical level - something that has been lacking in the historiography of the Irish independence struggle. The remarkable lack of a standard term to describe the period encompassing the Easter Rising of 1916, the War of Independence of 1919-21, and the Civil War of 1923, has already been commented upon. And while in recent decades it has become more common (though hardly universal) for historians to refer to the period as the 'Irish Revolution', this concept has been extremely vague, and attempts to relate it to concepts, definitions and theories of revolution thrashed out in the social sciences have been rare, and sometimes cursory.4

These points may seem unfair, in that historians can hardly be expected to have the same priorities as social scientists. But even on its own terms, the historiographical literature has problems. The aforementioned rough agreement on various causal factors does not amount to a consensus on what happened and

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3 An exception to this is Kissane (2002, 2005), one of the few social scientists (as opposed to historians) to seriously study the Irish independence struggle. However, Kissane's focus is more on the coda and aftermath to the independence struggle, in the form of the Civil War and the foundation of the Irish Free State, whereas my focus in this thesis is on the period immediately preceding those events.

4 For reasons that will hopefully become clear in Chapter Three, this dissertation opts for the much less loaded term 'Irish independence struggle'.

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why, and key points remain contested and controversial.

Was the independence struggle the logical conclusion to the 'devotional revolution' that had been copperfastening the resurgent power of Catholicism in Ireland since the nineteenth century? Townshend (2002:11) suggests it might have been. But this explanation runs into a number of obvious problems: though Irish nationalism had been a mostly Catholic affair since the defeat of the multi-confessional United Irishmen in 1798 (see Chapter 4), Protestants were always present - relatively small in number, but consistently playing a decisive role, from Charles Stewart Parnell to Bulmer Hobson. Furthermore, the mostly Catholic Fenians - the progenitors of the modern republican tradition - were notable for their secularism, verging on anti-clericalism, from the outset (Garvin 1987).

Was the movement for independence really a sectarian struggle - a minor bout of ethnic cleansing, even - fought out between Catholics and Protestants? The work of David Fitzpatrick (1998 [1977]) and Peter Hart (1998; 2003) has encouraged this view, and indeed it is hard not to see this as an important aspect of the conflict. The notorious "pogroms" in Ulster - especially Belfast - were nakedly sectarian, with Catholics coming out by far the worse. The subject of the IRA targeting Protestants, on the other hand, is highly controversial, but there is some evidence of this occurring in certain instances. But while this may have happened, it is still very difficult to argue that it was a driving force of the separatist movement. There is simply not sufficient evidence of systematic targeting of Protestants by the IRA to make the issue clear-cut (O’Halpin 2012), and as Lee (1989:9-10) points out, Irish separatism was almost unique in being an anti-colonial national liberation movement that insisted on claiming the colonial settler minority as members of its own nation - albeit slightly confused ones. This consistent feature of Irish nationalism and republicanism may be judged naïve, or even presumptuous - but it is a far cry from murderous sectarianism.

Did the independence struggle simply reflect the class interests of well-to-do Catholic farmers tired of paying taxes into British coffers? Tom Garvin
(2002:230) still makes this claim, and indeed it is tempting to see the Irish independence struggle as a long 'bourgeois revolution' on the part of Catholic farmers who had grown prosperous and more assertive since the mid-nineteenth century (see Chapter Three). But again this only goes so far in explaining the independence struggle. IRA veterans consistently complained about the indifference and hostility of well-heeled farmers to their movement (Hart 1998:143-144), and Hart's (2003) statistical analysis found that farmers and farmers' sons were distinctly under-represented in the ranks of the IRA. This is not to say that the rise of the Irish farming class was not implicated in the background to the independence struggle - it is simply to say that on its own, it clearly does not suffice as an explanation.

Did the independence struggle have more to do with the class interests of workers and small farmers? Many of these spent the period engaged in workplace occupations, land grabs and strikes - with several of the latter playing an important role in the independence struggle in their own right. Indeed the socialist firebrand James Connolly and his small Irish Citizen Army had been to the forefront of the independence struggle at its inception at Easter 1916. The 'proletarian class struggle' side to the story of these years has been brought out articulately by authors such as Emmet O'Connor (1988) and Conor Kostick (2009) - with the latter going so far as to claim that the British government was brought to the negotiating table in 1921 by its fear of the Irish situation going from bad to worse, via an upsurge of labour radicalism that would challenge British capitalist interests. But while labour radicalism figured prominently in the socio-political ferment of these years, it only goes so far in explaining the independence struggle. Not only were there few self-defined socialists in the republican movement, but a considerable part of the leadership cadre were conservative, and in some cases reactionary - including many of those who formed the Free State in 1922 (Regan 1999). There is a long tradition of construing the independence struggle in leftist or "socialist-republican" terms - but it is not clear that anyone in recent times has successfully countered English's (1994) rebuttal of this school of thought.
Why were the separatists able to achieve what they did? Did the explanation simply lie in the nature of guerrilla warfare, as Hopkinson (2004:201) suggests? Was all that violence unnecessary, as none other than former Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) John Bruton (2014) has recently suggested, following a distinct line of historiographical opinion? Would similar results - and even a similar national leadership personnel - have probably emerged without it, as Peter Hart suggested?

In fact, these last points say much about what is wrong with the historiography of the Irish independence struggle - illustrating how a less than rigorous approach to crucial causal questions can coexist with fine narrative historiography. Hopkinson's excellent book is one of the best available on the War of Independence - but his casual suggestion that republican success can be explained by the nature of guerrilla warfare makes no sense. If the nature of guerrilla warfare explains guerrilla success, how do we explain all those guerrilla struggles that failed? This is tautological logic.

Likewise, the suggestion made by various good professional historians that violence was not necessary to secure the essence of the 1922 settlement does not stack up - and Fanning (2013;2014) has recently demolished this argument by pointing out that before the independence struggle started in earnest in 1916, Asquith's government had no intention whatsoever of granting anything more than a very watered down and bowdlerised home rule package.

The distinct but related suggestion that a similar national leadership might have emerged anyway also speaks volumes. Hart made a huge contribution to the literature with his rigorous data-gathering and analysis from the 1980s onwards, but his last public statement on the Easter Rising fell far short of this standard:

So was the Rising necessary to produce this new generation of leaders? Would the genius of Eamon de Valera and Michael Collins not have emerged otherwise? In fact, the revolution’s deep talent pool was there before the Rising. It drew on the Gaelic League, the Gaelic Athletic Association, Sinn Fein, the Volunteers, the IRB and their assorted projects and newspapers. These Gaels made up a political counter-culture and were very aware of their status as an alternate nationalist leadership. All they needed was an opportunity - political, not military - and that
This dissertation is not set against counter-factual thinking in any way, but the above extract is counter-factual speculation of a very questionable sort. This dissertation argues that the extraordinary developments of 1916 were extremely contingent and that they changed the course of Irish history. Moreover, it is not in any way clear that if they had not happened the way they did, another similar opportunity would simply have rolled along and brought the same republican leadership cadre to prominence. And without the 1916 Rising, the post-1916 separatist leadership would certainly have been different - because the leaders of the Rising would still be alive!

All of the above points are still contested - and attempting to resolve them all would be far beyond the scope of this dissertation. The aim here is much more modest. Based on a systematic reading of the secondary literature, combined with original archival research, the dissertation will attempt to identify the key causal mechanisms of the Irish independence struggle, and to combine them into a clearer and more parsimonious theoretical framework than has been the case in the past. In this vein, the thesis seeks to make a clear argument that the Irish independence struggle was contingent and path dependent, in that it did not flow inevitably from initial conditions prior to the start of the crucial 'reactive sequence' in 1916. But it also argues that there was a paradoxical 'rebound of structure'. That is, initial conditions and structural circumstances were crucial - but in a way that was only realised thanks to the agency of the rebels in 1916 and later.

But does this mean the only original contribution of this research is "theoretical"? On the contrary, this author considers that in a project such as this, theoretical reflection is largely only useful in so far as it enhances our understanding of what happened, why it happened or how it happened. It is hoped that in a modest and incremental way, this dissertation does so with

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5 Emphasis must fall here on the words 'in a project such as this'. That is, this statement is not meant in any way to suggest that purely theoretical work could not be a very valid basis for another type of project.
regard to the Irish case - but it will be up to the readers to judge the success of this.

More concretely: the point of the extensive theoretical reflection on 'eventfulness' and path dependence vis-à-vis 1916 is to come up with a better explanation as to how and why the Rising came about, and why it had the effect that it did. This is specifically aimed at making up for a certain fuzziness in historians' accounts of the episode. Likewise, the focus on the causal mechanisms catalysed in 1916, and driving the ensuing reactive sequence, is motivated specifically by the sense that historians have been rather vague on these points. Indeed there are concrete differences here: most historians have focused on the effect of the executions of Easter Rising leaders in swinging public sympathies towards the rebels; this dissertation, on the other hand, argues that the collateral damage endured by Dublin civilians at the hands of British forces - something that has been surprisingly underplayed in the standard histories - probably played as much of a role as did the executions in this shift. And since this argument is framed in terms of causal mechanisms, 'eventfulness' and path dependence, it is simultaneously a theoretical and an empirical argument. The dissertation goes on to state very explicitly that this was the start of a reactive sequence that continued for the next five to seven years - during which time the mechanisms that emerged in 1916 would smoulder on until being accentuated to the point of semi-open warfare between 1919 and 1921 - with a violent coda between 1922 and 1923.

It has often been commented that the British decision to put the brakes on this sequence, and to give the separatists a state, was based on political exigencies rather than purely military ones. This is of course true, but it begs the question: when is a war not a political matter? If decisions were usually made according to algorithms of brute military force rather than politics, the world would be a radically (and irradiatedly) different place. By 1921, the British government had a very messy problem on its hands, and even if it had thrown "politics" to the wind and exerted its full military force in Ireland, it is not at all clear that it could have met its objectives in any useful way - even on straightforwardly military
terms.

Of course, this would be a very strange piece of historical sociology or comparative historical analysis if most of the arguments contained herein did not echo some or other parts of the existing historical literature on the topic. That is simply how historical sociology and comparative historical analysis are constituted. But all in all, the account presented here does not conform to some standard interpretation of the Irish independence struggle - which in any case does not exist, as the literature on the period fields a variety of interpretations of these years, not all of which recognise the essential continuity between the 'break-point' of 1916 and the developments of 1919-1923.

Another feature of the analysis that must be flagged in advance is its generally 'southern' orientation - in the sense that most of the action takes place in the part of the island of Ireland that would become the Free State and later the Republic - as opposed to the six northern counties that would form 'Northern Ireland'. While the author of this dissertation wholeheartedly agrees with Hart (2003) that too much historiography of this period is of a 'partitionist' bent - that is, it treats Irish history as if 'Ireland' was always the 26 counties that would go on to form the Irish Free State, and as if the border cutting off Northern Ireland had always existed - the southern orientation of the dissertation reflects the nature of the historical question at issue, rather than an indifference to northern questions.

For while the following chapters make very clear that the reason there was a Home Rule crisis, the reason there were rival armed mobilizations in pre-war Ireland, and the reason there was a 1916 Rising was northern unionist resistance to the prospect of a Catholic and southern-inflected Irish autonomy, it must also face up to another fact: that from the 1916 Rising onwards, the direct confrontation over Ireland's political fate was mainly played out between the Irish separatists and the British state. It is clear that British policy was shaped in very large part by Ulster unionist demands - but once the Ulster unionists were satisfied that they would be safeguarded from any measures for Irish Home Rule,
they effectively battened down the hatches while the Irish separatists fought the British state. Moreover, they were able to do this because that fight largely happened on the other side of the border - a border that only existed formally from 1920 onwards, but that was expressed in terms of the bounds of Ulster unionist territorial power some time before that.6

Though the six northern counties of Ulster unionist supremacy - the proto-'Northern Ireland' statelet - experienced considerable violence during this period, the IRA was weak there, and its armed campaign made little headway (Townshend 2013:173). Likewise, these northern counties comprised the part of the island that saw the lowest Sinn Féin electoral penetration, and encompassed the last significant holdout of Sinn Féin's nationalist rivals in the IPP. Thus, the southern emphasis of this dissertation reflects the fact that it is essentially a story of the separatist movement in the 1916-1921 period - and while this story only makes sense with the spectre of Ulster looming large in the background, it was largely in the 'south' that the separatist movement fought its struggle for independence.

The story of this independence struggle will be taken up in Chapter 2, which provides a literature review situating this research project in the historiography of the Irish independence struggle, and also touching on some relevant theoretical issues. Chapter 3 delves much deeper into the theoretical issues animating the project. Chapter 4 considers the transformative event of the 1916 Easter Rising, asking why it happened, and why it was transformative, and emphasizing mechanisms to do with repression and reversal of expectations. Chapter 5 considers the period between the 1916 Easter Rising and the 'War of Independence' - roughly the period of late 1916 to early 1919. It examines the building of the separatist movement in that period, paying particular attention to the mechanism of social appropriation. Chapter 6 considers the climactic phase of the reactive sequence of the Irish independence struggle, the 'War of

6 Electoral data provides another angle on the divergence between the six northern counties and the rest of the island, preceding formal partition: Coakley (2004:145-146) points out in electoral terms, the divergence of the six northern counties from the rest of the island could be seen from the nineteenth century on - with the former being a stronghold of solid Tory constituencies, whereas southerners tended to vote much more for Catholic, Home Rule and Liberal candidates.
Independence’ of 1919 to 1921. It sees the mechanisms unleashed in 1916 as being reproduced and accentuated in these years, and being joined by other mechanisms connected to the ‘disorganized retreat’ of the British state from parts of Ireland, and the efforts of the separatist shadow state to fill the vacuum it left. This will be followed by a short conclusion.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW: BRIDGING THE STUDY OF REVOLUTIONS AND IRISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of the literature on the Irish independence struggle, and it will touch on some relevant theoretical issues. Most of the literature on the Irish independence struggle has been outwardly atheoretical. But even 'anti-theory' historical interpretation is rarely done without any background theoretical assumptions, – but the 'theory of revolutions' element to historical analysis of the Irish independence struggle's causation is muted, and largely implicit (Townhend 2002, Hart 2003, Fitzpatrick 1990). Even the framing of this period of Irish history in terms of a 'revolution' is far from hegemonic – and explicitly articulating this history with social science approaches to the theorisation and comparative study of revolutions is quite another matter: Apart from some very cursory (and perhaps misleading) allusions to the work of Skocpol by Peter Hart (2003:14) – probably the historian of the Irish independence struggle most attuned to social science theory and methodology – this 'bridging' work has not meaningfully been done.

While a subsequent chapter in this dissertation will take a much closer look at theory and research on revolutions, here I will ask (in just a little more depth than above) what an attempt to relate the history of the Irish independence struggle to some different theoretical approaches to the study of revolution might look like.

A glance at recent literature on revolutions betrays both the promise and frustration surrounding the search for progress in the field. The publication of Jeff Goodwin's No Other Way Out in 2001 brought about much talk evaluating such levels of progress, and much discussion of Goodwin's long-awaited tome in relation to the various 'generations' of theory on revolutions (Foran 2002, Selbin 2002, Schwartz 2002).
Goodwin’s contribution represented a powerful refinement of the ‘state-centred’ approach made paradigmatic by Skocpol – Goodwin’s mentor – in particular with her towering 1979 work States and Social Revolutions.

With No Other Way Out, Goodwin was widely acclaimed for building on Skocpol, in the direction of a number of tightly argued claims about how political (and not just social) revolutions happen, and in the direction of a sweeping comparative analysis of a large sample of cases drawn from the Cold War period. Goodwin was careful to differentiate his perspective from other statist approaches – as well as from ‘structuralist’ approaches – and to concede that the state-centred approach could not explain quite everything in revolutionary causation. But, he insisted, it could go most of the way, most of the time.

However, insist as he might throughout the substance of his book, Goodwin’s caveats seem to reflect his sense – hinted at around the text’s edges – that by the time of No Other Way Out’s long overdue publication, he no longer felt entirely satisfied by its approach. Even if the book’s ‘statism’ is not necessarily ‘structuralism’, as he claims, it hardly does justice to the concern with agency expressed by Goodwin elsewhere, specifically in his collaborations with Jasper in critique of the political process approach within the closely related field of social movement theory (Goodwin and Jasper 2004b).

A parallel sense of missed opportunity tinged many of the otherwise positive responses to the book, from peers in the sociology of revolutions. Eric Selbin (2002) laments that No Other Way Out is more a powerful swan song to the ‘third generation’ of revolutionary theory, than a defining first step into the fourth. Both he and John Foran (2002) point out that Goodwin’s parsimonious claims about revolutionary causes lying in state action and “political context” often thinly veil their debts to class-based and world-systems explanations on the one hand, and on the other simply occlude or marginalise the ingredients of revolutionary action lying in the agency of revolutionaries, in ideologies, and in popular culture.

This dialogue – and even Goodwin’s part in it – leave the sense of a hunger for an
amended theoretical approach to revolutions that satisfactorily synthesises Goodwin’s emphasis on the powerful influence of state action, with the socio-economic factors, and the factors of culture and agency, highlighted by scholars such as Foran and Selbin.

**No other way out?**

At first glance, a number of elements of Goodwin’s statist approach seem to hold up well in the Irish context. Goodwin makes a series of strong claims about the kinds of states, and the kinds of circumstances, that can incubate revolutions – a more or less hermetic group, according to the author, with other types of states being ostensibly much more immune to revolution. A non-exhaustive list of some of Goodwin’s key characteristics of state susceptibility to revolution might include:

- the determinacy of peripherality – whether that is the peripherality of a colonial society, or of a satellite East Bloc state prior to the USSR’s collapse;
- the determinacy of poor or draconian state handling of dissent, and particularly indiscriminately repressive state reaction to dissent;
- and the determinacy of the level of state strength/weakness at the point in time that a given state must interact with revolutionary insurgency – this also relates to crisis conditions that a state may be facing, leading to the overstretching of resources and so forth.

All of these characteristics could quite comfortably be factored into the Irish case. For instance, whether or not pre-’independence’ Ireland is understood as a bona fide colony, its sheer *peripherality* at least seems hard to refute: apart from the north-eastern part of the island around the city of Belfast, Ireland had not taken part in the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, and in the early twentieth was still built around an agricultural economy overwhelmingly
oriented toward the export of a handful of cash crops to Britain. Cut off from the Western edge of the European mainland by sea and by its larger island neighbour, Ireland constituted a true backwater of Europe, with a chronically declining population. It was also politically marginal: in spite of its formal representation in the UK parliament, it was ruled from London in a more or less colonial way – complete with directly-appointed governor, parallel institutions and carbine-bearing gendarmes.

As for poor, draconian and counter-productively repressive state handling of dissent, this was certainly present also. It is a cliché of standard histories of the revolutionary period – but, it would seem, a true one – that the nature of the British state response to the 1916 Rising was pivotal in turning an initially marginal and unpopular insurrection into a cause celebre in the renaissance of militant separatism seen in the revolutionary years. The razing of a large part of central Dublin by a Royal Navy gunboat, despatched to drive the insurgents out of their stronghold at the city's General Post Office, is probably a good example of the less than surgical precision, in terms of counter-insurgency response, identified by Goodwin as a key ingredient of revolutionary situations (see Chapter Four). The replacement of the collapsing Irish police forces with ad hoc *gendarmeries* of battle-hardened First World War veterans also fits into this picture – as does those forces' widespread, if unofficial policy of responding to republican actions through collective punishment, notably the burning of creameries and of town centres (notably Cork city centre) (see Chapter Six). Indeed, republican militants observed at the time that these “reprisals” seemed to very efficiently drive “the people” into greater support for the IRA (English 1999:81).

These features of the inept and heavy-handed state response to the insurgency are suggestive of the overstretched and crisis-ridden character of the British “state infrastructure” (in Goodwin's (2001) language) at the time of the revolution. The 1916 Rising – launched with arms acquired from the German regime – sought to exploit the British state's precarious footing in the middle of the First World War, and this context no doubt shaped the British response to the
rebellion. In 1918, the IRA saw its recruitment levels surge as the British state threatened to extend to Ireland military conscription, to help fight the war in Europe. And the 'War of Independence' proper took place in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, as Britain struggled with crisis on various fronts – not least domestic manifestations of the continent-wide wave of workers' struggles following the war.7

These represent only a handful of aspects of Goodwin's framework, which seem to fit relatively well with the contours of the Irish case. However, in other respects, Goodwin's framework does less well in this context.

For instance, while clumsy and indiscriminate state repression goes some way towards explaining the escalation of the Irish insurgency, it does not obviously explain why the insurgency emerged in the first place. Against Goodwin's insistence on revolutionary movements emerging when a critical mass of people feel forced into defending themselves from the arbitrary oppression of delinquent states, lacking in legitimacy (Goodwin points to patrimonial regimes in particular), it is arguable that the British state in Ireland had been strengthening its legitimacy for some time (Augusteijn 2002b).8 Apart from certain instances of major labour unrest (bearing a complex, but mostly distant relationship to nationalist mobilisation) (Kostick 2009), sporadic 'inter-communal' violence around Belfast (Hart 2003), and a certain air of militarism around the mass militias of the Irish, Ulster and 'National' Volunteers (Augusteijn 2002), Ireland before the 1916 Rising was still a relatively peaceful place – at
least in comparison to the European mainland.

A 'longview' approach to Irish history – the stuff of standard nationalist accounts – might frame the independence struggle in terms of 'one last push' against generations-long oppression; this is not an entirely unreasonable tack to take, considering the not so distant legacy of rebellion after rebellion coming in regular succession, alongside dispossession, disenfranchisement, harshly oppressive "Penal Laws", widespread "transportation" (exile) to Australian penal colonies and West Indian slave plantations, callous Malthusian handling of catastrophic famine conditions (Cleary 2007), and so forth.

But a closer look throws the continuity between the independence struggle, and this wider historical background, into doubt. It had been some time since the last major rebellion against British rule in Ireland⁹ – and it is arguable that this may have had something to do with the fact that successive British governments had invested some energy in finally resolving "the Irish problem" - or important aspects of it at least, for example in the breaking up of the large landed estates, and the pursuance of some kind of Home Rule settlement – since the late nineteenth century. (These were themselves the result of vigorous Irish agitation and mass mobilisation – significant nineteenth century 'contentious politics' stories in their own right - see Chapter Four.)

This is not to say that there were not "objective" reasons for the mobilisation of yet another wave of Irish rebellion. Try as they might to ameliorate the Irish situation – not without some apparent success at the time – it would take a lot more than some modest land reform, and the floating of a Home Rule bill, for the London government to deal effectively with the fact that a large part of Ireland’s problems derived from the fundamental patterns of how its economy had been structured and restructured under the British rule of the last number of centuries – that is, according to a thoroughly colonial logic.

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⁹ Indeed, Augusteijn (2002:110) quotes an IRA volunteer of the period explaining his and his peers' motivation to fight in terms of an urge to make up for the inaction of their fathers’ generation – the tradition of rebellion having been shamefully allowed to 'skip' a generation. The possibility that this kind of sentiment might have been widespread should be borne in mind in relation to the discussion of 'culture/ideology' and 'cultural repertoires' underlying the revolution, below.
Despite his emphasis on peripherality, this is the kind of causal logic that Goodwin understates in his account of what makes a revolution. Nonetheless, John Foran (2003:552-553) suggests that, whatever point Goodwin wishes to make about exploitative socio-economic structures not being sufficient cause for revolution, 'dependent development' and 'world systems' explanations are in fact implicit in many of the author's accounts of revolution on the periphery.

The Irish separatists' case against British rule was clearly colonial - albeit sometimes in all but name, as nationalist intellectuals often shirked explicit colonial comparisons, preferring to assert that Ireland was "a Mother Country" in her own right (Kissane 2005:52) - with Sinn Féin leader Éamon De Valera reminding an American audience during the War of Independence of the Irish nation's "independent formation" in the distant past, in contrast to the United States' relatively recent origins as "only an English colony" (Ibid.). And while nationalist intellectuals might have been uncomfortable with the notion that Ireland was a colony, a 'dependent development' analysis of Ireland's economic subordination to Britain clearly figured in separatist discourse. Indeed, even before the nascent Sinn Féin party had become explicitly separatist or republican, it had by the first decade of the twentieth century called for a national settlement that would allow for a more autonomous Ireland to break its economic dependence on Britain, foster its own industrial base and "native capitalism", and even, ultimately, develop its own overseas colonies (Kostick 2009).10

But if a potential 'Goodwinian' explanation of the Irish independence struggle is found wanting, even economic explanations emphasizing resistance to 'dependent development' only go so far. If the rebels had really been intent on

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10 Sinn Féin political positions would metamorphose many times in these years - but such 'would-be colonialist anti-colonialism' was not an aberration, and reflected well the eclectic political thought of a nationalist movement birthed in Ireland's anomalous conditions - those of a colony inside Western Europe, where both colonisers and colonised were white Europeans.
transforming the Irish economy, they might have been expected to do more about it once in power. Some experiments with protection of domestic industry were seen from the 1930s on, but the formative years of the Irish Free State were remarkable for how little economic reform was attempted, and how conservative the new rulers were. It was difficult to see much of the early Sinn Féin “native industrial capitalism” ideology being put into practice in the early years of the state (Garvin 2002). What was easier to see – within a general pattern of economic stagnation – was a consistent protection of large agricultural interests. For Tom Garvin (e.g. 2002), an influential scholar of the period, this is the key to understanding the episode – not as the revolution of Griffith’s radical urban Catholic intelligentsia, but as a revolution of the class of middle and large farmers grown prosperous in the wake of the famine, and particularly in the window of opportunity for profiteering on the British market provided by the scarcities of the First World War (somewhat ironically). According to Garvin, these farmers felt overtaxed within the UK system, and desired a client state of their own, more amenable to their interests. Garvin suggests that the IRA’s war was disproportionately funded by these farmers, and that the deeply conservative and relatively anti-welfarist state produced by the independence struggle reflected their strong level of ‘ownership’ over what happened.

The revolution of the urban Catholic intelligentsia, and the revolution of this rural bourgeoisie – both suggestive of familiar class-based revolutionary narratives – are very real jigsaw pieces within this historical puzzle, and how best to fit the two together is an open question. But a third important ‘class’ dimension to the independence struggle makes this task even less straightforward: this is the fact that the rank and file of the republican movement – and indeed of the IRA’s “fighting men” – were disproportionately drawn not from the rural farmsteads, but from the upper working classes and lower middle classes of the towns and cities. Hart’s (2003) recent findings in this regard – based on extensive quantitative analysis of sources such as newspaper, court, and incarceration records of the time – are deeply counter-intuitive against many of the myths of the independence struggle, but appear robust – and quite stark, when the strikingly paltry number of farmers and farmers’ sons implicated in
IRA activity are set in the context of an overwhelmingly rural country quite literally full of farmers and farmers' sons.

The vigorous participation of so many more or less proletarian young men and women in the independence struggle is even more curious considering the wider 'contentious politics' context of this phase of Irish history: apart from perhaps being 'not the only way out', neither was the nationalist independence movement assembled around Sinn Féin and the IRA 'the only show in town'; there was another, parallel revolutionary movement mobilising in Ireland in these years: the militant syndicalist movement (Kostick 2009, O'Connor 1988). Apparently depending on given commentators' political inclinations, this movement tends either to get a walk-on role in the history of the independence struggle, to be assimilated as a vital – but subsequently 'betrayed' – part of the 'revolutionary' whole – or to simply be ignored. But the syndicalist movement involved hundreds of strikes, workplace occupations and self-declared 'Soviets' across the Irish countryside and towns, and an ideology and organisational infrastructure autonomous from the republican movement (Kostick 2009). Moreover, in spite of occasional and crucial support for the republican movement, it had a different membership, and was ultimately outflanked and crushed by the nationalists. For these and other reasons, both marginalising it from, and collapsing it into the wider republican narrative of the independence struggle are inadequate.

How did the urban intelligentsia's (soon decommissioned) 'native industrial capitalism' ideology, the farmers' money, and the human resources of the upper trades and lower professions fit together? Why did the latter groups join the conservative republican revolution, rather than the radical syndicalist one?

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11 It is unfortunate that the hard data to hand is so overwhelmingly focused on the men who carried out the revolution: as Hart points out, a hugely important factor in the 'success' of the revolution, in contrast to previous Irish revolts, was the newfound mobilisation of women to the cause, both formally, in organisations parallel to the IRA, such as Cumann na mBan, and informally. It is much harder to establish the social profile of these women with exactitude, because they did not tend to get arrested and leave paper trails in prison records and newspaper court reports. But it would seem reasonable to assume that the massive and crucial mobilisation of republican women hued to similar social and class outlines as those of their male counterparts.
As indicated above, Goodwin's framework might well have something to say about how the 'war' between the IRA and the British state escalated, and how it took on momentum – but his framework might say less about how these disparate elements could be made to gel together in the first place.

This puzzle cannot, of course, be solved here. But it seems that a number of perspectives would be important in joining these dots, and in piecing together an analysis of how all of this happened.

Three key perspectives – somewhat messily congealed together, and potentially overlapping at points – would be (1), agency/strategy, (2) culture/ideology, and (3) events.

(1) Agency/strategy
Peter Hart (2003) has argued strongly that the Irish revolution was to a large extent *made* by the republican militants. Although it could be suggested that Hart might pay more attention to the not insignificant and deeply-rooted 'objective' grievances conceivably felt by some members of Irish society under the empire, Hart's point that the IRA in effect "started it" - and that they took the clear initiative, and lead, in the violence that animated the revolution – is hard to refute. Considering that there was little obvious appetite, on a popular level, for such insurrection on the eve of the independence struggle, the agency of the relatively small band of militants who "started it", and somehow managed to spread "it", seems important.

Where the line ought to be drawn between 'agency' and 'strategy' in not entirely clear. In a small space, it is in fact hard to know where to start as far as describing the 'strategic' successes of the republican rebels is concerned. But managing to balance a self-initiated guerrilla war, punctuated by raids, ambushes, and executions of civilians, police and soldiers on the one hand, with successfully winning legitimacy – nationally and internationally – as a democratically-elected 'constitutional' regime (in the wake of the 1919 election) in a 'dual power' situation – and then going on to hold a 'truce', and 'treaty' negotiations, leading
to the creation of a new state – with the very regime they had just launched an insurrection against – would seem to be an important part of the 'big picture' of the republicans' overall strategic success.

Picking apart the dynamics of how this was achieved would, I think, overlap with the category of culture/ideology.

(2) Culture/ideology
In opposition to Jeff Goodwin's 'state-constructionist' framework, Eric Selbin (echoing other contentious politics scholars) has called for a 'cultural-constructionist' approach to the study of revolution. This would stress the stories, myths, motifs and cultural residues upon which revolutionaries draw – and which they may weave together, or sometimes even spin – in creating a bricolage or language through which a revolutionary ideology may be articulated. Part of the significance of such cultural idioms in this context is as a nexus between 'politics' and 'ideology' on the one hand, and 'emotions' on the other. These factors may have been significant in the Irish case: while the apparent marginality of the desire for revolution before the 1916 Rising seems to be suggestive of 'master frames' (Goodwin and Jasper 2004b) and 'political context' (Goodwin 2001) not particularly on the side of the rebels, it would also seem that the turn of events ensuing from the rising led to the republicans tapping into more deeply buried and more diffuse cultural frames which were enabling of nationalist revolution. Working out the relative import of more or less 'organised' cultural work, on the one hand, and more 'subterranean' cultural repertoires – a la Scott's “hidden transcripts” (Scott 1995) - is an open question. In terms of the former, we might consider the cultural nationalist proselytising of organisations like the Gaelic League and the Christian Brothers (Hart 2003), while folk memories of past revolts, and folklore and balladry surrounding native versions of Hobsbawm's “social bandits and primitive rebels” - tinged, arguably, with anti-colonial sentiments – could be seen as examples of the latter.

(3) Events
The point about the “turn of events” ensuing from the 1916 rising serving as a
hinge between revolutionary agency and strategy, on the one hand, and, on the other, the escalation of a marginal political voluntarism into a mass mobilisation – apparently tapping deeply into submerged cultural repertoires in the process – is important. These things do not just happen, and dwelling statically on factors of agency 'over here', and unlocked cultural repertoires 'over there' would seem to leave important questions about the dynamics of escalation unanswered. Some 'negative' mechanisms of escalation, around oppression and repression, can be taken from Goodwin’s framework. However, Sewell (e.g. 1996), and more recently Beissinger (2002) (drawing on Sewell) take the analysis of such (for want of a better term) escalation-mechanisms in a somewhat different direction with their focus on events, or 'contentious events'.

Connected to Sewell’s concern with time and space, the 'eventful' approach stresses 'events' as moments of “thickened history” (Beissinger 2002), where unexpected conjunctures of given circumstances arise and seem to throw open radically new possibilities for how actors imagine their social worlds – and, crucially, where the 'membranes' between structure and agency are breached. In such events as the taking of the Bastille (Sewell 1996), and the many instances of rupture which led to the rapid disintegration of the USSR (2002), social realities long accepted as inevitable and immutable quickly come to seem fragile, and prospects considered impossible come to seem inevitable. In Beissinger's description, events are those rare times/spaces where the constructed nature of social facts and totalities suddenly becomes visible, and open to de-, and re-construction – where social facts – and, crucially, identities – can, often for the first time, be radically renegotiated.

Like some of the other approaches called for here, the 'eventful' focus seems like a useful tool for making sense of the Irish independence struggle because it gives a name to some of the dynamics described by observers and historians of the period – like the radical renegotiations of identity that followed the 1916 rising, providing a support and recruitment base for the IRA where there had been none, and injecting a sense of dynamism and momentum – of things happening, and history being on the side of the rebels – into proceedings. And crucially, it
helps explain why things that seemed unthinkable in early 1916 – like the resumption of a people's war against British rule, and the achievement of (some kind of) Irish independence – came to be accepted as inevitable by a critical mass of people in both Ireland and Britain.

Before delving deeper into the relevant social theory and outlining the analytical approach of this dissertation in detail in the next chapter, a general overview will be presented here of how these topics - events/contingency, culture and agency/strategy - could be expected to fit together in the Irish case. Though a single case is at issue, this will be done with a keen sense of how that case could relate to the wider study of revolutions and related phenomena - a field that has long emphasized comparative and international perspectives.

Events/contingency, culture, and strategy/agency in the Irish independence struggle

Social scientists concerned with revolution have long emphasized wide-ranging comparisons across space and time, as well as attention to the international and global dynamics shaping local and national conditions for revolution - the latter epitomised by Skocpol’s seminal 1979 work on States and Social Revolutions. In his recent bid to re-emphasize the culturalist perspective, and in particular the “power of story”, within the sociology of revolutions and contentious politics, Eric Selbin (2010) identifies three main kinds of stories – or, perhaps, “meta-narratives” - with which different instances of revolution tend to be associated. These are “the story of civilising and democratising revolution”, “the story of social revolution”, and “the freedom and liberation story of revolution”.

Discussing the latter, he notes that “the Freedom and Liberation Story of Revolution has largely been understood and represented as one that happens outside the North/West. There are exceptions (the slave revolts in the United States, for example, and the struggle in Ireland), but by and large this is a story told ‘over there’, on the periphery (or semi-periphery), about ‘those people’ in
what in recent years has been identified as the ‘third’ or ‘developing’ world (Selbin 2010:157-158).”

Is Selbin right that Ireland was such an exception? It is true that Ireland is, geographically speaking, both North and West, and that, until recently, the entire island comprised not just part of the British Empire, but part of the United Kingdom itself (part of the island still does).

But when Ireland experienced its “Freedom and Liberation Story of Revolution” revolution, it represented at best a half exception in terms of Selbin’s formula: geography, and physical proximity to Britain notwithstanding, much of Ireland was, in many ways, objectively a third world colony, filled, moreover, with “those people”.12

Anticipating a worldwide wave of anti-colonial struggles, and ultimate decolonisation, across the British Empire and others in the following decades, this revolution saw the British state rapidly unravelling over much of Ireland between what is commonly seen as the start of the “War of Independence” in 1919, and its collapse in 1922 – after a number of decades, moreover, when the British state in Ireland seemed to be strengthening and stabilising, and gaining in legitimacy.

If Ireland’s credentials as a full member of the “North/Western” world are debatable, should Ireland’s story of “Freedom and Liberation” be repatriated to the “over there”, periphery world where most such revolutionary tales originate? More specifically, is Ireland’s experience best understood as one act in a longer twentieth century play of anti-colonial struggles? Or, in the spirit of McAdam et al’s (2001) approach, should we avoid compartmentalising it away, “over there”, and expect that it might well share ‘genetic material’ with other diverse outbreaks of contentious politics, from near and afar?

12 See Cleary (2007) for a persuasive account of Ireland’s colonial character. Moreover, Coulter (2002) points out that in the pre-‘Celtic Tiger’ Ireland of the 1980s, elements of the intelligentsia were still seriously debating whether Ireland might reasonably be considered a third world country – a debate that seemed odd in the late 1990s and early 2000s, but somewhat less so now.
In truth, Ireland’s experience sits awkwardly between the kinds of contentious politics seen in the history of the colonial world, and that of the North/West. (For although McAdam et al (2001) are no doubt right that similar mechanisms of political contention can often be seen in apparently very different times and places, those times and places would not be so obviously different if they did not tend to throw up patterns of social life, and of (contentious) politics, that were often identifiably different.)

Ireland’s experience was basically colonial, but adjacency to the British metropole, Anglicisation, reconfiguration of the country along “British” lines (Cleary 2007, Canny 2001), and at least partial political integration of Ireland into the United Kingdom (Ireland was incorporated into the UK proper in 1801) did not happen without leaving some residue. When the British state in most of Ireland collapsed in the early 1920s, it was to a rather British model of liberal, constitutional democracy that the ‘founding fathers’ of the Irish state turned, almost by default (Garvin 1987; Garvin 1996; Kissane 2002). And despite the outward appearance of “anti-Englishness” – often expressed through a hardline Catholicism – a fundamental mirroring of British values has been identified by various authors within Catholic elite-formation from the mid-nineteenth century on (Garvin 1987), and even in the peculiarly Victorian “more puritan than you” moral posturing of the hegemonising Irish Catholic church (Inglis 1987).13

These kinds of considerations have implications for how we may understand the events that took place in Ireland in these years. If we are to insist on a perspective on the Irish independence struggle not as a unique, or isolated, or teleologically pre-ordained happening ‘outside history’ (as some popular and

13 In some ways, the Fenians (Irish Republican Brotherhood) are an exception here, but in some ways they ‘prove the rule’: Garvin (1987) points out that in their late eighteenth century heyday, their reference points were determinedly modernist, secular, and non-British: their republicanism looked to the constitutions of France and the United States, and they intended to re-draw the map of Ireland, de-establishing the hated colonial capital of Dublin, and dividing capital city duties between then provincial towns such as Athlone and Limerick. However, it was ultimately IRA leaders of a Fenian pedigree that accepted the 1922 Treaty with the London government – setting up the Irish Free State as a dominion within the British Empire – and it was those IRA leaders who set up the most conservative, and British-oriented political party, Cumann na nGaedheal, after the Treaty settlement and split.
official nationalist narratives might frame it], but as one instance of a particular kind of revolutionary outbreak in a world that incubates many such outbreaks – as well as chains, waves, and cycles of such outbreaks running together with some continuity – then we would do well to seek to relate it to frameworks for the comparative study of revolution and contentious politics, and questions arising therein.

**Cause and effect in the Irish independence struggle**

In the concluding pages of his important study of *Nationalist Mobilisation and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, Beissinger (2002:458-459) emphasises the 'eventful' (a la Sewell (1996 etc.)) and thoroughly contingent character of nationalism and nation-state formation – using as reference points the perspectives of Ernest Gellner and Michael Mann:

The way in which pre-existing structural conditions, institutional constraints, and action itself conspire to imbue some nationalisms with force and to deprive others of the same provides new meaning to Gellner's insight that "Nationalism as such is fated to prevail, but not any one particular nationalism.".. As Michael Mann described the event-dependent conjunctures surrounding the rise of nations in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Europe:

“Though the nation's rise seems inexorable when viewed teleologically from the twentieth century, in this period it advanced contingently.. Had Louis XVI compromised, had the Brissotins foreseen that war would destroy them, had the French troops at Valmy run away (as they were expected to do), had the Directory not produced a consummate general who proved an insensitive conqueror and who made one terrible decision to invade Russia.. these, and other "might have beens" might have stemmed the national tide [Mann 1993:246].”

Contrary to Mann, I do not mean to imply that with the failure of any specific nationalism, other nationalisms would not have emerged; nationalism is a ubiquitous feature of a world of states.. But the dependence
of nationhood on the conjuncture and outcome of the event injects a deeper set of contingencies into nationalism than even Gellner's theory recognised.

If we twist Beissinger's lens around slightly, to focus specifically on anti-colonial nationalist mobilisations, as opposed to nationalisms in general, the case of Ireland takes on a different light. A 'Mann-ian' counter-factual with regard to the Irish independence struggle might be: if Ireland – simultaneously Britain's oldest colony, its closest neighbour, and indeed formally part of the United Kingdom itself – had not fallen to nationalist demands, would other claim-makers, elsewhere in the British Empire, still have pushed for independence in the way that they did, even without this example of the spoils to be gained by nationalist audacity, revealing weaknesses at the heart of the British Empire?

According to Beissinger's and Gellner's logic, the answer would presumably be yes. Either way, it is interesting to consider Ireland's experience in the context of the event- and action-led trajectories of the life of twentieth century British colonies. How 'structurally determined' was it that almost all of Britain's colonies would at some point in the twentieth century – and mostly by mid-century – shirk off formal imperial control and fall, apparently domino-like, to nationalist mobilisations?

The obvious answer here – reminiscent of Goodwin's (2001) point about overstretched "state infrastructures", especially in peripheral contexts – has to do with state weakness; that in the wake of the strains of the First World War in the case of Ireland, and of the nailing shut of Britain's 'great power' coffin after the Second in the case of the next major wave of decolonisation, nationalist revolutionaries found themselves pushing at an open door.

This kind of answer has some explanatory power with regard to all of these cases – quite a lot in some. But it probably has less explanatory power with regard to the Irish case than the others. Certainly, the exigencies of war, and the strain placed by war on British state power and resources, were extremely significant.
factors in the events of 1916-1923 in Ireland. Perhaps if Britain had not been at war, it would not have razed central Dublin in response to the “stab in the back”\footnote{Townshend, in an article marking the 90th anniversary of the Rising, fails to attribute its characterisation as a “stab in the back” - long a cliché of commentary on the event – but it seems that it can be traced back to a piece written by Irish poet and intellectual George Bernard Shaw for the New York Times magazine, in the wake of the Dublin insurrection (New York Times 1989).} of the Easter Rising, armed by certain “gallant allies”\footnote{The full, thinly veiled reference to German support for the Easter Rising occurs in the second sentence of the 1916 Proclamation of Independence: “Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.” (Provisional Government of the Irish Republic 1916)} in Europe. Then again, perhaps, had Britain not been caught up in the First World War, Pearse and company would not have sensed the political (or military?) opportunity to launch the Rising in the first place (and perhaps would have had to find another arms dealer than the Kaiser’s Germany). Perhaps, if not distracted by the fallout from the First World War, the British state would have worked out a more coherent policy in response to the Irish insurgency. And certainly, were it not for Westminster’s intention to extend conscription to Ireland in 1918, the separatist movement would not have seen the dramatic peak in its support (including, significantly, robust electoral support) that occurred in that year, nor the IRA its record recruitment levels. Indeed, Garvin (1987) suggests that were it not for the “accident” of the First World War, the militant separatist movement in Ireland would probably have simply died away quietly – a fate it had seemed to be heading for in the years before the take-off of the independence struggle, and a fate that many of its adherents more or less openly feared.

But the background of the First World War can only explain so much of what happened in these years in Ireland. The 1918 “Conscription Crisis” indeed saw a massive surge in IRA recruitment, but the vast majority of these new recruits disappeared as soon as the crisis was over. This has been confirmed in Hart’s (1998) quantitative analysis of IRA manpower of the period, and it was universally understood by hardcore republicans at the time (O’Malley 2002:104). And while the 1918 Sinn Féin electoral support accompanying the conscription crisis was key to the party’s positioning itself as ’legitimate’ democratic
government of its declared “Irish Republic”, many in the movement – especially the militarist section of the movement – were rather indifferent to questions of democratic mandate and of “politics”. Since this included many of the local leaders and fighters who prosecuted the guerrilla war on the ground, in some cases relatively autonomously from their notional headquarters in Dublin, it is very debatable to what extent alternative electoral circumstances would have changed their courses of action.

Moreover, Britain was hardly the only war-ravaged European state to face insurgency and revolutionary mobilisation as the First World War came to a close. These were very much years of insurrection outside Ireland as well, and a wave of revolutionary mobilisation stretched across Europe, reaching its apogee in Russia in 1917. Not all of the states facing down insurrection collapsed in the way that the British state in much of Ireland did – even ones more war-ravaged than Britain, such as the German state, a First World War loser – which faced considerable danger of some kind of overthrow in these years. The British equivalent of the Freikorps – the ‘Auxiliaries’ and ‘Black and Tans’, ad hoc forces recruited among demobbed First World War veterans to bolster the disintegrating Irish police – may not have been successful in crushing the revolutionaries, but the German Freikorps were.

In 'political process' terms, the First World War was certainly seen, and seized upon, as an opportunity by Irish rebels – reflected, indeed, in the old adage that “England’s difficulty is Ireland’s opportunity”. There may have also been other aspects to the window of opportunity encountered by the republican insurgents. Kostick (2009) puts a 'better the devil you know' slant on the Treaty settlement, suggesting that the British urge to settle with the Irish nationalists had as much to do with Westminster's desire that Ireland would not fall to a separate layer of

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16 Peter Hart's (2003) term to describe this attitude of the movement at the time is “ademocratic”. For a discussion of this point, see Regan (2004). Hart (1998) and English (1999) also discuss the obsession with soldierliness, and contempt for the “politicians” of Sinn Féin, to be found among IRA activists of the time.

17 Townshend (2006) refers to this “opportunity” adage as the “old Fenian dogma”, but in fact the “dictum” can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century figurehead of Irish Catholic emancipation (and of the attempt to scrap the 1800 Act of Union), Daniel O'Connell (Davis 1997).
revolutionaries, potentially even more dangerous to British interests: the militant syndicalists, who were busy during the years of republican struggle waging their own bid at revolution, involving hundreds of strikes, Soviets, and workplace and farm occupations across the country.

Whether or not Kostick's contention is sound, it is certainly fair to say that it may not have been the 'fighting prowess' of the IRA that on its own won the 'War of Independence'. But even if this is true, that 'fighting prowess' – or more usefully, the mobilisation of thousands of (mostly very young) men and women to the cause of militant separatism in these years, involving for many the departure from ordinary life into a campaign of clandestine armed struggle – presents some significant sociological questions.

How did this mobilisation start? How did it escalate? How did a militant separatist movement, considered by many to be marginal and moribund on the eve of the revolution, transform itself in the space of a few heady years into an effective mass movement, around an effective hard core of several thousand militants?

The lurch of Irish history towards independence in these years was uncharted, and unpredicted. Once we eliminate teleological explanations for how and why this happened, we are back to the questions of contingency suggested by Beissinger above. Following Sewell, Beissinger emphasises the power of action and events to rupture people's perceptions of the immutability of the states and regimes that surround them. In this view, events open up windows in space and time where the membranes between 'structure' and 'action' can be breached – and where the constructedness of 'structure' – its banal reproduction through the patterning of everyday activity – is revealed.

The 'action' aspect to this is important. 'Action' and 'agency' are intimately linked, and both were important ingredients of the Irish independence struggle. From the Easter Rising of 1916 – described by Garvin (1987:139) as "a very successful example of the propaganda of the deed", and responsible (along with the British
response to the Rising) for instigating the rebirth of the increasingly moribund militant separatist movement – to the audacious military coups of the IRA, often leading to brutal reprisals from the Crown Forces, leading large numbers of people into the arms of the republican movement (and often calculated by the IRA to do just that) the revolutionary process followed a jerky and breakneck course of agency, action, reaction and escalation.

The following chapters will go into greater depth in sketching out empirically how these factors of action and agency collided with, entangled with, and broke through structural constraints. But first, this literature review will be rounded out by an overview of what the existing literature on the independence struggle can tell us about the agency and action that fuelled this eventful period of Irish history – as well as addressing the question of who, and what type of people, were responsible.

**Elite and non-elite action**

Tom Garvin's (1987) (highly vituperative) landmark account of *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland, 1850-1928*, is alive to the high levels of sheer contingency involved in the years of the independence struggle in Ireland, and indeed emphasises this as a factor in how those years played out. However, he frames this contingency rather differently than a Beissinger might. Garvin – with some debt to Pareto (Garvin 1987:40) – insists on viewing the Irish experience as a process whereby certain 'elite' elements made a revolution, and a certain 'elite' came to power. Contingency comes into play, in Garvin's account, in the shape of a series of “accidents” that brought this elite – still decidedly rough around the edges in Garvin’s view – to power before its time:

The growth of a Catholic would-be elite stratum in late-nineteenth-century Ireland was steady and can, in outline at least, be traced adequately. Because of the 'accident' of the British political crisis of 1910-1914 and the Great War, elements of this stratum were precipitated into power 'prematurely', being given a chance to grasp political power much earlier and much more completely than they would
have had in times of peace (Garvin 1987:41).

From one point of view, Garvin is quite right to emphasise this particular intersection of elite action and 'serendipitous' (for want of a better term) circumstance. The story of the independence struggle is laced with the victories, snapped from the jaws of defeat against all odds, of unlikely revolutionary heroes – whose posthumous careers were in some cases more edifying than their marginal lives and bad deaths (e.g. 1916 leader Pearse) – and with the coming to fruition of badly laid plans, including badly laid, or barely thought out, plans for state-building.

The career of the Fenians – AKA the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) – is reflective of this phenomenon. The IRB is remembered as the secret society – almost extinct by 1900, after an 1860s heyday – that infiltrated the broad church mass organisation of the Irish Volunteers, to inveigle (part of) it into insurrection at Easter 1916, hence changing the course of Irish history. (Actually, there was another layer to this intrigue, in that it was in fact a secret cabal within the entryist secret society, that contrived the Easter Rising – a fact rarely remembered (Garvin 1987) (see chapter four).) And ironically, it was largely the leaders of the IRB cadre within the republican movement that essentially dumped the republican ideal in 1922, and led the signing of the Treaty with the London government, becoming the first leaders of the new Irish Free State in the process.

As alluded to by Garvin (1987:33-34), none of this would have been predicted by many before the 1916 Rising:

> The Irish Republican Brotherhood, or Fenians, was an extraordinary organisation. Despite years of failure and tragi-comic debacles, it was its political project rather than that of the parliamentarians which was to prevail in Ireland, a project that still haunts the minds of the democratic leaders of the Irish Republic to this day.

However, to present the 'outrageous fortune' of 'elite' elements such as the Fenians and their peers as the story of contingency that the Irish independence
struggle has to tell, is to present an impoverished account of the contingency and 'eventfulness' of that process. Such elites were crucial, not only in taking bold and inspiring actions such as the 1916 Rising – a tour de force of propaganda by deed, to paraphrase Garvin – or in acting as strategists and field-marshals in a quasi-war with Britain, as Michael Collins and company did quite effectively; more broadly, a somewhat disparate gamut of elites and micro-elites (in Garvin's (e.g. 1987:41) terms, the fragments of a slowly but inexorably emerging Catholic national elite, yet to be fully 'born') were crucial in nurturing a discourse of separatism, and a certain “counter-culture” around cultural nationalist institutions such as the Gaelic League (Garvin 1987:88).

But Garvin's account of the 'accident' whereby the stars crossed and let this still somewhat inept elite slip 'prematurely' into power misses out on something; the problem with Garvin's preoccupation with elites (a la Pareto) is that it elides the role played by non-elites in revolution and contentious politics. The crux of the contingent dimension to the Irish independence struggle was the moment when the seeds engineered by various 'elite' republican architects exploded out into the Irish provinces; in certain places these took root, and their shoots became the non-'elite' grassroots of the militant separatist movement, who would spend the next number of years leading their own war, notionally under the leadership of the largely Dublin-based elites, but in reality, 'not giving a damn' what the 'politicians' in Dublin said, stealing their own weapons in ambushes and barracks raids, and lying to their Dublin commanders to justify their frequently unauthorised guerrilla actions.

Anatomy of a movement

In Garvin's defense, he defines his elite quite broadly:

The elite is defined as all Sinn Fein or Republican Labour MPs (entitled... TD, in Irish) elected in 1918 and 1921, in republican reckoning the members of the first and second Dails; all IRA leaders of the guerrilla war deemed significant enough to
be included in the standard *Who’s Who* of the war of independence; all officers of Cumann na mBan, the women’s auxiliary to the IRA, similarly included; all members of the Supreme Council of the IRB, 1920, and all sixteen leaders executed after the 1916 Rising. These categories overlap very considerably, as many of the leaders held several positions, frequently simultaneously; for example, many IRA commanders were elected unopposed and, in effect, in officio, to the second Dáil. The elite as defined came to 304 individuals, and included all the well-known Sinn Fein, IRB, and IRA leaders while also including many less well-known local figures and central administrators within the separatist hierarchy. (Garvin 1987:49)

However, I would suggest it might be more meaningful to look at this group of people in a different way. I would suggest that, around the edges of Garvin’s broadly defined ’elite’ lie figures cut from a different cloth than figures at its centre, such as Michael Collins, Arthur Griffith (founder of Sinn Féin and pioneering ’bourgeois-moderniser’ within the movement), or Éamon De Valera (future premier and president of the Irish state).

Towards the margins of Garvin’s group were men like Tom Barry and Dan Breen. Both clearly meet Garvin’s criteria for ’elite’ membership, because they became household names in Ireland during and after the independence struggle, coming to prominence as well-known IRA militants through feats recorded in song and story, and both were at some point in their rebel careers elected to the the Dáil (parliament) in the manner suggested by Garvin, above. (The autobiographies of both men are among the best known Irish republican memoirs, forming part of a sometimes somewhat lurid popular literature of the period - as suggested by their books’ titles: *Guerrilla Days in Ireland*, by Barry (1981), and *My Fight For Irish Freedom*, by Breen (1981).)

Yet men like Barry and Breen were representative of a different IRA from that of the proto-’statesmen’ in Dublin. Both were from modest rural backgrounds in the southern province of Munster (where the fighting in these years was by far the heaviest – the death toll in County Cork easily exceeding the average rate of violent deaths in Northern Ireland during the post-1968 ’Troubles’ [Hart 1998]); both men joined the republican movement some time after the 1916 Rising; and
once into the movement, both men systematically ignored their orders from headquarters, and led their own local wars on their own initiative.

Breen is, in a sense, the man who started the Irish 'war of independence'. History textbooks in Irish schools still record the first engagement of that war as taking place in the rural townland of Soloheadbeg, County Tipperary (near Breen's place of birth), in January 1919, in which two police officers were shot dead as an IRA unit raided for explosives. This took place on the day that the first Dáil opened in Dublin, and so was seen as particularly significant. But this was not an act of the new parliament or government; this was an act of a local IRA unit commanded by Dan Breen, without authorisation from the republican hierarchy. In later years, Breen was to reveal that he and his men had expected more police to be present, and thus expected a higher death toll, adding that he was disappointed they had not had the opportunity to kill more that day.

Tom Barry, now one of the best-remembered guerrillas of the war, was a somewhat unlikely IRA leader. 1919 found him demobilised from the British Army of the First World War – in which he had served with distinction at Ypres and elsewhere – and back in his native County Cork (Hart 1998). Young men were usually recruited to the IRA through close personal ties and social networks – which Barry did not have with the organisation – and British Army veterans were viewed by the IRA with considerable suspicion (Ibid.). After apparently falling afoul of the support networks in place for ex-servicemen, however, Barry the outsider vainly tried to join the IRA a number of times, before eventually being headhunted by the organisation (Ibid.).

After a number of unsuccessful operations, and eager for a coup against the Crown Forces, Barry set up an ambush that would go down in popular culture and history, and that would ultimately lead to the imposition of martial law in the southern counties. (The London government had been trying hard to avoid this for political reasons, but in the wake of Barry's action were forced to view the IRA as a bona fide military threat.) The ambush at Kilmichael, West Cork,

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18 See Hart (1998:30-32) for a useful, brief biographical sketch of Barry and his path to the IRA.
involved the wiping out of an entire patrol of Auxiliaries (18 demobbed British officers, standing in for the atrophying Irish police).

Again, Barry’s action was totally unauthorised. His original report on the incident, written for his superiors, has survived, and it presents the action as spontaneous and defensive, launched as an IRA unit was about to be discovered by the Auxiliaries – a rather different version of events from his subsequent writings on the topic, which present it as a daring and premeditated plan, and a personal initiative of Barry’s – which other evidence confirms that it was.19

These were but two incidents in two illustrious guerrilla careers – more conducive to chronicling in song and printed word than many, thanks to their high incidence of gunfights, skin of the teeth escapes and daring prison breaks. In a way the experiences of Barry and Breen were not representative, because for these reasons they were more celebrity guerrillas than rank-and-file guerrillas. But in another way their experiences were quite representative: theirs was the IRA of the young men who joined at various points in the years after the 1916 Rising – often without previous involvement in ‘politics’ (in the broadest sense), and without a family background in republicanism. This was the intensely local IRA that acted on its own initiative20, indifferent or even oblivious to orders and supervision from headquarters in Dublin.

Through the work of historians such as Hart (1998, 2003), a picture has only recently been emerging of just how much of a disconnect there was between the republican leadership and the fighters on the ground.21 In ways they were fighting different, largely autonomous, but loosely affiliated campaigns. Garvin’s

19 See Hart (1998:20-30) for a detailed comparison of Barry’s (and others’) accounts of the fateful ambush at Kilmichael.

20 Or not: a constant theme of memoirs of the period – such as those of IRA organiser Ernie O’Malley (2002), despatched from Dublin to travel the country, trying to put order on ragtag local units – was how the ‘quality’ of the local officers and men, and little else, determined whether an IRA area was “good” or not. Another theme of O’Malley's writings is his insensitivity to local IRA leaders' excuses that lack of arms supply from headquarters kept them from fighting: O'Malley would always point out that the most active units acquired most of their own guns, usually raided directly from police and military barracks and patrols. See O'Malley (2002).

21 Although Augusteijn (1996) warns against over-emphasising this disconnect, arguing that the relationship between IRA GHQ in Dublin, the local IRA units, and the mobile IRA Flying Columns, was a complex one, that changed considerably over time.
emphasis on ‘elites’ is interesting, but on a certain level it is handicapped by its inclination towards refining, rather than breaking free from a general and implicit habit of commentators to conflate the movement in, say, West Cork – Tom Barry country – with the cabinet and even the war room of the “politicians” in Dublin.

Hart (1998) has demonstrated that the uprising in places such as West Cork was an uprising of “the boys” – as the IRA were, and often still are, simply known. The spread of the IRA in the years after 1916 hewed closely to the lines of already existing social and kin networks. Hart stresses that recruitment was overwhelmingly collective rather than individual, with whole groups of young men and boys – usually neighbours, kin, or friends since childhood – joining at the same time – even whole football teams.22 Hart highlights the appearance of the IRA as an organic outgrowth of local youth culture – and of the peculiar rural Irish forms of the charivari rituals of young unmarried males seen all over Europe in early modern Europe, and still extant in Ireland in the early twentieth century.23

Hart points out that few IRA veterans of the time, who have discussed the subject, can give very good explanations of how or why they joined the organisation, beyond, “It was the thing to do at the time”, “You couldn’t understand it now”, and “The older brother sort of half asked me, half ordered me...” (IRA veterans quoted in Hart 1998).

Likewise, the politics of IRA recruits’ rationales for joining were as unclear as the movable feast romantic nationalism of Garvin’s revolutionary elites: “The politics of it were a bit vague” (IRA veteran quoted in Hart 1998).

Indeed, without stretching the imagination too far, from certain angles the events of these years look as much like a revolt against the norms of everyday life as a revolution against British domination of Ireland. The Irish countryside of the

22 Of course, there were prominent exceptions to these rules, such as Tom Barry himself.
early twentieth century was an extremely regimented and hierarchical place, with rigid pecking orders extending right into the rural farmstead; inheritance, marriage rights and fertility were tightly policed. Internal family politics around these issues left cold, distant and thoroughly authoritarian relationships between fathers and sons, and husbands and wives – while daughters would just be lucky to get a dowry to secure marriage, and exit from home.

Hart has uncovered a good deal of evidence of the independence struggle serving as a cover for rebellion against these norms – particularly of the domination of sons by their fathers, with sons absconding from farm work to go on IRA duty, bullying their fathers into voting “the right way” or not at all, and so forth.

Sinn Féin was pejoratively nicknamed the “Women and Children’s Party” (Garvin 1987). The prominence of “the boys” in all matters labelled Sinn Féin (a vague and misleading moniker in this context) explained this partly – and partly it was explained by the preponderance of women in the movement. Again, Hart has argued that in so far as Irish revolutionaries had parental guidance into their revolutionary ways, it overwhelmingly tended to come from their mothers. Furthermore, a parallel has been drawn between the alliance struck between the priests of the hegemonising Catholic Church in late nineteenth century Ireland, and the wives and women of Catholic Ireland – as an escape route of sorts from their domestic domination by their husbands and fathers (see Inglis 1988) – and the flood of women towards the republican movement during the independence struggle.

Thus, in many parts of the country – and certainly in the parts of the country where the most fighting took place – the Irish independence struggle resembled a mass social movement, filled by young men, and women, determined to fight for Irish independence – and perhaps, on a certain level, against the norms of everyday life. It would be hard to imagine such a movement of armed resistance going very far in a society that was not structured along the lines of colonial peripherality. But the ‘structural’ factors in favour of such armed resistance in Ireland do not fully explain why the movement emerged. It seems that a number
of key events – such as the 1916 Rising – set off a wave of other events and actions around the country, that led to the creation of a mass grassroots movement, which literally took not just the law, but the Crown Forces' rifles into its own hands, and fought those forces with them.

The dynamics of rebellion

However, this puzzle – this question of 'What happened?', or even 'What else happened?' – cannot be answered just by saying 'Events happened'. The 'eventful' approach may be a promising analytical starting point into a given episode of contentious politics, but for that promise to be fulfilled, empirical substance is needed to fill in the gaps between theory on the one hand, and explication of complex real-world happenings on the other.

Sewell (1996 etc.) puts his concept of the event forward as an interface between structure and agency, where one in effect collapses into the other. And without the trigger mechanism of this contingent 'other factor', the available material on both the 'structure' and 'agency' aspects to the Irish independence struggle – both empirical and theoretical – seem somewhat flat, partial, and unsatisfying.

For instance, in his book From Public Defiance to Guerrilla Warfare – one of the prominent works of the most recent generation of Irish independence struggle historiography – Joost Augusteijn (1996) neatly sums up some of the major perspectives on why the independence struggle happened the way it did.

Augusteijn echoes Fitzpatrick’s (1977) commentary on Erhard Rumpf’s explanations of the independence struggle – seeing a point in Rumpf’s highlighting of popular and local 'demand', or support, in the success of guerrilla campaigns – as well as popular/local hostility to the guerrillas’ enemies. These are not particularly 'revolutionary' claims – but even at that, Rumpf’s observations run into problems: during the independence struggle, some parts of Ireland saw overwhelming grassroots support for the militant separatist
project, but at the same time saw little or no 'action'. County Mayo, in the poor western region of the island, was the scene of dramatically greater Sinn Féin electoral victories, as well as dramatically greater IRA recruitment, than many other parts of the country (Augusteijn 1996). But Mayo saw little real guerrilla activity, and little violence – almost none until the closing stages of the 'war of independence' phase of the struggle, in 1921.24 Indeed Mayo saw far less guerrilla warfare than other counties with significantly less overall republican support – as measured electorally, and in terms of IRA membership – such as County Tipperary, one of the hotspots of the struggle. Fitzpatrick attempts to fill this hole in Rumpf’s line of argument by suggesting that greater police vigilance in Mayo may have accounted for the failure of the guerrilla war to get off the ground there – a suggestion which Augusteijn (1996:346) points out to be rather weak, and unsubstantiated.

Augusteijn turns to Garvin’s identification of the farmers and artisans of the southern counties (the heartland of the guerrilla war), and the pressure they experienced to change their ways and incorporate more fully into a modernising capitalist economy, as lying at the centre of the revolution in Ireland. However,

[Peter] Hart's findings that IRA activity in Co. Cork thrived in more urbanised areas with better land [a distinctive geographical pattern of southern counties such as Cork and Tipperary] and was hampered by poverty and physical isolation [typical of 'inactive' (albeit often supportive) counties, especially western ones such as Mayo] support this assessment. However, the socio-economic background of Volunteers found by Hart [i.e. more urban and more proletarian than in Garvin's picture] and the inconclusive proof of downward economic pressure on artisanal and cottage industry in Munster disclaim it (Augusteijn 1996:346).

As such, Hart’s work forms an important benchmark here. To a literature suffering somewhat from speculative 'throw of the dice'-type explanations, Hart brought data, and data analysis, of a kind more robust than the literature was

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24 Augusteijn (1996) points out that in many instances where relatively inactive areas saw late upsurges in guerrilla activity, it was largely due to the outside influence of IRA GHQ, who made it their business to push local IRA units in such areas into greater activity.
used to. Hart’s findings regarding the preponderance of urban workers in the ranks of IRA officers and men raised important questions about some of the long-standing narratives of the independence struggle – such as the narrative of the rural areas always being “good” in terms of republican support, and the towns “bad”, in the words of key IRA organiser and chronicler Ernie O’Malley (2002) – themes echoed in much Irish independence struggle historiography.

Augusteijn brings this dialogue forward, suggesting that the apparent incongruence between long-held perceptions of the republican struggle being strongest in the countryside on the one hand, and Hart’s picture of a more urban IRA on the other, are explicable. He suggests that the towns were indeed more hostile to the IRA, and the countryside more supportive – and that the more hostile and intense environment of the towns catapulted urban IRA activists into contention and conflict earlier, brought them to the attention of the republicans’ enemies and of the Crown Forces earlier; got them into trouble earlier, and radicalised them disproportionately. During the independence struggle, many IRA activists were forced to leave their homes for fear of capture, and go “on the run”. It was the groups of such “on the runs”, circulating around the country in these years, that formed the basis for the “Flying Columns” - the mobile bands of experienced IRA fighters who brought the guerrilla war to its highest level yet in 1920.\(^{25}\) Circumstances determined that the men forced to “run” were disproportionately urban, and, naturally, in their flight they gravitated towards rural areas, where support could be counted on to a much greater degree than in the “hotter” environment of the towns that they fled. Thus the republican movement had stronger roots in the countryside, but many of its militants were from urban backgrounds, in the intense and radicalising environments of the towns.

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\(^{25}\) The Flying Columns were established by an official order from IRA General Headquarters (GHQ) in Dublin in autumn 1920. In large part this was a move from above, aimed specifically at dealing with what had become a real practical problem for local IRA units: dealing with the IRA “on the runs” who had fled from their own areas, and turned up on the doorsteps of other IRA units, seeking shelter and, of course, food. The Flying Columns order came from above, and was designed to put these men to some kind of use. But on another level, it recognised and formalised something that was already happening on the ground: the organic coming together of groups of footloose IRA militants, banding together for protection and solidarity, some of them already anxious to carry on their fight on the run.
To this observation, Augusteijn adds some more layers of explanation for the escalation of the revolution, and the dynamics it followed. Augusteijn highlights the “threshold of violence” needing to be breached before IRA Volunteers – largely reluctant to be blooded in battle, and to take life – would engage in serious violence. For Augusteijn, this “threshold” question was tied closely into the separation of Volunteers from their families and communities – and from the restraining influences of both – as they went “on the run”, just as it was tied into the ‘socialising’ influence of living full-time with other IRA militants while on the run, and “on the column”. Augusteijn also highlights the importance of the successful ostracisation of government representatives and Crown Forces – particularly the police, who were transformed from respected community figures to pariahs in the short space of time preceding the revolution; as well as the successful building of republican legitimacy at home and abroad through parallel state-like institutions and foreign diplomacy; the restraining influence of international actors such as the United States government on the London government’s ‘war’ in Ireland; and the self-defeating effect of poorly-formulated and executed government policy.

Augusteijn’s observations represent very commendable progress in Irish independence struggle historiography. Like Hart’s output, his work has the advantage of paying attention to the dynamics of the Irish ‘revolution’: the tit for tat patterns of violence, the action and reaction of IRA guerrilla activity and British state response, the escalation, the contingency, and, occasionally, the randomness.

But still, these accounts say more about the “how’s” of the independence struggle, than the “why’s”. On why the revolution broke out in the first place, Augusteijn is succinct: there was a long-standing nationalist tradition, this tradition came to be dominated by one party, and by a constitutional approach, and this constitutional project became discredited as its demands were frustrated in the crisis years preceding and during the First World War. A resurrected ‘physical force’ separatist republican movement then took its place.
But this account sidesteps certain questions regarding the political make-up of Ireland in these years: on the eve of the independence struggle, nationalism – whether mild, constitutional, and 'Home Rule'-oriented, or militant and separatist – was not hegemonic, even outside of the unionist heartlands of Ulster and parts of the other provinces (for example the cities and counties of Dublin and Cork, then with substantial Unionist and Protestant elements).

The question of how much genetic material was really in common between the mild 'Home Rule-ism' of John Redmond's Irish Party, and the militant republicanism of the IRB and IRA, is quite debatable – as is the question of how meaningfully they can be lumped together as different sides of the coin of 'Irish nationalism'.

But in any case, just how deep ran the roots of either before the crucible of the independence struggle is debatable. Take the memoirs of Tom Barry, the legendary IRA leader mentioned above, as he recounts his time in the British Army of the First World War:

For me it began in far-off Mesopotamia now called Irak... It was there in that land of the Arabs... that I awoke to the echoes of guns being fired in the capital of my own country, Ireland... One evening I strolled down to the orderly tent outside which war communiques were displayed... this evening there was a “Special” communiqué headed “REBELLION IN DUBLIN.” It told of the shelling of the Dublin G.P.O. and Liberty Hall, of hundreds of rebels killed, thousands arrested and leaders being executed...

... my mind was torn with questionings. What was this republic of which I now heard for the first time? Who were these leaders the British had executed... none of whose names I had ever heard? What did it all mean?

In June, 1915, I had decided to see what the First World War was like. I cannot plead I went on the advice of John Redmond of any other politician, that if we fought for the British we would secure Home Rule for Ireland, nor can I say I understood what Home Rule meant... I went to the war because I wanted to see what war was like... Above all I went because I knew no Irish history and had no national consciousness... Let it also be recorded that those sacrifices were equally necessary to awaken the minds of ninety per cent. of the Irish people (Barry
Barry’s comments – his references to “awakening” and so on – are by no means atypical of IRA activists of the time.26 At the risk of caricaturing Augusteijn, it should be pointed out that a hegemonic but ineffectual constitutional nationalism did not just roll out of bed one morning and realise that it was time to become a militant, separatist republican movement instead; rather, the ground for this movement had, to a large extent, to be created in a rather short space of time. And for people like Barry, “national consciousness” had to be improvised – in a manner somewhat reminiscent of the process described by Beissinger in the Soviet ‘republics’ of the late 1980s.

Beissinger points out that there had been nationalist movements – of sorts – in some of the Soviet republics for some decades prior to the break-up of the USSR. But to even describe these as 'movements' is pushing it: “Out of 185 mass demonstrations identified with 100 participants or more that took place in the USSR between 1965 and 1986, only 20 raised the issue of secession, and all of these were located in the Baltic” (Beissinger 2002:54n).

In truth, Ireland’s case was somewhat different from that of the Soviet Union. While somewhat marginal on the eve of the independence struggle, a militant Irish separatist movement, and tradition, at least existed, in an incontrovertible way – probably more than could be said of anywhere in the USSR before the mid-1980s. And while a majority of Irish people may perhaps have been oblivious to Irish “national consciousness” and, as it were, 'cultural identity', as evoked by Barry above – there was at least an active minority oriented towards an Irish cultural renaissance – giving rise to a certain “counter-culture” (Garvin 1987:88) around such entities as the Gaelic League (tasked with saving the Irish language from extinction, and revitalising it as the national vernacular) and the Gaelic Athletic Association (dedicated to the institutionalisation and preservation of indigenous Irish sports). As detailed by Garvin (1987), this cultural nationalist

26 O’Malley, who was considering joining the British Army, like his older brother, at the time of the 1916 Rising, provides a similar account. See O’Malley (2002, chapter 2).
movement had been busy since the mid-nineteenth century elaborating an Irish national consciousness and cultural identity – albeit of types that people like Tom Barry were still entirely oblivious to prior to the independence struggle.

Was it just a matter of time before this new consciousness – nurtured, it would appear, by the cultural nationalist movement – broke out of its ghetto, and fused itself with the official ideology of the revolutionary movement, and of the state which it produced?

Such an argument would be in the spirit of Eric Selbin’s recent thesis on the “power of story” – and of myth, memory, mimesis, and so on – in movements of “revolution, rebellion, resistance”. That thesis holds that well-established frameworks for the analysis of such episodes (typically oriented towards “economic, political and social structural conditions”) actually tell us rather little about how revolutions – and other genetically-related phenomena – really come to pass. Selbin (2010:21-22) suggests that

While stories clearly serve many purposes for many people, they are, at base, tools by which we organize to maintain and develop our future. Thus it seems reasonable to construe them as a form, even the primary form, of socio-political struggle.

Reclaiming the importance of popular forms of 'meaning-making', such as Selbin’s stories, is no doubt a good way of getting at some of the grassroots agency typically washed out of 'structuralist’ accounts of revolutions and contentious politics. But to me, working out just what to do with these stories – and with this dimension of popular agency – once reclaimed, is less clear. It would seem to me that such an approach is not without its dangers. It is not entirely clear what Selbin would have to say about the role of stories in the Irish revolution (he only makes passing reference to it), but the weaknesses in the revolutionary case studies he does take on leave me with mixed feelings as to what such an analysis would look like.

In his analysis of the Cuban case, he appears to muddy the waters between the
narratives and myths spun by Castro's regime ex post facto, in the wake of the revolution – the “myth of the Sierra (Selbin 2010:136)”, as he puts it – with the key factors leading to victory for the rebels in the thick of the revolution’s unfolding:

If there is a single case that has shaped most contemporary understandings of revolution, it is the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Today the revolution is at times presented as a Hollywood-like scenario: a small, dedicated band of freedom fighters battles its way out from the hills against a repressive authoritarian dictatorship, gaining the following of the people as they go; seizing power; they go on to create a bold new society unlike any the world had seen, where everything is possible. What is often forgotten is that, more than any other single event or process, it was the Cuban Revolution that provided this Hollywood scenario (Selbin 2010:132).

Selbin (2010:136) – not unreasonably – makes much of the shadow cast by the Cuban example over would-be revolutionaries the world over (particularly this was in the “third world”, and especially in Latin America):

... just as the Russians sought to create a unified, compelling narrative of 'October'... so too did the Cuban revolutionaries have a deep investment in the 'myth of the Sierra,' especially as it came to be articulated by the revolution's most mythic and emulated character; the asthmatic Argentine doctor Ernesto 'Che' Guevara... What matters most in this story is that whatever versions of the story they heard, some of those people who took notice found their way to Cuba where Guevara, his and Castro's mentor Alberto Bayo, and other veterans trained them and sent them back to spread the revolution. Millions more who could not come were emboldened by their struggles already under way – in Algeria, Vietnam, Colombia, Malaysia, Central America, and sub-Saharan Africa.

Far more than the training (or meagre support), what mattered was the story told around the world: a small, committed band of revolutionaries who cared about and for the people and counted on those people for support had vanquished not only a more powerful foe but the United States, one of the world's two superpowers. Having acheived their objective, they set about transforming the country exactly as they had promised...
This is, of course, a remarkable 'story'. But, as I have suggested, there are a number of problems: firstly, the Cuban revolutionaries did not succeed in defeating Batista in 1959 (let alone the United States) because of the momentum of "story" they had behind them. As pointed out by Wickham-Crowley (1992), they succeeded because the Batista regime was so rotten, and had so alienated whatever support it once had – even that of the United States government – that it simply collapsed as soon as Castro and his allies managed to mount something resembling an actual military challenge, however meagre, and once they had made some key breakthroughs in recruiting peasants, and not just their college friends, to be guerrillas, crucially widening their support base. Batista's morale-sapped army, the marrow leached out of it through years of cronyism and political promotion under Batista's personalistic rule, simply melted away.

Furthermore, Selbin is correct that the 'myth of the Sierra' that the Cubans created represented a powerful inspiration for revolutionaries the world over. Perhaps most importantly – as he points out – Cuba was an example of third world revolution – and it was taken up in particular by radicals across Latin America, eager to follow "the Cuban road". But he neglects to mention that, as powerful as this inspiration was, it did not usually lead rebels elsewhere in Latin America to success. Apart from the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua, it led Latin American rebels – many of them trained in Cuba – to failure, and to a realisation that, despite the power of the "Cuban road" myth, their societies and their situations were very different to those of Cuba, and could not be expected to 'break down' into revolution in the same way. That this did happen in Nicaragua – where, as Selbin correctly points out, the Sandinista rebels explicitly took the Cuban model, and sought to apply it to their own country – would seem to be down to the unusual similarities between Nicaraguan society under Somoza, and Cuban society under Batista: both were deeply corrupt, personalistic dictatorships, with little support outside immediate ruling circles – at home or abroad – and with militaries consisting of little more than glorified yet inept praetorian guards, backed up by demoralised conscripts.27

27 These characteristics were by no means universal across Latin American militaries during the various waves of guerrilla struggle since the Cuban revolution. Based on his comparative study of a
This has been a long excursus on Latin American revolutionary episodes. But my point is that while Selbin's initiative to 'bring story back in' – or even, just to bring story 'in' in the first place – to the study of revolutions and related phenomena is a worthwhile one, he quite clearly overstates his case. No doubt the “power of story” is an important and overlooked aspect of revolutionary episodes – but other things have “power” as well – and it was not just good stories that brought the Batista and Somoza regimes down.

Bearing in mind these caveats, the “power of story” dimension to the Irish struggle – and how narratives and myths of Irish rebellion were cultivated by radical separatists, cultural nationalists, teachers, and others – is very much worth excavating. But it seems that until the catalyst of the 1916 “thunderclap” (in O'Malley's words) came, this world of stories could have comfortably remained in its ghetto. The tumultuous happenings of 1916 were the major “game-changer” here – and the time seems ripe for a close analysis of the 1916 Rising as a Sewellian 'event'.

This literature review chapter has given a very general outline of the current state of play in research on contentious politics and revolutions, and on how these could be related to the case of the Irish independence struggle. The following chapter will eschew discussion of the empirical case entirely, to take a closer theoretical look at the study of revolutions, and problems within that - before specifying a specific analytical and theoretical approach for the rest of the dissertation.

number of Latin American cases, Wickham-Crowley (1992) is able to identify some of the important factors determining the effectiveness of national military forces in combating the guerrilla threat. Among these are what might be called simple esprit de corps, or a belief on the part of military rank and file in what they are doing, beyond a demand for personal loyalty to a caudillo figure – whether that belief is in the nation, or simply in the “total institution” of the army itself; training and professionalism – linked to the former, in that militaries lacking professional and meritocratic practices of, say, officer promotion, do poorly in countering guerrilla challenges; and the tailoring of military task forces specifically to the task of fighting guerrillas – for instance, Wickham-Crowley points out that in a large proportion of instances where national militaries successfully combated guerrilla insurgencies in Latin America, a large share of the fighting was done by special forces units, trained specifically for that task, and privileged with better equipment and pay than their peers in the regular army.
3. THEORY: REVOLUTION, EVENTS, PATH DEPENDENCE AND MECHANISMS

Introduction

Though this thesis draws on a number of literatures, the tradition it is closest to at heart, in terms of its general analytical approach, is that of the sociology of revolutions. However, for a number of reasons, the study has an angular relationship to that literature, and hence draws liberally from a number of others - not least the sociology of social movements. Part of the reason for this is the 'awkward fit' the study sees between the Irish case and the paradigm of revolution, but partly it is also because of various theoretical and conceptual difficulties that the thesis identifies in the study of revolutions today.

This chapter gives a broad overview of the most important bodies of theory drawn upon in the analytical approach adopted in the thesis. It starts with a critical appraisal of the literature on revolutions, before linking this with theories pertaining to events, path dependence and mechanisms - themes introduced in the previous chapter, and elaborated upon in this.

Studying revolutions

Explaining how and why revolutions happen has been an abiding concern of political thinkers, historians and social scientists since at least the nineteenth century. But attempts at explanation have produced little consensus. There is always a temptation to answer the question in a simple way – something like: ‘Revolutions happen when people are oppressed, and organize to overthrow the system of their oppression.’ But any cursory review of the literature on revolutions will show that such a causal statement will not do. Many of the most oppressive social systems on earth do not experience revolution, while revolution sometimes springs up where social conditions are relatively benign.
And within a given society, it is sometimes not the most oppressed groups that lead revolutions, but relatively privileged ones. So it is not clear that any simple statement can give even a parsimonious answer to the question of how or why revolutions happen.

**Defining revolution**

Samuel Huntington, the prominent political scientist, defined revolution in the 1960s as “a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies. Revolutions are thus to be distinguished from insurrections, rebellions, revolts, coups, and wars of independence (Huntington 1968:254).”

But Charles Tilly, a pioneering scholar of forms of ‘contentious politics’ from social movements to civil wars, pointed out that according to Huntington’s definition, it could be said that no ‘revolution’ had ever occurred (Tilly 1973:433). Tilly provided his own alternative definition – suggesting that a revolution is “a forcible transfer of power over a state in the course of which at least two distinct blocs of contenders make incompatible claims to control the state, and some significant portion of the population subject to the state’s jurisdiction acquiesces in the claims of each bloc (Tilly 1993:8).”

However, some other scholars would say that Tilly’s definition errs in seeing conflict and turmoil as the most important markers of revolution, rather than change – and would ask whether, if there is no fundamental change after all that turmoil and conflict, there can really be said to have been a revolution.

Theda Skocpol, a peer of Tilly’s, and still the most towering figure within the sociology of revolutions, did explicitly build change into her definition of revolution. She argued that revolutions are “rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures . . . accompanied and in part carried through
by class-based revolts from below (Skocpol 1979:4).”

But Skocpol’s definition too is contested. For one thing, what kind of change is she talking about? Social change, perhaps, or economic, or political? How much of it does there have to be to be considered ‘fundamental’? And what if the ‘fundamental change’ is driven by a movement that is not based on class, but on some other marker of identity, be it ethnic, religious, or otherwise? Would this still be a revolution?

These have been important sticking points in recent academic debates about revolution. But such debates do not tell the whole story, because revolution has not just been a concept used by scholars, but one that has animated political life, political thought and political struggle beyond the academy. (Nor did the concept emerge within the academy.) Marx, for instance, would go on to influence social science through his intellectual work, but it was as a revolutionary rather than as a social scientist that he articulated his own vision of revolution. For Marx, revolution was, in one sense, the mechanism by which history moved from one stage to another; as, in leaps and bounds, the evolution of society’s economic base made obsolete the existing relations of production (who and which class controls what, and how), and motivated ascendant classes – such as the bourgeoisie – to overthrow those relations.

More importantly, revolution was also to be the means by which capitalism would ultimately be overthrown to make way for the next stage of history: socialism, which would eventually metamorphose into a stateless communist society. However, Marx’s vision had no fewer difficulties than any of the more recent academic outlooks on revolution cited above. It suggested that socialist revolution would occur only after capitalism had been allowed to fully develop – and that it would be led by the offspring of that capitalist development, the organized industrial proletariat. But it is exceedingly difficult to identify any revolution that has ever occurred along these lines – even among revolutions that have led to the establishment of nominally Marxist regimes, from Russia to Cuba to Vietnam. Many of these revolutions have occurred in societies where capitalism was, if anything, decidedly underdeveloped, where peasants and
artisans were as important as, or more important than Marx's proletariat to the revolution, and where small cadres of committed, self-consciously revolutionary intellectuals and militants found it necessary to guide, commandeer and even provoke the revolution that eventually came to pass. Making sense of this paradox – of the coming to power of 'Marxism' across a great part of the twentieth century world, to a large extent in spite of the theories of Marx – has been a major theme of Marxist thought from the 1917 Russian Revolution to this day.

**Emergence of the modern idea of revolution**

Given this background, it is clear that the student of revolution is faced with major theoretical challenges, as well as definitional and conceptual ones. To a large extent, the story of revolution is the story of a concept as much as an objective category, and that concept has evolved and shifted in meaning over time. Understanding revolution means tracing that evolution.

The French Revolution, commencing in 1789, is invariably seen as a watershed in the emergence of the 'modern' sense of the term. From this time, revolution came to be associated with innovation, rupture and change. Some scholars go so far as to pinpoint the improvisation or 'invention' of this concept of revolution to the heady days of July 1789, as contemporaries struggled to make sense of, to frame, and to shape the events and changes rapidly unfolding around them in the wake of the Tennis Court Oath and the storming of the Bastille (Sewell 1996). While some scholars have argued for an earlier pedigree to the modern species of revolution, in the 1688 ‘Glorious Revolution’ in England, and while more still have pointed to the influence of the American Revolution on the events of 1789 in France, one thing is clear: it is widely held that a distinctively ‘modern’ kind of revolution emerged at some point in the eighteenth or perhaps seventeenth centuries, that this modern kind of revolution was felt to have something fundamentally to do with innovation, rupture and change, and that this marked a break with an older sense of the term, which could mean simply a turn of events, the coming full circle of events, or a change in fortunes for a state or ruler. And
importantly, in this older sense of the term, revolutions were seen as phenomena that were experienced passively, rather than experienced actively, or made.

However, associating revolution with rupture and change raises as many questions as it answers. The idea that the ‘invention’ of revolution in the seventeenth or eighteenth century marked a break with the past is clearly intertwined with the meta-narrative of modernity, and the great break with the past that it is held to have represented around the same time. Indeed, episodes such as the French Revolution are taken to be so fundamental to the onset of modernity that it is difficult to disentangle one from the other.

Both this outlook on the invention of revolution, and this outlook on the invention of modernity, suggest a ‘present’ that is built around regular, dynamic and expected change, and a ‘past’ in which it is custom, tradition, and the reproduction of the status quo that are expected, rather than change. The obvious problem with this perspective is that, taken too schematically, it suggests a pre-modern past in which change did not really happen.

In Marxist thought, such a perspective has often been expressed in terms of a withering critique of the supposedly reactionary, short-sighted and atavistic nature of pre-modern and pre-industrial revolts – which tend to be associated in Marxist thought with peasants. For many Marxists, such revolts were held to be essentially conservative and defensive in nature; concerned with stopping progress and change in their tracks, and protecting or restoring a status quo ante, rather than advancing their own vision of a progressive future, as a proletarian-led revolution, conceived along Marxist lines, might.

Such an implication – that modernity heralds an ‘age of revolutions’, and that before this there were only various types of ‘rebellion’ – demands interrogation. But just as importantly, it raises a fundamental question about the meaning of revolution itself, which is not only historical. If we take revolution as a particular strain of ‘political contention’ – McAdam et al.’s (2001) umbrella term for struggles running the spectrum from social movement mobilization to outright
civil war – then it would appear that it is seen as rather a special one. Revolutions are regularly distinguished from putatively lesser forms of revolt, for which there are many names: ‘rebellions’, ‘uprisings’, ‘insurrections’, ‘insurgencies’, the generic ‘revolt’ itself, and so on.

It is not always clear on which basis this distinction is made. The perspectives described above suggest that revolution appears with the modern era, and that it appears in the parts of the world inhabited by Europeans and their descendants. This raises some issues. On the one hand, the implication that nothing of this nature ever happened before ‘Western’ modernity is questionable. Too little is known about the histories of ancient and non-Western societies for this contention to sit well; but even what we do know puts the implication in doubt. Anthropologists attest that the roots of many egalitarian peoples lie in revolt and secession from more hierarchical groups (Graeber 2004), while ancient complex societies from Sumer to Rome were stalked by the spectres of popular and slave rebellion (Graeber 2011). In Rome, this threat shaped state policy and expansion, where the ‘trickles’ of imperial spoils were used to ameliorate the material lives of the popular classes, so as to keep sedition at bay (Ibid.). More recently, middle ages China was racked by almost constant peasant rebellions, and some ruling dynasties had their origins in successful ones (Graeber 2007). Thus, if it is accepted that many varieties of rebellions have been an important part of human civilization for so long, we must ask again about the putative ‘newness’ of revolutions. Some scholars use the emergence of modern states as a shortcut to explaining the ties between revolution and modernity, arguing that it is only such relatively recent developments that make revolutions possible. However, this does little more than raise awkward questions about how to define the modern state – and about how the ‘stateness’ of eighteenth century France trumps that of Ancient Rome or middle ages China.

On the other hand, even if we accept that episodes not unlike what we understand as revolutions may have happened previously, there may still be some sense in understanding revolutions in terms of a certain novelty in the modern era. For while phenomena resembling revolutions may, objectively
speaking, have happened before, it is clear that from at least the time of the French Revolution, a newly-minted concept of revolution provided people with new ways of thinking about sovereignty, about political power and its circulation, about the constitution of political orders, about social change, and, of course, about rebellion against the status quo (Sewell 1996, McAdam and Sewell 2001).

Scholars such as William Sewell (1996) have referred to this as the ‘invention’ of the concept of revolution as we know it in the days following the storming of the Bastille. McAdam and Sewell (2001) emphasize how an improvised idea of revolution was used to justify the violence at the Bastille, while similar, disturbing acts of violence that followed in its wake were condemned (Sewell 1996, McAdam and Sewell 2001). From the perspective of those who pioneered the concept – disturbed by the growing violence, but feeling unable to condemn an act at the Bastille that had accrued considerable public support – the latter violence was justified because it represented a sovereign act of the people that transcended everyday norms and laws – what they christened an act of ‘revolution’ – while subsequent acts of similar violence were framed as mere mob disorder, without the special aura of popular mandate and legitimacy that were said to have marked the events at the Bastille.28 Sewell argues that through this move, a new model of revolution emerged, which could be copied and modified in other places and times.

**Theorizing revolution**

McAdam and Sewell (2001) argue that the events of 1789 in France gave the world a new "master template" of revolution, which was copied and modified elsewhere and later. Specifically, they consider the French model to have been a recipe for ‘constitutional revolution’, in which a state is reconstituted around a national assembly that receives its mandate and its political legitimacy from ‘the people’, in whom sovereignty is held to reside. McAdam and Sewell see subsequent modifications on this master template of constitutional revolution:

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28 This chain of events is discussed in more depth elsewhere in the thesis.
the ‘Bolshevik revolution’ variant improvised in Russia, and then modified again in China and various ‘Third World’ settings; the ‘Islamic revolution’ variant pioneered in Iran in 1979; and what Sewell calls the ‘people power’ variant that emerged in 1989 to founder the Eastern Bloc.

This represents an approach to the study of revolution in which revolution is not just an objective category – the sum of a number of objectively observable parts that can be ticked off, with its own distinctive empirical signature – but a living, breathing phenomenon that is defined as much by how participants conceive of it and experience it subjectively. Other scholars have taken a different approach to conceptualizing revolution. For Motyl (1999), Sewell’s approach epitomizes what he sees as a cardinal error of many major analysts of revolution: the habit of building causal statements about how revolutions happen into the very definitions and concepts of revolution used, and of mingling the stories revolutionaries tell with the scientific objective of explaining what revolutions actually are, and how they happen. For Motyl, this sleight of hand represents an erroneous, circular logic. He argues that definitions of revolution tend to identify the phenomenon with either ‘upheaval’, ‘turmoil’ or ‘change’ – but that only the latter is a valid indicator of revolution, whereas focus upon upheaval or turmoil largely speaks to individual scholars’ pet causal theories of the ‘revolutionary’ processes leading up to change, rather than starting with that change and really seeking to explain how it happened.

While Motyl’s broadsides against some of the most important scholars of revolution, from Sewell to Skocpol to Tilly, have not all stuck, his critique is at least worthy of attention for identifying the general problem of fuzzy conceptualization in the study of revolution. Scholars routinely distinguish between ‘political’ and ‘social’ revolutions, and sometimes between the ‘great’ revolutions (such as in France, Russia and China) and the rest. But it is surprisingly rare for these distinctions to be clearly conceptualized. Furthermore, struggles for national liberation and against colonialism, as well as a host of other types of social and political conflict, are increasingly claimed as types of revolutions, but little attention has been paid to seriously attempting to
conceptualize or theorize these categories, or to attempting to relate them to
relevant existing literatures and bodies of theory on nationalist mobilization,
anti-colonial struggle, and other forms of collective action and political violence,
that lie outside the corpus of the sociology of revolutions.

Instead, most of the energy of sociologists of revolution has gone into developing
causal theories of revolution – sometimes referred to as ‘social’, sometimes as
‘political’, and sometimes attached to other adjectives or none at all – and into
theories of how revolutionary processes unfold once their causes have put them
into motion. A good deal of energy has also gone into debates over rival
paradigms of revolutionary theory – the key axis here being, roughly speaking,
that between scholars mostly concerned with ‘structural’ and state-centred
explanations of revolution on the one hand, and scholars more interested in the
role of ‘agency’ and of culture on the other.

While it is arguable that some of the concepts of revolution underlying these
pursuits have been fuzzy, they have certainly produced a theoretically and
empirically rich body of research. Within the sociology of revolutions, scholars
regularly distinguish between several different generations of revolutionary
study since the start of the twentieth century. The first generation is often called
the ‘natural history’ school. This approach is associated with the drawing of
biological and epidemiological analogies in identifying recurring patterns of
revolutionary processes, rather than with causal analysis of why those patterns
emerge. While for its perceived quaintness, this school had for some time been
relegated to the footnotes of literature reviews on the ‘prehistory’ of
revolutionary study, the work of Crane Brinton (1938) has recently been afforded
some renewed recognition by scholars who appreciate it for its pioneering
commitment to the comparative study of revolutions, and to the identification of
generally observable patterns – as against countervailing orientations toward
exceptionalism and ‘theory about theory’ – as well as for the astuteness of some
of its observations.

A second generation, more closely tied to the social sciences than the first (many
of whose cohort were historians), is associated with more explicitly causal analysis. However, this generation’s causal statements – from Huntington’s (1968) identification of revolution with modernization drives, to the fingering of ‘relative deprivation’ (sometimes compared to Marx’s ‘immiseration’) as the key to revolution by scholars such as Davies (1962) and Gurr (1970) – came to be seen as rather monochrome and unsatisfactory from the point of view of the third generation.

The pioneering efforts of third generation scholars, from the 1960s and 1970s on, have come to define the study of revolutions ever since – and while various scholars have tried to break new ground towards a ‘fourth generation’ perspective, it is not clear that this has yet crystallized. The third generation was marked by a serious commitment to comparative historical sociological approaches. For its most prominent pioneers, this commitment foregrounded the decisive role of what can broadly be called social structures, from changing economic forces, to state institutions, to the relations between classes, and it foregrounded macro-level processes. Barrington Moore (1966) argued that particular conjunctures between levels of economic development, integration into world markets, and relative power of social classes – and particularly local bourgeoisies – propelled societies alternatively towards democratic, or authoritarian communist or fascist revolutions. Moore’s student, Theda Skocpol, built on this perspective considerably. In her comparison of the ‘great social revolutions’ of France, Russia and China, Skocpol (1979) identified the vulnerability of ‘agrarian bureaucracies’ to revolution as they struggled to compete economically and militarily in the inter-state system with more developed states. In bringing attention to this international dimension to revolutionary causation, Skocpol traced the repercussions of war and deficit military spending on state finances, and the potential for ensuing fiscal crises to touch off elite conflicts over who would pick up the bill. And while Skocpol sought to highlight the key role of peasants, as well as some urban artisanal groups – rather than a Marxian proletariat – in driving these revolutions, she was careful to point out that peasant discontent does not explain revolution. Rather, it is a constant – and what explains revolution in an agrarian bureaucracy is the
appearance of conditions that allow that constant flow of discontent to break its levees and become revolutionary. This is where elite conflict and the ensuing incapacitation of the establishment and of the state come in.

Skocpol is associated with the ‘historical institutionalist’ departure in the social sciences. Her insistence that revolutions cannot be explained just by looking at revolutionaries – whether peasants, or proletarians, or Jacobin ideologues – and require attention to institutions and their breakdown, has been highly influential in turning attention towards elite conflict and state crisis in the study of revolutions. The ‘state-centered approach’ that she shaped has proven a particularly fecund ground for revolutionary analysis, and a launch pad for several distinct approaches to the question of the state’s role in revolutionary causation.

Goodwin (1997:12-13) distinguishes four of these: a state-autonomy perspective, influenced by Weber, that emphasizes the way that groups within the state may develop their own identities and act relatively autonomously from even dominant groups within society; a state-capacity perspective, again influenced by Weber, and related to but distinct from the former, concerned with the extent to which states can ‘get things done’, even without state projects coinciding with the will of (even dominant) social groups; a political-opportunity perspective; and a state-constructionist perspective, taking off from what Skocpol called a ‘Tocquevillian’ approach, and emphasizing the way state action shapes identities, social ties, ideas, and even emotions of actors in civil society.

More concretely, while Skocpol primarily concerned herself with the vulnerability of the ‘agrarian bureaucracy’ to revolution, other statisticians have honed in on the vulnerabilities of other types of states. Timothy Wickham-Crowley (1992) has, perhaps, done the most to demonstrate the particular vulnerabilities of what he calls ‘mafriacracies’ – polities that, in effect, barely meet the criteria of modern states: brutal and corrupt personalistic dictatorships built upon the flimsiest of social bases, often lacking effective state infrastructures or bureaucracies; with military arms that tend to be little more than glorified
praetorian guards for the strongman at the top, hollowed out by paranoid political appointments and low morale. According to his study of mid-to-late twentieth century armed struggle in Latin America, the only successful revolutions were carried out in what he argues were these kinds of states, namely Batista’s Cuba and Somoza’s Nicaragua.

Goodwin, a student of Skocpol’s, has paid attention to some similar patterns as Wickham-Crowley. However, whereas Wickham-Crowley mainly focused upon Latin America, Goodwin’s work has been wider in scope, examining revolutions in other types of states, and in other parts of the twentieth-century third world. In particular, Goodwin (2001) has argued that, apart from cases of ‘sultanistic’ dictatorships like those identified as conducive to revolution by Wickham-Crowley, revolutions have also been consummated in parts of the third world where colonial powers chose to rule directly, rather than through the co-optation of local elites. (Outside of the specialist literature on revolutions, similar explanations for militant secession movements have been made by scholars of nationalism such as Hechter (1975, 2001).) But across these different contexts, Goodwin identified a common dynamic that led to revolutionary challenges going all the way. Goodwin (2001) pointed out that if regimes, on the one hand, employed exclusionary, indiscriminate and brutal repressive tactics in the face of political dissent, but, on the other hand, did not possess ‘state infrastructures’ strong enough to quash such dissent entirely – or in every part of their territory – then they were likely to make the radical opposition of the revolutionaries seem credible in such desperate circumstances, to drive critical masses of terrorized people into support for the revolutionaries, and, ultimately, to create the conditions for them to prevail.

These perspectives have followed in the footsteps of Skocpol’s state-structuralist approach, while pushing it in new directions. Also seen as building on Skocpol has been Jack Goldstone – most closely associated with another dimension to the broadly structuralist approach to revolution, that of demography. Stretching his canvas to several hundred years of history, Goldstone (1991) has argued that demographic patterns have been key factors in revolutionary causation.
Goldstone identified two great waves of revolution in Eurasian history since the Middle Ages, both coinciding with significant waves of demographic growth: one from about 1580 to 1650 and another from about 1770 to 1870. Goldstone argued that demographic increases can touch off social conflict as both elite and non-elite elements find themselves competing over economic resources and opportunities that fail to grow at the same pace as demographic increases. That is, people end up fighting over a ‘pie’ that is, in relative terms, shrinking.

Goldstone became known for applying this demographic-structural perspective to the study of revolution in the early modern world. However, he has also argued for the salience of this perspective in the context of the dramatic demographic growth seen in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Goldstone 1997).

Both Goldstone and Goodwin have acknowledged the need to integrate broadly ‘structuralist’ perspectives, such as their own, with approaches to revolution concerned with the roles of ‘agency’ and ‘culture’. William Sewell, Eric Selbin, Lynn Hunt and Forrest Colburn have been among the scholars associated with such approaches – sometimes being referred to as the ‘French cultural school’ for their efforts, and for the association of their work with studies of the French Revolution – as well as Sewell’s famous debate with Skocpol over the role of culture and ideology in that episode (Skocpol 1994).

But despite the ecumenical words about better integrating perspectives on structure and agency from various scholars, all have at times been criticized by ‘structuralists’ for the purported shortcomings of their work. Wickham-Crowley (1997:44) has suggested that explaining individual revolutions on the basis of local peculiarities of ‘culture’ or ‘agency’ is a retreat to national exceptionalism, and an exit from the social scientific project of developing generalizable theory. He has argued that, at best, attention to such local peculiarities and contingencies sheds light on the differing trajectories shown by different post-revolutionary scenarios – but not on the question of revolutionary causation.
However, at least one member of the ‘French cultural school’ – Sewell – has engaged directly with the debate about ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ long running in social theory, and has, to a large degree, designed his theoretical approach to revolution as a way of integrating the two perspectives. In what can be seen as a twist on the Braudelian distinction between temporalities such as that of the longue durée and of histoire événementielle, Sewell (1996) posits dramatic and highly contingent events like the storming of the Bastille in July 1789 as moments in which the membranes between these long-run and short-run temporalities rupture – when old certainties are toppled by infectious outbursts of popular agency and by the pace of events, and the structures of everyday life are changed rapidly as a result. (This theme of Sewell’s work recurs elsewhere in this thesis.)

Sewell is not the only revolution specialist to attempt to integrate perspectives on structure and on agency. Foran (1997, 2005), Goldstone (1997, 2001) and Wickham-Crowley (1992, 1997) have all attempted to find a place for cultural factors within multi-causal models of revolutionary causation that, otherwise, are basically structural. For instance, Foran (2005) – the most “culturalist” of the three – identified “cultures of resistance” as one factor contributing towards third world revolution when combined with dependent development and economic crisis. Wickham-Crowley (1992) pointed out that when Latin American ‘matriacracies’ were overthrown, “rebellious culture” was in the background to the successful revolutionary movements, even if certain structural factors were ultimately more important in the regimes’ downfall. And Goldstone (1997) pointed out that alongside the "prime mover" of demographic pressure in his model of revolutionary causation, the potential for mass mobilization within a given society is also crucial to determining prospects for revolution – and the peculiarities of local culture are a factor in this. Indeed, Goldstone has continued to push for more eclectic explanations of revolution, and it is very much in the spirit of his recent acknowledgment of the role of contingency in this story that this thesis proceeds and attempts to build:

In contrast to these structural causes, which gradually create unstable equilibrium
over years or decades, transient causes are sudden events that push a society out of stability. These may include spikes in inflation, particularly of food prices; defeat in war; and riots or demonstrations that challenge state authority (Goldstone 2014:24).

Goldstone has also followed Selbin in underlining the importance of effective leadership in any revolutionary equation - a crucial manifestation of the agency without which 'structural' potential for revolution might well evaporate:

Yet it requires skillful revolutionary leadership to take advantage of instability and disorder; and to construct from this chaos a successful revolutionary movement and build a new regime. In the absence of revolutionary leaders to articulate and spread a new vision of society, an economic crisis or military defeat will likely be followed by the restoration of the old order with just a few institutional tweaks and adjustments. (Goldstone 2014:33)

Since a key plank of this dissertation is the argument that the developments of 1916-1923 were not structurally determined, but highly contingent on the actions of the rebels - growing from a small but zealous kernel of insurrectionists in 1916 - considerable attention will be paid to tracing just these dynamics.

Such bids to better integrate structure and agency have long fuelled talk of a distinctive ‘fourth generation’ of the sociology of revolutions. Though such a fourth generation has been hinted at for well over a decade, no one seems quite sure that it has ever really crystallized. However, this may not be entirely accidental – for reasons connected to happenings in the real world as much as intellectual vagary.

While the boundaries between the sociology of revolutions and literatures on related phenomena, such as social movements, have always been porous – with some authors, such as Tilly, being known as much for their contributions in one field as the other – since the late 1990s the calls to bridge these boundaries have nonetheless been growing in volume. These calls have often lamented that fragmentation in the social sciences has led to the constant reinvention of intellectual wheels, as scholars in nominally distinct fields and sub-fields try to
explain related and sometimes analogous phenomena from the vantage points of
different intellectual traditions. Justifying systematic attention to subjects such
as ‘social movements’ and ‘revolution’, and carving out niches for their study, had
taken some energy in the first place, amid an intellectual climate in which such
phenomena were often seen as little more than ‘a spot of crowd trouble’, or
through analogies to ‘fever’ and ‘contagion’. But by the end of the twentieth
century, many scholars had begun to worry about how watertight the
distinctions were between many of these subjects of study. It was Tilly, along
with McAdam and Tarrow (2001), who at the turn of the millennium coined
“contentious politics” (or “political contention”) as an umbrella term for
everything from social movements, to ethnic conflict, to revolution, suggesting as
they did that similar dynamics and “mechanisms” – explicable using the same
intellectual tools – could be found in all these cases. More than ten years on, not
all of the specific theoretical propositions associated with this departure have
stuck, but attempts to bridge the divides between the different fields and sub-
fields have proceeded in this spirit, and the term “contentious politics” is often
used to describe the subjects of the different fields collectively, even by scholars
who do not agree with all of the theoretical propositions originally attached to
the term.

Terms like ‘sociology of revolutions’ and ‘sociology of social movements’ are used
now as much as ever, as if to refer to distinct specializations – but it has become
increasingly common for scholars to jump between the two. At the interface
between them, some recent theoretical developments could have implications for
the debate about ‘structure’ and ‘agency’ within the sociology of revolutions.
Attempts to move on from certain long influential paradigms in the study of
social movements, associated by many with ‘structuralism’ – such as the ‘political
opportunities’-based approach (closely related to Skocpol’s approach to
revolution, emphasizing the openings for popular mobilization created during
moments of state crisis and elite conflict) – have led some scholars to turn their
focus to ‘strategic action’ (Fligstein and McAdam 2012), or ‘strategic interaction’
(Jasper and Goodwin 2011). In short, these approaches to contentious politics
place as much emphasis on the agency of ‘challengers’ in creating opportunities
for themselves, as it does on those challengers’ ability to take advantage of opportunities that appear independently of what they do – whether those opportunities crystallize at the level of court politics and elite squabbling, of Marxian economic evolution, or of Braudelian *longue durée* (Braudel 1995). Furthermore, such approaches emphasize the contingent nature of these processes. From this point of view, outcomes in “contentious politics” can rarely be predicted, because so much depends on the interplay of ‘challenger’ and ‘incumbent’, and since one strategic gambit necessarily shapes its response, and vice versa, in a ‘dance’ that lasts either until victory for one side or another, or stalemate.

This framework is readily applicable to the study of revolution. Indeed, its implications for revolution could be weightier than for social movements. More ‘structuralist’ revolution scholars have often suggested that, if agency and contingency have a role in revolutionary analysis, it is more in explaining the twists and turns of post-revolutionary trajectories than revolutionary causation. Many scholars have also suggested that the only ‘revolutions’ worth studying are ones that are ‘successful’ – that is, the ones that end up in the overthrow of a state. This criterion has been explicitly built into many definitions of revolution – the implication being that ‘successful’ revolutions, on the one hand, and ‘attempted’ or ‘failed’ revolutions, on the other, are of entirely different species, requiring different tools of analysis (McAdam and Sewell 2001:194). (In contrast, a social movement is considered to be a social movement whether it fails or succeeds in its objectives – and no one (to this writer’s knowledge) has ever built a criterion of success into their definition of what a social movement is.)

A ‘strategic action’ or ‘strategic interaction’ perspective would compromise this approach to revolution, in that it would see revolutionary ‘success’ as contingent upon the choices and stratagems of ‘challengers’ and ‘incumbents’ – *not* as predetermined by the largely structural circumstances to be found at the episode’s outset. This would imply that rather than being its own essential category, revolution is only separated from ‘attempted’ or ‘failed’ revolution by a fine line. Taken to its logical conclusion, this line of reasoning could easily
suggest that the lines between ‘revolutionary movements’ and common or
garden ‘social movements’ are potentially just as fine.

Revolution today

If a ‘fourth generation’ of the sociology of revolutions were to meaningfully build
on the third, it would have to reckon with these issues. Some of them hint at a
potential ‘identity crisis’ for the specialist study of revolutions. Meanwhile, real-
world events in the recent past have thrown up their own challenges to
traditional outlooks on revolution.

The events of 1989 presented an awkward case for the revolution specialists, in
that the popular uprisings which toppled regimes across the Eastern Bloc looked,
on the one hand, much like revolutions, but on the other hand fitted rather
idiosyncratically with theories about how revolutions are supposed to come
about. The states affected were neither ‘agrarian bureaucracies’, nor colonies
subjected to direct imperial rule, nor (in most cases at least) ‘sultanistic’ or
‘mafiaocratic’ dictatorships. Pre-existing cultures of opposition had seemed
relatively weak, the states had seemed strong and stable, and when the uprisings
came, they were (in most cases) remarkably peaceful, but managed to upend
regimes in any case. Targeted as they were against nominally ‘revolutionary’
states – something, again, without much obvious precedent – these uprisings
were associated as much with the discourse of ‘reform’ as that of ‘revolution’.

These uprisings also ended the Cold War, which had major implications for
would-be revolutionary projects everywhere. By the start of the twenty-first
century, scholars of revolution were seriously debating whether revolutions had
a future (Goodwin 2004). Meanwhile beyond the academy, many on the political
left assumed that, with a globalized capitalism now more dominant than ever,
older ideas about revolution in the sense of taking power to transform a given
nation-state were now redundant, and that the concept of revolution would have
to be re-thought (Holloway 2002; Sitrin 2006).
In the 2000s, certain events brought revolution back on the agenda. The "Colour Revolutions" in post-socialist states such as Serbia, Ukraine, and Georgia led some scholars to compare them, as "non-violent" or "people power" revolutions, to the Iranian Revolution, the mid-1980s Filipino Yellow Revolution, and the events of 1989, and to suggest that they marked a new departure from many of the forms of previous revolutions. And in 2011, the events of the Arab Spring

This author does not necessarily advocate the "non-violent revolutions" perspective as the best possible approach to the episodes referred to here. However, this perspective has been a significant feature of the literature on revolution, social movements, and so on, in recent times. More specifically, the fit between the Iranian Revolution and the paradigm of the "non-violent revolution" is open to question. But the case for understanding the Iranian Revolution in this way is at least arguable and influential. Of course, no revolution is entirely non-violent, and advocates of the "non-violent revolution" perspective usually couch their definitions in terms of the relative non-violence of the episodes in question - and especially of the relative non-violence of the revolutionaries involved in these episodes, as opposed to their regime opponents (Ritter 2012). (Indeed, in light of lingering confusion around the term, Daniel P. Ritter (2015) has recently switched from the verbiage of "non-violent revolution" to that of "unarmed revolution").

The Iranian Revolution had its share of violence, but the reasons some scholars have commented on its relative "non-violence" would appear to be twofold: firstly, the protagonists of the revolution do not appear to have focused their energies on violence on any very significant scale, organized or otherwise; large, raucous demonstrations, at times bordering on mass riots, were the order of the day, but for the most part, guerilla warfare and armed struggle against the regime were not. Armed conflict seems to have been mostly confined to the last days of the revolution, when armed followers of Ayatollah Khomeini - including military defectors - wrested control from residual armed elements of the state apparatus still loyal to what was left of the existing regime (Ibid.).

Secondly, while individual martyrs, and broader narratives about revolutionaries selflessly sacrificing their lives en masse to the machine guns of the Shah’s forces, were important to the self-image and the meaning-making of many of the revolutionaries, these aspects of the revolution must be weighed up carefully. For one thing, the death toll of the revolution would appear to have been surprisingly low. While it was common in the period immediately following the revolution for death tolls to be placed in the tens of thousands, this now looks doubtful. According to Kurzman (2004:71), the Martyr Foundation established after the revolution could identify only 744 revolutionary martyrs in Tehran, where most of the deaths were thought to have occurred. Other credible estimates suggest somewhat less than 3,000 fatalities in the lead-up to Ayatollah Khomeini’s takeover. (The population of Iran at the time of the revolution was in the region of 40 million.)

Furthermore, while the Shah and his security forces gained a reputation for brutal repression, and almost certainly did provide the revolutionaries with hundreds of martyrs at least, evidence suggests that the repressive response to the massive unrest sweeping the country between 1977 and 1979 was rather wavering in its intensity. This was probably in part because the security forces - including an atrophying and unenthusiastic conscript army - were overwhelmed by the sheer scale of the revolutionary mobilization. But it would also appear that the Shah chose not to use all the repressive powers available to him (for reasons still speculated about (Kurzman 2004: 108)), and rather than hanging on in office until the bitter end, chose to cut his losses and go into exile.

Regarding events after the overthrow of the Shah’s state, and Khomeini’s consolidation of power,
put the word revolution back in the zeitgeist even more dramatically.

However, it is at least questionable whether any of these purported twenty-first-century revolutions meet the criteria of classic definitions of revolution, whatever their form. Some have achieved negotiated democratizing reforms rather than any true system overhaul. Some have depended on high levels of outside intervention and militarization to threaten or achieve state overthrow. And some have been reversed or defeated, or have simply degenerated into carnage. Events in the Arab world continue to unfold, but it may be the case that, rather than being explicable simply in terms of evolution in revolutionary forms, they reiterate the unresolved questions raised around the turn of the millennium about the future of revolutions in the twenty-first century, as well as deeper questions about how to define, conceptualize and think about revolutions.

Thus, the very concept of revolution as an analytic category could be seen to be under pressure on a number of grounds. In theoretical terms, the contentious politics, strategic action and strategic interaction perspectives, taken to their logical conclusions, could all be seen as throwing open to question the sanctity of revolution as a 'special category' of its own - as something fundamentally different from other types of contentious politics. And back in the 'real world', the bewildering pirouettes seen in the discourse of revolution in recent years raise their own questions.

Well before the latest wave of purported "revolutions", Lawson (2005a:474)
commented that

The term revolution has been reduced to a sound bite, more often a means to peddle magazines, sell cars or spin policy proposals than act as a call to action. Revolutions appear to have little place amidst the apathy and weariness of mainstream political discourse in advanced market democracies. In an era seemingly best captured by Fukuyama's infamous phrase 'the end of history', revolutions have been tamed and commodified, becoming irrelevant to a world in which the big issues of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been settled.

If anything, the banalisation of the term has become even more acute in the decade since Lawson's remark. Given that 'revolutions' are now declared in an alarmingly casual manner, in reference to a bewildering array of different types of collective action and social conflict that do not always have much obviously in common, the question arises as to how much is to be gained in analytical terms from labelling one or other case a revolution. Scholars may need to decide what is more worthwhile: debating whether one or other case meets the criteria for 'revolution' ('Was the 'Egyptian Revolution' really a revolution?' etc.), or debating whether those criteria themselves really mean very much anymore. Definitions of revolution were always shaky, but there seemed to be enough in common between a critical mass of relevant historical cases that one could talk about revolution, and expect that others would know more or less what one meant - and perhaps even argue about which ones were 'real' cases of revolution, and which were not. After quite some years of wild talk about revolutions here, there and everywhere, this may no longer be the case. And while one can, if one desires, choose to have that debate about whether, say, the Egyptian revolution really was a revolution, one may eventually run up against the awkward problem that revolutions were only ever partly an 'objective' reality - and that, rather than being a 'force of nature' whose properties could be scientifically and objectively inventoried, revolutions were always as much a subjective idea as anything else. (Hence the emphasis placed by many scholars on the 'invention' of revolution in Paris or perhaps elsewhere, as discussed earlier in this chapter.)

This is not to say that it is not valid to talk about revolutions anymore - but it is to question how scientific it is to do so, and what is to be gained analytically from
This throws up a vexing question. The 'correct' theoretical approach to studying revolutions was hotly debated even when revolution as a concept seemed relatively secure. How are we to study what we might once have studied in terms of revolution, if the integrity of the very concept may now be breaking down?\(^\text{30}\)

\(^{30}\) Some other scholars have made sophisticated attempts to grapple with some of these issues - albeit coming to different conclusions than those presented here.

Between the outbreak of the "Colour Revolutions" and the "Arab Spring", George Lawson (2005a; 2005b) made similar remarks about a certain degradation in the meaning of the word 'revolution'. Lawson went on to suggest that revolutions as understood within a traditional, essentializing framework, were being outmoded by a new type of revolution - the "negotiated revolution". As interesting an idea as this is, this author would question the usefulness of the "negotiated revolution" concept, and question whether the cases forming the bases for Lawson's analysis (Chile, Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic and South Africa) are meaningfully comparable. Indeed Lawson (2005b:197-199) admits himself that the Chilean case is really more a story of authoritarian regime transition than of revolution as such. The author of this dissertation would also place the South African case closer to authoritarian/non-democratic regime transition than to revolution - and see the Czechoslovakian case as a hybrid, somewhere between the two. Furthermore this author would question whether the causal mechanisms lying behind these transitions were sufficiently similar as to provide a sound basis for meaningful comparison.

To put these case-specific quibbles aside and accept Lawson's analytical framework at face value, this author would still feel compelled to challenge the proposition that "negotiated revolutions" have been edging out revolutions as traditionally understood. Among other things, Lawson's definition of "negotiated revolutions" stresses their relative non-violence and their commitment to moderate, liberal, democratic and human rights-based values (Lawson 2005b:230-234).

However, 'revolutions' on this model have been in short supply in the years following the publication of Lawson's book. Tunisia is perhaps the only "Arab Spring"-era case that has seen political upheaval coming about relatively non-violently - even if the degree of 'revolutionary transformation' occurring in that country has been limited, as old regime and 'deep state' elements have managed to weather the post-2011 democratisation process very effectively via the current ruling party of Nida Tounes. Other Arab uprisings have been characterised by violence and poor outcomes. And despite the impressive survival skills of old regime elements, Tunisia has at least experienced some degree of democratising reform - while such initiatives have failed elsewhere.

Whatever about the contemporary context, could any of this framework be adapted for the study of historical cases such as the Irish one? In fact the Irish case poses some difficulties here; differently from Lawson's framework, the opposing sides in the Irish independence struggle only came to the negotiating table after considerable violence - indeed, armed conflict resulting in thousands of deaths - sustained over several years. They did eventually come to a negotiated settlement, but again this was of a very different nature to those described by Lawson - not the reform or democratisation of a given state, but secession from an existing state and the building of a new one. All of this was followed by violence to rival (and possibly even surpass) that of the pre-settlement phase of the independence struggle, as the architects of the new state built a military/repressive apparatus capable of crushing their erstwhile comrades who rejected and contested the settlement. Such bloodletting is precisely one of the things that Lawson's "negotiated revolutions" are supposed to eschew (Lawson 2005b:234).

Ritter's (2015) work on "unarmed revolutions" raises some similar issues. While his account of political upheavals in Iran, Egypt and Tunisia is highly stimulating, this author cannot agree with his contention that relatively non-violent revolutions are superseding 'traditional' violent ones - for reasons that should be clear from the above comments on Lawson. This author also questions whether many of Ritter's
If we accept that different species of revolution and contentious politics emerge, mutate and evolve in interaction with their environments (McAdam and Sewell 2001; Lawson 2005a; Lawson 2005b), then we might have to accept that concepts of revolution developed to understand events in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries may not work very well in the twenty-first. Then again, some of them may not have worked very well for cases in those centuries either: While twenty-first century ‘revolutions’ seem to blur into other kinds of contentious politics – as well as institutional politics and civil or proxy wars – many nineteenth and twentieth century revolutions seem to blur into

purported revolutions can truly be considered as such, and questions the contention that authoritarian and repressive regimes usually feel hemmed in by their alliances with ‘liberal’ western powers. At the risk of stating the obvious, this author would simply point to the counter-evidence, in the form of the long (and continuing) history of western support for regimes of the most illiberal and repressive nature outside the west. (This author would suggest that when regimes succumb to revolutionary challenges, it is often because they make political blunders that lead to their domestic and international isolation - Batista's Cuba and Somoza's Nicaragua springing to mind. However, this is not necessarily the same thing as regimes losing their nerve for fear of upsetting their international patrons’ liberal values - closer to Ritter's idea.)

That is not in any way to suggest that regimes do not sometimes feel constrained in their handling of dissent by ‘political’ concerns, or by reputational concerns at home and abroad. It is merely to point out that this is more of a concern in some cases than in others, and that many regimes - including many allied to the west - have little compunction about engaging in the harshest and deadliest of repression. A recent example of this can be found in one of Ritter’s own cases - Egypt - where the military leadership did not hesitate to launch a coup against the democratically elected Morsi government, and kill hundreds of his supporters.

In fact, this author would suggest that a dynamic something like what Ritter describes - the phenomenon whereby regimes feel their room to manoeuvre restricted by reputational concerns - was probably more evident in the Irish case than in some of his own. As the conflict in Ireland wore on, the British government did feel increasingly concerned about how its actions in Ireland were being perceived at home and abroad, and this was a factor in pushing them towards a settlement. This theme will be returned to later in the dissertation.

31 Again it is worth quoting Lawson (2005a:475-476):

The second point about the importance of revolution to the modern world is more theoretical. Many of those scholars who deny the importance of revolution to the contemporary world do so because they mistakenly equate revolutions with certain inalienable, essential features: class-based, violent, Utopian and so forth. For the most part, revolutions are ascribed certain core features, masquerading as objective criteria, without which they are considered to be 'invalid'. Such a view is misguided because it reduces revolutions to static objects of analysis rather than seeing them as dynamic processes with features that change according to their historical and social contexts. The concept of revolution exists in every major language group in the world - its heritage is diverse, drawn from a variety of cultural settings.
nationalist struggles, anti-colonial revolts and so on. It may be that when dealing with the events of past and present, we will have to take our paradigms of ‘revolution’ and other specific strains of contentious politics with a pinch of salt – and accept that the episodes we see before us may be best thought of as messy hybrid cases touching down at different points along the contentious politics spectrum at different times and places. And we may need to adapt our use of theory accordingly.\(^{32}\)

The Irish independence struggle is a case in point. Though it is tempting to view it as a revolution, it has confounded generations of commentators as to how it ought best be described - and recent scholarly attempts to rebrand it as a revolution appear only partly convincing (a theme addressed elsewhere in this thesis).

McAdam et al. offer us tools for analysis of such a case regardless of whether it is counted as a full-blown revolution or not. Following Goldstone (1998), they point out that "successful revolutions are not a genre apart, but share characteristics with social movements, rebellions, failed revolutions, and cycles of protest (2001:109)." Seeking to drive home the point that successful and failed revolutions are not of different species, and that the difference between the two can be decided by highly contingent factors, McAdam et al. use a comparison of the Nicaraguan Revolution of 1979 and the 'failed revolution' of 1989 China to argue the case for an analytical approach based on "first, contingent events, second, strategic leadership decisions that sometimes had unexpected effects, and third, an intersection of causal mechanisms that led to outcomes that could not have been predicted with either structural or cultural determinism."

The analytical approach of this thesis is in this spirit, and the rest of this chapter will elaborate on how that approach takes off from this contribution of McAdam et al.'s.
Overview of analytical approach

As briefly indicated in the introductory chapter, the analytical approach of the thesis is premised on the idea that the eventful approach pioneered by Sewell and other scholars, and drawn upon by McAdam et al., would do well to be filled out in various respects. Firstly it suggests that too often, transformative events are presented as things that 'just happen', and that we would profit from a better understanding of where transformative events come from in the first place, and of how they come about. It suggests that sometimes, as in 1916, they are the product of high levels of agency and strategic initiative. Secondly, the analytical approach of the thesis suggests that we would benefit from a better understanding of how transformative events become transformative, and by what mechanisms. The approach presented in the thesis focuses on certain specific causal mechanisms, ultimately yielding an account of eventful transformation that is quite different from Sewell’s. And thirdly, the thesis suggests that the eventful approach can benefit from being more explicitly connected to the literature on path dependence - and argues that the events and mechanisms of the Irish independence struggle ultimately produced a path dependent reactive sequence that would significantly reshape state, politics and society in Ireland and the United Kingdom in the seven or so years it took to play out.

Events

Students of contentious politics have often seen what happens in the short run - from riots, to assassinations, to disputed elections - as little more than exhaust fumes from the tectonic rumblings within the deep structures of society. The rumblings are thought to reflect big, slow, and difficult-to-understand processes, practically impervious to the actions of puny human beings. Such thinking was part of a wider pattern, stretching beyond the study of contentious politics. As Sewell (2005:197-199) points out, social scientists were long happy to leave 'events' to historians, preferring to study 'structure' (Sewell 2005:197-199). Not that historians were immune to this allergy to events; indeed, in Braudelian
terms, one might say that *histoire événementielle* was seen as a function of the *longue durée* (Braudel 1995).

Against this background, it has taken the considerable efforts of scholars such as Abbott (1990, 1992, 2001), Abrams (1983), Staggenborg (1993), Sahlin (1985, 1991), and, perhaps most importantly, Sewell (1996, 2005; McAdam and Sewell 2001) to put events seriously on the agenda of social science theory.

Where did this impulse come from?

At the most basic level, renewed interest in events had much in common with a wider backlash against structuralist assumptions on the part of some social scientists in recent decades - especially driven by a sense that upsets in social and political life are often far too sudden and unexpected to be convincingly explained through structuralist approaches. This can be seen in a field a handful of degrees removed from the eventful study of contentious politics, namely the mid-1980s work of Schmitter and O'Donnell on transitions from authoritarian rule. Schmitter and O'Donnell pointed out that certain types of moments were more structurally determined than others - and that the ouster of authoritarian rulers tended to throw up the kinds of circumstances that were not tightly scripted by structural constraints, and in which other, much more contingent and unpredictable forces took over:

What actors do and do not do seems much less tightly determined by "macro" structural factors during the transitions we study here than during the breakdown of democratic regimes. The dismayed impotence of most democratic political actors during the latter contrasts sharply with what gives a characteristic flavor to many moments of the transition—namely, the exultant feeling (even if it is usually quite exaggerated) that the future is open, and that ideals and decisions count as much as interests and structures. Even by itself, this strong belief is likely to be a powerful factor, in the short and medium run, for reinforcing the high degree of structural indeterminacy that characterizes such moments. (Schmitter and O'Donnell 1986:19)

However, contingent events were not the focus of Schmitter and O'Donnell's
work, and it would take the dedicated efforts of other scholars to tease out the implications of such insights. These scholars pointed out that sometimes, the contingent and often quite unpredictable repercussions of short-term events can disturb the reproduction of long-taken-for-granted patterns of social life, and end up shaping history in the medium to long term (Hunt 1984; Sahlins 1985, 1991; Sewell 1992, 2005; Abbott 1997, 2001). After all, when great political and social changes occur, they do not always happen gradually, as if slowly evolving along the *longue durée*. Often they become visible suddenly, when the last thread holding together a given *ancien régime* finally snaps. The concept of the "transformative event" is a way of getting at what happens in the moment when that thread snaps, and when the temporalities of long-term, short-term and medium-term collide:

... the key feature of transformative events is that they come to be interpreted as *significantly disrupting, altering, or violating taken-for-granted assumptions governing routine political and social relations*. In so doing, they serve to dramatically ratchet up (or down in the case of demobilizing events...) the shared sense of uncertainty (with its partisan variants, “threat” and “opportunity”) on which all broad episodes of contention depend. (McAdam and Sewell 2001:110).

Of course, scholars concerned with the power of events, and of the *courte durée* temporal plane that they inhabit, have still tried to understand their significance in relation to other temporalities: that of the long-term change processes they tend to spring from, for instance, and that of the medium-term cycles of contention they often precipitate (McAdam and Sewell 2001; Tarrow 2012; Moore 2012). The point was that long-term change processes are not magic wands: new cycles of contention such as protest waves and revolutions do not arise from them automatically (Aya 2011). Usually, highly contingent, and often unpredictable events lie in between.

But transformative events are not magic wands either. And while events-focused scholars have made crucial progress in showing how transformative events intermediate between long-term change processes and new cycles of contention,
they have not always examined systematically what lies behind transformative events themselves.

**Path dependence**

The thesis suggests that attention to the causation of strategic events shines a light on something that has been under-researched in the literature on contentious events, and on contentious politics more generally. At the same time it also speaks to larger theoretical debates in historical sociology and political science. Though the connection is not always clearly drawn, to speak of events and eventfulness is to confront important questions about contingency and path dependence. James Mahoney (2000:507-508) argues that

path dependence characterizes specifically those historical sequences in which contingent events set into motion institutional patterns or event chains that have deterministic properties. The identification of path dependence therefore involves both tracing a given outcome back to a particular set of historical events, and showing how these events are themselves contingent occurrences that cannot be explained on the basis of prior historical conditions.

In defining path dependence thus, Mahoney distinguishes the concept from what he sees as the sloppy and misleading ways in which it is all too often employed - often denoting little more than a vague notion that "history matters", or that "the past influences the future" (Mahoney 2000:507) - and along these lines, he criticizes the 'eventful' approach associated with Sewell (2000:510). However, it is suggested here that these different approaches are not necessarily so at odds as they might appear to be. Looking inside a contingent event, and at its causation, could be described as looking at the start of a path-dependent sequence. In the contentious politics literature, we now hear relatively often about events that are contingent and transformative, and how such events go on to shape chains of subsequent events. However, we hear less about where these contingent events come from in the first place. Meanwhile, in the literature on
path dependence, we hear somewhat more about what lies behind the contingent events that set in motion path dependent sequences. However, it is still relatively rare to find in that literature a close study of how such contingent events come about in a context of contentious politics and collective action.

This thesis, then, is concerned with a path dependent reactive sequence - the Irish independence struggle - initiated by a contingent event - the 1916 Easter Rising. But while this event was highly contingent, and in no way inevitable, it was neither 'spontaneous', nor a random 'fluke' of history. On the contrary, it would never have happened were it not for high levels of agency on the part of the actors involved.

Since 'agency' can be hard to pin down, this thesis seeks to address it in as tangible a way as possible. Taking a lead from Jasper (2004, 2006), it pays close attention to the strategic interaction of the actors implicated in the Irish independence struggle, and in the transformative event that set the episode in motion: those who struggled to make the event happen, and those who struggled to stop them from doing so. This focus is not just on the strategic interaction between movement challengers on the one hand, and their opponents outside the movement (within the state, within counter-movements, etc.) on the other. The analysis of the causation of the 1916 event also considers the competition between different strands within the movement. This is presented as a corrective to the idea that the courses of action taken by movement groups might have been in any way inevitable. It is contended that in reality, no one course was inevitable, because wildly different strategic visions competed with each other within the movement. Movement actors faced the same strategic dilemmas, but made very different choices as to what to do at each fork in the road. To look at these choices - and at the strategic 'bets' that contending actors made on the basis of them - is to look directly at the trail of agency leading to the transformative event in question. Looking at this strategic interaction also shows that the question of which strategic initiative would prevail was a close-run thing. The fates of individual strategies teetered on a knife-edge. In other words, things could have gone one way or the other.
Thus, it is sought to demonstrate the agency and strategic interaction that can lie behind transformative events - something that has been curiously under-researched. But a transformative event would not be a transformative event if it did not change the situation in volatile and uncontrollable ways. As indicated in the introductory chapter, the thesis contends that the transformative event of the 1916 Easter Rising initiated a new path dependent reactive sequence, powered by a handful of decisive causal mechanisms. This amounts to a somewhat different take on the role of transformative events than that found in Sewell’s (1996) groundbreaking eventful account of the Storming of the Bastille and the French Revolution.

In the works of Sewell and other event-focused scholars, considerable emphasis has been placed upon the capacity of events to disturb prevailing assumptions about the stability of the status quo, and to broadcast new possibilities. Scholars of the event routinely stress the role of interpretation - particularly retrospective interpretation - in this process, and emphasize the creativity and agency involved in such interpretive acts. In this analysis, events only really become ‘events’ after the fact (Sewell 1996, 2005). For instance, in Sewell’s seminal eventful analysis of the early stages of the French Revolution, it takes some time for the Storming of the Bastille to become the transformative event that it ultimately does. Sewell points out that while representatives of the Third Estate had initially been aghast at what happened at the Bastille, a number of contingent factors led them to retrospectively reframe the event in a radically different way. The repressive backlash they had expected from royal forces failed to happen (Sewell 1996:854), and the conquest of the fortress seemed to infuse the streets of Paris with an air of euphoria. But when copycat acts of violence began breaking out (Sewell 1996:856-860), certain National Assembly members hit on the rhetorical conceit of lauding the Storming of the Bastille as a legitimate act of ‘revolution’ (giving new meaning to an old term), while condemning subsequent violent acts as perversions of the righteous anger expressed at the Bastille (Sewell 1996:857-859). This collective scramble over the meaning of what had happened at the Bastille led to its retrospective construction as a transformative, epoch-defining
moment.

This account of eventful transformation hinges on creative interpretation, meaning-making, and the evocation of new possibilities. Is this broadly representative of the means by which events become transformative?

Kuran (1989, 1991, 1997) provides a rather different account of how sudden, dramatically unexpected events can seem to change everything. For Kuran, 'preference falsification' is widespread in society - and especially in the kinds of more or less oppressive societies that tend to incubate revolutionary movements. In Kuran's analysis, all that is really needed for something like a revolution to happen is the right set of circumstances for people to express their real social and political preferences - long buried under the weight of years spent keeping up appearances and outwardly conforming to the status quo. The processes by which such circumstances emerge are highly contingent and inherently unpredictable - but once in train, the 'radical bandwagon effect' (Kuran 1991:20) can rapidly take on a momentum all of its own:

Structural factors are thus part of the story, yet by no means the whole story. While they certainly affect the likelihood of revolution, they cannot possibly deliver infallible predictions. A single person's reaction to an event of global importance may make all the difference between a massive uprising and a latent bandwagon that never takes off. So to suggest, as the structuralists do, that revolutions are brought about by deep historical forces with individuals simply the passive bearers of these forces is to overlook the potentially crucial importance of individual characteristics of little significance in and of themselves. It is always a conjunction of factors, many of them intrinsically unimportant and thus unobserved, if not unobservable, that determines the flow of events. A major global event can produce drastically different outcomes in two settings that differ trivially. Structuralism and individualism are not rival and mutually incompatible approaches to the study of revolution, as Skocpol would have it. They are essential components of a single story. (Kuran 1991:22)

Importantly, the potential for revolution is, in this view, often latent. No great transformation of people's preferences is required to make it happen - only the activation of those preferences already there. This is a compelling insight, and Kuran makes an intriguing case that such dynamics were at work in the 1989 Eastern European uprisings, as well as in other cases. The only problem is that
'preference falsification' arguments may work far better in some cases than in others, and do not represent a panacea as far as explaining revolutions or other sudden and unexpected events goes. Indeed, while preference falsification was no doubt an element in the background to the Irish independence struggle (see chapter four), this thesis argues that much more important was the transformation rather than uncovering of people’s preferences.

This leads back to the question as to how events can be transformative. It has already been suggested here that some of the common explanations for this are vague, and that some - like Kuran’s - probably work better in some instances than in others. But we may be able to demystify events by identifying much more direct and dynamic mechanisms through which they effect change. Indeed, this thesis suggests that some of these mechanisms may be familiar from studies of contentious politics and social change beyond the consciously 'eventful' literature, and that these mechanisms may often derive their power as much from their capacity to shut down certain possibilities, as open up new ones.

For example, the thesis argues that, in Irish terms, the Easter Rising was every bit as transformative an event as the storming of the Bastille or of the Winter Palace. However, this event was not just transformative because of retrospective acts of creative interpretation, or because it opened up new possibilities. Rather, it drew its transformative power from the conjuncture of powerful causal mechanisms that it entailed - and from the effect this conjuncture had of shattering certain possibilities for peaceful settlement of the “Irish question” that had erstwhile remained, and of impelling actors down a road of conflict and violent escalation.

Though it is not made explicit by scholars such as Sewell (1996, 2005) or Sahlin (1985), to speak of events leading to crucial acts of interpretation is, to put it in slightly more formal theoretical terms, to speak of a particular causal mechanism working itself out. Identifying causal mechanisms is one of the many techniques in the social scientists’ toolbox. Such mechanisms are the observable cause-effect relationships between particular occurrences and their consequences, and identifying them allows social scientists "to fill in the void (the ‘black box’) left
when general effects are imputed to general causes (della Porta and Keating 2008:13)." Though attention to causal mechanisms is not new, the approach has seen something of a resurgence in recent years - arising from the complaint that other types of causal explanation in the social sciences often fail to truly 'causally explain' very much - veering wildly from 'thick description' of micro-level phenomena, often poorly connected to the macro-level, to broad gestures at explanation of macro-level phenomena that identify correlations between variables, but frequently fail to find what joins these variables up. As an explanatory mode of the middle range, between the micro and the macro, the search for causal mechanisms steps into this gap.

If we can accept that powerful and reasonably consistent causal mechanisms play an important role in social life, then we must accept that frequently, events are key markers of these causal mechanisms - variously initiating, reflecting, and (sometimes) stopping and reversing particular causal mechanisms. In studies explicitly concerned with causal mechanisms, the salience of events is often left implicit, or taken for granted. But when it is made explicit, it becomes clear that causal mechanisms are inseparable from events.

**Mechanisms and events**

McAdam et al. (2001:24), in the most sustained book-length study of mechanisms in contentious politics, identify mechanisms as "a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations." This is a rather different vision of events from that of Sewell. For while Sewell emphasizes the subtle and contingent acts of (often ex post facto) interpretation that give events their meaning, McAdam et al. suggest that events are connected to powerful and dynamic cause-effect relationships that can be found recurring in similar ways from one context to another. That is not to say that, following McAdam et al.'s line of thought, events cannot involve contingency or interpretation. But it is to give contingency and interpretation a different accent. For Sewell, action is
contingent, and so are the interpretation and/or repercussions of that action. If we focus on mechanisms, however, we could see action as contingent, but its effects as *sometimes predictable* - or at least as pointing towards a handful of potential paths, that are roughly identifiable in advance.

For instance, if the peasants of the kingdom come to the king’s palace with a petition of their grievances, and the king responds by slaughtering half the peasants, two possible outcomes spring to mind: the remaining peasants may be so terrorised that they turn their backs on any form of dissent indefinitely; or they may feel that they have no option but to engage in open rebellion, and to try to kill the king. Which path is taken depends on many factors - but the important point is that, if the peasants respond with rebellion, then attributing this to their creative interpretation of the king’s slaughter of their peers, and their inventive retrospective framing of it, would be a weak explanation indeed. Much better would be to see the peasants' response as reflecting one of a number of familiar mechanisms seen again and again in contentious politics, from Middle Ages Europe to twentieth-century Latin America - namely a response to severe repression that backfires by driving actors over the edge into outright rebellion (Goodwin 2001). The difference between a mechanisms-based account of this scenario, and one focused on variables, is that while the latter might answer the question 'Why did the peasants kill the king?' by pointing to underlying structural conditions fuelling peasant grievance - poverty, hunger, exploitation, etc. - a mechanisms-based account would see this as an overly static and 'wide angle' view of what happened, and seek instead to hone in on a 'close up' of the specific causal mechanisms - or, in other words, the specific happenings and their effects - that made the potential for conflict a reality. This is somewhat like the difference between finding motives for a killing at a prima facie level, and piecing together for the purposes of a murder trial a blow-by-blow account that explains how these motives were activated and acted upon.

The scenario of the above thought experiment is highly schematic, and reality tends to be more complicated. But in however complicated ways, such
mechanisms do play important roles in social life, and are seen again and again. 'Mechanisms' can also describe processes with different kinds of causal backgrounds - for instance, processes that are set in motion by the tensions or contradictions in long-term economic, environmental or demographic processes (McAdam et al. 2001:25). (When the environmental basis of a given society is fundamentally undermined, certain mechanisms can very reliably be expected to kick in - and the same can be said for when demographic pressures mean that the resources of a given society can no longer support its population growth (Goldstone 1991, Goldstone 1997).)

But as in the thought experiment, certain mechanisms are sparked by individual, short-term, contingent events. Of course, the word 'event', as used by social scientists, is thoroughly ambiguous. We might say that the difference between an 'event', and a 'great transformative event' is simply that the latter are conjunctures of particularly consequential causal mechanisms, unfolding in rapid succession.

Indeed, in all of this, the approach to mechanisms is similar to that laid out by della Porta (2014:18):

... mechanisms are categories of action that filter structural conditions and produce effects... Following Tilly (2001), I conceptualize mechanisms as relatively abstract patterns of action that can travel from one episode to the next, explaining how a cause creates a consequence in a given context. I would not restrict capacity of action to individuals, however, instead including collective actors. I will in fact consider mechanisms as a concatenation of generative events linking macro causes (such as contextual transformation) to aggregated effects (for example, cycles of protest) through individual and/or organizational agents. In this way, I believe that the search for mechanisms helps in combining attention to structure and to agency.

Perhaps the only notable difference being that in this thesis a particular emphasis is placed on the agency through which actors can generate events and mechanisms in the first place. Thus, this thesis will seek to chart how a contingent but decisive event can consummate a political crisis arising from long-term, intractable social conflicts that otherwise might or might not have attained 'revolutionary' proportions. It will trace this process from the agency of the actors behind the contingent event, to the mechanisms that made that event so transformative, to the path dependent reactive sequence it set in motion, leading
after several years of armed conflict to a permanent realignment of the relationship between the ethno-national communities on the island of Ireland, and between Ireland and the United Kingdom.
4: THE TRANSFORMATIVE EVENT OF THE 1916 RISING

Introduction

This chapter will consider the start of the reactive sequence that was the Irish independence struggle - that is, how a short-term contingent event became the switch point between long-term change processes, and a new cycle of contention in the medium term. It will start by briefly outlining the long-term processes in the background to the political conjuncture of 1916. Next, it will recount how, against this background, a small group of militant separatists contrived to bring about the great transformative event of that year - the 1916 Easter Rising. The main analytical point of this account is to demonstrate that, rather than always being 'accidental', 'spontaneous' or 'fluky', transformative events can spring from the agency and strategic initiative (Staggenborg 1993) of political actors - even ones who are marginal, and few in number. This part of the chapter seeks to bring this agency and strategic initiative out by focusing on the way that the actors had to struggle to make their event happen. Their strategic interaction was not just with the state or counter-movements, but also with their own peers and ostensible comrades within the movement. This intense intra-movement competition meant that the pivotal Rising might very easily have been stopped from going ahead. This is not idle speculation: less than twenty-four hours before the launch of the Rising, it looked like it had been thwarted. The very coming to pass of this transformative event, upon which the next part of Irish history turned, really did come down to last-minute contingencies - but behind these lay a trail of agency and strategic interaction.

This is to speak of the causation of a transformative event. Following this, the chapter will turn from the question of causation - what made the event happen? - to the question of its effect - what made the event so transformative? This will be explained on the basis of the mechanisms discussed in the previous chapters - primarily those of what this thesis calls 'provocation-repression-backlash' and 'reversal of expectations' - with the transformative power of the event being
understood in terms of the powerful interaction of these mechanisms. Again, contingency runs through this story: these mechanisms were not just triggered by the action of the rebels: it takes two to strategically interact, and in this case the decisions and actions of the British authorities were key to shaping the event that was. If they had played their role in this event differently, ensuing Irish history could have been very different as a result.

Thus, the chapter can be seen as being anchored by two main questions: 'What causes transformative events?' and 'What makes transformative events transformative?'

**Historical background and long-term change processes**

The transformative event of the Easter Rising, and the cycle of contention it initiated - the Irish independence struggle of 1916-1923 - cannot be understood without considering Ireland's colonial history, whose distant roots lie in the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland launched from the neighbouring island of Britain in 1169. While Ireland was arguably England's oldest colony, Ireland's colonisation was only fully consummated considerably later, during the first great wave of English and European colonialism in the long sixteenth century.

The protracted and uneven colonisation process left very different socio-economic and demographic footprints in the different parts of the island. Over much of the territory, older generations of Anglo-Norman settlers mixed with the indigenous, Gaelic Irish (Carey 1999, Connolly 2007). The later British settlers of the early modern era observed a studied separation from both the indigenous, and the older generations of Anglo-Norman settlers, now extensively Gaelicised (Canny 2001). This separation was facilitated by the great social marker that would do for the Irish colonial experience much of what skin colour, or other indices of "race", would do in others - for in Ireland, it was *religion* that would primarily distinguish the new settler elite from everyone else (Cleary 2007:33, Crotty 1986:38). The coincidence in the 1500s of the Tudor 'reconquest' of Ireland with the English Reformation meant that from this point on, British
settlers would be overwhelmingly Protestant - while the Gaelic Irish and the Gaelicised Normans seldom converted to the new state religion, and increasingly identified their resistance to further British encroachment with their Catholic faith.\(^{33}\) The religious fault line mapped closely on to a material one: the economic base of the new Protestant settlers lay in the acquisition of land at the expense of the indigenous and Norman clans, through invariably punitive and violent means. The oligarchical power of the Protestant "Ascendancy", as the new settlers and their descendants became known, was compounded by repressive laws restricting Catholics from the professions, from public office, and from political life - the infamous "Penal Laws".

But the colonial process unfolded differently in the northern province of Ulster (Cleary 2007, Ruane 1992). Only in Ulster did sustained mass migration of British settlers occur, so that by the early eighteenth century, Protestants formed a demographic majority in the province - as opposed to a thin garrison layer in other parts of the island (Lenihan 2008:200). Many of the Ulster Protestants were of Scottish extraction, and adherents to the Presbyterian Church, making the Ulster settler identity doubly distinctive. In every province, smouldering tensions between dispossessed Catholics and Protestant settlers frequently broke out into open conflict; in Ulster, dispossession had been more extreme, and violence was often more extreme in accordance (Lenihan 2008).

By the late eighteenth century, many prominent members of the Protestant Ascendancy were pushing for greater Irish autonomy from England, and some of them even for Catholic "Emancipation" - the repeal of harsh anti-Catholic laws (Cleary 2007:38-40, Bartlett 1991). This "patriot" tendency within the "Protestant nation" echoed the concurrent colonial-settler nationalism of the Americas, taking great inspiration from the American Revolutionary War (Cleary 2007:40). But in the shadow of the French Revolution, a more radical republican nationalism would soon emerge, changing the Irish political equation entirely. Emerging in 1791, the United Irishmen contended that the power of the British

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\(^{33}\) The incentive of alliance-building with England's Catholic enemies in continental Europe did not discourage this.
metropole and of the Protestant Ascendancy could only be broken by concerted action across all religious groups - especially the repressed ones (Whelan 1996). Accordingly, their 1798 rebellion mobilized not just Catholics, but also some Ulster Presbyterians - their sect lying well beyond the bounds of the privileged, Anglican mainstream of the Protestant Ascendancy (Lenihan 2008:200-201).

With armed revolt from below fresh in their minds, and their oligarchical domination of Ireland threatened, the Protestant Ascendancy largely abandoned their nascent, settler nationalism, and embraced their connection to the metropole (Cleary 2007:39, Crotty 1986:58). The British government responded to the unrest of 1798 by abolishing residual Irish autonomy, and formally incorporating the island into the United Kingdom - with the consent of the Ascendancy. Though the 1798 rebellion was crushed militarily, it would inspire a long tradition of separatist, republican armed struggle - with abortive uprisings occurring several times in the nineteenth century. The most important armed group to emerge in this lineage was the Irish Republican Brotherhood - the "Fenians". Their 1867 rebellion failed, but the small clandestine group that survived would later play a crucial role in Irish nationalist politics.

The 1800 Act of Union conjoining Ireland and Britain ushered in a century of dramatic change. A great economic bifurcation emerged, as Ulster (or at least its main city of Belfast) took full part in the British Industrial Revolution, while much of the rest of the island stagnated and declined (Cullen 1976, Crotty 1986:51-54). The Ulster Presbyterians, main protagonists and beneficiaries of their province's economic dynamism, became wedded more firmly to the metropole, leaving their 1798 flirtation with separatist republicanism far behind. Meanwhile, many Catholics - within and without Ulster - seethed in frustration. As Ulster prospered, the social and economic experience of the nineteenth century was to have a catastrophic dimension in the rest of the island. While middle-class Catholics benefited from Daniel O'Connell's strikingly successful campaign for Catholic Emancipation in the 1820s, a perfect storm of extreme economic exploitation, indifferent governance, and rapid demographic growth based on mass, precarious subsistence farming, led to chronic famine and full-
fledged humanitarian disaster by mid-century (Crotty 1986:68-69). Through
death and emigration, the population of the island dropped from 8.5 million in
1845, to 6.5 million in 1851 (Whelan 1999:3). The famine of the 1840s wiped out
almost an entire rural proletarian class, and marked the starting point of a long-
term population tailspin from which Ireland would never fully recover - with the
population of the whole island dipping to 4.6 million by 1901 (Whelan 1999:4),
and the population of the post-partition 26-county state continuing to decline
until 1961, when it reached its lowest recorded population of 2.82 million.34

These are calamitous figures, by any yardstick - without obvious parallels in
modern Western Europe, but anticipating later demographic events related to
famine and disease in other Third World colonies. From the point of view of
untangling the causes of contentious politics, however, they call for some parsing.
In the literature on revolutions and contentious politics, it is more often runaway
population \emph{growth}, rather than shrinkage, that is seen as being implicated in the
structural causes of revolution and political upheaval. However, Goldstone -
perhaps the figure most closely associated with this feature of the literature (see
Chapter 3) - points out that this is not necessarily always so, and that "The "rule"
of my model is not that population growth per se is destabilizing, but that
changing population/resource balances can wreak havoc with rigid fiscal and
elite structures (Goldstone 1991:414)." Goldstone illustrated this by reference to
Tokugawa Japan, where a case of "not quite a full social revolution", but certainly
"state breakdown" in the face of mass mobilization occurred against a backdrop
of demographic stability (Goldstone 1991:402) - and perhaps even localised
decline in some areas (Goldstone 1991:406).

Indeed, the revolutions literature aside, it is hardly counter-intuitive that

\footnote{34 One of the few exceptions to this trend was Dublin, whose population continued to grow after
the Famine. However, Dublin’s growth was of course directly related to the population decline
seen elsewhere. As Mike Davis points out, Victorian Dublin was, along with Naples, a clear
outlier in European terms, in that its growth was not fueled by the Industrial Revolution, but
rather by the swathes of destitute people no longer able to subsist on the land, and with no
place else to go (Davis 2006:16). Davis compares Victorian Dublin and Naples with the slum
cities seen in the Third World in the twentieth century and beyond - with the growth of the
former two cities only limited by the availability of emigration channels, especially to the New
World (Davis 2006:183).}
spectacular population implosion is not necessarily a signal that all is well in a given society. And after the initial wave of famine deaths, what it most directly signalled in Ireland was chronic emigration - with an estimated 4.2 million emigrants departing the island between 1850 and 1910 (Whelan 1999:4). And what chronic emigration signals in turn is that, to paraphrase Goldstone’s formula, the struggle over the means of existence is sufficiently desperate that a given society is failing to support its own offspring, and ultimately failing to replenish itself. Indeed, if the struggle for existence is that desperate, very similar mechanisms can be set in motion as those seen in moments of uncomfortable population expansion - all it takes is the right set of circumstances.35 Thus, since both scenarios hinge on the relationship between population and available resources, they represent two sides of the same coin.

The sense of frustration and of blocked opportunities that led so many to emigrate must be factored into the tapestry of motivations that led people to rebel between 1916 and 1923 - especially given that emigration, the typical safety valve for such tensions, was cut off during World War I. However, population decline can also play another role in revolutionary causation - one that is extremely different, but not mutually exclusive. Sudden demographic declines - or sets of circumstances that mimic these, for example when small numbers of settlers experience a windfall of large amounts of land in a frontier society - can have profound implications for class relations and social structure.36 With more land, less excess hands to work it, and less mouths to feed, such circumstances can be the engine for shifting social power dynamics and upward social mobility for certain groups. And since revolutionary causation is often associated with shifting social relations and the rise of certain classes (e.g. the

35 For instance, emigration can serve as a safety valve on these tensions - but if circumstances arise whereby that safety valve is cut off, a situation of population decline could quickly begin to mirror the tensions seen in a situation of population expansion. In fact, this happened in Ireland in the early part of the independence struggle period - with channels of emigration being cut off in the context of the war: It is highly plausible that this was a factor in the conflagration that ensued - something that has been speculated about by various commentators. However, getting beyond such speculation would take a dedicated piece of research on this specific question, and this is not pursued in this thesis.

36 The period following the Black Death in England and Western Europe (Lachmann 1997:75), the resettlement of northern and central Spain following the Reconquista (Brenan 2014[1943]), and the colonial settlement of what is now the United States (Hofstadter and Lipset 1968) might be considered examples.
bourgeoisie), this particular dimension of demographic decline is of obvious relevance to studies such as this one.

This can be seen if we look back to our case. Because they changed Irish society so irrevocably, the famine years of the 1840s are regarded as a watershed in Irish history. Some benefited from the easing of demographic pressures through population loss: the residual rural proletariat, to some extent, thanks to decreased labour supply, but above all, the rural Catholic middle class, which was able to consolidate its position (Crotty 1986:69-71). A majority of agricultural land was still owned by members of the Protestant Ascendancy, but after the population implosion, there was more of it for their middle class Catholic tenants to rent and farm, and at lower prices. Perversely, as the society as a whole continued to atrophy, and as mass emigration continued, the middle-class Catholic tenant farmers who managed to stay on the land became better off. As the century wore on, and as the class grew more assertive, it became increasingly restless in its persisting subordination to the landed Protestant oligarchy. Through boycott and civil disobedience, Catholic tenant farmers collectively struggled to radically renegotiate their relationship with the landowning class - ultimately winning better rights, and ownership of much of the land, in the "Land War" of the 1870s through 1890s (Cullen 1976:149-150). With the landed Protestant oligarchy now all but ruined, the Catholic middle classes thereafter set their sights on bigger things: political power to reflect their greater economic clout.

From the outset, the Land War had been entangled with the "Home Rule" project of the Irish Parliamentary Party - the first Irish nationalist political party to organise effectively in Westminster, founded by Charles Stewart Parnell in 1882. By the turn of the century, the IPP - now better known as the "Nationalist Party" - enjoyed something close to hegemonic status in Catholic Ireland (Garvin 2005). In an otherwise deadlocked House of Commons, Liberal governments of the early twentieth century relied on the Nationalist Party for their support in Westminster - and the Nationalist Party sought to make Home Rule their quid pro quo. Incipient Liberal support for Home Rule had led to failed Home Rule bills in
1886 and 1893, but by the introduction of the Third Home Rule Bill in 1912, it appeared that the then Liberal government was determined to make Irish self-government a reality (Jackson 1997, Lustick 1991, Wilson 1985).

Ironically, however, the Nationalist Party was to become a victim of its own success: for while Home Rule was to be formally approved by parliament, the events that accompanied the Home Rule Bill would destroy the Nationalist Party's political monopoly in Catholic Ireland, and launch a new cycle of contention - not a constitutional struggle for Home Rule, but a violent struggle for independence. The Nationalist Party would be completely sidelined by a new nationalist elite hailing from the armed struggle tradition associated with the Fenians, thousands would die in armed conflict, and the island of Ireland would be partitioned indefinitely.

The new era of separatist armed struggle opened with the Easter Rising of 1916 - a weeklong insurrection against British rule - and climaxed with the guerrilla war of 1919-1921. Since this dramatic and unexpected event played such a disproportionate role in touching off the new cycle of contention, the following sections looks in some detail at how the Easter Rising came about.

"... even a glorious failure would be better than no attempt at all...":

Making the 1916 Easter Rising

The path to the 1916 Easter Rising lay in a struggle for position in the field of early-twentieth-century Irish nationalist politics. The dominant strand of Irish nationalism - the 'Home Rule-ism' of the Nationalist Party - had always had to coexist with other strands, not least the militant separatist republicanism of the IRB. The Easter Rising, a plot hatched by a small cabal within the IRB, would see the latter strand go from the margins of the Irish nationalist field to its centre - and to the head of a mass movement.

After the first stage of parliamentary approval for the Third Home Rule Bill in
1912, the government balked at mounting opposition in Ulster. Thousands of armed Ulster unionists were preparing to resist Home Rule. The Bill passed its final reading in parliament in 1914, but the government used the excuse of World War I to put the new legislation on hold, ostensibly until wartime hostilities ceased. The Nationalist Party acquiesced, even urging Party supporters to join the British Army, as thousands did. But the war changed the political situation in unforeseen ways. Among Irish Catholics and nationalists, support for the war effort was uneven. As the war dragged on with mounting losses, and with no Home Rule in sight, the mood of nationalist and Catholic Ireland slipped into a slow ferment (Lee 1989:23). The Easter Rising was the catalyst for this volatile brew to explode.

As a tiny secret society, the pre-Rising IRB lacked the muscle to take much action on its own. Instigating a rising would demand elaborate organising work through alliance-building, intra-movement competition, and cloak-and-dagger intrigue. An opportunity to work within a mass organisation came in 1913, with the founding of the Irish Volunteers - a nationalist militia established in response to the armed unionist mobilization in Ulster. The initial reluctance of the Nationalist Party to compromise its respectability by associating with such an initiative provided a rare opening for nationalists outside the Party's orbit to seize the day by launching a new mass initiative with mass appeal (Lee 1989:17-18). IRB men were careful to be among the founding members of the Irish Volunteers, and to take key leadership positions (Martin 2013; McGee 2005; Townshend 2005). Over the next two years, a handful of these IRB men sought to manoeuvre the Volunteers toward insurrection. Division within the Volunteer leadership became more obvious, based on a tactical-strategic split - with one group leaning towards mass, open insurrection at the earliest opportunity, and another group favouring armed resistance only if their hand were forced - and even then only along the lines of small-scale guerrilla warfare.

But division and competition were nested at different levels - with overt debates about tactics and strategy among the Volunteer leadership being the tip to an iceberg of covert machinations. The split between insurrectionists and anti-
insurrectionists even ran through the IRB leadership, with some senior members such as Bulmer Hobson - one of the men who had recently rebuilt what had been an almost moribund Fenian organisation - being shut out of the plot (Townshend 2005:118-119). Thus, senior IRB figures were thrown together with non-IRB Volunteers in their opposition to a unilateral uprising - while, to complicate matters further, the IRB insurrectionists would co-opt non-IRB members such as revolutionary socialist James Connolly, and his small paramilitary force, the Irish Citizen Army.

Some of the most basic disagreements underlying this discord reflected what Jasper (2006) calls the 'Today/Tomorrow dilemma.' One of the most common strategic quandaries, this dilemma revolves around the tough decisions strategic actors are forced to make as they strive to balance short-term and long-term goals and possibilities. Questions of whether (and when) to take armed action against British rule had long been in the DNA of Irish nationalism. The circumstances of the war years brought these old dilemmas to fever pitch. On the one hand, insurrectionists saw a short-run window of opportunity while the fog of war engulfed the British state. A long-held Fenian watchword was that "England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity", and to the insurrectionists, wartime seemed the ultimate difficulty. Many considered the tradition of Irish rebellion to have skipped a generation, and intended to make up for it (Augusteijn 2002:110). Speaking of Tom Clarke, the important Fenian veteran, fellow Fenian Seán McGarry recalled that his

feeling of humiliation at the failure of his generation... [to rebel] during the Boer War was still with him and he wanted to do all that one man could to assure that should another war come, it would be proved to the world that there were still in Ireland men who were willing to fight and die for Irish freedom (McGarry, BMH WS 368).

At a pivotal meeting in September 1914, the IRB Supreme Council agreed with Clarke that

something should be done before the war ended. Clarke said definitely that, Volunteers or no Volunteers, he was going to let out some force during the occasion,
that if they did not strike during the war, they were damned for posterity... (Ibid.).

The sense that the British state was uniquely vulnerable during war was not exclusive to Fenians. Before his recruitment to the plot, James Connolly had heaped scorn on the Volunteers for their failure to act, at the same time as threatening to launch his own insurrection unilaterally. McGarry recalled that when Fenians marked the death of IRB hero O'Donovan Rossa in 1915, Connolly "looked at me for a while then almost shouted, 'What's the good of talking about Rossa? Rossa wanted to fight England when England was at peace. You fellows won't fight when she is at war (Ibid.)..." McGarry reported Connolly's reaction to Clarke - who "saw him and shortly afterwards he [Connolly] became a member of our committee (Ibid.)."

But this thinking was not shared by everyone, even at the heart of the IRB. Dissension was palpable ever since the crucial September 1914 Supreme Council meeting - where Denis McCullough had to "quieten the protests" when one of those present "pointed out that we were taking a great responsibility in committing the country to war, without having, at least, a considerable section of the population behind us (Denis McCullough, BMH WS 916)."

Within the IRB, Bulmer Hobson would become the greatest thorn in the side of the insurrectionists. Hobson never forgave the plotters for manoeuvring their comrades into a high-stakes gamble not of their making - arguing that “The great majority of the Irish Volunteers, and the great majority of the members of the IRB, would have been definitely hostile to a demonstration like the 1916 insurrection had it been possible to consult them (Hobson, BMH WS 1365)."

Hobson argued that widespread support for his and MacNeill's long-term strategic vision was illegitimately usurped:

An overwhelming majority of the Irish Volunteer Executive supported MacNeill and me in our design to build up the Volunteers into a powerful organisation, and to resort to guerrilla tactics if and when we were attacked. The 1916 men were unable to challenge this policy successfully in the Executive Committee and were, therefore, driven to
misuse their position as officers in the Volunteers to order men into action in pursuance of a policy different from the one they were publicly pledged to maintain (Ibid.).

J.J. "Ginger" O'Connell, another key anti-insurrectionist, clearly demarcated "the two tendencies that prevailed among the Executive and the Volunteers", and "wished that Eoin MacNeill would attend more frequently so as to counteract the influence of a small section that had the definitive purpose of rushing a rising, which he felt militarily could have no success (MacNeill, BMH WS 303)."

According to a friend in later years, O'Connell was already wary before the Rising of the idea of "blood sacrifice" (in terms of which the Rising would often be described in later years):

He was afraid that their mystical view of the need for a blood sacrifice would bring about a premature clash with the English, which would be futile and disastrous, as it would waste this opportunity for advancing the cause of Irish freedom while England was at war... (Ibid.)

Perhaps the most extensive rebuttal of the insurrectionists' case came in a 'lost' memorandum written by Eoin MacNeill. Though prepared for a meeting of the Volunteer executive in February 1916, the document was ultimately shelved, and forgotten for decades. Nonetheless, it sums up the thinking of the anti-insurrectionist camp. MacNeill made clear the conditions under which he approved of military action by the Volunteers:

The only reason that could justify general active military measures... on the part of Irish nationalists would be a reasonably calculated or estimated prospect of success, in the military sense... not merely some future moral or political advantage which may be hoped for as the result of non-success (Martin 1961:234).

MacNeill posited that the reason the government had not yet suppressed the Volunteers was that it was "convinced that it would lose more than it could gain... unless we create a special opportunity for it (Martin 1961: 238)." He stressed that the Volunteers could now "strengthen our general position still further and indefinitely, by increasing our numbers of armed men and developing their
training and organisation, and by getting the country more and more on our side” (Ibid.). Rather than indulge the will towards glory and martyrdom, now was the time "to use these advantages, not to throw them away or bring them to a standstill” (Ibid.).

MacNeill was certainly right that for some of the insurrectionists, thoughts of honour, duty, martyrdom and glory in the short term were as or perhaps sometimes more important than cold, strategic, long-term thinking. But there was sometimes a fuzzy line between these logics. The ambiguity is summed up in the testimony of Eamon Martin - another Fenian on the Volunteer Executive - who noted that Hobson’s vision of guerrilla warfare had

... seemed to be quite sound and practicable. This is not to say its soundness or practicability would have diverted my own course. I believe that Pearse’s doctrine, no matter how impracticable from the military aspect, had a greater appeal for those who had become tired of waiting for favourable opportunities” (Eamon Martin, BMH WS 591).

Despite appearing to dismiss the pursuit of "favourable opportunities", Martin went seamlessly on to explain the 1916 action in just this way - in terms of an opportunity not to be missed:

... I think it was generally felt that the European war... might end without any attempt being made to take advantage of England’s difficulty, that this would be shameful and disastrous, and that even a glorious failure would be better than no attempt at all (Ibid.).

Such thinking amounted to a quasi-strategic argument for actions acknowledged to be "impracticable", and very possibly doomed to failure - albeit hopefully a "glorious" one. It shows that despite MacNeill’s rhetoric, the question of what was really 'strategic' in 1916 was by no means clear-cut. All there were were different bets, and different gambles. Joseph Lee (1989:27-28) suggests that while historians have been kind to MacNeill, his strategic outlook as of early 1916 had no "more objective chance of success than the actual Rising", and that "MacNeill’s insistence on waiting for the enemy to choose his time made little
logical or moral sense in the circumstances..."

Indeed, if the insurrectionists were so unconcerned with the actual military effect of their planned rising, one must ask why they waited so long to launch it - well past the originally expected expiry date of the World War. One must also ask why they bothered securing German support - for crucial to the rebellion plan was a secret German naval mission to smuggle 20,000 rifles to Ireland. If the rebels were interested in 'blood sacrifice' rather than strategic action, it could have been achieved at any time, and without going to the trouble of winning over the German general staff - a body with little obvious objective interest in materially supporting the 'blood sacrifice' of some Irish patriots, and with bigger fish to fry in spring 1916.

Volunteer and IRB man Liam O'Brien remembered a more nuanced plan than simple 'blood sacrifice' - envisaging a "dramatic seizure of Dublin Castle" [the seat of British government in Ireland] which, along with the landing of the German arms in Kerry, might have brought about "in 1916 the guerrilla warfare of 1920-21" (O'Brien, BMH WS 323). According to O'Brien, this might not have led immediately to a republic ("Hardly!" (Ibid.)), but it might have changed the odds in the David and Goliath contest with the British state: "It was expected that the Rising, if it coincided with a big German offensive in France, would divert large British forces, and later on compel the enemy to negotiate (Ibid.)."

This logic can be endlessly debated - with Lee (1989:25) suggesting that wartime would be the least likely time for Britain to contemplate a revision of its borders. But whatever the wisdom of the insurrectionary plot, it is clear that it emerged from a pronounced clash of strategic visions, as actors with similar political goals made very different bets (in the face of the same strategic dilemmas) as to how to achieve them.

The plotters decided to use the large-scale Volunteer manoeuvres scheduled for Easter Sunday 1916 as cover for their insurrection. Since official Volunteer policy was to avoid military action unless provoked by the Crown Forces, the
insurrectionists spread a document purportedly leaked from Dublin Castle, outlining an imminent crackdown on the Volunteers (Townshend 2005:133). MacNeill took the bait, instructing all units to "be prepared with defensive measures," so as to preserve "the arms and organisation of the Irish Volunteers" (Townshend 2005:132). Great confusion ensued in the days before Easter; for a time, MacNeill seemed to reluctantly defer to his more gung-ho comrades, but the last straw came when he found out about two crucial developments on Easter Saturday - that Hobson had just been kidnapped by the insurrectionists, and that the German arms ship had been intercepted by the Royal Navy the same morning, and scuttled. The night before the planned Easter Sunday manoeuvres, MacNeill circulated last-minute orders cancelling the mobilisation.

Reading the orders on Sunday morning sent the insurrectionists into despair. But after a day of tense meetings, the Military Committee made one last, desperate throw of the dice: they issued new orders rolling the mobilization over to Monday - resolving to act with whatever fighters and arms they could gather at short notice. The following morning, between 1,000 and 1,600 Volunteers and members of Connolly's ICA were mustered around Dublin (McGarry 2010:120). By afternoon, under orders from the insurrectionists, they had seized a series of important buildings - almost taking Dublin Castle, and trading gunfire with Crown Forces. To the bemusement of Dublin's citizenry, Pearse and his confidantes declared themselves the Provisional Government of the "Irish Republic".

Though caught unprepared by the Rising, the response of the authorities was robust. Martial law was declared, and soon Dublin was flooded with about 16,000 troops (Townshend 2005:191). Intense firefighted raged in parts of the city, while the Army deployed artillery to shell the main rebel positions.

Remarkably, the rebels held out under the Army's superior firepower for almost a week. On Saturday, after the deaths of about 64 rebels, 132 soldiers, and 254 civilians (Foy and Barton 2004:325), and with much of the city centre in ruins, Pearse surrendered, citing the ongoing "slaughter of Dublin citizens" (Kiberd
1998:xii). Nearly 1,500 people were interned under emergency powers - many of whom had not been involved in the fighting. Fifteen were executed in the following weeks, including all the main ringleaders.

Dublin had been quite literally transformed by the Rising: beforehand, Ireland was still relatively peaceful, relatively far removed from the ravages of World War I. Afterwards, the centre of her capital was a bombed-out warzone. However, the real changes effected by the Rising would take some time to become visible. Though initial popular reactions to the Rising were ambiguous, within months an overwhelming wave of sympathy for the rebels had swept nationalist Ireland - along with rage at the British forces' heavy-handed response. This sympathy was expressed politically - and at the expense of the Nationalist Party, which quickly saw its near-monopoly on Irish nationalist politics crumble.

In the last UK general election of December 1910, the Nationalist Party had taken seventy-three Irish seats, and other moderate nationalists ten - with the rest (twenty) going to unionists, and a single Liberal. None were taken by separatists. In the 1918 general election, the Nationalist Party collapsed - its Irish seats dropping to six - while Sinn Féin, the party now squarely associated with the 1916 Rising, took seventy-three - with many going to 1916 veterans (Mair 1987).

But there was more to the post-Easter Rising transformation than electoral upsets, and Sinn Féin did more than win seats: a 'dual power' situation emerged, as Sinn Féin's elected representatives shunned Westminster, swearing allegiance to the Irish Republic declared in 1916, and founding their own parliament, and elements of a shadow state. Meanwhile, the remnants of the Volunteers gradually cohered into the "Army of the Republic" - or "Irish Republican Army". It was this military wing of the separatist movement that would fight the 1919-1921 guerrilla war that would lead to partial Irish independence. The 1916 Rising was the event that decisively brought an end to business as usual in Irish politics, and that set in motion the sequence that would lead to Irish partition, and to the founding of the Irish Free State.
It is to explaining the role of the Easter Rising in instigating this wave of transformation that the following section of this chapter turns.

The Transformation of 1916

Before making detailed arguments about exactly how and why the Easter Rising had such a transformative effect on Irish history, it is important to point out that even though this event has rarely been the subject of significant theoretically-guided analysis - let alone 'eventful' analysis - it has traditionally been understood at least implicitly as a transformative event, both by professional historians and by lay commentators. This traditional interpretation of the Rising might be described as that of a 'transformative event without the theory', and the Rising was seen in these terms because of the way it seemed to change the tempo of Irish politics, and mark a turning point on the way to the independence struggle of the following years. But the transformative effect of the Rising was sufficiently dramatic, and sufficiently visible, that commentators have frequently looked to the happenings of Easter Week to try to identify a particular moment when public opinion went from widespread indifference or opposition to the rebellion, to widespread sympathy or support. In fact, it is difficult to pinpoint such a moment - but it is easy to illustrate why such a moment has been sought. It makes for a tantalizing puzzle, given that soon after the Rising, sympathy and support for the rebels was visible everywhere - while during the Rising itself, opposition from sections of the public was so bitter that many rebels later testified that they were more put upon by hostile civilians than by British soldiers.

The public response to the Rising was certainly ambiguous, and piecing together a systematic breakdown of public opinion at the time is now practically impossible. However, ample evidence exists of widespread opposition right across the social spectrum of the Dublin citizenry.

A Canadian journalist, McKenzie, identified a split in public opinion along class lines:
“In the better parts of the city, there had been open and strong sympathy with the
troops, but what I myself saw in the poorer districts... rather indicated that there
was a vast amount of sympathy with the rebels, particularly after they were
defeated” (Townshend 2005:306). In the words of a woman McKenzie found
cheering the prisoners: “Shure and aren't they our own flesh and blood?”
(Townshend 2005:306)

However, McKenzie was perhaps overstating the support of the “poorer districts”
of Dublin for the rebels – if, at least, other contemporary accounts are anything to
go by. BMH statements of 1916 veterans are haunted by the spectre of “lower
class” opposition to the Rising – and in particular, the spectre of the “separation
women” or “dependants’ allowances” - synonyms for the wives of Irishmen in the
British Army, depending for subsistence on government allowances paid in lieu of
their husbands serving on the frontlines of the war in Europe.

Volunteer Robert Holland described to the BMH trying to gain access to one of
the rebel garrisons, surrounded by a throng of angry civilians, “a very rowdy
crowd of the poorer classes... mainly made up of soldiers' wives and their
dependents” (BMH WS 280).

IRB man and Volunteer Sean Murphy describes in his BMH statement the
difficulty of leaving his home to join the fighting, once the Rising had started:

On account of the hostile element round the house, my wife was nervous of
remaining there, as previous to my return home part of the mob outside was trying
to burn her out...
Some civilians had been very aggressive towards our men and... had attacked one
of the Volunteers and in order to save his life they had to shoot one of the civilians.
(BMH WS 204)

Mary Walker, a star of cultural nationalist theatre and leading light of Cumann na
mBan (CnnB) – the main women's nationalist organisation – described, years
later, having run the gauntlet to access another rebel garrison, Jacob's factory,
and encountering a “Huge crowd of poorly-dressed men and women... shouting and screaming and waving their fists...” (Townshend 2005:261)

Peadar Kearney (composer of what was to soon become the Irish national anthem), engaged in building barricades in the slum district of the Liberties, “thought that the aggression of the 'separation women' was 'easily the worst part of Easter Week’” (Townshend 2005:179).

Jerry Golden's BMH statement mentions a 'fusillade of rotten cabbages, oranges, apples etc.' launched by "separation women" on the north side of the city (BMH WS 521). Patrick Egan's BMH statement records that “The women shouted jingo slogans, while the men started to pull down the barricade” at a rebel outpost in Kilmainham, on the south side of the city (BMH WS 327). Recalling the march of her CnMB troop across the city centre, Aine Heron told the BMH:

I felt scared for the first time. There was a crowd of drunken women who had been looting public houses. They called all sorts of names at us, but were too drunk to attack us... It was a shock to us, and we marched away as quickly as we could. (BMH WS 293.2)

But much worse was to come. McKenzie suggested that working class sympathy for the rebels increased after their defeat. But this was not the experience of Robert Holland according to his BMH statement, being paraded as a prisoner through the working class neighbourhoods of Inchicore and Kilmainham, in his own part of the city, after the surrender:

At this point a crowd had gathered. It would then be about 8pm and was falling dusk. At Kilmainham we were jeered at and as we passed by Murray's Lane both men, women and children used filthy expressions at us. 'F' Company, which was mainly made up [of men from] Inchicore, heard all their names called out at intervals by the bystanders. They were [shouting] 'Shoot the Sinn Fein -----s.' My name was called out by some boys and girls I had gone to school with, and Peadar Doyle was subjected to some very rude remarks. The British troops saved us from manhandling. This was the first time I ever appreciated the British troops, as they undoubtedly saved us from being manhandled that evening, and I was very glad as
I walked in at the gate of Richmond Barracks. (BMH WS 280)

In Frank Robbins’ BMH statement, he was similarly troubled by the memory of the hostility

of the vast majority of the citizens... Little did we think that the Dublin citizens would ever go so far as to cheer British regiments because they had as prisoners their own fellow citizens – Irishmen and Irishwomen – just as they were. (BMH WS 585)

The Rising, then, was no Storming of the Bastille. The insurrection launched by the Volunteers did not immediately spark a general, popular insurrection as they might have hoped. It elicited a spectrum of reactions among the ordinary Dublin citizens who witnessed it, and this spectrum was, as suggested by the Canadian observer McKenzie, no doubt complex. Amidst this complexity, however, anger, contempt and sheer bafflement would seem to have been among the more prominent sentiments. The puzzling thing for us, then, is why within months of the Rising – or perhaps even weeks – the complexion of Irish politics had started to change, in an apparently irrevocable manner; and why, against the background of popular fury seen during the Rising, a profound sympathy for, and even sanctification of the rebels, would become a major feature of this new politics.

It is possible that some embryonic changes in popular attitudes had started to hatch sooner. Trying to make it back from Belfast to Dublin on the Thursday of Easter Week, the Labour leader Thomas Johnson noted in his diary that in the town of Drogheda, he found “no sign of sympathy for the rebels, but general admiration for their courage and strategy” (Townshend 2005:267). Trying to make a similar journey, but from Cork, at the opposite end of the country, Mairin Cregan, a CmB messenger, describes in her BMH statement what we might call a 'Ken Loach moment':

Rumours were rife and I remember one cold and miserable evening, while in the waiting room of the station, a man came in with yet another [message] that 'The military [have] mown down the Volunteers in front of the GPO.' I, being worn out
with fatigue and frustration, began to cry. To give an idea of the attitude of the
general public at that time, who apparently did not realise the significance of the
Rising in Dublin, one of those present turned to console me, saying, 'It is only the
Sinn Feiners that were killed,' This enraged me and I turned on them, saying, 'But it
is the Volunteers I am crying for. My friends are among them and fighting too.' It
was remarkable that in a very short time, first one and then another began to
murmur, and the little crowd began to argue and take sides (BMH WS 416).

Actually, another contemporary observer – the well-known writer James
Stephens, whose comments are reproduced by Townshend (2005:265-267) –
might have been closer to the mark than McKenzie. Stephens spent Easter week
roving around the city, listening attentively to the Rising’s transfixed onlookers.
By mid-week, he found that: “There was a singular reticence on the subject... Men
met and talked volubly... but they said nothing that indicated a personal desire or
belief.” There was a thirst for news “or, rather, rumour” and “astonishment at the
suddenness and completeness of the occurrence”. Women – who “knew they had
less to fear” - were quicker to judge in public, and were “actively and viciously
hostile to the rising”. From the “best dressed” to the “dregs”, there seemed to be
wide agreement that: “They ought all to be shot.” Importantly, Stephens notes a
change in mood around the Wednesday of Easter Week – the beginnings of
respect, as it became clear that the rebels were holding out much longer than
expected, and putting up a good fight – whereas swift defeat would have been
humiliating for the city:

The idea at first among the people had been that the insurrection would be ended
the morning after it began. But today, the insurrection having lasted three days,
people are ready to conceive that it may last forever... [There is] almost a feeling of
gratitude towards the Volunteers... [for] holding out for a little while, for had they
been beaten on the first or second day, the city would have been humiliated to the
soul.

Whether or not Stephens was right about nascent popular respect or sympathy
for the rebels springing in large part from their tenacity in holding out against
the Crown Forces – and about ordinary citizens sitting on the fence while the
Rising’s outcome was still unclear – what is certain is that in the wake of the
Rising’s defeat, all things started to “change utterly”, in WB Yeats’ famous phrase. And another thing was for certain: the executions of fifteen of the ‘leaders’\textsuperscript{37} in the weeks following the Rising was an important factor in immediate changes to perceptions of the Rising and its protagonists – as well as in the Rising’s ‘afterlife’ in the narratives and collective or public memories that would soon start to be congeal around it. These executions were to become a central plank of the story of 1916.

Unionist journalist Warre B. Wells likened the public reaction to the executions – the result of secret courts martial, staggered over a number of weeks in May – to “something of the feeling of helpless rage with which one would watch a stream of blood dripping from under a closed door”\textsuperscript{38} (Townshend 2005:306)

Despite this and other similar warnings (also from the Irish Chief Secretary, Wimborne) – the slow trickle of executions continued. In the wake of the executions, and of further repression – such as the arrest and internment of more than three thousand suspects (almost indiscriminately, being based on very poor intelligence), widespread raiding – as well as spiralling rumours (with some basis) about Crown Forces indiscipline and summary executions (of civilians as well as insurgents) during the fighting, by as early as mid-May, ominous warnings were being sounded in police reports about changing attitudes on the ground. A Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) report from that month, cited by Townshend (2005:301-302) refers to “a significant sign in a sudden unfriendliness or even hostility towards the police” throughout the country; “popular sympathy for the rebels... growing” throughout Leinster; the Dublin “labouring and shop-boy class” showing “sullenness”; and in Munster, “sympathy among all Nationalists is becoming intensified in favour of the rebels arrested or sentenced”.

\textsuperscript{37} Some of the executed were not leaders by any stretch of the imagination, such as Willy Pearse – who was unfortunate enough to share a mother with Patrick Pearse, the figure the Rising would come to be most closely associated with.

\textsuperscript{38} Perhaps unknowingly echoing the sanguinary tone of Pearse’s quasi-messianic pre-Rising references to “blood sacrifice” and the “red wine of blood warming the battlefield” (Townshend 2005:114).
By June, General Maxwell – the British military commander in Ireland, and responsible for the suppression of the Rising – was warning Asquith, the Prime Minister, about a “a growing disposition to demonstrate on every possible occasion in favour of Sinn Feinism or Republicanism. At masses for the repose of the souls of executed rebels, at the arrival or departure of released or deported suspects, on their return to their native towns, are [sic] all seized upon to demonstrate”. Maxwell complained about the waving of republican flags on these marches and of the marchers' booing of Crown Forces – and expressed his bafflement at the turn of events, and of mood: “a revulsion of feeling had set in – one of sympathy for the rebels” (Townshend 2005:302).

Maxwell might have found it interesting to see who was organising the masses-cum-political demonstrations that so vexed him. In her BMH statement, a student of one of the executed leaders, Thomas MacDonagh, Eileen McGrane – who had been unconnected to any nationalist activity before the Rising – explains how she took the initiative to organise a month’s mind mass for her fallen lecturer in the church at University College Dublin:

“We put a notice in the paper and the Mass was attended by many others outside the student circles, including Rory O'Connor. The notice we sent to the papers included a verse about MacDonagh's having died for his country, but that part was omitted.” (BMH WS 1752)

After organising the mass, the previously unconnected McGrane joined Cumann na mBan, set up a “half branch” of Inghinidhe na hEireann ('Daughters of Ireland') at UCD, and went on to become a prominent activist in the 'War of Independence' years following the Rising.

Outside Dublin, the ferment must have seemed to the Crown Forces to be taking a worrying course indeed. Townshend (2005:307-308) cites a police intelligence report on events in the Midlands in the summer after the Rising: “On July 17th when pictures of the rebellion were shown at the Mullingar Cinema Exhibition, a section of the audience hissed the soldiers and cheered the rebels…. The manager did not produce these films again.”
Further afield, by September the New York Times Magazine was publishing the story of a CnMB activist’s experience in the Rising: “The greatest result of the Rising is the complete and amazing revival of Irish nationality. We have been asleep... now we have awakened to the knowledge that we really are separate as a nation” (Townshend 2005:300). That same month, HE Duke, the then Chief Secretary for Ireland, was reporting that “The reaction in popular feeling upon the repression of the rebellion has altered the relations of the extremists to the general population” (Townshend 2005:300).

Perhaps nothing illustrates this 'alteration' better than the strange – and almost profane – process by which the executed 'leaders' of the Rising came to be treated as something like lay saints. Townshend (2005:309) relates the well-known stories of the little girl praying to 'Saint Pearse' in a Dublin shop that her mother would buy her a new hat, and of the priest who asked the condemned insurgent leader Con Colbert for an 'intercession' in Heaven while he was giving him his last rites. Hart (2011:18) goes as far as to suggest that we should think of at least some of the large-scale recruitment of “brand new activists” that took place over the summer of 1916 in terms of “quasi- or actual religious experiences” - happening as it did in the context of a heavy rhythm of requiem masses for the fallen rebels over those months.

This, of course, raises the question of the relationship between the rebels and the Catholic Church – an institution whose power in Irish society at that time is impossible to overstate. The story of the Catholic Church’s relationship to the Irish independence struggle as a whole is a complex and contradictory one – stretching from the strident and explicit support of the Church hierarchy for the Empire, the war and the Irish Party in the years before the Rising, to a rather rapid and public break with the British government and with Redmond’s party soon afterwards. This is not the time to delve into this very involved story – but suffice to say that a softening public attitude of the Church towards militant nationalism at least facilitated the retrospective rehabilitation of the 'men of '16' as heroes, patriots, and even as something approaching sainthood.
But of course, the real significance of all these romantic, imaginative and cosmological changes was rather more worldly: as suggested by Hart, it meant new recruits for the 'national movement', new activist muscle for the nexus of organisations around the IRB and the Volunteers, and it meant the money and resources to reorganise. Hart (2011:19-20) points out that cash – and particularly American cash – started to flow into these organisations' coffers in the latter part of the year.

A large part of this money was channelled into supporting the dependants of jailed Volunteers, as described in the BMH statement of CnMB activist Aine Heron:

> When we called at the houses sometimes the inhabitants denied all knowledge of the Volunteers in question, as they did not know us and they thought we might be setting traps for them. Gradually it became easier as the sympathy of the public had veered round to the victims of the rebellion. Especially, the Masses for the men of Easter Week did a great deal to give courage to all these people. They gave them the only opportunity they had of coming together and exchanging news from the various prisons. (BMHS 293.2)

And it was not just Americans who were now willing to contribute money to the cause, as related to the BMH by Eilis Bean Uí Connaill of CnMB: “People who had refused to subscribe before now gave generously and sympathetically. This gave us great courage and resulted in [our] filling several boxes on Sundays instead of merely one” (BMH WS 568).

The last of the Rising prisoners, whose dependents people like Heron and Uí Connaill were helping to support, were released and sent back to Ireland just in time for Christmas 1916. For some of the prisoners, the changes that had escaped them since the time that they were hounded through the streets of Dublin upon their Easter defeat, became apparent as soon as they boarded the Irish Sea ferry. In the words of Seamus Ua Caomhánaigh to the BMH:
We were not long on board when a man came up to me and asked me would I like a cup of tea. I said I would. He went away and brought it back to me in no time. Then a lady gave me an enormous hunk of rich Christmas cake. Another gave me a large piece of cheese. I was literally starving, as we had [had] no refreshment of any kind since leaving Frongoch... I drank the tea and with the cheese in one hand and the cake in the other I would take an alternative bite out of each and by the time I got it all down I was feeling fine. (BMH WS 889)

What makes transformative events transformative?

How can this transformation - one hinging on a seismic shift in popular sentiment - be explained? This has been the subject of considerable debate among historians and other commentators. However, this debate only tends to get so far: It is universally agreed that the unpopular post-Rising executions were a key factor in shifting the public mood - and the 'common wisdom' explanation of the change effected by the Rising could be summed up not too uncharitably as: 'The decision to execute the fifteen rebels - slowly and callously - moved the public from opposition to sympathy for the rebels.'

While the significance of the executions in changing the public mood is universally acknowledged, what historians have tended to debate is the extent of that change - whether it was really as stark as has often been portrayed, or whether it was more of a "crystallization" than a true transformation, as the historian Joseph Lee (1989:36) famously put it.

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39 Among the literature on the Easter Rising, one book stands out for special mention here - Jonathan Githens-Mazer's *Myths and Memories of the Easter Rising: Cultural and Political Nationalism in Ireland* (2006). This is a rare and interesting attempt to study the Rising according to an approach informed by social science theory - in this case theory drawn from the study of nationalism and of social movements. Thus, Githens-Mazer casts the Rising as a decisive "cultural trigger point":

My contention is that the Easter Rising and the events that occurred in its aftermath constituted a *cultural trigger point* that accounted for this new popular sympathy for radical nationalism in the wake of the Rising. This concept of the cultural trigger point is based on aspects of social movement theory, in so far as it defines a moment or set of events that bring together a self-aware groups to react with a sense of agency and urgency to a perceived injustice. (Githens-Mazer 2006:xiv)

This is an interesting approach, but it has little to do with the approach taken in this dissertation. Githens-Mazer's approach is basically culturalist, and I would suggest that the mechanisms behind his "cultural trigger point" remain hazy. Clearing up such haziness is the object of this dissertation.
However, this discussion, useful as it is, is remarkable for what it leaves out. Though every analysis of the Rising that this author has seen places great weight on these fifteen executions, remarkably little attention is paid to the fact that this number pales in comparison to the civilian death toll of the Rising. At least 254 civilians were killed - the vast majority almost certainly by British forces - dwarfing the 64 rebels and 132 soldiers and police killed in action during the Rising (Foy and Barton 2011:271). Partly because of inattention from historians, and partly because they were never properly investigated or were covered up, the details of the circumstances of many of these killings remain obscure. But some key facts can be pieced together.

Although the rebels assumed that British forces would never use artillery against them (Townshend 2005:98) - seeing it as an unthinkable action to take in a major urban population centre of the United Kingdom - in fact the army lost little time in commencing the bombardment of Dublin city centre. Field guns were brought to the city, and a gunboat was taken off anti-U-boat patrol to shell buildings from the River Liffey. Soon the centre of the city was in ruins - and inevitably, rebel positions were not the only ones hit, with at least 179 buildings being destroyed (Foy and Barton 2011:270).

The decision to use artillery in an urban population centre showed a wilful disregard for civilian life - heavy collateral damage being an inevitable result of these tactics. But such disregard did not stop there. The street-fighting of Easter Week represented a type of combat little known to the officers and men of the British Army, trained (in many cases only barely) for the trenches and battlefields of France. And the street-fighting in Dublin foreshadowed the savage urban warfare to become more familiar later in the twentieth century. Orders were given to troops not to advance beyond any building from which they came under fire, until its occupants had been "destroyed" (McGarry 2010:168). British troops paid dearly for this policy - as at Mount Street Bridge, where well-placed rebel snipers picked off dozens of soldiers when their officers insisted on confronting the strong rebel position head-on (McGarry 2010:172-173). But
civilians paid a still heavier price. While artillery was used to bombard rebel positions, armoured cars and machine guns were deployed in the battle at street level, leaving civilians highly vulnerable (Foy and Barton 2011:248). During savage house-to-house fighting in residential North King Street, at least thirteen civilians were killed in their homes in highly suspicious circumstances. Some of the bodies were hastily buried at the scene, with all evidence pointing towards execution-style reprisal killings - some apparently long after troops had won the gun battle to secure the area (McGarry 2010:187).

Many other civilians were simply cut down in crossfire, shot at their windows by troops scouring for rebel snipers, or killed by trigger-happy soldiers confused by orders not to take prisoners, and by warnings that rebels might be dressed as civilians.

Evidence of the circumstances of these killings is fragmentary - but the various eyewitness accounts that do survive are suggestive of the kind of chaotic and deadly environment in which a civilian death toll in the hundreds becomes not just possible, but highly likely. A British officer, Captain Gerrard, later recounted how one of his sentries reported his killing of two young ladies on the second day of the Rising:

"I beg your pardon, Sir, I have just shot two girls.’ I said ‘What on earth did you do that for? He said, ‘I thought they were rebels. I was told they dressed in all classes of clothes. At a range of about two hundred yards I saw two girls – about twenty – lying dead." (Foy and Barton 2011:245)

The elderly and infirm were more vulnerable than the young - with one Dubliner recounting second-hand how an old lady met her demise near an army checkpoint:

"One night on her [source's sister] way home she was stopped with several others at Binn’s Bridge by a party of British soldiers. An elderly woman went on, although a young sentry called on her several times to stop. Before anyone could
rush forward to drag her back he raised his rifle, fired and she fell dead. Afterwards a girl who had known her told my sister that the old woman had been stone deaf for many years." (Foy and Barton 2011:243)

And the death toll was also boosted by the behaviour of some Dublin citizens - with numerous testimonies describing Dubliners courting death by going directly to where the fighting was taking place, rather than staying away - both to take in the novelty and spectacle of the warfare on their doorsteps, and in some instances to loot the rich pickings provided by abandoned and devastated city centre businesses. Many civilians died in the crossfire in both cases - while looters were also directly fired upon by soldiers and, on some occasions, by rebels - with both sides being touched by a sense of moral panic at the scavenging behaviour of the Dublin lumpenproletariat, many of whom were literally drunk on the spoils of their larceny (various public houses having been raided) (Foy and Barton 2011:254-256).

And some other killings of Easter Week veered towards the bizarre and macabre. In one of the most notorious episodes of the Rising, an Anglo-Irish army captain named Bowen-Colthurst arrested and executed several civilians at Portobello Barracks - for no reason whatever, since all of them were unconnected to the rebellion. Bowen-Colthurst had apparently been in the throes of a psychotic episode - but his account of his actions was accepted by his superiors until the issue was forced into the open by a judicious colleague, and by the widow of one of his victims (a well-known Dublin personality), leading ultimately to his court martial (McGarry 2010:186).

And yet perhaps the most damning indictment of the British handling of the Rising comes not from these fragmentary pieces of evidence, but from the utterances of senior British officials themselves. General Maxwell, sent to Dublin during the Rising to take over as British commander-in-chief, bridled soon afterwards at criticisms of the army’s conduct at North King Street and elsewhere - making candidly clear in his report to Cabinet on the 26th of May what he thought about the question of collateral damage:
No doubt in districts where the fighting was fiercest, parties of men under the great provocation of being shot at from front and rear, seeing their comrades fall from the fire of snipers, burst into suspected houses and killed such male members as were found. (Townshend 2005:293)

Maxwell suggested that it was "perfectly possible" that this had led to civilian deaths, but that "the number of such incidents that have been brought to notice is happily few" (Ibid.). In the confidence of his wife he struck a somewhat less strident note, admitting to being "bothered to death with these cases where soldiers are accused of having murdered innocent civilians in cold blood. I fear there have been some cases of this" (Foy and Barton 2011:249). But his comments to British Army icon Lord Kitchener made it clear that, the inherent unpleasantness of such killing aside, civilian casualties of the order seen in Dublin - or even greater - were to his mind simply par for the course:

It must be borne in mind in these cases that there was a lot of house-to-house fighting going on, wild rumours in circulation and owing to darkness, conflagrations, etc, apparently a good deal of "jumpiness". With young soldiers and under the circumstances I wonder there was not more. (Ibid.)

Lord French backed Maxwell up on this point, counselling that "“regrettable incidents" such as those you refer to are absolutely unavoidable in such a business as this." French echoed Maxwell’s view that "the only wonder is there have been so few of them". Referring to disquiet at Westminster over British heavy-handedness in Dublin - disquiet largely stoked by Irish nationalist MPs - French advised Maxwell that "You must not think too much about what goes on in Parliament... We soldiers have always to put up with that." (Townshend 2005:293)

But try as they might to absolve themselves of responsibility, invariably laying all blame on the rebels for creating the chaos in Dublin, the high civilian death toll clearly did flow largely from specific British decisions. The decision to use heavy artillery and raze central Dublin - something they would presumably not have
done had there been an armed uprising around the same time in England (not so unimaginable given the social unrest experienced in Britain a few years later, which saw troops and armour deployed, for instance, to Glasgow in 1919) - was an obviously fateful British policy choice. But it was not the only one. While Maxwell might dismiss killings like those at North King Street as what happened when troops, under great pressure, "saw red" (Foy and Barton 2011:249), the government's expert advisor on the matter, the permanent secretary at the Home Office Sir Edward Troup, saw things differently. Reporting directly to Prime Minister Asquith on the military's handling of the Rising, he suggested that abuses had not occurred because troops were "exasperated or reckless", but that "the root of the mischief" lay elsewhere, in the orders of Brigadier-General William Lowe, who had been in charge of British forces until the arrival of Maxwell mid-week. Troup pointed out that, based on Lowe's free interpretation of his powers under martial law, his soldiers were given "orders not to take any prisoners, which they took to mean that they were to shoot anyone whom they believed to be an active rebel". Troup pointed out that "it should have been made clear that it did not mean that an unarmed rebel might be shot after he had been taken prisoner: still less did it mean that a person taken on mere suspicion could be shot without trial". Appreciating the highly charged atmosphere in the wake of these events, Troup advised Asquith against revealing in public any more evidence of what had happened in Dublin - suggesting that "there are many points that could be used for the purpose of hostile propaganda, and I have no doubt its publication would be followed by a strong demand for a further inquiry" - from which "nothing but harm" would arise (Townshend 2005:294).

Troup's comments pointed to a growing unease within ruling circles about a brooding anger in Ireland at the British response to the Rising. Stories such as those of North King Street and Portobello Barracks, along with the whiff of cover-up, fed lurid rumours worthy of the Great Fear of 1789, alluding to hushed up mass killings. Indeed, in the House of Commons the independent Irish nationalist MP Laurence Ginnell even alleged there had been seventy-three summary executions at Richmond Barracks, with none other than John Dillon, deputy leader of the IPP, suggesting there was "very considerable foundation" to the
story (McGarry 2010:280).

'The dictator's dilemma': Repression and backfire

While the names of the executed fifteen were etched into the annals of Irish history, the names of the more than 250 dead civilians slipped into obscurity. However, the indifference to human life shown by British forces in pulverizing the city centre could hardly have gone unnoticed in a relatively small and tightknit city like Dublin. The smouldering shell of the city centre would be a potent reminder of the events of Easter week for some time to come. Neither would the incarceration of up to 1,500 men and women - many of them untried, others unconnected to the Rising altogether - help people in Ireland to quickly forget what had happened.

Though good data is hard to come by on how ordinary Irish citizens subjectively experienced all of this, the bare facts speak to a number of important themes animating many studies of insurgent movements and state violence. As in the thought experiment presented above concerning the hypothetical king’s decision to slaughter large numbers of his peasant subjects when given a list of their grievances, we are familiar with the idea that harsh repression, collective punishment, and indiscriminate killing on the part of the state can be a double-edged sword. These practices can have the desired effect. Frequently, though, they do precisely the opposite - burning bridges and sowing a popular sense of injustice and resentment, to the extent that it is hard for a given state to win the people back. If hegemony rests on "the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally" (Gramsci 1971:80), then this is the point at which consent, such as it is, can crumble, leaving only coercion in its place - a precarious position for any ruler to be in. The dynamics surrounding repression and its sometimes unintended consequences have animated many studies of contentious politics and political violence (Earl 2006; Hess and Martin 2006; Johnston 2006; Rasler 1996; Sørensen and Martin 2006), notably forming an important plank of Goodwin’s (2001) argument that revolutions tend to happen
primarily when states leave their inhabitants with little choice but to fight back against the institutions that they perceive as threatening their survival. It is impossible to go into this literature in any depth here, but a handful of points are worth noting.

In their attempt to inventory the recurring components of political contention, McAdam et al. (2001) list repression as an important mechanism of escalation for social movements and revolutionary situations. They focus on repression in its narrowest sense - in terms of repression's effects on political actors subjected to it. McAdam et al. (2001:69) define repression as "efforts to suppress either contentious acts or groups and organizations responsible for them [original emphasis]." They see it as,

In one form or another, ... a predictable response to contention, with relatively predictable effects – generally stiffening resistance on the part of threatened communities, encouraging evasion of surveillance and shifts of tactics by well organized actors, and discouraging mobilization or action by other parties. Repression may be selective, in which case it isolates more militant groups and closes off to them prescribed or tolerated means of contention. Or it can be generalized, in which case it throws moderates into the arms of the extremists (McAdam et al. 2001:69).

We should bear in mind that, as hinted by McAdam et al., repression does not just impact on the political actors that make up its 'prime targets', and that civilians and non-combatants can get caught in the crossfire - often literally, as in the case of the Easter Rising. This is when repression blurs into collective punishment and indiscriminate state killing.

One of the authors of the aforementioned book, Tilly, expands on this subject in a piece co-authored with Goldstone (Goldstone and Tilly 2001). They point out that repression as explanans is part of a wider story that also takes in its opposite, in the form of concessions - and that one of the prime reasons contentious politics episodes spiral out of control is that states often struggle to find the right balance between repression and the concessions necessary to
assuage and contain challengers and their constituencies. With the "threat" posed by repression having as much significance as the "opportunity" posed by concessions in this equation, this perspective modifies that older tradition within social movement studies of explaining social movements in terms of "political opportunities" or even "political opportunity structures". In Goldstone and Tilly's somewhat technical model, the 'sweet spot' for incumbents facing social movement challenges is defined in relation to an imaginary "AB line" between repression and concessions:

As one example, the state may initially set the level of concessions or repression too low, and thus find itself under the AB line. Protest activity will then start to mount, and the question for the state is what to do next - increase repression, or increase concessions, or both. One problem is that the state is uncertain where the AB frontier lies, and thus can easily fail to find its way out. It may swing back and forth between concessions and repression, trying to find a combination that quells protest, without success. This kind of inconsistent repression and concession is strongly associated with increasing protest actions (Kurzman 1996; Lichbach 1987). (Goldstone and Tilly 2001:188)

The dynamic captured by Goldstone and Tilly's important insight comes through in this dissertation - particularly as the reactive sequence winds on into the 'War of Independence' phase of 1919-1921, as British state forces engaged in repression which was often harsh, but which was also felt by British state actors to be faltering, inconsistent, and undercut by countervailing concessionary moves.40

But while this chimes with the approach of Goldstone and Tilly, its particular story of repression also addresses something that is not to the forefront of their analysis. That is the peculiar fact that the repression that was so central to what happened in Ireland was clearly provoked by the rebels. Indeed the same thing

40 See Hopkinson (2004:52) for a long quote from the army's official 'Record of the Rebellion in Ireland' detailing the damage to morale caused by perceived flip-flopping on policy - e.g. coercive policy having its purpose defeated by policy reversal, such as the release of hunger strikers (and accompanying blunders), the cancellation of deportation policy etc. There is speculation that the coercive initiative of January 1920 might have worked if not dropped.
would happen again in the period from 1919 on, when the rebels would again
provoke the authorities into more repression, after several quiet years following
1916.

The point of this is not to point the finger of 'blame' at the rebels - either to
suggest that they were 'morally' responsible for the actions of the authorities, or
to suggest that they provoked such repression on purpose. The point is to engage
with a sociological puzzle: if repression can go either way, why would it have
gone this way this time? While there are many roads to repression, and
repression can often be a brutal response to peaceful protest, in this case it was
very much provoked by the violent initiative of the rebels. Goodwin points out
that when this is the case - when rebels 'start it' - the dynamic of violence can
backfire on them as much as on the state:

... some [revolutionaries] employ violence purposely to incite or provoke the
[indiscriminate] state repression that will presumably expand their ranks. But
this can easily become a self-defeating strategy since the targets of such
violence are likely to blame the revolutionaries as much as the state for their
travails. Indiscriminate counterstate violence can produce a popular backlash
as easily as state violence. (Goodwin 2001:48-49)

Regardless of whether or not the 1916 rebels intended to provoke the state in
this way, the question remains: Why did violence backfire on the state this time
round, and not the rebels? McAdam et al. point out that while the purpose of
studying mechanisms is to chart how particular phenomena recur from one case
to another, this does not mean they are entirely predictable, as if bound by 'iron
laws' of history; and indeed, the direction mechanisms take is often determined
by other mechanisms - or more precisely, by the particular conjuncture of
mechanisms found in a given scenario. Mechanisms rarely occur in exactly the
same combination or sequence, guaranteeing a degree of contingency and
unpredictability, depending on the mix that occurs:

"... much of the contingency unfolding in our narratives results from the
concatenation of different mechanisms...
similar mechanisms can yield very different outcomes when they combine with other mechanisms." (McAdam et al. 2001:224)

Nowhere was this truer than in 1916 Ireland. This chapter has argued that the traditional explanation for the change in popular feeling following the Rising - that hinging on the fifteen executions - is a weak one. It is not dynamic, and it treats the instance of change as a 'magic wand' moment: the executions changed public opinion simply 'because'. Instead, this chapter has suggested that a wider focus on the more general repression and state violence experienced in 1916 makes for a much more powerful explanation. However, even this cannot tell the whole story of why public opinion changed in the way that it did in 1916. For the state violence of Easter 1916 only took on the meaning that it did in the context of other mechanisms working themselves out at the time - and which in turn were acted upon by the mechanism involving backfiring repression and state violence, referred to in this chapter as 'provocation-repression-backfire'.

As indicated above, the transformative event of the Easter Rising was only the switch-point between the conjuncture of certain long-term and medium-term dynamics in Irish politics, and the new cycle of contention that would lead to a decisive rupture and reconfiguration of Irish and British politics. Both the long-term and medium-term dynamics can be described as mechanisms in their own right. The structural shifts changing the position of Irish Catholics since the mid-nineteenth century - the process that created the potential for a power struggle in the first place - fit easily into what McAdam et al. would define as the mechanism of "historical change processes". This gave way to one of Tilly's "traffic jams" - in this case a medium-term conjuncture, and a three-way confrontation between Irish nationalists, Ulster unionists, and the British state.

Thus, long-term developments meant that by the years leading up to 1916, some kind of confrontation between unionists and nationalists over Ireland's political fate was inevitable. In the medium term, in turn, the British government's
decision to dilute its commitment to Home Rule and favour the unionists meant that in this increasingly zero-sum game, an expression of nationalist consternation was inevitable sooner or later. But it was in the short term that the highly contingent courses of action taken by the 1916 rebels, and by the British state in suppressing them, set the coordinates for low-intensity war, for Irish partition, and for the creation of the Irish Free State - developments that had been in no way inevitable prior to the 1916 Rising.

To sum up, the Rising did two things in particular: by militarizing the Irish question, it made the constitutional wranglings of the IPP over home rule - a prospect already withering on the vine - suddenly seem utterly irrelevant. And it made it dramatically harder for a critical mass of people in Ireland to dispel the feeling that they were not living in a state whose government, as neutral and benevolent arbiter, was honestly trying to find a solution to their problems - but rather that they were living under a brutally oppressive and indifferent state, whose government would respond to the threat posed by marginal subversives by blowing up a major population centre, and shooting its citizens in the streets. The British response to the Rising had, as it were, been all gunboat, and no diplomacy.

Part of the importance often attributed to transformative events is their capacity to open up possibilities - but the Easter Rising was as much about foreclosing on possibilities: when the centre of Dublin went up in flames, with it went what was left of the IPP's Home Rule project. Home Rule was supposed to provide a way out of long-term, intractable Irish problems. Without it, or a plausible constitutional alternative, stakeholders of the Irish question were left with little option but to fight. This was so striking that even the IPP leadership - those with the most to lose from the latest turn of events - could not publicly ignore the shifting of the ground beneath their feet. In parliament, John Dillon - an arch-nemesis of the separatists - incensed his House of Commons colleagues by charging the government with unleashing "a sea of blood... a river of blood, that is washing away our whole life's work" (Townshend 2005:282). Dillon pointed out that thousands of people in Dublin "who ten days ago were bitterly opposed to
the whole Sinn Fein movement and the rebellion, are now becoming infuriated against the government” (Townshend 2005:281).

The brutal British response to the Rising, then, militarised the Irish question, marginalised the moderates of Redmond's IPP, and suddenly - albeit somewhat paradoxically - gave ordinary people a reason to look upon the erstwhile marginal separatists with both sympathy and respect.

Conclusion

Taking the 1916 Easter Rising as its empirical subject matter, this chapter has focused on making an argument as to how certain violent events can be transformative - an exercise hinging on concerns with agency, contingency and temporality (how the short, medium and long run fit together).

While taking off from the pioneering 'eventful' studies of authors such as Sewell, the chapter argued that, as useful as the eventful approach has been, it is in danger of being watered down to the point that the event becomes, in effect, yet another 'black box' of social science - obfuscating as much as it reveals by failing to explain what, exactly, made particular events more transformative than others, or by relying on vague categories such as 'creative interpretation' to explain how events changed the world - or led people to change it. If we do not want the power of events to be reduced to that of something akin to 'collective epiphanies', we may need to be more precise about the specific causal mechanisms by which events effect change.

The empirical analysis in this chapter has concentrated on a handful of key mechanisms at work in 1916, suggesting that the transformative event of the Easter Rising can be seen as the crux moment when these powerful causal mechanisms conjoined and catalyzed. Attention to causal mechanisms is not always strongly connected to questions about temporality, but in this case the relationship is fundamental. While the empirical analysis contained in this chapter could only focus narrowly on how the Rising effected change, the very
occurrence of the Rising in the first place hinged entirely on questions of timing and temporality.

In the 'deep background' to the causation of the Rising lay structural strains and structural change processes of a decidedly long-term nature. British colonialism had been shaping and reshaping Ireland for centuries. This process had also been driving conflict for centuries, while economic and demographic shifts had been emboldening Irish Catholics since the mid-nineteenth century. The changing of objective conditions on this long-term temporal plane had corresponding 'subjective' meanings for many Irish nationalists. It was not until the later twentieth century that "eight hundred years of oppression" would become a common watchword of Irish nationalism - locating the origins of Ireland's 'English problem' squarely in the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169 - but many Irish nationalists clearly thought along similar lines in the early twentieth century, and members of the militant separatist minority within Irish nationalism believed that Ireland's long-term destiny lay in shaking off British rule, and that their job was to bring that closer, even if only incrementally. The idea that the 1916 Rising was a suicide mission, or act of "blood sacrifice", has been overplayed both in scholarship and popularly - but there is no doubt that many of the 1916 rebels were ready to lay down their lives even for a militarily unsuccessful bid at rebellion, taking a firmly long-view approach to the import of their actions.

But from the point of view of temporality, the nub of the issue is that despite this long-run background to the conjuncture of 1916, there is no basis upon which to say that something like the Easter Rising was bound to happen - or that the subsequent developments that issued from the 1916 Rising would have happened anyway. The Easter Rising happened because a handful of zealous republican separatists, swimming against the tide of mainstream Irish nationalism, forced it into being. Indeed, up to twenty-four hours beforehand, it looked like the Rising might not happen at all. Had it not happened, it is highly plausible to argue that none of those subsequent developments - the War of Independence of 1918-1921, Irish partition in 1920, the foundation of the Irish
Free State in 1922 - would likely have happened either.

The popular reaction to the Rising - with a critical mass of the Irish people turning from indifference and hostility to sympathy and support for the rebels - had much to do with on-the-spot decisions made by British statesmen and army officers (what orders to give their soldiers, whether to use artillery, and so on) - but the more medium-term temporal background to the Rising was equally important. The Rising occurred at precisely the point in time that the mainstream nationalists of the IPP and their flagship project, Home Rule, were at their most vulnerable. The Rising all but shattered any popular residual hopes in the IPP and Home Rule. It cannot be assumed that the popular reaction to the Rising would have been the same had it occurred at another point in time, when the IPP and Home Rule looked more viable. But then, had World War I not happened - or had it simply finished sooner, as everyone expected - the Rising would almost certainly not have happened at all.

This is how agency, contingency and temporality mattered to the Rising, and if this chapter has demonstrated that in this historical episode, these factors were crucial, it will have achieved something. Much more specifically, the chapter has attempted to make an intervention into the literature on transformative events by pointing out that there are more ways events can be transformative than by simply 'opening up possibilities' and leading people to interpret things in new ways. Interpretation, of course, was happening, and was important in 1916. The point is that this can be said of almost any social situation. In a socially constructed world, interpretation is always happening - but to explain why people interpret things in such consequential ways, close attention to underlying causal mechanisms is sometimes necessary.
5. BUILDING A MOVEMENT, 1916-1920

Introduction

The last chapter suggested that the 1916 Easter Rising was as dramatic a turning point for Irish history as the storming of the Bastille was for French, in that it formed a watershed between an era of widespread public indifference or hostility in Ireland towards the separatist cause, and an era in which that cause attained a counter-hegemonic position within Irish society. However, unlike the storming of the Bastille – a more or less ‘spontaneous’ affair – the 1916 Rising was a ‘strategic initiative’ (Staggenborg 1993) writ large secretly planned by a tiny cadre of men whose vision was precisely to take advantage of a short-term political opportunity, and to rouse the Irish masses from their indifference to the separatist cause; to provide the spark to ignite a national conflagration. In reality, the weeklong Rising laid waste to the city and led to the deaths of hundreds, and invoked the ire of many of the citizens. As the defeated rebels were led to captivity amid the jeers and physical attacks of ordinary Dubliners, angry at the carnage and destruction, it looked like this project had failed miserably. Funnily enough, attitudes soon changed, and the rebels became venerated as icons of a new national movement.

But transformative events are not magic wands. The essence of such an event is that it disrupts established norms, routines and expectations, but – at the risk of stretching the ‘opportunity’ trope to breaking point – the future direction that such a disrupted reality takes, in the ‘window of opportunity’ opened by a transformative event, is unwritten.

The occurrence of transformative events depends much on the agency of individual and group actors – but what is done with the window of opportunity once it is open depends on the same thing in turn. Events must be interpreted, and given meaning. As Sewell points out, as dramatic a turning point as it was,
‘The Storming of the Bastille’ only really became ‘The Storming of the Bastille’, as we know it, in the days and weeks following the incident, as various actors scrambled to make sense of what had happened, according to their own agendas. This could also be called a struggle over how the event might be ‘framed’.\textsuperscript{41}

Though a very different episode in crucial respects, strong parallels exist in the case of the Easter Rising in Ireland (demonstrating the capacity of the ‘transformative event’ concept to work across very different kinds of cases).

As discussed in a previous chapter, the Easter Rising did have a profound impact on ‘ordinary’ Irish people while it was unfolding – particularly, it would appear, after a certain threshold had been reached mid-week, as spectators realized their expectations of a swift, crushing defeat for the rebels had been defied, and as many went from anticipating the rebels’ (and the city’s) humiliation, to a feeling of creeping admiration for their nerve and tenacity, in holding out against superior British forces for longer than anyone had imagined.

Even if the entire separatist movement had been wiped out or sent into permanent exile in the southern hemisphere at this point in time, the ‘cultural’ effects of this highly disruptive event would, no doubt, have been significant. But much of the real significance of the Rising lay in what followed: as previously discussed, the protracted wave of executions following the Rising played very badly in propaganda terms for the authorities, and very well for the rebels. The rebels – and fellow travellers of the rebels – who avoided capture lost little time in eulogizing the sacrifice of the “men of ’16” (the ‘women of ’16’ did not get quite the same plaudits, despite their full, and in some cases armed, role in the episode) – fundraising for the prisoners and their families, spreading propaganda and 1916 ‘merchandise’, and organizing regular requiem masses for the martyrs – and the repatriation of Easter internees from British prison camps in July and December meant the return of committed activists to the fold. In short, the separatists were heavily bruised after their military defeat, but slowly

\textsuperscript{41} That is, even if the concept of ‘framing’ is usually held to refer to processes and strategic gambits that occur at later points in movement mobilization (McAdam 1999).
yet surely, their machine whizzed back into action in its aftermath. The activism that was carried out in the immediate aftermath of the Rising was just the start of an intense cycle of collective action on the part of the republicans, that would carry on until the denouement of the 1922-23 Civil War following the Treaty settlement with Westminster, and the foundation of the Irish Free State.

Change was afoot in Ireland after the transformative event of the Easter Rising – but this change would follow a different kind of temporality to that seen in France in the wake of the Storming of the Bastille. If, in the highly charged atmosphere of Paris in July 1789, the ‘victory’ at the Bastille detonated a powder keg, in 1916 Dublin the embers of the Easter ‘defeat’ in a bomb-shattered Dublin continued to smoulder, but would need some coaxing to turn into the conflagration that finally engulfed the country between 1920 and 1923.

A transformative event is still just one event. Its real significance lies in what people do with the window of opportunity it opens when it disrupts taken for granted ways of looking at the world. What follows below is an attempt to tell the story of what Irish separatists did in the years between the Rising, and the high water mark of the War of Independence in 1920-1921. The chapter will do so by attempting to bridge Sewell’s notion of the transformative event with other perspectives such as that of strategic interaction and the mechanism of social appropriation. These were the crucial years of ‘regime delegitimization’, as mechanisms set in train in 1916 gradually broke a critical mass of the Irish population of the Irish populace away from the British state - a process that was already in motion, but which would be considerably stoked by the rebels.

Leading in to this account of the movement-building process will be an account of the social and ‘structural’ context of the country that the rebels were trying to win.

**Structure and agency in Ireland**
This dissertation is concerned with looking at the history of contentious politics in Ireland in terms of concepts such as structure and agency. In the context of a colonial settler society such as Ireland, riven by ethno-national cleavages intersecting with fault-lines of power and privilege, and haunted by the long legacies of colonial underdevelopment and attendant social cataclysms like the Great Famine of the mid-nineteenth century, we can take our pick as to the best way of getting to the heart of the structures shaping the case.

These perspectives are crucial, and any attempt to understand a case like this – a case of ‘early Victorian holocausts’\(^{42}\) like the Famine, of long-term political failure, of the shaping of competing communal identities and their plunge into bitter conflict amid war and revolution – without placing such ‘structural’ considerations front and centre in one’s analysis, is to fail before one has begun.

My approach here, then, is not to argue against ‘structural’ explanations of the Irish case, and for an explanation based on ‘agency’. But it is to suggest that, on their own, such structural explanations are not enough to explain what happened on an empirical level in Ireland, and it is to suggest that, on a theoretical level, more work remains to be done in rethinking the relationship between structure and agency in the unfolding of contentious politics. And it may even be to suggest that both of these terms – and especially the former – ought to be quarantined inside inverted commas. The references to ‘structure’ in these lines are best thought of in this way.

Of course, it is all very well to say that we need to rethink the relationship between structure and agency, and to question ‘unreconstructed structuralism’ in explaining cases of contentious politics. The ‘structure-agency problem’ is an old social sciences chestnut, and particularly after the best part of two decades of attacks on structuralism in the study of contentious politics (as elsewhere in the academy), and of attempts to better ‘get at’ agency, talk of this sort is, by now, cheap.

\(^{42}\)This is Cleary’s (2007) term, paraphrasing Mike Davis’ indictment of the Victorian-era policies that contributed to cataclysmic famines in India – what he calls ‘late Victorian holocausts’ – that helped to create the Third World, in Davis’ argument.
Thus it is necessary to say something about the lay of the land in the structure-agency debate in contentious politics studies today, and it is necessary to say something about how this project relates to developments in that field.

A reasonable starting point is McAdam et al.'s (2001) observation that, if structural pictures of contentious politics are too often static and deterministic, these badly need to be put into motion – to be made dynamic.

More than ten years on, this observation of McAdam et al. is now almost a cliché. At the time, it announced a new departure on the part of the three scholars – till then closely associated with concepts such as ‘political opportunity structures’ and ‘political process’ – and it reflected their attempts to rise to the challenge of a younger generation of scholars who charged them with, among other things, putting undue emphasis on ‘structure’, and giving short shrift to ‘agency’.

The spirit of McAdam et al.’s new departure was applauded, even if, for many scholars, the results failed to live up to the ambitiously-stated intent (Koopmans 2005, Polletta 2002, Jasper 2006).

The story of McAdam et al.’s initiative does not, of course, begin and end with the publication of a book by three veteran scholars; it reflected a much wider debate about structure and agency in contentious politics, and it contributed to the debate that has continued on this topic in the decade or so since.

That debate is not over, and the structure-agency problem is far from ‘solved’. This project is presented in the spirit of contributing to the ongoing debate – applying what I think are the most promising insights springing from it, and attempting to build on some of those insights in a modest way, and to help fill in some of the interstices between them.

43 Although McAdam, at least, has tended to distance himself from the term ‘political opportunity structure’, as opposed to ‘political opportunity’. See the new introduction to McAdam (1999).
44 Goodwin and Jasper (2004) represents a classic collection of these debates.
With ‘structuralism’ under fire, but in the knowledge that (as in the above sketch of the Irish case) the things identified under its rubric must be considered crucial to any story of contentious politics – even by the scholar most hung up on ‘agency’ – I consider that one of the most important things to do in this context is to salvage what fragments one can from structuralist accounts, and, as McAdam et al. suggested, to try to come up with compelling and dynamic accounts of how these fragments interacted and collided with one another – and with forces that may not have been ‘structural’ at all – to produce moments of rupture and change, and ultimately how the ‘fragments’ came to be arranged in new ways – or according to new ‘structures’.

Needless to say, such abstract statements can only really be given meaning in the detailed analysis of empirical material as it is applied to a given theoretical framework. My attempt at such an analysis will be presented below. But first, I outline my theoretical framework and analytical approach, and – without wanting to pre-empt too much the empirical section to follow – I say a little about why I think this particular approach resonates with the Irish case, and how I think this might in turn contribute to the theoretical debate itself.

**Contentious politics in Ireland: the missing theory**

After more than a decade of theoretically-minded debate about the structure-agency problem in contentious politics, what insights can we harvest that can usefully be applied to the Irish case?

As a country shaped by colonialism and resistance to colonialism, of ethnic strife and of revolution, Irish history has the strange distinction of being shaped to an unusual extent by contentious politics, but having been almost never studied in such terms – or in the terms of proximate literatures such as the sociology of
revolutions or the sociology of social movements.

Meanwhile, Irish historiography has the strange distinction of being, in general, deeply atheoretical, but at the same time unusually politicized and partisan. As pointed out by Regan (2010), Irish historiography – especially that relating to Ireland's civil conflicts of the twentieth century – has very often been seriously compromised by the desire of historians to use their histories to make political points about the present.\(^{45}\)

Against this background, the recent calls from a number of scholars to escape this ghetto (Cleary 2007; O’Leary 2007; Regan 2010), and to take seriously the need to connect Irish history with wider theoretical debates about colonialism, nationalism and capitalism, have come as a breath of fresh air.

In a devastating review of the prominent historian Richard English’s (2006) history of Irish nationalism, Brendan O’Leary (2007) sketches what a more serious, systematic and theoretically informed historiography of Irish nationalism and ‘secessionism’ might look like. In particular, he compiles a list of the obvious hypotheses that a cursory reading of the literature on nationalism would bring to bear on Irish history – but which English’s study of Irish nationalism – while claiming to combine a social scientific, theoretically-minded approach with a more traditionally historiographical one – misses out on. To name but a few such potential lines of inquiry: A la Gellner (1983), did Irish nationalism arise out of conditions of unevenly developed industrialization? Did it arise out of conflict over state-management of modern primary, secondary and tertiary educational systems?

What about the implications of uneven development? Or Kedourie’s (1960) claim that nationalism is spearheaded by ‘marginal men’? What about Hechter’s (2001) attempts to explain secession and the ‘containment’ of nationalism ‘politically’ – for instance, as a ‘strategic response’ to attempts of the ‘modern centralized and penetrative state’ to impose direct rule?

\(^{45}\) Also see Whelan (2004).
What about Lustick’s (1991) argument about the failure of settler colonial states in Ireland, Palestine and Algeria to incorporate their territories in a ‘hegemonic’ way – that is, in such a way that they would be accepted as part of the ‘natural order’?

Such lines of inquiry are entirely missing from English’s highly lauded account of Irish nationalism, and with a few exceptions, are missing from the literature in general.

Essentially, calls like O’Leary’s amount to a recipe for a greater apportionment of rather ‘structural’ social science theory to Irish history. In the theory-starved context of Irish historiography, such a project would have obvious attractions. But a structuralist research agenda would still be missing something. Or, as James Jasper might say, it would still have a ‘vacant core’.

If we describe Irish society as being ‘structured’ in a particular way at a particular point in time – such as before the revolution – what does that really mean?

As so often in the humanities – especially, perhaps, at the intersection between different disciplines – talk about ‘structures’ runs into the muddy waters between social science jargon (with the same jargon meaning very different things in different disciplines (Sewell 1992:3), ‘ordinary language,’ and commonsense concepts. It is likely that much of the time when we talk about ‘structure’, our use of the term owes as much, or more, to the latter two things as the first. (Unfortunately, the distinction is not always clear.)

In so far as it means the first – and in so far as the term is thought of as having, or potentially having, some kind of analytical value – then we must interrogate it to some degree.

If we can draw a conceptual distinction between ‘structure’ and ‘agency’, then
structure must presumably be seen as

primary, hard, and immutable, like the girders of a building, while the events or social processes they structure tend to be seen as secondary and superficial, like the outer "skin" of a skyscraper, or as mutable within "hard" structural constraints, like the layout of offices on floors defined by a skeleton of girders (Sewell 1992:2).

Structure, from this point of view, is that which shapes and stabilizes social reality – or simply, that which ‘structures’:

The term structure empowers what it designates. Structure, in its nominative sense, always implies structure in its transitive verbal sense. Whatever aspect of social life we designate as structure is posited as "structuring" some other aspect of social existence - whether it is class that structures politics, gender that structures employment opportunities, rhetorical conventions that structure texts or utterances, or modes of production that structure social formations (Sewell 1992:2).

But there is a problem: the logical conclusion of this way of thinking about structure is that structure does not change:

A second and closely related problem with the notion of structure is that it makes dealing with change awkward. The metaphor of structure implies stability. For this reason, structural language lends itself readily to explanations of how social life is shaped into consistent patterns, but not to explanations of how these patterns change over time. In structural discourse, change is commonly located outside of structures, either in a telos of history, in notions of breakdown, or in influences exogenous to the system in question. Consequently, moving from questions of stability to questions of change tends to involve awkward epistemological shifts (Sewell 1992:2-3).

Indeed, some ‘structuralist’ social scientists have more or less devoted themselves to displaying just that: how structures reproduce themselves. Bourdieu's theories of ‘fields’ and ‘habitus’ – based on fieldwork carried out in
Algeria – and his frequent insistence that the real sociological puzzle is how things stay the same rather than change, spring to mind (Sewell 1992:14). Awkwardly for Bourdieu’s theory, the Algerian revolution followed rapidly his commencement of the fieldwork that led him to conclude that structures largely reproduce themselves, rather than being subject in a significant way to human action and to rupture and change (Sewell 1992:15).

What if Bourdieu had time-travelled to Ireland before its revolution? Perhaps he would have concluded that the ‘structures’ of Irish society looked relatively impervious to change? (Indeed, as late as the 1930s – after the Irish revolution – scholars were managing to uncover ‘unchanging’ structures in Irish society and culture – such as in the famous case of the Harvard anthropologists Arensberg and Kimball (2001), who wrote about the quaint and ‘traditional’ structures of family and community they found in rural County Clare. Little did they realize that much of the ‘tradition’ they witnessed was quite recent, reflecting, for one thing, the patching together of altogether new social structures in Ireland after the old ones were torn asunder through the catastrophic episode surrounding the mid-19th century famine (Byrne et al 2001).)

At a certain extreme, then, structuralist perspectives in social science can, in a sense, ‘out-structure’ themselves – that is, if their logical conclusions are followed, it is difficult to see how they can allow for any change at all. Other ‘structuralist’ perspectives – such as those found in the sociology of social movements, and the sociology of revolutions – take a different tack, in that it is precisely change and rupture that they seek to explain (Goldstone 1991, Skocpol 1979, Tilly 1973, Wickham-Crowley 1992).

This dissertation is written in sympathy with the critique of such structuralist approaches, on the basis that they leave little room for human action in shaping moments of change and rupture. It is written from the point of view that, without engaging in unfair caricature of the great structuralists, it seems reasonable to say that there is often something missing from structuralist accounts of change, and all too often that change seems to come about as the result of some kind of
‘hidden hand’.

Structures change – not because of ‘hidden hands’ though, or because of magical, mystical processes, but because of struggle and agency. Actors make choices and decisions all the time – ones that could have been different. Once certain decisions have been taken, and certain processes put in motion – for instance, capitalist trade, competition, and cycles of debt (Graeber 2011) – they do have a habit of reproducing themselves (Sewell 2008) – but again, these also are the product of choices, decisions and strategic interaction, and they are shaped in turn by class struggle from below, and can at times be broken. History is contingent.

Contingency and Transformative Events in Irish History

Asking about contingency in Irish history means asking why so many Irish secessionist movements failed, while only one partly succeeded. It is simply not satisfactory to say that the one that succeeded did so because this was somehow structurally determined. It certainly did not look that way before the Easter Rising.

Sewell has posed the concept of the ‘transformative event’ as a way out of some of the problems of the structure-agency impasse alluded to above. In the last chapter, I considered Ireland’s Easter Rising in relation to Sewell’s concept. I suggested that, in terms of the Irish case, the ‘transformative events’ approach is very compelling, and holds out promise in filling in some of the gaps between ‘long term change processes’ and ‘cycles of contention’. But it still leaves some parts of this picture somewhat obscure. We are told that transformative events occur unexpectedly and rupture the membrane separating ‘structure’ from ‘agency’ – but how does this happen? I am sympathetic to this approach, but
consider that it is in danger of ‘solving’ the problem of how long-term change processes beget new cycles of contention by means of a ‘magic wand’.

McAdam and Sewell (2001) complain that in structuralist accounts, the mechanisms translating long-term change processes into political contention are left out – the logical conclusion to this approach pointing towards some kind of ‘hidden hand’. The ‘transformative events’ approach marks a serious improvement on this – but if what happens around these events – both in terms of their causation, and in terms of how people interpret the events, and what they do with the changed realities these events and these interpretations usher in – we are back to something like square one. The ‘transformative event’ becomes a magic wand, waved by a hidden hand.

I believe that Jasper’s recent work can be useful in building on McAdam and Sewell’s perspectives. Teasing out the micro-dynamics behind causation in contentious politics – and behind what happens in contentious politics after causation, from mobilization to process to outcomes – is exactly what Jasper has in mind in his critiques of structuralist approaches to contentious politics, and in particular of the ‘political opportunity structures’ approach associated with ‘McTeam’.

On the basis of a pioneering book project geared towards systematically testing the ‘political opportunities’ concept across a wide range of cases, Jasper (2011) criticizes the ‘political opportunity structures’ or ‘political process’ approach on numerous grounds.

Jasper argues for the analysis of contentious politics in terms of ‘strategic interaction’ – an approach that would emphasize the role of highly contingent choices and decisions made by actors embroiled in political contention – whether protestors, insurgents or other types of challengers, on the one hand, or, on the other hand, the ‘challenged’ – for example government, the police, the military, or corporate CEOs. This approach would also emphasize the highly complex and unpredictable nature of the interaction, or “dance”, of which
challengers and challenged partake:

Unsure of what others will do in strategic engagements, players cannot plan too far in advance, with the result that most strategy consists of responding to the actions of others, always looking for new opportunities (Jasper 2006). For example, in a devastating blow to game theory, behavioural economists have shown that game players typically anticipate only one or two moves in advance, rather than imagining the possible final outcomes of and working back to select their moves (Johnson et al, 2002). This makes sense, because strategic interaction is simply too complicated to predict more than one or two moves in advance. (Jasper 2011:12)

How does this relate to Sewell’s perspective?

I have suggested that, as compelling as a Sewellian perspective on the 1916 Rising as ‘transformative event’ is in explaining the interface between structure and agency in the Irish case, it still leaves some gaps unfilled, and some parts of the story untold. ‘Transformative events’ do not just happen as if by magic – they have to be made. And, in a sense, they still have to be ‘made’ even after they happen – that is, the Storming of the Bastille only really took on the significance that it did because of the way people framed it and interpreted it ex post facto. (A complex process, hinging on the contingencies of day-to-day political life in Paris in July 1789.)

This means dropping down a level of analysis, from the ‘meso-level’ of transformative events to the ‘micro-level’ of what people do to produce them, and to build on them after the event. This is where Jasper’s emphasis on the micro-level dynamics of strategic interaction comes in. It calls for attention to the way that all political contention, in a sense, comes down to actors frantically ‘making moves,’ and responding to other actors’ moves – looking for opportunities, and indeed trying to make their own opportunities.

However, the weakness of such statements is that, while compelling in a way, they still sound somewhat vague. Statements like ‘actors strategically interact,’ ‘actors respond to the actions of others’ and ‘actors seek opportunities,’ do not
quite amount to new causal theories of anything.

Of course, one way to make such statements more concrete would be to try to identify particular kinds of actions that actors engage in. The whole point of Jasper’s approach is that choices about actions are highly contingent – so contingent, in fact, that they cannot be predicted more than, at best, one or two ‘moves’ in advance. But perhaps amidst all this undeniable contingency and consequent unpredictability, some broad categories of recurring types of action can be identified. After all, the course of a war cannot usually be predicted in advance, but particular types of tactics and strategies – recurring categories of action, so to speak – can be identified. Their order and timing cannot be predicted, but it certainly can be predicted that, in war, tactics like frontal assaults, flanking manoeuvres, feints and retreats will recur.

Jasper’s propositions regarding strategic interaction come, in part, out of an attempt at critical but constructive engagement with the political opportunities-based approach associated with McAdam et al.. And in fact, there may still be much within this approach that the ‘strategic interaction’ perspective can usefully build upon.

For instance, in his 1999 attempt to amend the political opportunities-based approach, McAdam suggests that a major mechanism of social movement emergence may be what he calls ‘social appropriation’ – an example of the kind of painstaking, grassroots cultural work that social movement actors engage in in building their movements.

The concept of social appropriation suggests that part of the ‘mystery’ of social movement emergence can be explained by observing how, rather than emerging in a vacuum, social movements are often built on the foundations of already existing social space – organizations, institutions, other social movements, and so on.

For McAdam, this observation comes out of a criticism of what he sees as a
growing consensus among scholars from nominally different theoretical traditions about how to understand movement emergence – a consensus that he admits some responsibility in shaping:

“Increasingly, one finds scholars... emphasizing the importance of the same three broad sets of factors in analyzing the origins of collective action. These three factors are... political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and framing processes (1999:viii-ix).”

For McAdam (1999:xv), the opportunity/organization/framing triad does not constitute a dynamic model of movement origins – and rather is little more than a static listing of a general set of factors presumed to be important in the development of collective action.

Building on this criticism, McAdam points out a particular problem with regard to explanations for movement emergence. He suggests that structural/network analysts have done good empirical work on how mobilizing structures cohere, but the empirical progress has not been accompanied by progress on the theoretical side. Much of the empirical work “stresses the role of established organizations or prior network ties in pulling people into active participation in a movement” (xii). Essentially this leaves us with a picture of “structural proximity” as a strong predictor of differential recruitment to activism.”

But, as Jasper might say, there is a vacant core to this insight:

By default, they are guilty of assaying a structurally determinist account of movement recruitment. We are left with the unfortunate impression that individuals who are structurally proximate to a movement are virtually compelled to get involved by virtue of knowing others who are already active...

... to say that people join movements because they know others who are involved, ignores the fact that on the eve of the movement, there are no salient alters available as models for egos involvement... (McAdam 1999: xii-xiii)
In the case of the dramatic growth of the separatist movement in Ireland after 1916, this critique is all too relevant. As previously emphasized, the story of the Irish revolution has tended to be told by historians rather than by social scientists – but such historians, even at their most analytical, clearly follow the pattern indicated by McAdam. (As I will indicate later in this chapter.)

McAdam further suggests, counter to the structurally-determinist ‘network stories’ of movement recruitment, that:

for any established organization or associational network to become a central node in movement recruitment requires a great deal of creative cultural work that has been totally glossed in the dominant account, which is simultaneously too individualist and too structuralist for my taste... (1999: xii-xiii)

For action to take place, would-be activists must either create a new organizational vehicle, or commandeer an existing organization (and attendant collective identity upon which it routinely rests.). According to McAdam, they usually do the latter. (McAdam 1999: xxiv)

For McAdam, this consideration is fundamental to any attempt to understand popular, as opposed to elite, collective action.46 To understand how would-be activists create or (more often) appropriate organizational vehicles, McAdam suggests, means looking seriously at the creative cultural/organizational work they carry out – e.g. the creative work carried out by civil rights activists in the US, who turned the black churches from a bastion of conservatism into a vehicle of movement organizing.

46 McAdam argues that ‘rationalist’ approaches are much more useful with regard to the latter than the former. When dealing with elite groups – e.g. state actors – it is usually quite reasonable to say that there are relatively stable sets of interests – and calculi based on those interests – at stake.

When such actors interpret ongoing events in terms of these interests, and make decisions on this basis, they tend to be able to translate these decisions into action in a relatively straightforward way – largely for the reason that they have significant resources at their disposal. Thus, the rationalist approach can go some distance in explaining the actions and interactions of such elites.

However, the point of movement mobilization is that it involves the mobilization of people who were not previously ‘organized’. Thus, while rationalist considerations can never be entirely dispensed with – after all, any talk of the relevance of ‘opportunity’ or ‘threat’ involves an at least tacit recognition of basic rationalist principles (McAdam 1999: xxxiv) – the rationalist perspective only goes so far here.
This is all very suggestive with regard to the Irish case – but how exactly does it relate to the strategic interaction perspective?

I think it relates to this in a number of different ways. On the one hand, any coordinated “creative cultural work” of the kind alluded to by McAdam, with the aim of recruitment or movement-building, represents a type of strategic action – or what Staggenborg (1993) called a “strategic initiative”. On the other hand, I think that implicit in this notion is the observation that, to appropriate other social spaces, social movements have to compete with other actors – and with other organizations, institutions and social movements – for control (or even ‘hegemony’) over those social spaces. Importantly, much of this activity does ultimately come back to the contingent ways that actors try to take advantage of opportunities that arise, and to make opportunities. Here, we are at the interface between structure and agency: long-term ‘structural’ change processes create short-run opportunities – but, as Tilly (2008) acknowledged explicitly towards the end of his career, it takes agency to recognize an opportunity.\textsuperscript{47} Furthermore, different actors – including different social movement actors, who are in direct competition with one another – make different choices about how to respond to such opportunities. The fact that different choices and counter-choices, taken by different movements or movement strands, can drive episodes of contentious politics in such different directions and with such different results, speaks directly to the role of agency in contentious politics.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{47} Indeed, as certain scholars have noted (Jasper 2011, Koopmans 2005), one of the problems with the concept of ‘political opportunity’ is that such things may be said to exist all the time. The point is that much of the time, it may be the case that no one actually notices or takes advantage of them – leading on to the problem that they may be said to only really exist in retrospect.

\textsuperscript{48} From my point of view, the question of inter-movement dynamics connects with the question of agency in a clear way, in that strategic interaction highlights the importance of choices made by actors in contentious politics arenas – choices that could have been made differently – and the way that these choices, and ‘counter-choices’ – rather than just the hidden hand of ‘structural forces’ – shape the trajectories taken by processes of contentious politics. Inter-movement dynamics fit into this picture because they speak directly to the ways that alternate choices, tactics, stratagems and gambits (and perhaps, sometimes, pure chance occurrences) lead to relative success or failure for different movements and movement factions in the crowded social movement ecosystem described in evolutionary terms by Koopmans (2005) as a Darwinian struggle for the survival of the fittest. If in every extinct human sub-species there is an alternative, unfollowed track of human evolution, in every social movement or political formation that falls from grace – such as Redmond’s Nationalist Party, whose hegemony over much of Ireland was broken by the separatists in the years following 1916 – there is a petri dish of potential counter-factual history.
In the rest of this chapter, I will attempt to present a snapshot of how these dynamics of long-run ‘structural’ change, of short-run opportunity, and of strategic interaction – including dynamics of inter-movement competition, and of social appropriation – played out in the Irish struggle for independence – with an emphasis on the period between the great transformative event of the 1916 Easter Rising, and the start of the 'War of Independence’ phase in 1919-1920.

Importantly, however, I will try to suggest that even though these perspectives are extremely useful in understanding the events of these years, they probably do not tell the whole story. The independence movement in Ireland grew rapidly during this time, and much of the growth that took place then looks a lot like ‘social appropriation’, as the movement absorbed large constituent parts of what made up Irish society. However, it is not clear that this kind of activity explains all the movement growth that happened, and we should bear in mind the possibility that other factors – including, possibly, other ‘structural’ factors – were also at work.

While the last chapter looked at the 1916 Rising as a transformative event, in the next section of this chapter I will give a brief overview of how long-run ‘structural’ changes, short-run opportunities, strategic interaction and inter-movement competition shaped that moment – before considering how similar dynamics shaped the movement-building that followed the 1916 Rising, and asking to what extent ‘social appropriation’ played a role in this process.

**Overview of long-run ‘structural’ change, short-run opportunity, strategic interaction and inter-movement dynamics in the Irish independence struggle**

Before the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the ‘Irish problem’ was just one dimension of a general crisis engulfing UK politics. The extent of this crisis is
signaled by the fact that the outbreak of the war was widely taken to be Britain’s *salvation* of the political deadlock of the pre-war years (Wilson 1985) – years characterized by a severe polarization between the Whig and Tory blocs (a polarization aggravated by the policy split between the two camps on the issue of Irish Home Rule.)

Recognizing the unsustainable nature of the status quo vis a vis Ireland, the UK regime had initiated reform – but its attempts to implement it were faltering and ham-fisted, for various reasons; indeed, suffering from quite a severe split in the ranks of the elites running UK and Ulster governance, the regime lacked the capacity to even agree on a coherent formula for implementing reforms, and successive Home Rule bills were introduced by Liberal prime ministers, but defeated in the House of Lords, the upper house of parliament.

A key point here is that some kind of change in how Ireland was run, and in terms of Ireland’s relationship to the rest of the UK, was more or less inevitable. There is no space here for a discussion of the long-term changes that demanded this indeterminate ‘new deal’ for Ireland, but they included the collapse of the power of the traditional Anglo-Irish landowning elite, and the growth of an increasingly assertive Catholic middle class and elite, which demanded power. But while some form of accommodation was more or less inevitable, the course that the eventual change ultimately took was anything but.

What the critical juncture of these years – one blocked by factional differences, elite splits, and regime fudging – led to was a case study in the kinds of crux moments and contingent outcomes that ride on inter-movement dynamics. Had governing elites in Westminster and Ulster managed to accept the need for negotiation and accommodation and reached an agreement, the moderates of the Nationalist Party would have surely led a Home Rule parliament in Dublin. It is impossible to say exactly what shape Irish politics under home rule would have taken, but it seems likely that Ireland, administered from a home rule parliament in Dublin, would have remained a part of the UK – perhaps something between the current Scottish arrangement that sees MPs elected to an Edinburgh
parliament as well as to Westminster; on the one hand, and on the other, the early-twentieth century settlements reached for the quasi-autonomous ‘white dominions’ of the British Empire, such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand.49

But such a home rule settlement was not to be, and the Nationalist Party, led by John Redmond, which had long made home rule its raison d’être, was ultimately to be sidelined by its erstwhile much more marginal counterparts in the family of separatist organisations spanning the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), Sinn Féin, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and beyond. The Nationalist Party had made some fatal strategic mistakes. At the outbreak of World War I, they bet everything on a policy of support for Britain’s war effort, even encouraging young Irish men to enlist – which many did. Redmond hoped that this display of loyalty to the Crown would smooth the path to Home Rule – but by 1916, the prospect of a Home Rule settlement looked farther away than ever, thousands were being slaughtered on the battlefields, and the government was announcing its plans to extend conscription to Ireland.

As the credibility of the moderate Nationalist Party started to be seriously compromised, the separatists launched their offensive. The 1916 Rising brought with it the opening salvos of the military side of the offensive. The following years brought the parallel political offensive. Fighting elections vigorously from 1917 on, an ad hoc alliance of separatist militants and political activists rapidly absorbed most of the Nationalist Party’s support as its vote collapsed, and filled the vacuum of nationalist politics with an apparently much more radical solution than that of Redmond’s party: immediate unilateral secession from the United Kingdom, based on an approach that might be called ‘armed dual power’. Republicans took their success in Westminster elections as a mandate to create their own ‘independent’ parliament (albeit an underground one) and shadow state based in Dublin, while across much of the country the armed wing of the movement fought a low-intensity insurgency against their perceived enemies, including, if not entirely limited to, the forces of the British state.

49 For counter-factual historical speculations as to what an Irish Home Rule arrangement might have looked like, see Jackson (1997).
By 1922 the Nationalist Party, behemoth of Irish politics from the mid-to-late nineteenth century till a few years before, was all but forgotten, and the separatists had ‘won’. Albeit the scorecard of their victory was a complicated one: they had fought the British government to a military-political stalemate, and to the negotiating table, and created a new state from those negotiations. But the new state was a partitioned one, leaving a north-eastern sixth or so of the island within the UK proper. And more importantly for many contemporaries, the new state covering the rest of the territory was not unambiguously independent, but rather a dominion within the British Empire – that is, ironically, a state not unlike that which might have resulted from the home rule efforts of the Nationalist Party, had they not been scuppered. That scuppering had been due partly to the general disfunctionality of UK politics at this time, and partly to the effective competition of the ‘separatists’. Now, the standing-in of the zombie dominion of the Nationalist Party’s dreams in place of the autonomous republic coveted by the separatists triggered a split and ‘civil war’ between the faction of the movement that supported the new ‘Anglo-Irish Treaty’ and formed the first government, and the hardliners who stayed outside the new state.

Better-resourced, and with the acquiescence of a war-weary population, the government forces crushed the rebels in less than a year. Within fifteen years, the remnants of the rebels who took a constitutional path would enter government, cut the umbilical cord to the UK and Empire, and write a new constitution, turning the ‘Irish Free State’ into something less offensive to their ‘republican’ sensibilities. Their party would go on to become the state’s dominant one for the rest of the century, learning to live in relative peace with their erstwhile opponents on the ‘pro-Treaty’ side, with whom they would join forces when necessary in suppressing the residual rebel elements that, unlike them, never did lay down their arms, or embrace constitutional politics.50

50 The classic account of the shaping of the Irish political landscape in the early twentieth century – from a ‘party systems’ point of view, and including suggestive comments about the importance within this of inter-party competition, and of highly contingent outcomes linked to the interplay of differing party strategies – is Mair (1987), especially chapter one.
This is a story of dizzying inter/intra-movement dynamics and competition: of the most marginal and radical nationalist militants dramatically sidelining the long-dominant moderate nationalists – and of the very same radical militants equally rapidly going on to become the moderate compromisers of their day, outflanking and crushing those who defended the republican separatist project that had been their raison d’etre a couple of years beforehand. In this complex story, the designation of inter- or intra- depends on where we choose to draw lines around and between different factions of early twentieth century nationalism and separatism – and hence, is open to debate.\(^{51}\)

In the next section, I will try to give a more detailed picture of how just these kinds of dynamics played out in the period between the transformative event of the 1916 Rising and the start of the ‘War of Independence’ phase of the independence struggle.

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**Strategic interaction, inter-movement dynamics, movement-building, and the question of ‘social appropriation’: from the 1916 Rising to the War of Independence**

The years between the surrender of the Easter rebels in Dublin in 1916, and the creation of the Irish Free State in January 1922, were marked by the collapse of the political status quo in Ireland, and the emergence of mass contestation of British rule itself, led by the separatist movement.

But ultimately, ‘separatist movement’ is just one term of convenience among

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\(^{51}\) Remarkably though, such a story of twists and turns is still often told in a determinist way, as the more or less inevitable unfolding of an Irish national destiny. By contrast, some accounts – particularly some hostile to Irish nationalism – stress the ‘accidental’ nature of what happened, and the fluke by which ‘the wrong men’ took over the controls of Irish nationalist politics (Garvin 1987). As the preserve largely of historians rather than practitioners of other disciplines, neither position tends to be theorized in a robust way. Mair’s (1987) emphasis on the importance of party strategy is something of an exception here, but it is primarily concerned with the dynamics of the Irish party system *after* independence.
many (‘republican movement’, ‘secessionist movement’, ‘nationalist movement’
etc.) that can be used to describe the new mass politics seen in Ireland in these
years. What was the movement behind these terms of convenience?

The new movement in Ireland consisted of a cross-class alliance of some
thousands of more or less committed activists, strung between a motley line-up
of organisations and institutions ambiguously tied together in a united front
against British rule – and, crucially, endowed with a growing mass popular base.

The movement was built on the rubble of the separatist and ‘advanced
nationalist’\textsuperscript{52} organizations that had survived the military rout of the Easter
Rising, and subsequent repression – but the organizations that were reborn,
Phoenix-like, from the flames of the Rising, were not, in all cases, quite the same
ones that had gone into it. The Easter rising was fought, mainly, by sections of the
Irish Volunteers – an organization founded in 1913 as a mass, public militia, to
ward off unionist threats to Westminster’s much-vaunted Home Rule deal for
Ireland. (The cue for the Irish Volunteers’ founding had been the creation of the
Ulster Volunteers the previous year – a militia of Northern Protestants sworn to
\textit{thwart} Home Rule.)

The Volunteers were not, ostensibly, supposed to be an insurrectionary force –
but a secret ‘entryist’ cabal, occupying leadership positions within the
organization, had managed to manoeuvre a layer of the Volunteers into precisely
that at Easter 1916. That cabal was drawn from members of the Irish Republican
Brotherhood – the ‘Fenians’ – which had itself started life as a mass separatist
militia in the 1860s, and by 1916 taken the form of a highly secretive, oath-
bound, fraternal organization, committed to clandestine action in the cause of an
independent Irish republic.

After the Rising, the militarily shattered Irish Volunteers would slowly
reorganize, and gradually metamorphose into the ‘Irish Republican Army’ (the

\textsuperscript{52} A common euphemism of the time for Irish nationalists prepared to demand more than a home rule settlement.

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names would become largely interchangeable, until the latter eventually overtook the former around 1920 – the fighting force, and iconic brand name, of the separatist movement.\(^5\) (In the process, it would, funnily enough, mirror the historical trajectory taken by the IRB, in transforming itself from an open militia, with uniforms, military pomp, and public drilling, to an underground force of revolutionaries.) The IRB itself, with many of its leaders killed in and after the Rising, would too reorganize, and continue to play a shadowy role in the separatist coalition.\(^6\)

Beyond the Irish Volunteers lay their auxiliaries: the *Cumann na mBan* (‘Council of Women’) for female activists, and the youth organization *Na Fianna* (named after ancient warriors of Irish folklore). Beyond this family of organisations lay the political party Sinn Féin (‘We Ourselves’, or simply ‘Ourselves’). Sinn Féin was founded as a fringe nationalist party in 1905, calling initially for a dual monarchy arrangement between Britain and Ireland. It was not directly implicated in the 1916 Rising – but amidst a public and an administration ignorant of nationalist politics beyond the mainstream forces of the Nationalist Party and its ilk, the Sinn Féin brand name came, fatefully, to be lumped in with the rebels – and eventually, the association would come to stick (Townshend 2005). By the 1917-18 period, Sinn Féin had become a party of fellow travellers (and in many cases, members) of the Irish Volunteers/IRA – functioning as something like its political wing, even though the organisations were not formally linked (Hart 2003:16-17, 95-96).

These were the main ‘social movement organisations’ around which the separatist movement gelled. But apart from the relatively small numbers within the IRB, and the militant fringe of the Volunteers and their auxiliaries (only a fraction of the Volunteer organization took part in the Rising), that movement did

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\(^5\) Hanley (2010:6) discusses the ambiguous history of the term ‘Irish Republican Army.’ Hart (2003:18) describes the ‘IRA’ that emerged as a “distinct entity” in 1920 or so as a “fusion of the IRB and the [Irish] Volunteers.”

\(^6\) Regan (2010:277-278) argues that, due to certain political sensitivities in the era of the post-1969 Northern Irish ‘Troubles’, scholars of Irish history have colluded in leaving the (still opaque) activities of the IRB in these years – and indeed in the years following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 – in the shadows.
not really exist prior to the Easter Rising (Townshend 2005). In large part it had to be built by the activist hardcore of the post-Rising movement. And to some extent – in a country whose crisis was amplified by the Easter Rising, and where the Easter rebels seemed like just about the only group offering a bold way out of Ireland’s national impasse – the movement at times even appeared to build itself.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Easter Rising had a curious life in the Irish collective imagination. In so far as they can be pieced together, it seems that immediate reactions to the Rising veered from bemusement, to rage, to creeping admiration – in many cases for the same people. For some sections of the population, the dismay at the ‘Sinn Féin murderers’ would never go away – but overall, the confused mix of emotions increasingly gave way to veneration of the rebels, and even the construction of a quasi-religious personality cult around the dead leaders of the Rising. The frequent requiem masses for the martyrs served as a recruiting ground for new separatist activists in the summer of 1916 (Hart 2011:18). Likewise, a trickle of new recruits, inspired by the action at Easter, began to find its way into the slowly regrouping Volunteers soon after the Rising.

Ernie O’Malley – an apathetic medical student considering joining the British Army on the eve of the Rising, who would go on to become a legendary IRA leader (English 1999) – describes his route into the Volunteers as such:

The University was changed now for me – new associations, new affiliations. Some of the boys had been ‘out’ [in the Rising], and had escaped arrest; others who had been in the country had not received orders. I reconstructed my world slowly. We were being hammered red-hot in the furnace of the spirit and a spark was bound to fly and disclose us to each other, with a word, a look, a chance remark...

Christmas [1916] came and the Volunteers met in scattered groups... A medical of my year asked me to join his company. ‘It’s on the north side, in the first battalion area, and it will begin to meet in a few days’ time. I’ll bring you along with me.’ In the days that passed we smiled knowingly at each other, for we kept a secret that nobody else was aware of. (O’Malley 2002:52-53)
The Rising had produced a layer of sympathy for the rebels among the population at large, and, as in the case of O’Malley, inspired some young men and women to join the movement. It also led to a strange alliance between the Volunteers and the Sinn Féin party, as imprisoned veterans of the Rising – locked up, in some cases, alongside senior Sinn Féin members, who were deemed guilty by association with the rebels – came to reflect that the separatist movement would need a political machine alongside the military one.

Seamus Robinson, for one – a 1916 veteran who would go on to be implicated in pivotal IRA actions of the following years55 – became convinced while in Reading Jail alongside Sinn Féin leaders such as Arthur Griffith, of the need for a party machine that would counter the “pro-British propaganda of the press and pulpit”; that would offer the “moral-legal support of an elected government”, and be the “nation’s second arm” (BMH WS 1721).

But for the separatists to become a real force in Irish nationalist politics, they would have to confront the power of the Nationalist Party. Officially the ‘Irish Parliamentary Party’, the organization was known by many names: the ‘Home Rule party’; the ‘Molly Maguires’, or just ‘Mollies’ (thanks to its association with the Ancient Order of Hibernians); the ‘Redmondites’, after its leader John Redmond; or simply ‘the Party’ – the latter moniker reflecting its dominance within Catholic Ireland since its founding by the legendary Charles Stewart Parnell in the 1880s.56

Amid the fundraising drive to support the dependents of prisoners of the Rising, IRB figures had pulled off the coup of capturing the Irish National Fund – a

55 Most notoriously, he was the Officer Commanding (OC) at the Soloheadbeg ambush, with Dan Breen and Sean Treacy. The ambush, on the same day the Dail first met in January 1919, and which involved the killing of two RIC constables, is often seen as the action that started the War of Independence – but actually was a solo-run on the part of the local IRA unit that carried it out, and threw the Dail and the Dublin movement leadership into crisis. See Breen (1981), Brean BMH statement (BMH WS 1763), Hart (2003:63-64).

56 See Garvin (1981), chapters V and VI, and Fitzpatrick (1998), chapter three. Somewhat paradoxically, Parnell, leader of ‘Catholic Ireland’, belonged, like many other prominent early figures in the party, to the lineage of Protestant Irish nationalists. (For consideration of the Protestant ‘patriot’ tradition, and comparisons to ‘settler nationalisms’ elsewhere, see Cleary (2007).)
conduit for donations to Ireland, largely from the Irish diaspora. The fund had
traditionally been controlled by the Nationalist Party, but in 1917 it was
amalgamated with the Volunteer Dependents’ Fund, with none other than key
IRB and Volunteer figure Michael Collins – himself only freed from captivity in
December 1916 – as its secretary, no doubt to the great consternation of ‘Party’
bosses. Donations were energetically courted, and by July 1917, the amalgamated
fund was receiving over 10,000 pounds a week, largely from Irish America. (Hart
2011:19-20).

In a way, this was ‘social appropriation’ – or, perhaps, ‘expropriation’ – on a grand
scale, but the separatists would have to do more than syphon off some of its
financial fuel lines to supplant the despised Nationalist Party. It would mean
confronting them squarely on the electoral battleground. In these years,
‘electoral battleground’ was not a metaphor, and the line between ‘electoral
politics’ and ‘contentious politics’ was entirely blurred.

Even before the rise of the separatists after 1916, Irish party politics had been
marked by deep antipathy, and often violence, between the Party machine and its
political bosses on the one hand, and its rivals and offshoots on the other – with
everyone accusing everyone else of operating as a corrupt political mafia. On this
point, they were probably all right.

Cork city and county – which together would make up by far the bloodiest
theatre of IRA violence in the years following the Rising57 – had before this
watershed been carved up between the fiefdoms of John Redmond’s Nationalist
Party and a breakaway organization, William O’Brien’s All For Ireland League
(AFIL).

In these years, the curious and clannish world of Cork attracted descriptions like

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57 Hart (1998:50) puts Cork’s bloodshed in perspective, by comparing it to the violence seen in
Northern Ireland at its early 1970s highpoint: “between 1969 and 1975, Northern Ireland
experienced one ‘political’ death for every 1,000 people. Between 1917 and 1923, Cork
experienced one for every 530 people.”
“the modern Bagdad”\textsuperscript{58} from outside observers, and native accounts of Cork politics suggest something between this and an old-country spin-off of the world of \textit{Gangs of New York}. Famed Cork writer – and rank-and-file IRA member – Frank O’Connor (1982:686-7 in Hart 1998:43) describes ‘ancien regime’ Cork as such:

I don’t profess to remember what we inhabitants of Blarney Lane were patriotic about: all I remember is that we were very patriotic, that our main principles were something called ‘Conciliation and Consent,’ and that our great national leader, William O’Brien, once referred to us as ‘The Old Guard.’ Myself and other kids of the Old Guard used to parade the street with tin cans and toy trumpets, singing ‘We’ll hang Johnnie Redmond on a sour apple tree.’

Unfortunately, our neighbourhood was bounded to the south by a long ugly street leading uphill to the cathedral, and the lanes off it were infested with the most wretched specimens of humanity who took the Redmondite side for whatever could be got from it in the way of drink... It always saddened me, coming through this street on my way from school, and seeing the poor misguided children, barefoot and in rags, parading with tin cans and toy trumpets and singing ‘We’ll hang William O’Brien on a sour apple tree.’ It left me with very little hope for Ireland.

This picture of a local politics carved up between the Redmondite and O’Brienite political gangs had been complicated somewhat by the springing up of Irish Volunteers units upon that organization’s founding in 1913. Initially the established political forces remained aloof – until Redmond’s party swooped in and largely co-opted the Volunteers in 1914, as crisis loomed elsewhere in the country – in the form of stiffened opposition to Home Rule in Ulster, as well as among the officers at the British Army’s Irish headquarters at the Curragh\textsuperscript{59} – and as war loomed on the continent. With the Party’s blessing, Volunteer

\textsuperscript{58} Hart (1998:39) quotes a London \textit{Daily Mail} correspondent in February 1917: “Cork… is a modern Bagdad for romantic and astonishing happenings.”

\textsuperscript{59} The ‘Curragh Mutiny’ of British Army officers stationed in Ireland tends to be seen as a key episode in the chain of events leading to the 1916 Rising and the War of Independence, reflecting certain ‘structural’ impediments to the sealing of a viable Home Rule deal. However, Jackson (1997:222) argues compellingly that the incident has been cruelly misinterpreted and that the supposed ‘mutiny’ was highly contingent on bungling that occurred in military chain of command at the time, and points out that key ‘mutineers’ stated that they would not contravene direct orders to enforce home rule arrangements in Ulster.
recruitment soared – jumping from 400 to nearly 3,000 men between June and September in remote West Cork alone, and with 700 recruits joining in Cork city in just one week (Hart 1998:45-46). Almost as suddenly, however, the organization split over the issue of the war in Europe: Redmond and his Party impelled the Volunteers to show their loyalty to Britain by enlisting, which many did. In the split, Redmond took the majority of members – now known as the ‘National Volunteers’ – while the original, more republican officer cadres of the pre-Redmond Volunteers took the minority who rejected the British call to arms, and the ‘Irish Volunteers’ brand-name with them. Perhaps 10,000 to 15,000 out of 160,000 or so Volunteers rejected Redmond’s move, but in the wake of the split and ensuing confusion, the rump of the Irish Volunteers may only have numbered 2,000 to 3,000 men (Augusteijn 1996:44-45). But as Redmond’s stock continued to fall as the war he endorsed became uglier, and as the prospect of the Home Rule he promised receded, the ‘National Volunteers’ soon became moribund, while the surviving rump of the ‘Irish Volunteers’ was winnowed down to a small, but still active force (Hart 1998:46-47).

As elsewhere, Easter 1916 was a watershed in Cork. In the event itself, the local IRB and Volunteer leaders dithered over the mixed messages, orders and countermanded orders emanating from Dublin. They took little decisive action, and ‘the Rising’ in Cork was limited to a handful of desultory, if bloody, skirmishes between Volunteers and RIC men attempting arrests. Many of the local firebrands would be haunted for the rest of their lives by their failure to act, and by the ignominious surrender of Volunteer arms to local police (Hart 1998:191; Townshend 2005:234-238). On the surface, the Redmondites and O’Brienites continued to dominate local politics in the Rising’s aftermath – the former winning a by-election in West Cork in December 1916 – but this belied a groundswell in the strength and assertiveness of the separatist movement, which now absorbed the Sinn Féin party alongside the Volunteers:

In June 1916 Sinn Féin broke up a meeting in the city and prevented William O’Brien from speaking. In July there were marches and fights with opponents and police in the city and Charleville [a County Cork town]. City council sessions
were disrupted by rowdy youths. The offices of the *Cork Examiner* were attacked on several occasions (Hart 1998:49).

Hart (1998:49) points out that there was nothing new about such rowdy antics in Cork politics – they represented something like business as usual in a city that had seen eleven people shot in ‘normal’ election violence between 1910 and 1914 (Hart 1998:47). The only apparent novelty was the identity of the people who were now marking their territory: the separatist fellow travellers of Sinn Féin and the Irish Volunteers, erstwhile marginal dissidents of Cork political life.

The sea change was not lost on the people whose job it was to take note of such things – with the RIC County Inspector for West Cork (in Hart 1998:49) writing in August 1916 that:

> Old landmarks in the form of names such as ‘Mollies’, ‘Redmondites’, ‘All For Irelanders’, so much in evidence before the war, are almost now obliterated. One seldom hears them now. An excursion, for instance, which before would be called either a ‘Molly’ or ‘All-for-Ireland’ excursion, is now a ‘Sinn Fein’ one, or else not known by any political name at all.

In Cork, the separatist bloc had, in Hart’s (1998:50) words, “won and guarded its new political turf with the obligatory minimum of street-fighting and gunplay.” But even still, now that separatists had come around to thinking of electoral politics as a valid adjunct to more ‘direct’ means of struggle against British rule, electoral success would be hard-fought – not just in Cork, but nationwide. Accounts of these years often hop freely from the 1916 Rising to Sinn Féin’s sweeping success in the 1918 general election – on which basis the first ‘Dail’, or underground republican parliament, would be established in Dublin – but the road to the 1918 success would be more winding and rocky than such narratives often imply.

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60 The *Cork Examiner*, probably the most important newspaper of the region, was closely associated with the Nationalist Party.
The electoral battlefield and the path to 1918

Sinn Féin managed to win victories in by-elections in 1917 in counties Roscommon, Longford and Clare. Once again, no neat distinction existed here between the ‘arenas’ (Jasper 2006) of ‘routine politics’ and ‘contentious politics’: the election campaigns involved major mobilisations of activists from all over the country, converging on the electoral hotspots – including armed Volunteers, doubling as campaign workers for ‘routine’ canvassing, and as providers of muscle to defend the Sinn Féin electoral effort against physical attack. Meanwhile, many Sinn Féin activists and candidates were in jail at the time, on account of the “German Plot” Dublin Castle had supposedly uncovered. Muddying the waters between ‘routine’ and ‘contentious’ politics even further, these electoral mobilisations also served as recruiting grounds for the Volunteers – as recollected in the testimony of Volunteer Joseph Barrett on the Clare by-election:

The prisoners who were sentenced after the Rising were released and numbers of these, as well as the men who had been released from internment early, came to Clare to assist in the election. The presence of all these around the county, as well as the meetings held in connection with the election, gave a great fillip to the morale of the volunteers in the county. Thousands of new recruits joined the ranks that time (BMH WS 1324).

Things did not go so smoothly everywhere. The city of Waterford – the hometown of John Redmond, the Nationalist Party leader, and a place with little separatist tradition – represented a particular challenge. Sinn Féin lost a by-election there in 1918, and even the general election later that year, which was a landslide victory for them on a national level.

James Daly, a Volunteer captain sent to Waterford from County Kerry, sketched the kind of opposition that the separatists faced, recalling that “When we got to Waterford we found we were part of a large party of Volunteers drafted in... to protect Sinn Fein meetings and voters who were being attacked by mobs, who were being used by the Redmondite party (BMH WS 1111).”
Another Volunteer officer, Liam Walsh, likewise “did a lot of canvassing around the Redmondite quarter... I stopped about fifty people voting in the names of dead people for the Redmondite candidate (BMH WS 1005).”

Thomas Brennan (BMH WS 1104), a local Volunteer, elaborated on the nature of the Waterford opposition:

Our men were continually beaten up whilst engaged on such jobs as conveying voters to the poll, and everything possible was done by opposition mobs to prevent republican sympathisers from going to the polling booths...

There were three anti-national elements in those days, viz. the unionists comprising the ascendancy classes; the element known as the 'Ballybricken pig-buyers', which was entirely pro-Redmond and pro-British; and those who had connections with the British army, i.e. soldiers’ wives and families, and ex-British army men who were pensioned off. These three elements formed a most formidable opposition to anything pertaining to republicanism.

William Keane, another Volunteer, corroborated the account of the stiff opposition faced in Waterford, and tried to put it into perspective vis a vis the guerrilla war that would follow these electoral battles – describing his being ordered into Waterford city to help in the election campaign of [Sinn Fein candidate] Dr. White... The Redmondite mobs, mainly composed of ex-British soldiers and their wives – and the pig-buyers from the Ballybricken district... carried on in a most blackguardly fashion. Anybody connected with Sinn Fein [was] brutally assaulted with sticks, bottles, etc...

As a man from the Flying Column61 said to me years afterwards, he had tougher fighting in Waterford during these elections than ever he had with the “Column” (BMH WS 1023).

The separatists had not yet taken Waterford, the hold-out of 'Redmondism’ – but

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61 The ‘Flying Columns’ were the mobile fighting bands of IRA guerrillas during the most intense period of the conflict, between 1920 and 1921, and would go on to attain a somewhat mythic status in the folklore of the independence struggle. See Augusteijn (1996:124).
in fact, it was the only constituency outside of Ulster and of Dublin that Sinn Féin did not take in the 1918 general election. Now the previously electorally insignificant Sinn Féin took 73 seats to the Nationalist Party’s 6. (The Unionists, in second place island-wide after Sinn Féin, took 22, almost all in Ulster). And the Sinn Féiners lost no time in exploiting their new electoral mandate by taking their seats in their own homespun parliament in Dublin – ‘Dáil Éireann’ – rather than in Westminster, in January 1919 declaring an Irish Republic from the new, semi-clandestine Dáil (underlining once again the erasure of the line between ‘routine’ and ‘contentious’ politics in this setting).

Some caveats must be entered here: the story of the landslide election of 1918 tends to be told as one of a fantastic coup for Sinn Féin and, by extension, the separatist movement as a whole – which it was. But inevitably, this electoral ‘event’ looks more complex and ambiguous when examined up close. Mair (1987:47) points out that this was bound to be a remarkable election no matter what – like other remarkable elections elsewhere in Europe around the same time, the 1918 election represented a massive opening up of the franchise, with the introduction of universal male suffrage, and with the granting of the vote to women over 30. In Ireland, the electorate almost tripled in 1918 to about two million – as opposed to about 700,000 in 1910. Despite all this, Mair (1987:48) highlights some of the problems with an uncomplicated view of 1918 as a great “mobilizing election”: about a third of Sinn Féin victories were in uncontested seats, and even in contested seats, turnout was not very high – and island-wide came to just 47 per cent of those registered to vote.

This suggests that the realities of Irish political life on the eve of independence were much more complex than standard narratives tend to reflect. But it does not take away from the remarkable achievement of the separatists, who went from electoral insignificance to dominance almost overnight. Even if some victories were in uncontested seats, the very fact that they were uncontested marked Sinn Féin’s new clout, and ability to bargain forcefully with the Nationalist Party - or simply persuade them not to bother competing in certain areas. Indeed, Coakley (1994:33) argues that while Sinn Féin took 47% of the
vote on the island of Ireland, this understates their support - since many constituencies did not vote at all, because no other candidate dared to contest the Sinn Féin juggernaut. Coakley puts their true support at around 56%. Furthermore, in various constituencies where there was a straight fight between Sinn Féin and the IPP, Sinn Féin won victories of more than 80% (Ibid.). When the six northern counties of the proto-Northern Ireland are removed from the figures (these counties had been voting differently from the rest of the island since the nineteenth century (Coakley 2004:145-146)), the Sinn Féin vote looks even more resounding: since proportional representation had not yet been introduced, Sinn Féin took 94% of seats (69 out of 72) with 65% of the vote (Coakley 1994:33).

The above stories of running battles with Redmondite opponents come from one of the toughest constituencies in the country – but everywhere Sinn Féin and the Volunteers had to fight vigorously for their electoral success in 1918, and mostly they won. (By 1919, the separatists’ perseverance would even pay off in inhospitable Waterford, with Sinn Féin finally achieving success in local municipal elections there in that year.)

Does this mean their advance was built on ‘social appropriation’ of the Redmondite political empire? This is debatable. There is no question that Sinn Féin took very many of the Nationalist Party’s votes, but ‘social appropriation’ must mean something more than this. Historians such as David Fitzpatrick (1998) have argued that as the Nationalist Party brand became toxic as the disastrous nature of its policy on Home Rule and on the British war effort became apparent, many of the party's local political bosses and fixers saw the way the wind was blowing, and simply migrated to the side of Sinn Féin. But while there is undoubtedly evidence of such individual defections happening – especially as Sinn Féin and the Volunteers started to become ‘respectable’ around their effective exploitation of the ‘conscription crisis’ of mid-1918 (a moment when the movement was buoyed much more by the ‘threat’ of conscription extending to Ireland, rather than by any ‘opportunity’) – it is very unclear whether the evidence points to a systemic change in the nature of the party that had come to define itself against such specimens, and the clientelism they
represented, or whether it simply points to the predictable choices of a certain layer of opportunists. Indeed, Mair (1987:16) points out that as late as the general election of 1927, a residual rump of the old Nationalist Party continued to exist, trying to unite former Party supporters under the banner of the National League. Furthermore, Mair (Ibid.) points out that this election marked a high point for parties that did not trace their origins to the split in the separatist movement over the Treaty. Since the three ‘Treaty Parties’ got only 63% of the vote, it is likely that the old power-brokers of the Nationalist Party days continued to exist within their own organisations.

This is to speak of the Party’s organization, and of the local fixers and power-brokers who made it up. As for the grassroots membership of Redmond’s Party – and of its rivals in William O’Brien’s All For Ireland League – while it is logically and quantitatively impossible that significant migration to the separatist side did not occur from these sources (where else would the votes have come from?), it seems that this largely happened in trickles rather than en masse, and that little of the Party’s residual structures migrated along with the individual refugees.

Notable individual defectors stick out. From the notes of interviews conducted by Ernie O’Malley with veterans of the independence struggle, Hart reconstructs the peculiar route to separatism taken by future IRA chief of staff and Civil War casualty, Liam Lynch.62 One IRA peer recounted to O’Malley that “Liam was a terrible Redmond man [ardent Nationalist Party supporter] and he hated the Irish Volunteers” (Hart 1998:204). Lynch’s grandmother – a separatist activist before him – told O’Malley that

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He was a Nationalist [Party supporter] until the day the British attacked the
Kents [a Volunteer family] of Bawnard [in May 1916] and he saw Thomas
Kent being brought in bleeding through the town of Fermoy, and his poor
mother dragging along after them... He said that when he saw the Kents
going through Fermoy it was like a sword going through his heart” (Hart
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62 Lynch was commander of the anti-Treaty IRA when he was killed in action by Free State troops in the Cork mountains in April 1923. His death is widely seen as the death knell of the Civil War, as the order to Volunteers to “dump arms” came from Lynch’s replacement, Frank Aiken, just days afterwards (Hart 1998:125).
From that point on, Lynch was a committed Volunteer and Sinn Féiner.\(^{63}\) Much of the time, however, ‘conversions’ to separatism seem to have been less dramatic in their political twists and turns. For many of the aging War of Independence veterans interviewed by Hart in the 1980s, little importance was attached to memories of prior political affiliations – if they were remembered at all:

Most of the Volunteers I interviewed did not identify with either party [Redmond’s Nationalist Party or O’Brien’s All For Ireland League] in any way (one was even offended by the question) but thought that O’Brienites had been friendlier and had played an important role in breaking the Irish Party’s hold on local politics. Several had O’Brienite parents but others either had Redmondite families or could not remember. The Ernie O’Malley interviews record essentially the same opinions... (Hart 1998:205)

“Mother Teresa could always present us with hundreds of rounds of .45 ammunition...”: Social appropriation and the Catholic Church

If this was the extent of the ‘social appropriation’ of the incumbent political organizations by the separatists, what about other institutions? Many historians have noted the significance of the softening attitude of the Catholic Church and of the bishops towards the separatists in the years after the Easter Rising. Did this represent the ‘social appropriation’ of the organizational infrastructure of the Irish Catholic Church, in the way that civil rights activists captured many of the black churches in the US south (previously seen as bastions of conservatism (McAdam 1999) in the 1950s?\(^{64}\) Again, this is unclear. It is undeniable that the

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\(^{63}\) In a future research project, it would be tantalising to attempt to determine how much recruitment and social appropriation to the separatist movement could be explained in a similar way to Lynch’s trajectory. How many people joined the movement after witnessing or being personally affected by state repression? With the increasing volumes of personal testimony now becoming available, there may be opportunities to ask such quantitative questions in the near future.

\(^{64}\) This might also be considered in light of Kurzman’s (2005:38-50) discussion of the role of mosques in the Iranian Revolution. In somewhat similar fashion to McAdam on the black Southern churches, Kurzman argues that there was little inherently radical or revolutionary about the Shia mosques in Iran – and that it took the rather aggressive initiative of young revolutionaries to mobilize the
bishops became publicly more supportive of the separatists after 1916, as the Nationalist Party began to crumble. This was no small factor in their general election victory in 1918. But upon closer inspection, it is also clear that, regardless of what the bishops did and said, increasing numbers of clergy, particularly but not exclusively younger clergy and curates, had been becoming ardent supporters – and collaborators – of Sinn Féin and the Volunteers for some years.

The relationship of the church to the separatist movement was complex. The staunch support of the church hierarchy for the Nationalist Party agenda had been the norm. After the 1916 Rising, this started to fray. However, a crucial breaking point came with the 'Conscription crisis' of 1918. In May, Westminster passed a bill approving the extension of the draft to Ireland. By chance, Sinn Féin founder Arthur Griffith was also contesting a by-election in East Cavan in the same month. In his statement to the Bureau of Military History, republican priest Monsignor Patrick Browne described the circumstances in which the bishops at Maynooth, an important seminary and Catholic University, decided to throw their weight behind Griffith, and behind the anti-conscription campaign – to the surprise and delight of Volunteers and Sinn Féiners. Tensions were high:

It was on at the same time as the meeting of the bishops in Maynooth. The bishops held a special meeting in May 1918 to consider the question of what attitude they would take with regard to the conscription of Ireland becoming law. To that meeting came the members of the Mansion House Conference on Conscription. One of the results of that meeting was that the bishops broke up Maynooth and gave holidays to the students. It looked as if there would be a fight. It was partly to give the students a chance to help...

The general feeling of the bishops was to rejoice that Griffith, the Sinn Féin candidate, had been elected, on account of the conscription crisis, instead of the Party candidate. The bishops behaved wonderfully at that time. Stephen McKenna said they behaved ‘like Irish gentlemen’. The form of the Resolution was very strong (BMH WS 729).

resources of the mosque network. Kurzman discusses this in terms of “commandeering”, in a way that closely mirrors McAdam’s discussion of “social appropriation”.
It had not always been like this. Republican or separatist priests had once felt isolated, and despaired at the behaviour of their peers and superiors. Father Nevin, a Passionist Priest, recalled in his BMH statement his disgust that before the Conscription Crisis, many priests had been actively complicit in promoting British Army recruitment:

It was deplorable, disconcerting and bewildering to the young men and the country in general to see their Reverend, their Very Reverend and Right Reverend fathers in God, hobnobbing with British recruiting agents. Aye!...

for an ordinary cleric to hold and maintain a contrary opinion and course was little short of a misdemeanour... (BMH WS 1605)

From Nevin's description of celebrating a mass for a group of Irish Volunteers, it can be seen that these men did not take it for granted that they would have the blessing of their priests:

When at the customary time I had read the weekly notices, standing behind the altar rails, I closed the book and addressed them. I learned afterwards that many of them were very apprehensive of what they were going to get... But I soon set them at ease... (BMH WS 1605)

And this was just a mass for Volunteers – a relatively public and ‘respectable’ body by the standards of the time. The relationship of the clergy to the secret society of the IRB was a much thornier matter. In his Bureau of Military History statement, Ernest Blythe, a senior republican (unusually, a Protestant)\(^65\) described attending a meeting organized for the express purpose of easing the consciences of IRB men about the relationship between their faith, and their membership of the proscribed oath-bound organization. They had been told that an ‘IRB priest’ would explain the issue to them:

\(^65\) Hart (2003:229) suggests that Protestants within the IRA in these years “could be counted on one hand”. This is presumably meant literally, although it is not entirely clear on what basis Hart can say there were not more.
The priest was Father O’Sullivan... who was on a mission to America. He was a member, I gathered afterwards, of Clan na Gael66 and not exactly a member of the IRB. I looked forward with some interest to hearing why he felt the IRB did not come under the classification of a condemned secret society. He did not touch on the point at all, but merely said he was a member, that he had no conscientious troubles, and proceeded to make a patriotic speech. The meeting, however, was quite effective, because we heard nothing more of members leaving for some time (BMH WS 939).

Assistance from members of the clergy had been low-key, and it had been associated with the lower-status priests – principally the curates. But this also began to change. Blythe’s statement goes on to describe the circumstances in which, as a wanted man in 1918, he decided to arrange his own arrest:

... Griffith suggested that it would be a good thing from the propagandist point of view if I could be arrested in the house of a parish priest. I told him that I did not know any parish priest whom I could ask to take me in, that up till then all the help I had got in organizing the Volunteers had been from curates, and that so far, no parish priest had shown any sympathy (BMH WS 939).

This time, Griffith found one, and the plan went ahead.

Even some Parish Priests had been willing to court controversy earlier – such as during the heady days of Easter Week 1916. Patrick Doyle, a young Volunteer in Wexford, far away from the main fighting, described the local Parish Priest coming on board at that time. The Volunteers were:

told to go to Ballindaggin and to cut all the telephone wires, to close all the public houses... and to call on the young men of the district to join the Volunteers and to take part in the Rising...

The Parish Priest, Canon Meehan, advised the young men to join (BMH WS 1298).

As the independence struggle progressed in the years after 1916, members of the clergy became more open in their support for the Volunteers – no doubt egged on by the change in attitude of the bishops after 1918 – and this support was not

66 Clan na Gael was a United States-based sister organisation to the IRB.
just moral.

Coyle, who would go on to become a Canon, described in his BMH statement how, as a priest in a ‘Catholic’ town called Fintona, lying in a ‘Protestant’ part of Ulster, he became irked by the mobilisation of the unionist Ulster Volunteers in that area. They took to marching, armed, through the streets of the Catholic town. Coyle decided to take action:

I went to Dublin and called on The O’Rahilly [a senior republican] and explained to him my people’s situation in Fintona and my determination to help, so far as I could possibly do it, in getting our people armed. I gave him a cheque out of my private means, which at the time were limited, for 150 pounds for rifles for my parishioners. He supplied me with sixty rifles, a bayonet for each rifle and a supply of suitable ammunition. Those rifles etc were packed into cases and were put on the train. I returned from Dublin and all arrived safely in Fintona...

Shortly after this, sixty young Fintona Volunteers paraded on the streets of our town, all armed with serviceable rifles, each rifle having attached a fixed bayonet...

In the peculiar situation of our Irish people in those early years of 1914-15, I believed that defensive military preparation by our people was the keystone of our national wellbeing. I attended with Dr McCartan all the principal meetings of the IRB in County Tyrone. I was not an official member of the organization; my priestly calling would not allow my joining an oath-bound secret society. I attended those meetings, and in this way I hoped to give the country boys the feeling that they were working on the right lines by organizing, arming and training for the defence of our country (BMH WS 325).

Canon Coyle was not unique. Nor was this kind of ‘logistical support’ limited to the priestly wings of religious life. In his BMH statement, Patrick Burke, a Volunteer in Bagenalstown, County Carlow, described the help received from a local monk he approached – with the science lab in the monk’s school in mind:

I remember about that time a man named Jim O’Rourke, a painter by trade who worked with my firm, discovered, in a book he was reading, a formula for making explosives. With the idea of putting this formula into practical use, I consulted
Brother Francis of the De La Salle Christian Brothers in Bagenalstown. I knew perfectly well that he was very sympathetic towards the cause and that, if he could be of any assistance, he would gladly help us...

... with the aid of a mixing drum which I made, the ingredients for making the powder were put together... This made a highly explosive powder. We made about a stone of the stuff (BMH WS 1131).

Nor was this kind of support limited to the male members of the religious orders. Manus O’Boyle, an IRA man, described the tough fighting conditions that prevailed in one part of Ulster – and the crucial help that came from Mother Teresa and her sisters:

It was a continuous street fight in Ballymacarratt. Our opponents were heavily armed and had the assistance of the police and military. During all the fighting our headquarters were in the Cross and Passion Convent in Bryson Street. The nuns were magnificent. Mother Teresa, Sister Ethna, Sister Peter Paul and Sister Bridget...

Mother Teresa could always present us with hundreds of rounds of .45 ammunition... (BMH WS 289)

Was all of this an act of ‘appropriation’? Just as often, it looks like the clergy were ‘appropriating’ the separatist movement – not necessarily in an opportunist sense, but in the sense that the separatists seemed to fill for many of them a space that urgently needed to be filled, and to be fighting a fight that urgently needed to be fought. These clergy would not let such a movement pass by without grasping onto it, and well before the church hierarchy moderated their position on the separatists, these clergy were willing to shuck off the bishops’ reticence on the matter and embrace Sinn Féin and the Volunteers.

**Social appropriation, social networks and culture**

What about other institutions of Irish society, and the social networks to which they were connected? The cultural nationalist movement is often identified as having been a gatekeeper to the separatist organisations (Hutchinson 1987).
Indeed there was a major membership overlap between the separatist and cultural nationalist organizations, but nonetheless, on the basis of his extensive number-crunching of IRA membership data and other variables, Peter Hart points out that there does not appear to be any statistically significant correlation between the two. Many cultural nationalists became separatist activists. But many did not.

To re-state the question in a different way: what about the young women and men who joined the movement in the years after 1916? How were they recruited? Was it on the basis of their previous political, organizational or ideological affiliations?

On the basis of the evidence available, it appears that the answer may be: yes, but perhaps only in a very vague way.

Many were recruited directly by the budding political and paramilitary machines of Sinn Féin, the Irish Volunteers and their auxiliaries, which were increasingly visible and assertive after 1916 – whether at requiem masses for the martyrs of the Rising, or robustly fighting political turf wars with the increasingly dissolute Redmondites at elections and by-elections.

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67 It is worth quoting Hart (2003:54-55) at length here, as he takes several prominent scholars to task for propagating what he sees as the myth of the cultural nationalist institutions’ decisive role in birthing the separatist movement: “Contemporary observers and historians alike have frequently assigned great importance to the role of cultural nationalism and its organizations in paving the way for a political revolution. Tom Garvin identified the Gaelic League, which campaigned for the revival of the Irish language, as ‘in many ways the central institution in the development of the revolutionary elite’. W.F. Mandle wrote of the Gaelic Athletic Association, which sought to do the same for Irish games: ‘It is arguable that no other organization had done more for Irish nationalism that the GAA – not the IRB… not the Gaelic League… not even Sinn Fein.’

Judged by membership figures as of January 1917, however, there was at best a weak geographic association between these two organizations and Sinn Féin and the IRA. A significant correlation can be found for GAA and Sinn Féin membership as of July 1917 (.42), but this shrank as the party grew over subsequent months. Comparing the GAA and IRA activity produces only a .06 result. There is little other evidence to suggest a strong link between the two. Indeed, JJ O’Connell, a leading military organizer, recalled that ‘it was a fact that the Volunteers did not receive from the GAA the help they expected’...

The Gaelic League likewise had no significant relationship with either Sinn Féin or revolutionary violence as a whole. The one significant correlation was with IRA activity in 1917-19 (.41), so it might still be argued that the League had some influence on the early development of the Volunteers.”
But meanwhile, many were simply recruited by friends, neighbours, relatives and siblings – who, in many cases, had effectively ‘recruited’ themselves, without any direct soliciting from activists already in the movement, or with only tenuous links to the movement.

In rejecting many of the commonsense frames typically used to explain the movement’s emergence (common wisdoms often mediated by professional historians), Hart, the most astute recent historian of the period, provides the closest thing we have to a systematic account of the movement’s spread – at least in some locales.

Hart emphasizes the casual nature of much IRA recruitment and, above all, the embeddedness of the movement structure that emerged after 1916 in the pre-existing social networks of everyday life. IRA networks mapped other social networks closely.

The dramatic events of the revolutionary years – broadcasting variously opportunities, threats, and causes célèbres for mass public sympathy, from the Easter Rising, to executions and hunger strikes, to the 1918 conscription crisis – led to many dramatic and emotionally-charged conversions to the movement, sometimes on a very individual basis – like those of Liam Lynch and Ernie O’Malley. Accompanying organizing initiatives exploited the waves of sympathy, outrage, and solidarity feeling further, and the pattern of recruitment spikes accompanying these events is transparent in the surviving data on IRA membership (Hart 1998:223).

This is an important story, but Hart attempts to tell another story that is somewhat discrete from it. This is the story not of effective Volunteer recruitment drives, or dramatic individual conversions to IRA separatism, or of the defection or graduation of Redmondites, O’Brienites, Gaelic Leaguers, or GAA players to the separatist movement – but rather the story of the defection of large chunks of Irish society itself to the side of the separatists.
Some more ‘intellectual’ types may have been seduced by the movement’s propaganda – like Dulcibella Barton, part of the minority strain of separatists of solidly Protestant and Anglo-Irish stock:

Two of my brothers, Erskine and Thomas Barton... are buried in France, having been in the British army... How we got to know about Sinn Fein was that we took in the Sinn Fein paper in the early days (BMH WS 936).

However, for many other rank-and-file Volunteers, political niceties beyond the desire to join the fight, now that it looked like that fight might really be on, may not have been so important. Hart's (1998:207) point about the reading habits of the IRA men he interviewed late in life is telling:

None of the IRA veterans I interviewed had read Sinn Fein or any other products of the radical ‘mosquito press’. Of far greater importance was John Mitchel's Jail Journal. The only other nationalist writer who came close was A.M. Sullivan, who wrote The Story of Ireland and helped edit Speeches from the Dock. The young men of 1917 and 1918 read these works with passion and imbued them with revolutionary meaning but they were nevertheless a familiar part of mainstream Irish literature, read equally by large numbers of non-Volunteers.

This is not the time or place for an attempt at a cultural analysis of the complexities and contradictions of World War I and post-World War I Ireland – a schizophrenic world where to be a 'Nationalist' was often to be considered ‘anti-National’;68 where being a 'Nationalist' or an 'All For Irisher' on the one hand, and joining the British Army on the other, were considered by many not just consistent, but complimentary; and where being an 'anti-National' ‘Nationalist’ and perhaps British Army veteran did not mean it was socially acceptable not to contribute to the dependents’ funds of separatists killed by the British Army, at

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68 As indicated above, the party of John Redmond was known by many names, and ‘the Nationalist Party’ was one of the most common. Consequentially, supporters were often simply known as ‘Nationalists’. However, republicans frequently described their perceived enemies as ‘anti-national’. For instance, Hart (1998:205) quotes personal correspondence from an acquaintance of Liam Lynch – who would go on to be the leader of the anti-Treaty forces in the Civil War – describing his social milieu in his pre-‘conversion’ days as a zealous supporter of Redmond’s Nationalist Party: “Lynch’s associates in Fermoy were either colleagues in the business where he worked or other members of the commercial element in the town. Most of them lacked any sort of National outlook.” Hence, there was nothing strange about calling ‘Nationalists’ ‘anti-national’.
church gate collections undertaken by one's political enemies, who liked to remind one of just how ‘anti-national’ one was (Hart 2011:19).

But to take a ‘short-cut’ through such a potential cultural analysis for a moment, we might suggest that for a very large swathe of Irish society, worldviews were probably shaped by some ambiguous cocktail of the above sensibilities. Evidence suggests that the ‘national-minded’ component of this cocktail frayed somewhat at the very top and very bottom of Irish society – indeed, in those parts of Irish society that provided, respectively, most of the British Army Irish regiments’ footsoldiers: the unskilled labourers and ‘lumpenproletarian’ elements – and most of their officers: the well-to-do Protestants. (The big Catholic farmers, meanwhile (who provided practically no recruits to the British Army at all) were widely seen as lagging not so far behind the Protestant ascendancy in the ‘anti-National’ stakes.)

For everyone sandwiched socio-economically in between the Protestant ascendancy and the Catholic big farmers on the one hand, and the ‘lumpenproletariat’ on the other; an ambiguous, inchoate and politically ill-defined nationalism was increasingly a cultural norm by the second decade of the twentieth century – aided and abetted by the school curricula that upper-working class and lower-middle class Catholic children were exposed to, which featured strongly nationalist textbooks and, increasingly, the teaching of the Irish language. We might even call this a type of ‘banal nationalism’ (Billig 1995) – albeit without a state. To be sure, it was from this seedbed that most of the members of the separatist organizations sprang.

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69 See Hart (2003:129-134) on the overwhelmingly proletarian and unskilled nature of rank and file recruitment to both the British Army and the post-1922 Irish Free State ‘National Army’, and the relative immunity of farmers and farmers’ sons to recruitment to either. See Hart (1998:142-145) on the mutual antipathy common (though not ubiquitous) during the years of the independence struggle between separatists and ‘big’ or prosperous Catholic farmers.

70 Although some scholars (Inglis 1998) have emphasized the growth of a shadow state of sorts from the late nineteenth century on, anchored in the Catholic Church and its institutions (it controlled much of the education system and the healthcare system in Catholic Ireland) – and this nexus was an important source of nationalist ideas. Some scholars have even cast the ‘Irish Revolution’ as a stage in the ‘Devotional Revolution’ that had been growing in Ireland since the consolidation of the Catholic Church after the great Famine of the mid-nineteenth century. See Garvin (1987).
Alas, this does not quite work as a causal explanation of the emergence of the separatist movement. Many Volunteers were of this socio-cultural background, and had been to schools with ‘nationalist’ curricula. But just as most Gaelic Leaguers and GAA players did not become Volunteers, most people who were of this cultural background, and who had been to schools with such curricula, did not become Volunteers either.

Hart points out that, in terms of cultural and political background, there seems to have been little to distinguish those who did join the separatist movement from many of their peers. He argues that the main determinant of whether one joined the movement or not was simply whether one was exposed to the right social networks or not. Volunteer companies were built around kinship, neighbourhood, and friendship groups; around groups of co-workers, and football or hurling teams. But then, many such groups, and many such teams, never sprouted Volunteer companies (Hart 1998:209-210). Indeed, separatism put down deep roots in some locales, and skipped others entirely. That the experience of the revolutionary years was much more intense in some parts of the country than in others is well known; but what is less commonly reflected upon is that even in the counties that saw the most fighting – and even in legendary ‘Rebel Cork’ – certain valleys and districts were completely barren territory for the separatist movement, even though they lay adjacent to revolutionary hotbeds. Hart (1998:220) tells us that Cork IRA man

Michael O’Suilleabhain’s home village of Kilnamartyra was a Volunteer stronghold but a mile south was Ballyvoig, a ‘lost valley’ where ‘all the inhabitants, including my uncle Patsy, were honest, peaceful and law-abiding... none of the young men was even a nominal Volunteer... I knew them all. Most of them had gone to school with me. Not a Volunteer among them. All physically fit. A few good athletes among them. No good or harm in them, excepting some who covertly sneered at us.’

Ernie O’Malley (2002:129), whose job it was, as a roving IRA organizer, to visit places like Kilnamartyra and Ballyvoig, tells a similar story:
Sometimes I came to a townland where there was a company of twenty or thirty men and boys. Tall, well set up or lanky, eager, lithe, willing to learn and anxious to take risks. Six miles away across the barony the people were cowed; the men had no initiative. They were irresolute... Areas of country had a habit of going to sleep.

All of this brings Hart to the conclusion that it was the contingency of personal connections more than anything else that shaped the patchwork of the separatist map:

The question, then, is not: why did certain men become nationalists? It is, rather: why did certain nationalists become Volunteers? These men shared very real convictions and ideals, but it seems clear that, for the majority of Volunteers, the decision to join was a collective rather than an individual one, rooted more in local communities and networks than in ideology or formal political loyalties. Young men tended to join the organization together with, or following, members of their families and friendship groups. The 'boys' who 'strawed',71 played, worked, and grew up together became the 'boys' who drilled, marched, and raided together... (Hart 1998:208)

For most IRA men, joining the movement in its early days required little deliberate choice or effort. If you had the right connections or belonged to a certain family or circle of friends you became a Volunteer along with the rest of your crowd. If not, you probably stayed outside or on the fringes. (Hart 1998:220)

Hart's argument is compelling, and represents probably the most convincing empirical description of the broad dynamics of IRA recruitment yet proffered by any historian of the revolutionary years. However, as empirically accurate as it may be, it leads back to the quandary identified by McAdam in his critique of the literature on social movement recruitment. Hart is no social scientist or social movements researcher – but actually, his approach to IRA recruitment mirrors that of the social movements researchers McAdam critiques. That is, the account of IRA recruitment seems convincing on a certain empirical level of analysis – but on other levels of analysis, it is quite empty.

71 A ‘charivari’-type ritual in parts of rural Ireland well into the twentieth century.
Young men may indeed have become Volunteers because they knew other Volunteers – but why had the latter become Volunteers in the first place?

We are reminded of McAdam’s (1999:xii) statement of the dilemma: “... to say that people join movements because they know others who are involved, ignores the fact that on the eve of the movement, there are no salient alters available as models for egos involvement...”

Having identified the hole in explanations of recruitment and action, McAdam proposes an emphasis on the “creative cultural work” that he reckons is often going on behind the scenes of movement emergence:

... for any established organization or associational network to become a central node in movement recruitment requires a great deal of creative cultural work that has been totally glossed in the dominant account, which is simultaneously too individualist and too structuralist for my taste... (McAdam 1999:xii-xiii)

For McAdam, this is where “social appropriation” comes in. He argues that for action to take place, would-be activists must either create a new organizational vehicle, or commandeer an existing organization (and attendant collective identity upon which it routinely rests.). They usually do the latter (McAdam 1999:xv).

So what about the Irish case? On the one hand, McAdam’s proposed approach is extremely compelling here: I have disputed the extent to which existing organizations were directly ‘appropriated’ by the separatist activists, but a general commandeering of the sense of collective identity that attached to a lowest common denominator popular nationalism in Ireland seems indisputable.

But was this down to the “creative cultural work” of movement activists? In part, it surely was. As indicated in this chapter, the separatists had to fight hard to build their movement after 1916. But I have also suggested that, once the
transformative event of the Easter Rising had skewed popular assumptions about the impossibility of revolt against the British state, and once it became clear that ‘the fight’, so to speak, was ‘on’ – or even that a fight might be on – many individuals and groups around the country needed little coaxing to join the movement, and probably gravitated towards it relatively independently of the recruitment and organizing work of the movement leadership. Perusal of the finer points of the Sinn Féin manifesto was not necessary to apply – all the cultural capital really needed was the same reference points of lowest common denominator popular nationalism imbibed by anyone who had had a standard upper working class or lower middle class Catholic education with the Christian Brothers or a similarly nationalist-leaning religious order:

If lowest common denominator nationalist collective identity was indeed commandeered by the separatist cause, but the core movement activists were only partly responsible for this act of appropriation, how then can we understand what happened?

This question is partly about culture – or more specifically, about mainstream Irish nationalist culture in the early twentieth century, and about what happened in order to transform it into a vehicle for armed, insurrectionary separatism. In trying to conceptualise culture in terms of questions about social movement emergence, McAdam (1999:xxxiii) criticizes Swidler’s (1986) influential description of culture as a “tool kit”, pointing out that instead, culture usually works as a

set of binding cognitive, affective, and behavioural strictures. The question then becomes, under what conditions are we likely to transcend these strictures and to rediscover the tool-like promise of multi-vocal cultural materials?

In trying to identify what kinds of conditions this might mean, McAdam finds some common ground with Swidler:

Swidler seems to answer this query in much the same way I would. She draws a distinction between culture’s role during “settled” and “unsettled” times... But
how are we to account for the onset of these “unsettled times”? In my view, the kind of 
exogenous change processes discussed above constitute the source of 
Swidler’s turbulence, increasing the likelihood that cognitive and affective 
routines will be abandoned in the search for new interpretations of reality and 
the innovative lines of action that follow from same. (McAdam 1999:xxxiii)

This broad framework maps quite easily onto the Irish case in hand: the ‘tool-like 
promise’ of the ‘multi-vocal materials’ of Irish nationalism was indeed 
‘rediscovered’ during highly unsettled times, in the shadow of exogenous change 
processes and exogenous shocks. But ‘unsettled times’ do not necessarily beget 
movement emergence and mass mobilization. As McAdam (1999: xxxii-xxxiii) 
points out,

it is very possible to have what seem like “promising structural circumstances 
– that is, circumstances rife with imminent “threat” or “opportunity” – that fail 
to produce so much as a ripple of protest activity. Indeed, I regard such cases 
as modal.

Something more than ‘unsettled times’ is needed – but it does not always occur. 
In Ireland, the strategic initiative of the Easter Rising broadcast not just how 
unsettled times were, but showed that the existing regime could be challenged. 
This disturbed routine expectations and assumptions about political possibilities 
in Ireland, and left the door open to a cadre of militants to build a movement on 
the strength of the Easter Rising’s example. This chapter has attempted to show a 
snapshot of the kind of movement-building work that separatist activists 
engaged in, amidst the ‘short-run opportunity’ opened by the Easter Rising. But it 
has also suggested that the work of the separatist movement’s hardcore of 
activists – no matter how energetic – was probably not enough to create the 
movement all by itself. Amid the ‘unsettled times’ and the breakdown of what 
 existed of a hegemonic order in Ireland, the movement found many recruits. But 
many recruits also found a movement. This is no hair-splitting distinction to 
make: once the movement was built, the dynamics of the guerrilla war that 
followed – and even, arguably, the very outbreak of that guerrilla war itself – 
would hinge on the uneasy equilibrium between a movement leadership in
Dublin trying to build a republic through a strategy of what might be called ‘armed dual power’ – and a provincial movement grassroots, in places like Cork, intent on ‘raising hell’ and fighting the state, regardless of what the Dublin leadership wanted. This uneasy equilibrium, between agendas that did not always coincide, would shape the guerrilla war decisively. The next chapter will attempt to tell the story of how this unfolded.
6. STRATEGIC INTERACTION IN THE IRISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, 1919-1921

Introduction

In the last chapter I suggested that while there were deep structural causes for the crisis conditions seen in Ireland before and during its independence struggle - and while the rapid 'social appropriation' of large blocs of Irish society by the independence movement after the 1916 Rising may have reflected a hegemonic crisis brought about by such structural factors, as much as it reflected the kind of 'intense cultural work’ McAdam (1999) speaks about, on the part of the separatists - nonetheless, the particular course of the conflict's development and outcome were highly contingent on the agency of the contending parties, and of their strategic interaction. As has been stressed in previous chapters, the separatists who won what was at least a partial victory against the British state had looked like unlikely victors - or even 'partial victors' - a couple of years previously, in so far as they were visible at all. Furthermore, even after the separatists had attained what could be described as something like a counter-hegemonic position in Catholic Ireland, their partial victory against the British state was by no means a sure thing: as pointed out in the last chapter, the separatist position looked somewhat counter-hegemonic by the time of their electoral landslide of 1918, and their accompanying rout of their rivals in the atrophying Nationalist Party. But this election was not fought on a manifesto of armed struggle against the British state, and such armed struggle as occurred between 1920 and 1921 was not obviously a foregone conclusion at this time - let alone an ultimate partial victory in that armed struggle.

In this chapter, I will not attempt to produce a new theory of the courses or outcomes of nationalist struggles, guerrilla warfare, or asymmetrical conflict. But I will attempt to do something more modest: to demonstrate the highly contingent nature of the course of the Irish struggle, as against determinist interpretations - and in doing so I will be particularly concerned with showing how this contingency hinged on the strategic interaction of the contending
parties to the Irish conflict. However, while I am chiefly concerned here with contingency and the ability of contentious actors to shape political processes through their strategic action, I will also ask whether there were limits to this contingency, and limits to the ability of contentious actors to shape events: that is, whether after various contingent happenings, the conflict passed particular 'points of no return', beyond which certain kinds of solutions were no longer possible, and beyond which certain kinds of outcomes became almost unavoidable.\textsuperscript{72}

While this exercise is hoped to be theoretically useful, it is also hoped to shed light on some lingering questions over how to make sense of the empirical experience of the Irish independence struggle. Concluding his 2002 book \textit{The Irish War of Independence} - astonishingly, as Brian Hanley (2003) points out, the first monograph straightforwardly devoted [by a major scholar] to the conflict - Michael Hopkinson (2002:201) suggests that the real question raised by the period is that of just how "such a part-time, untrained, under-resourced force [as the IRA/Sinn Féin] could succeed to the extent it did." To be clear, "succeed to the extent it did" refers here to the fact that the Irish separatists walked away from the conflict with a deal creating an effectively independent state over the majority of Irish territory, and the effective withdrawal of the British state from that territory - more than anyone but the most hardline and ambitious of Irish separatists had thought possible up to a couple of years before. The stark asymmetry between the British and Irish forces underlined the dramatic nature of the development: after the exertions of the First World War, Britain was still one of the world's great powers, still in possession of an empire and one of the world's most formidable militaries. The Irish separatists, on the other hand, were a patchy coalition of jail-breakers, elected representatives of an underground parliament that almost never met for fear of mass arrest, and ragtag guerrillas with chronically few weapons.

Hopkinson suggests that:

\textsuperscript{72}This, obviously, calls to mind debates concerning path dependence, 'reactive sequences' and 'event chains'. See Mahoney (2000).
The answer to that [question] lies in the nature of guerrilla warfare and the weakness of British policy.

IRA fighting did not need to be that widespread or that continuous: individual actions on a comparatively small scale had profound effects on British opinion and morale. The British military had a far higher opinion of IRA Intelligence in the provinces than the IRA's own GHQ did. The success of a guerrilla force is partly built on myth: from a British perspective it was a sinister, shadowy, intangible and ubiquitous presence threatening them anywhere and at any time. For Irish nationalists, the IRA were their own heroic freedom fighters.

Occurring in the concluding remarks to Hopkinson's book, this is not, of course, a real answer to the question he raises, but the start of an answer. After all, saying 'the nature of guerrilla war explains why the guerrillas succeeded' may work to some degree here, but it is a poor answer to, say, the question of why guerrilla warfare does not always succeed, or why it has failed elsewhere. Likewise, 'weakness of policy' is rather imprecise. As a historian, Hopkinson prefers to let the narrative of his book chapters do most of the talking, and to address such 'big' questions in a perfunctory manner via concluding remarks, while avoiding explicit theoretical extrapolations.

But there is an important point to Hopkinson's analysis: for him, the IRA really did achieve something in their struggle with the British state and other opponents. Such an analysis has not been shared by all commentators. On the other end of the spectrum from the nationalist historians who viewed the IRA, in their fight against the British state, as the agents of some kind of metaphysical national destiny, some revisionist historians, and others sceptical of militant Irish nationalism, have argued that the separatists achieved little if anything beyond what could have been achieved without the war and its attendant bloodshed. Hopkinson (2002:203-204) points out that there is little basis to this view, and that before the IRA military offensive came into its own, the hopes of 'advanced nationalists' in Ireland had met with nothing other than frustration:

73 [On the other end of the spectrum from the nationalist historians who viewed the IRA's achievements against the British state in terms of the unfolding of some kind of national destiny, ...]
There lingered in some parts of Irish society an unease about the methods used to win this limited independence and the question has been asked whether a similar result could have been gained without violence. Passive resistance tactics had shown no signs of achieving their object by 1920 and IRA actions had been instrumental in causing the collapse of British administration as well as impressing the British government. Without IRA actions, the likelihood is that any substantial British concessions would have been delayed for much longer. The primary reason for the abrupt slide to widespread violence in the second half of 1920 was the British government’s refusal to offer settlement terms which could have proved at least as acceptable then as they did a year later.

Accepting Hopkinson’s point that the IRA’s war did represent a very significant David-versus-Goliath success - or partial success - but that a theoretically-minded explanation of how this happened is still missing, is the starting point of this chapter. The rebels of 1916 spoke explicitly of the window of opportunity they sought to exploit while the British state was already overextended through the war on the European mainland - but the post-war years were short on obvious such ‘political opportunities’. The prospect of ‘resource mobilization’ is also undermined in these years by the fact that the IRA campaign was defined more by the absence of resources than by their surfeit. Their main resources were not material ones, but guile, and a wily determination to fight for independence at all costs. This chapter will consider the deployment of these properties by the separatists over the course of the ‘War of Independence’ phase of the Irish independence struggle, the response of the British state, the separatists’ counter-response, and so on - echoing recent theoretical attention to strategic interaction by scholars of contentious politics.

**Analytical approach: Strategic interaction**

Critiquing the approach to contentious politics studies associated with concepts such as ‘political process’ and ‘political opportunity structures’, and associated with scholars such as McAdam et al., Jasper (2011) argues for an approach to
contentious politics that gives space to agency by taking seriously choice and strategic action - and interaction - in the shaping of processes of political contention. Jasper’s critique of the 'political process' approach - and of its central concept of 'political opportunities' - is complex, but its main elements boil down to a handful of key observations.

Jasper (2011:11) identifies the "sponginess" of the political opportunities concept as a problem – meaning too much "conceptual lumping" that conflates grievances and resources, short-run openings and long-run structural changes together under the same heading. Relatedly, he cites the inconsistent application of the term "political opportunity", resulting in ambiguity surrounding exactly what kinds of opportunities researchers should be looking for in cases of political contention. (Even colleagues as close as Tilly and McAdam drew up conflicting lists of the different types of political opportunities thought to occur in contentious politics scenarios (Jasper 2011:8-9).)

Jasper proposes that much can be salvaged from the political opportunities concept - going so far as to suggest, on the basis of the unusual project behind his co-edited *Contention In Context* book, that more precision in defining and conceptualising different types of political opportunities may show that they tend to occur in certain types of cases, and in certain types of states and societies, but not in others. Sometimes, then, the non-occurrence of political opportunities demands other tools to explain the emergence and trajectory of political contention. And even when they do occur - as Charles Tilly acknowledged towards the end of his career - it takes agency to recognise and take advantage of an opportunity in the first place (Jasper 2011:8). (Jasper points out that it is very likely that situations that could plausibly be called political opportunities very probably occur all the time; the point is, though, that usually no one takes advantage of them. This leads on to the problem that much of the time, political opportunities may only be identified in retrospect - after a contentious actor has taken advantage of it - raising obvious problems to do with tautology and triviality, and also throwing into question the characterisation of such a 'political opportunity' as an 'independent variable' (Jasper 2011:8-9, 17).) Reflecting the
lifelong preoccupations of Charles Tilly, the political opportunities approach emphasized the widest possible context in explaining contentious politics phenomena - rejecting the penchant of previous generations of researchers to explain collective action as the sum of individual-level grievance and sense of deprivation. The problem with this is that activists are precisely those types of people whose actions do not automatically respond in a predictable way to mere changes in context, and which are not interpretable merely in terms of ‘situations’, institutionalized expectations etc. On the contrary, it is precisely their capacity to buck expectations and to go against the grain that makes them activists (Jasper 2011:10).

Jasper (2011:9) found no less deterministic the turn-of-the-millennium attempt of McAdam et al. to respond to their critics via a turn from political opportunities to "a mechanisms approach that specifies smaller causal chunks that can be concatenated to explain complex processes and outcomes" (or the "processes" they "confusingly... retained... as predictable concatenations of mechanisms" (Ibid)). [Still missing, for Jasper (2011:10), were strategic interaction and choice.]

As a way out of the ‘selection bias’ problem mentioned above - that of ‘selecting on the dependent variable’, which reminds us that ‘opportunities’ may be there in many situations where no one notices or does anything about them – Jasper (2011:17) advocates looking not for ‘opportunities’, but for the choices and strategic actions that people undertake in given conditions. For Jasper, this amounts to looking at what people actually do, rather than awkwardly saying they go about their political lives encountering opportunities.

While Jasper (2011:17) accepts that Tilly’s approach may work better in the long-view, he suggests that sorting out causality is much harder in a shorter timeframe. For this, "we may need to abandon multivariate models that try to specify independent and dependent variables... We may need something similar to... extended forms of game theory..." (Ibid)

Jasper goes on to suggest that “One possibility is to focus more on choice as
events triggering other events” - and that most opportunities are the proximate result of players’ choices and interactions, while structures are the residue of more distant ones.

There was an elegance and a parsimony to the Tillian approach to political opportunities, at its best. Jasper’s critiques of that approach are compelling, but so far do not amount to an equivalent, 'off-the-shelf' theoretical framework - let alone an elegant or parsimonious one. What Jasper (2011:31) does suggest, though, is that “A carefully documented series of actions and reactions may be a focus that a strategic approach and a historian's approach share”.

**Strategic Action Fields**

Jasper makes a compelling case for looking at political contention in terms of contingency and strategic interaction - as opposed to more schematic, deterministic, mechanistic and structuralist approaches. However, as previously stated, his discussion of contingency and strategic interaction is partly critical, and partly suggestive of guiding principles in new ways forward - but is mostly reticent about prescribing specific research strategies, let alone a new model of strategic interaction, in any great detail.

But Jasper has not been the only scholar of social movements and contentious politics to recently address subjects such as the structure-agency problem, strategic interaction, and contingency. For example, starting from some similar premises as Jasper, Fligstein and McAdam (2011, 2012) have been more willing to engage in explicit theorizing as to the relationship between structure and agency in contentious politics - and beyond - and to propose specific research strategies in this vein.

Here, I will provide a cursory overview of Fligstein’s and McAdam's approach, as well as briefly consider its potential utility with regard to the Irish case. In doing this, I will in turn consider some criticisms of Fligstein's and McAdam's approach made by Goldstone and Useem (2012), as well as their alternative proposals for
how to conceptualize and study social stability and change.

Fligstein and McAdam describe society as a "great latticework" of "nested" and "interdependent" strategic action fields, in which

there is constant jockeying going on in fields as a result of their contentious nature. Actors make moves and other actors have to interpret them, consider their options, and act. Actors who are both more and less powerful are constantly making adjustments to the conditions in the field given their position and the actions of others (Fligstein and McAdam 2011:5).

Echoing the language used by McAdam (1999) elsewhere, and cited here previously, Fligstein and McAdam (2011:5) distinguish between contention within SAFs in "settled" and "unsettled times":

This [constant jockeying for position] leaves great latitude for the possibility of piecemeal change in the positions that actors occupy. Even in "settled times," less powerful actors can learn how to take what the system will give them and improve their positions in the field...

But, if there are more unsettled conditions or the relative power of actors is equalized, then there is a possibility for a great deal of jockeying for position. All of the meanings in a field can break down, including what the purpose of the field is, what positions the actors occupy, what the rules of the game are, and how actors come to understand what others are doing. Indeed, at this extreme, the order of an SAF is up for grabs. It is possible for a whole new order to then appear with a redefinition of the positions of the players, the rules of the game, and the overriding ends of the SAF. The purpose of our theorization is to understand better where such orders come from, and how they are continuously contested and move back and forth on the continuum just described. We expect SAFs to always be in some flux as the process of contention is ongoing and the threats to an order always in existence.

So far, this description of strategic action and interaction is not so far removed from that of Jasper's (2004, 2006, 2011) - and indeed Fligstein's and McAdam's inventory of actors populating the latticework of strategic action fields does not
sound so radically different from that of the "players" and "compound players" in Jasper's (2006) "arenas" - as well as being redolent on a deeper level of the classic challenger-incumbent model of social movements associated in particular with Gamson (1975):

Our interest in the dynamics of both conflict/change and stability/order is reflected in our general characterization of the composition of SAFs. We see fields as comprised of incumbents, challengers, and, sometimes, governance units. First introduced by Gamson (1975), the incumbent/challenger distinction has long been a conceptual staple of social movement theory. Incumbents are those actors who wield dispro-portionate influence within a field and whose interests and views tend to be heavily reflected in the dominant organization of the SAF. Thus, the purposes of the field are shaped to their interests, the positions in the field are defined by their claims on the lion’s share of the resources in the field, the rules tend to favor them, and shared meanings tend to legitimate and support their privileged position within the field.

Challengers, on the other hand, occupy less privileged niches within the field and ordinarily wield little influence over its operation. While they recognize the nature of the field and the dominant logic of incumbent actors, they can usually articulate an alternative vision of the field and their position in it. This does not, however, mean that challengers are normally in open revolt against the inequities of the field or aggressive purveyors of oppositional logics. On the contrary, most of the time challengers can be expected to conform to the prevailing order. They may do so grudgingly, taking what the system gives them and awaiting new opportunities to challenge the structure and logic of the system (Fligstein and McAdam 2011:5-6).

According to this model, then, society consists of a rich tapestry of interconnected strategic action fields, in which challengers and incumbents vie with one another for position - in relatively settled times achieving piecemeal positional changes, and in relatively unsettled times achieving potentially much greater changes as run-of-the-mill jockeying for position gives way to the all-out "episodes of contention" familiar to scholars of social movements. At this point fields can be radically re-arranged, rupture, collapse, or give birth to new fields.
But if the pivot between routine competition and outright contention within fields hinges on times being either "settled" or "unsettled", what accounts for this important distinction? How do times become "unsettled" in the first place?

Fligstein and McAdam suggest that while sometimes, fields can become destabilized - and hence "unsettled" - for endogenous reasons, typically the destabilizing event comes in the form of an "exogenous shock" emanating from another field:

While fields can devolve into conflict as a result of internal processes, it is far more common for a crisis to develop as a result of an exogenous shock emanating from a proximate field..

The main theoretical implication of the interdependence of fields is that it is a source of a certain level of rolling turbulence in modern society. A significant change in any given SAF is like a stone thrown in a still pond, sending ripples outward to all proximate fields. This does not mean that all or even most of the ripples will destabilize other fields. Like stones, changes come in all sizes. Only the most dramatic are apt to send ripples of sufficient intensity as to pose a real threat to the stability of proximate fields.

Most incumbents are generally well positioned and fortified to withstand these change pressures... Possessed of... material, cultural, and political resources, incumbents are positioned to survive.

Sometimes, however, these advantages may not be enough to forestall crisis. In rare instances, the sheer magnitude of the perturbation—e.g., the recent "subprime" mortgage crisis—may impose chaos on many proximate fields, especially those that stand in a vertically dependent relationship to the SAF in question..

We see the onset of contention as a highly contingent outcome of an ongoing process of interaction involving at least one incumbent and one challenger (Fligstein and McAdam 2011:8-9).

These are the bare bones of a much more elaborate and ambitious theory, spelled out here at a fairly high level of abstraction. Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out
that such a model could be applied to the Irish case: Nationalists, Unionists, and the British establishment had been vying with one another in a struggle over the question of Irish governance for many years - their structural positions in the struggle being comparable to, if of course necessarily rather different from, respectively, the roles of the civil rights activists, white southerners opposed to civil rights, and the federal government in the "field of racial politics" used by Fliqstein and McAdam (2012) to illustrate their model of contention in action.

From this point of view, the juncture of 1914 - and the still birth of Home Rule in that year - would have represented little more than routine contention in the strategic action field known simply as "the Irish Question". Challengers and incumbents vied for position, but the Nationalists did not get their Home Rule - that is, the field did not rupture, and no new fields were born. To bring the story forward, from this SAFs point of view, the critical "episode of contention" really started at Easter 1916, when the "exogenous shock" of the World War created an opportunity for the separatists on the radical flank of the mainstream Nationalists to 'change the game'. By bringing their own war to the streets of Dublin and declaring an Irish Republic, the separatists amply broadcast the death of the moderate Home Rule project by provoking British forces into (literally) bombarding Dublin into submission. In Fliqstein's and McAdam's terms, it could be said that this most dramatically "destabilized the field" of Anglo-Irish relations.

And in explaining the "field crisis", "episode of contention", and "field rupture" unfolding in Ireland over the ensuing years, the 'World War I as exogenous shock' thesis can be brought even further. For while the British government's loss of nerve over implementing Home Rule in 1914 effectively killed off the Nationalist Party's Home Rule project, the fateful decision of John Redmond, the Party leader, to support the war effort - pitching the gesture of mass Irish nationalist participation as a down payment on a bright Home Rule future - did much to kill off the credibility of the Nationalist Party itself. The war turned out not to be over by Christmas 1914 as per the jingoes' wild predictions, and after several years of fighting, Home Rule looked no more alive than the thousands of Irish war dead.
In terms of the growing alienation of Irish Catholics and nationalists from the Party and state, the war only continued to fray the threadbare fabric upon which existing field arrangements hung. IRA recruitment levels surged in 1918 as Government plans to spread the war draft to Ireland became public. It was on the back of this that Sinn Féin won its landslide electoral victory in December 1918 - at the Nationalist Party’s expense - and this was also (as discussed earlier) a decisive moment in the senior Catholic Church hierarchy's distancing itself from support of the British state, and in the bishops’ softening of their line on the separatists.74

Field destabilization and the onset of contention is only the first part of any story of social change or rupture told from an SAFs point of view. What challengers do with the opportunities and openings brought about by such field destabilization is quite another matter - highly contingent, and dependent on their "social skill" (Fligstein and McAdam 2011:6-7) - another key building block of Fligstein's and McAdam's theory, consisting in the capacity of challengers to reinterpret and frame field realities in innovative ways, and to engage in "organizational appropriation" of existing groups (Fligstein and McAdam 2011:9), so as to constitute and mobilize new challenges to the status quo.

Thus, the next part of the story from an SAFs point of view would be the "social skill" deployed by the Irish separatists, and the highly contingent contention they engaged in with the British state over several years, culminating in the armed conflict of the War of Independence, and field transformation in the form of Irish partition, the creation of the Irish Free State in secession from the UK, and in turn, at a different scale, the transformation of the field of Irish nationalist politics with the ascendance of a new elite, and the split within the separatist movement marked by the bloodletting of the 1922-1923 Civil War.

But before getting any further into the ins and outs of the strategic interaction between the insurgents and the state once the onset of contention had taken

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74 This is to ignore, for now, various posited socio-economic links between the war and the episode of contention of 1916-1923.
place, it is worth thinking again about the explanatory power of the SAFs approach with regard to the Irish case in its basic premises, in light of the critiques of Goldstone and Useem mentioned earlier.

Goldstone and Useem critique Fligstein and McAdam's portrait of episodes of contention as arising out of ever-present challenger-incumbent jockeying for position - punctuated, of course, by the openings for change presented by disruptions to the field caused, invariably, by exogenous shocks. (This they see as a standard trope of the social movements literature.) They criticize what they see as Fligstein and McAdam's blurring of the line between such routine jockeying for position and much more dramatic episodes of rupture and change akin to revolution and system breakdown. For Goldstone and Useem, this connects crucially to the question of values, norms, rules and institutions - which they argue are largely absent from Fligstein and McAdam's model - and the fractal nature of these across society. For them, routine positional competition, and more existential struggles over fundamental rules and norms, are of entirely different natures:

... Fligstein and McAdam under-theorize a critical part of their own model - the fractal nature of SAFs and the implications of fractal structures for larger social dynamics and institutions. In particular, when they discuss SAFs as 'nested' they do not distinguish between the simple coexistence of units that operate at different scales, and the binding of units at different scales to institutional structures that are reproduced across those scales. Thus, as one of us, Goldstone (1991), has pointed out, the fractal nature of social order - meaning self-similar structures on varied scales - often implies that social order coheres because institutions create similar rule frameworks (aristocratic privilege or democracy, market choice, individual rights) that operate across different levels of society. This one of the reasons that great revolutions are such major events is because they challenge the basic rule frameworks of authority and status that shape order from local inter-personal interaction up to regional and local economic and governance practices. A democratic society differs from an aristocratic one because certain rules of rights and responsibilities are agreed upon, institutionalized, and practices across many different scales and levels of social organization, not just because many SAFs are independently run according to such rules. By omitting consideration of how institutional frameworks do or do
not span fractal spaces in societies, Fligstein and McAdam also cannot distinguish between routine competition among SAFs for power and position, and true crises involving efforts to change the institutions and rule frameworks that provide the structure for vast numbers and levels of SAFs across an entire society (Goldstone and Useem 2012:41).

Goldstone and Useem maintain that the latter, much rarer, and special type of crisis tends to arise not simply from challenger-incumbent contestation - and the deployment of challengers' 'social skill' - but thanks to the destabilizing effects of instances of elite disensus and disarray - which arise out of the failure of elites to find consensual and effective ways to resolve chronic systemic problems, typically over the use, replenishment and distribution of finances and resources.\(^75\)

... it should always be explicit that institutions and "governance units" do not continue to exist simply at the wish of incumbents. Any such governance units require resources - financial and personnel - that must constantly be replenished. Fligstein and McAdam say nothing about the ability of SAFs to solve their fiscal and other problems that can generate movement action. The incumbent challenger model has long conceptualized collective action as flowing out of the struggle between incumbent and challenger which, in turn, leads to crisis. The reverse process may be the more fundamental one. Unsolvable institutional problems unleash collective action. In the case of prison riots, for example, it is the disorganization of the state, rather than the organization of the inmates, that predicts their occurrence. Likewise, in contemporary Greece, state elites have been unable to solve a fiscal crisis: spending far more than collected in state revenue. This has unleashed collective action, pulling in multiple directions (Goldstone and Useem 2012:40).

\(^75\) The way Goldstone and Useem speak of these problems suggests that they are internal to the system - but we might ask how many such 'internal problems' are really all that internal - reflective as they are of an international state system of wars and competition; Goldstone and Useem speak of the French Revolution and speak approvingly of Skocpol's historical institutionalist approach - but was not Skocpol's (1979) approach seminal for the very reason that it stressed the impact of war and competition in the inter-states system on the internal stability of regimes such as ancien regime France, Russia and China?
These problems often arise in the face of demographic pressures and changes in social mobility patterns - and crucially, it is often when certain elites attempt to initiate reforms that things come unstuck:

in his study of revolutions, Goldstone (1991) found that institutional breakdown that spurred efforts by elites to change institutions laid the foundation for popular uprisings. It was always efforts at reform from above that precipitated change and sparked the protests from below. This was documented by a study of the strains on those institutions: of the changes in social mobility and competition among different factions of the elites, and how fiscal weakness gave leverage to opposition elite factions and led rulers to seek changes in their own ruling institutions (Goldstone and Useem 2012:46).

In terms of the viability of Fligstein and McAdam's approach in the Irish context, many of Goldstone and Useem's points would seem to resonate: the years leading up to the terminal phase of the independence struggle were ones of crisis, and of seemingly chronic and intractable problems, of the kind linked by Goldstone and Useem to revolution and system breakdown. In the immediate run-up to the "episode of contention" that culminated in the War of Independence, the "strategic action field" of what was called "the Irish question" could only by means of some conceptual stretching be reconciled with the kind of picture of challenger-incumbent "jockeying for position" presented by Fligstein and McAdam.

The stakes of the "Irish question" SAF were not those of routine positional struggles: on the one hand, the great bulk of Irish Catholics - demographically dominant everywhere outside the north-eastern corner of the island - wanted greater autonomy. The intensity of this desire varied dramatically, running along a spectrum from that of the Catholics loyal to the British crown and to empire, who sought a Dublin Home Rule parliament within the United Kingdom, to the "advanced nationalists" who sought a republic and full independence. On the other hand lay the mostly Protestant "Unionists" - heirs to the centuries-long process of British colonization of the island, and most densely concentrated in the north-east, for whom any dilution of the link with Britain - and any
suggestion of subordination to a Dublin parliament, and to a Catholic democratic majority - were anathema. In the middle lay the British political establishment, deeply divided between the Conservatives, who tended to back the Northern Protestants to the hilt, and the Liberals, who by and large favoured a Home Rule settlement for Ireland, and tended to depend on the votes of the Home Rule-seeking Irish Nationalists in parliament.

As previously discussed, the attempts of Liberal governments to introduce a Home Rule settlement for Ireland came unstuck - with the crucial moment coming in the "Ulster Crisis" of 1914, when the mobilization of armed Unionists in the north-east convinced Lloyd George's Liberal government to back down, and to put its Irish Home Rule legislation on deep freeze - ostensibly to be revived after the resolution of the First World War. Lustick (1991) points out that in taking this decision, the British government opted for a short-term solution to its Irish problems, that scotched the hopes of moderate Irish nationalists for a satisfactory Home Rule settlement, and left them feeling cheated, thereby storing up the prospect of further and deeper contention over the Irish question in the longer term. Having contemplated a bold and high-risk strategy of facing down the Unionists militarily, the Liberals' nerve had failed at the crucial moment - with then Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill, having to literally recall warships dispatched for Ulster, and to humiliatingly deny in public that they had ever been steaming there in the first place (Lustick 1991). This juncture - effectively killing off the moderate Home Rule chapter of the struggle over Irish governance that had been fermenting for decades - would have profound implications for the relationship of Ireland to Britain, and for intra-Irish relations.

This episode of botched reform looks a lot like Goldstone and Useem's account of how revolutionary crises start: that is, in the ashes of elite attempts at reforms that crashed and burned. From this point of view, the field of "the Irish question" - or of "Anglo-Irish relations" - was not fundamentally destabilized by the "exogenous shock" of the World War, but by the unfolding of long-term structural problems - connected, indeed, to changes in demography, resource distribution, and social mobility in Ireland (as discussed elsewhere) - and by the failure of
British governing elites to solve these problems - thanks to specific decisions they made, in giving in to Unionist pressure in 1914, and shelving the Home Rule deal that might have placated nationalist Ireland.\textsuperscript{76}

However, there is no clear 'winner' here between the two approaches. While Goldstone and Useem's, with its emphasis on long-term, difficult-to-solve institutional problems, and elite failure to deal with them, speaks to some of the more compelling features of the Irish case, neither is Fligstein and McAdam's approach without its explanatory power. The field of the Irish question was already quite destabilized before the outbreak of the First World War; but, as discussed above, the war did aggravate the already fraying framework of existing field arrangements, and it did present the separatists with important opportunities to deliver the kiss of death to their Nationalist Party rivals, and to build their own movement, and prestige.

At least with regard to the Irish case, both approaches have deficiencies in terms of conceptualizing structure and agency, contingency and strategic interaction in the onset of contention. Fligstein and McAdam's approach makes the strongest claim to getting to grips with structure and agency. And yet the central ingredient in their explanation for the onset of contention seems to hide as much as it reveals. They say that SAFs usually become unsettled by exogenous shocks emanating from other, more or less proximate, fields. This may be a useful conceptual tool, and indeed, as a proposition, it may often, on a certain level, work. After all, a crisis in one area of social space often directly sparks another elsewhere; a war can provoke an economic crisis, and an economic crisis can provoke a war. But does this go very far in solving any problems to do with structure and agency? Is it good enough to say that a crisis in one strategic action

\textsuperscript{76}Indeed, Goldstone and Useem (2012:41) argue that Fligstein and McAdam's model is ill-equipped to handle such long-term change processes, existing rather in a continuum of uniform, short-term temporality:

\ldots Fligstein and McAdam seem to think in short and fairly uniform time-spans, characteristic of episodes of contention. There is not much room in the theory for longer term evolutionary changes of social organization, or for that matter for revolutionary social change that is the product of many decades of mounting contention.
field is sparked by a crisis in another? Or can the sum of such stories even add up to something that approximates in its explanatory power to any rival 'big picture' approach to explaining social change over long periods of time?

And anyway, if the explanation for a crisis in one SAF is that it was sparked by a crisis in another, then dare we ask: what sparked that one in the first place? Presumably, the answer is: a crisis in yet another SAF. Again, this may from a certain point of view be true. But taken to its logical conclusion, we might ask whether there is not a danger of some circularity in this line of reasoning.

Meanwhile, the logic behind Goldstone and Useem's central claim regarding the onset of systemic crisis and revolutionary contention is also open to question. They say that the catalysts for episodes of revolutionary contention can invariably be found in elite action, and in elite dissensus, rather than in popular mobilization. They stress elite bids at reform that go awry. But we might ask: why do elites take action, and attempt reform, in the first place? No doubt sometimes they are engaging in inter-elite squabbles over the distribution of resources among themselves. But sometimes - as with the British government in Ireland - their attempts at reform come when their hands are forced by the threat of popular action. Goldstone and Useem suggest that approaches such as Fligstein and McAdam's are rather movement-centric - but to say that it is elites who start revolutions - when in reality their actions may have a lot to do with the fear of popular action if they do not act - is surely open to the charge of being elite-centric, and of hiding as much as it reveals.

However, the discussion so far has been mostly concerned with the question of the onset of contention. Explaining the dynamics of a particular episode of contention once it has been set in motion is a different matter. Thus, what follows next is a broad overview of the Irish War of Independence, laying out some of its general dynamics. Following that will be a more 'analytical' section, with some more theoretically-minded comments on how to understand the course of the war in light of some of the theoretical issues raised here.
Overview of the Irish War of Independence

As mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, the problem of naming the years of conflict and upheaval that led to the creation of the Irish state has proved a thorny issue, and continues to be so for contemporary historians as much as it was for individuals who lived through the events in question. Hart (2003) has pointed out that while these events tend to be broken down into the 'Easter Rising' of 1916, the 'War of Independence' (or sometimes 'Anglo-Irish War' or 'Tan War') of 1919-21, and the 'Civil War' of 1922-23, this convention is entirely open to question. Hart points out that a strong case can be made for viewing the entire period as a protracted civil war gripping the whole island of Ireland (Hart (2003) points out that historians often write out the events that happened during this time in Ulster, as if the border already existed), rather than just the events in the new Irish Free State during 1922 and 1923 - the 'civil war' by convention. An equally strong case can be made for viewing the events as a revolution - depending, of course, on one's definition of 'revolution' - and the list of possible alternative paradigms through which to view the events of these years does not stop there.

The discussion of which terms make more sense is one for another place. But since, remarkably, there is no obvious or unambiguous term to use for the 1916-1923 process as a whole, I will refer to it in this chapter by the atypical but, I think, non-loaded and descriptive term, 'Irish independence struggle'. To refer to the period that this chapter is mostly concerned with, that of the terminal years leading to the signing of the truce and subsequent treaty agreement with the British government creating the Irish Free State - years marked by (among other things) the stepping up of guerrilla warfare activity on the part of the IRA, directed largely against the 'Crown Forces' of the British state, following the abeyance of armed struggle after the crushing of the Easter Rising of 1916 - I will follow convention with the term 'War of Independence'. (The War of Independence is usually said to have begun in January 1919, but a case could be
made for a start date about a year later.)77

However, even this periodisation of the conflict is open to question. I have argued elsewhere that the catalyst for much of what happened in these years was the transformative event of the Easter Rising in 1916 - and indeed a strong case can be made for making 1916 the year zero of the Irish independence struggle. In many ways this is beyond debate: the Rising was the single most important event in the breaking of the political hegemony of the Nationalist Party in Catholic Ireland, and in ushering in a new leadership for nationalist or Catholic Ireland - essentially the cadres who would go on to lead the War of Independence in the following years, and to create a new, essentially independent (albeit partitioned) Irish state in 1922.

However, the dramatic events of 1916 did not emerge in a vacuum. The island of Ireland had been in a state of ferment over the issue of Home Rule since the start of the decade, and the ferment did not respect the boundary of the Irish Sea. The years leading up to the outbreak of World War I in 1914 were experienced in Westminster as ones of chronic crisis, and "the Irish question" was at the centre of the web of interlocking crises. Liberal governments of the time relied on the parliamentary votes of Irish MPs of John Redmond's Nationalist Party, whose sole pursuit in parliament was the attainment of Home Rule for Ireland. This end was bitterly opposed by the Liberals' parliamentary rivals, the Conservatives, in partnership with the elected representatives of the Protestant Unionists of Ulster.

Before it brought the First World War, 1914 brought "the Ulster Crisis", when Northern Protestants - organised into the well-armed and well-trained mass militia of the Ulster Volunteer Force - threatened to resist militarily the imposition of any Irish Home Rule settlement on Ulster. That leading Liberal cabinet members such as David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill were prepared to take the unprecedented step of facing down the Unionists by force of

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77 Hart (2003:63) points out that it was in January 1920 "when the rebels' general headquarters (G.H.Q.) first authorized and encouraged a general offensive against the police. This triggered a military counter-offensive, so that two armies can be said to have been engaged, as opposed to police and militants."
arms - even dispatching warships to the Ulster coast - speaks to the fever pitch at which tensions in Britain and Ireland were running at this time.

However, for reasons that cannot be delved into here for lack of space, the Liberals backed down at the last moment on their willingness to confront the Ulster Unionists militarily, and the British government was saved from the imminent need to settle the "Ulster crisis" and the "Irish question" by the convenient commencement of hostilities in Europe. And 'saved' is precisely what the Liberal leadership felt themselves to be; Lustick (1993:210), in his comparative study of colonial conflicts in Ireland, Algeria and Israel-Palestine, quotes the then Liberal Prime Minister Asquith's later private reflections on the turn of events:

The events of 1911-14 challenged the legitimacy and stability of the British state more fundamentally than any crisis since the overthrow of the Stuart monarchy near the end of the seventeenth century. Most historians agree that only the outbreak of a world war prevented a civil war in Ireland which could well have spread, with disastrous consequences, into the rest of the United Kingdom. In his private papers, Asquith himself referred to "Luck ... in external things" as having played a major role in his political success, "above all (at a most critical and fateful moment...) in the sudden outbreak of the First World War."

The commitment to Irish Home Rule became legislation in 1914, but thanks to effective Ulster Unionist pressure, it did so in a state of deep freeze - the matter of its implementation to be sorted out after the resolution of the World War.

The successful Unionist manoeuvres against Home Rule did much to scupper the life's work of John Redmond, the Nationalist Party leader - and indeed, the entire oeuvre of the party since its foundation on the basis of the Home Rule issue by the legendary Charles Stewart Parnell in 1882. Meanwhile, the party did yet more to scupper itself through Redmond's unfortunate decision to back the British war effort, and to encourage Irish men to enlist.

This was the context for the bold move taken by the rebels of 1916. Elsewhere, I
have endorsed the view of Jasper and others that the concept of 'political opportunity' can still have explanatory power in certain circumstances, and the 1916 Rising looks like the taking advantage of a classic short-run opportunity. (Indeed, Ireland at this time was, arguably, the kind of society in which Jasper suggests 'political opportunities' are most likely to be relevant - that is, a partially democratic regime with large numbers of subjects who feel themselves locked out of full citizenship rights.)

The last chapter considered how the daring initiative of 1916 was followed by a period of regrouping for the separatists. By the election of 1918, the separatists had gone from the obscurity of the pre-1916 Rising era to something nearing hegemony in Catholic Ireland, amid the collapse of the Nationalist Party, and the welding together of the rebuilt Irish Volunteers - now increasingly referred to as the IRA - and the Sinn Féin party, as well as several auxiliary organisations, into a formidable paramilitary-political-civil society coalition.

But still, in 1918, there was little about the outcome of the independence struggle that was clear: neither the attainment of an essentially independent state in part of Ireland, nor the partition of the country, nor the 'Civil War' following British withdrawal, that would pit IRA veteran against IRA veteran, and take more lives than the 'War of Independence'. Neither was the character of the coming guerrilla conflict clear.

Here, I will attempt to indicate how contingent was the course of the independence struggle in the 'War of Independence' years, and how that contingency rode on the choices and counter-choices of the contending parties in their strategic interaction.

By convention, the start of the War of Independence tends to be dated to the 21st of January 1919. The act of this day seen as starting the war was the killing of

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78 “In fact, the cases seem to push beyond a simple dichotomy toward three kinds of regime. At one extreme, protestors can enjoy full citizenship rights… at the other, they can live in a dictatorship in which no one has rights and only a few have privileges. In between, protestors can live in a putatively democratic nation but still be excluded from full citizenship. This final status seems the one best suited to explanations through political opportunity structures…” (Jasper 2011:29)
two members of the Royal Irish Constabulary - the main police force in Ireland, largely staffed by Catholic Irish - by a group of IRA men in Soloheadbeg, County Tipperary. The day would go down in history as a watershed in the Irish independence struggle, and the identities of some of the IRA guerrillas involved - Seamus Robinson, Sean Treacy and Dan Breen - would become household names in Ireland - and infamous among the Crown Forces trying to hunt them down. However, this was not the first time that members of the Crown Forces had been attacked since the reorganization of the Irish Volunteers/IRA, and the reason the attack in County Tipperary gained the reputation it did - perhaps an unwarranted one - was because it fell on the same day as the opening of Dail Eireann in Dublin. The Dail was the homespun republican parliament established by the Sinn Féin candidates who won seats in the UK general election of December 1918, but who refused to sit in Westminster. Though the separatists of the Sinn Féin-IRA nexus would succeed in establishing some elements of a counter-state in Ireland during the War of Independence - including 'republican courts' and 'republican police' in parts of the country from which the Crown Forces had effectively withdrawn - the Dail was never to become a fully functioning parliament before the end of the War, meeting infrequently for fear of mass arrest, suffering the absence of the large numbers of incarcerated members of parliament, and existing as much for propaganda purposes as for practical ones. Nonetheless, the coincidence of the Dail's opening with the ambush in Tipperary was rife with (perhaps unwanted) symbolism - even if the attack by Dan Breen and his comrades was a solo-run, carried out without authorisation from either the Dail or from IRA General Headquarters in Dublin. Indeed, news of the attack caused widespread consternation in both bodies.

Dating the start of the War of Independence to the opening of the Dail following the landslide Sinn Féin election victory of December 1918 makes for neat periodisation - but any real attention to the chronology of War of Independence violence shows a rather different reality. While Hanley (2003) points out that the casualty figures for the War are still highly debatable in certain respects, Hopkinson has estimated they were something in the region of 1,400 altogether, including perhaps 550 separatist fighters, perhaps 200 civilians, and something
like 624 members of the Crown Forces (Hopkinson 2002:201-202). ('Crown Forces' includes RIC, Dublin Metropolitan Police, British regular military, and members of the special gendarmeries the 'Black and Tans' and 'Auxiliaries' formed in 1920, largely consisting of British World War I veterans.)

Few of these casualties occurred before 1920, and from mid-1920 the violence escalated towards the most bloody phase of the conflict in the six months or so leading up to the Truce of July 1921 that ceased major hostilities between the IRA and the Crown Forces, and paved the way for the Treaty negotiations. The figures are stark: whereas Hart (2003:66-67) estimates total victims of "revolutionary violence" - that is, serious "wounding" as well as killings - at 87 for all of 1919, the equivalent figure for the first quarter of 1920 alone is 96; followed by 229 in the second quarter of 1920; 682 in the third quarter; and 658 in the fourth quarter. "Revolutionary violence" shows a resumed escalation into 1921, with 907 victims in the first quarter, and peaks at 1,127 in the second quarter. In the context of the July 1921 Truce, the equivalent figures drop to 402 and 169, in the third and fourth quarters of 1921, respectively.

More recently, and on the basis of a major project concerned specifically with gathering and analysing data on "Irish Revolution" casualties, O'Halpin (2012) has settled on a somewhat different tally of "revolutionary" casualties, at 2141. Admittedly, this is not exactly a like-for-like comparison with all other figures; for while Hopkinson takes into account casualties of the 'War of Independence' - usually taken to mean January 1919 to July 1921 - O'Halpin's purview is that of the "Irish Revolution". However, O'Halpin lops off everything that happened before 1917 (including the Easter Rising, whose death toll he puts at 482) and everything after 1921 to get the 2141 figure, meaning that it is roughly comparable to Hopkinson's. (Not many casualties occurred in 1917 or 1918, or from July to December 1921.)

O'Halpin (2012) points out that

Assigning responsibility for the 2141 fatalities reported is not a matter of simply
splitting the total between rebels and government forces. The IRA were definitely responsible for 46% of these fatalities, and Crown forces for 42%. A further 6% were the work of undenominated snipers or rioters, almost all in sectarian clashes in Belfast. 2% occurred in cross-fire between Crown forces and separatists, 1% were killed by loyalists, 1% by civilians, and the killers of the remaining 2% are unknown.

He goes on to corroborate and challenge some of Hart’s findings:

Within the aggregate of 2141 deaths, 898 (48%) were civilian and 1243 (52%) combatant. The civilian proportion rose from 39% in 1920 to 45% in 1921. This confirms Peter Hart’s finding that the proportion of civilian fatalities grew in 1921, which was also the most violent year accounting for 61% of all deaths between 1917 and 1921. However, Hart’s estimate that 64% of deaths in 1921 were civilian is clearly excessive.29 The discrepancy cannot be explained simply by methodological differences, such as our inclusion of deaths in motor traffic accidents involving police and military vehicles, which some might find problematic. Rather, it arises mainly from the restricted range of sources available when Hart conducted his research. (Ibid)

The conflict showed a distinct spatial as well as temporal pattern. Indeed, the 'Irish' War of Independence could almost be called the 'Dublin and Munster' War of Independence: with the exception of Belfast - where violence was significant in 1920 and 1921, but took a different complexion than elsewhere on the island (intimately connected to the conflict elsewhere, but emphasizing street violence and communal/sectarian 'pogroms' rather than guerrilla insurgency and counter-insurgency) - the vast majority of the violence of the War of Independence period was confined to the capital city in the East, and the southern counties of the province of Munster - especially Counties Cork and Tipperary. Thus, for example, while Hart (2003:67) finds 1,027 victims of revolutionary violence for Munster in 1921, and 199 in Dublin City, only 190 can be found for the entire province of Connaught in the West of Ireland.

Indeed, some of Ireland’s 32 counties saw almost no violence related to the War of Independence: outside of the southern counties of Munster, Dublin City, and the communal street violence of Belfast, the greater parts of the provinces of
Leinster (in the East and Midlands), Connaught (West) and Ulster (North) remained quiet - with exceptional counties such as Longford in the Midlands proving to be islands of danger for the Crown Forces, beyond the main rebel heartlands.

The question as to why some counties and regions displayed such dramatically different levels of violence from others has vexed professional and amateur pundits since the heyday of the War - as evidenced by the voluminous correspondence of IRA GHQ staff of the time, upbraiding local commanders in quiet areas for their lack of activity, speculating among each other the reasons why, and dispatching IRA organisers (like Ernie O'Malley, mentioned in the last chapter) to lackluster areas to open new 'fronts' there, and take the pressure off more militant areas.

Causal hypotheses as to the geographical unevenness of the war have abounded, but as Hopkinson (2002:201) points out, "Single-cause explanations about the geographical distribution of revolution do not convince. Too many conclusions have been drawn from work on limited regions and too many generalisations made about the contribution of whole counties." Furthermore, most of these attempts at explanation share a narrow deterministic logic of one kind or another: Cork and other southern counties proved a seedbed of insurgency because its rugged, mountainous landscape facilitated guerrilla warfare; Cork and Tipperary were efficient guerrilla nurseries because of deep local traditions of nationalist rebellion; more adventurously, some areas sprouted local militancy because harsh local repression at the hands of Crown Forces and their allies backfired, turned ordinary people into rebels, and gave them a taste for vengeance.

But all of these logics are problematic, and counter-examples exist for all of them. Some parts of the southern counties that sheltered IRA guerrillas and afforded them prime ambush spots were indeed rugged country; but equally rugged country could be found in counties that saw almost no action: County Wicklow to Dublin's south; County Donegal in the north-west; the west of County Galway;
etc. And Cork and Tipperary may have had proud traditions of nationalist rebellion, but so did counties like Wexford - which still commemorated its leading role in the 1798 Rebellion proudly - and Mayo, a centre of the land agitation that played such a crucial role in shaping the late nineteenth century take off of the Home Rule struggle. Neither county played a significant role in the War of Independence. Furthermore, Dublin now found itself able to take a leading role in the struggle, breaking out of its reputation as a mere garrison of British rule in Ireland, and a graveyard for plans of rebellion. And if the force of tradition was so important in Cork, this left the question of why local Volunteers did nothing during the Easter Rising, instead humiliating themselves by surrendering their arms to the local police - while backwaters of nationalist rebellion, and non-players in the War of Independence to come - like Galway - at least tried to emulate the Rising in Dublin.

This is not the place to attempt to answer the question of the War's geographic unevenness - which may not even be possible. But it is an opportune place to point out what all of this says about the conflict, from the point of view of contingency and strategic interaction: studies of political contention - whether it be a social movement struggle or a guerrilla war - often assume relatively stable and coherent sets of contending actors, with relatively stable and coherent interests and agendas (and strategies, if this is factored into the analysis at all). A case like the Irish one shows something rather different. The separatist forces represented organised chaos. 'Strategic interaction' took place not just between the separatists and their opponents on the side of the British state, but among the separatists themselves: between the IRA and Sinn Féin; between both of them and the Dail; and within the IRA, between GHQ and local units, between different local units, and between different factions of GHQ. That is not to say that there was anything very unusual about this. But even if it is true that some elements of internal competition may always be present within contentious politics formations, it is also surely true that these tensions do not get nearly enough explicit attention.

The point is that these tensions, and conflicting ideas about tactics and strategy,
played a large part in driving the strategic interaction of the separatist forces with the British state, and the ensuing contingencies. It shaped the tactics and strategic approach adopted, and it shaped the evolution of the conflict - in interaction with the responses they encountered from the side of the British state.

The tactics employed by the IRA guerrillas during the War of Independence reflected a determination never to get trapped again in a doomed pitched battle scenario like that of the 1916 Rising, pitted against overwhelmingly superior forces, and with nowhere to go. In the words of Seamus Robinson, in his statement to the Bureau of Military History:

> It became abundantly clear to me [after the Rising] that we could hope to survive and win only if we were a ghostly army of sharpshooters operating all over the country combining to deal with small bodies of the enemy... I think I can state that Soloheadbeg was the accidental starting point of what later became known as the 'Tan War'.

"Accidental starting point" is a generous way to put what was seen at the time, both by senior Sinn Féin figures and GHQ staff, as a dangerous precedent for the independence struggle. Arthur Griffith, Sinn Féin founder, remarked that "if that kind of thing continues, we'll be eating each other soon". The Soloheadbeg ambushers, wanted by the authorities for their killing of the RIC men, were summoned to Dublin by GHQ, and non-negotiable one-way tickets out of the country were mooted. However, Michael Collins - apparently not as upset by the developments at Soloheadbeg as some of the other senior Dublin officials - was one of the few GHQ officers to show a hint of sympathy for the Tipperary men. While they were 'on the run' in Dublin, he even gave Breen, Treacy and Robinson the chance to join operations with the Squad - the special Dublin IRA unit personally controlled by Collins, handpicked for sensitive and dangerous work such as the assassination of important targets. (Such as, notoriously, eleven British intelligence agents on the morning of 21 November 1920 - 'Bloody Sunday'.) This was a rare honour for IRA 'on-the-run's'.

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Although Collins could be cautious about military action, the story of his sympathy towards Breen and the others accords with other accounts of his attitude to the taking of initiative by local IRA units in the guerrilla war; in short, he was for it. Tomas Malone - also known as Sean Forde - recalls in his BMH statement Collins' instructions as he dispatched him as a GHQ organiser to Limerick, where IRA activity was hampered by infighting:

The instructions, of course, from Mick Collins were to get these fellows doing something and not be wasting their time disputing among themselves, and that is actually what I did. We got them fighting and they forgot all about their troubles. Both sides came in then and that finished the row...

That was his idea. It was, 'Get going! Start a guerrilla war there!' That was the gist of his instructions to me when I was going to Limerick. He might have found fault with us for not consulting him or not notifying Headquarters about proposed actions. He often did things like that, but he was never opposed to a fight anyway.

But the attitude of GHQ to plans for militant action on the part of local units was not always so laissez-faire. One of the early tactics of the IRA offensive against the Crown Forces in the early stages of the War, in 1919 and 1920, was the attacking and raiding of isolated rural RIC barracks.

In time, GHQ would come to explicitly encourage local units to undertake such raiding, as a means of acquiring much-needed arms, as well as as a means of acquiring much-needed military training for the men. But GHQ's support for such activity had not been automatic. When Terence MacSwiney - who would go on to become Lord Mayor of Cork City, and indeed to be martyred in that role on an IRA prison hunger strike - sought permission from GHQ for a wave of coordinated barracks attacks in Cork in 1919, he was refused (Hopkinson 2002:71).

When the tactic of barracks-raiding did catch on in various parts of the country, it demonstrated the efficacy of guerrilla strategy. Since the RIC never knew where the rebels were going to strike, but knew they could not be sure of defending small isolated barracks against attack, the decision was taken in 1920 by the
Dublin Castle administration - the seat of British power in Ireland - to withdraw their constables from several hundred such isolated outposts, in favour of consolidation of forces in larger and more easily defensible barracks in urban centres. Thus, even parts of the country that had had lackluster IRA activity (perhaps consisting of occasional sniping at RIC barracks, as documented by Ernie O’Malley in his memoir of life as an IRA organiser from 1918 on (O’Malley 2002)) experienced the withdrawal of the police from their districts - and the withdrawal of the police often meant, effectively, the withdrawal of the British state. In many areas, the IRA and Sinn Féin were able to fill this vacuum to some extent, implementing arbitration courts, a form of policing, and even an improvised prison system for people found guilty of minor offences.

As the RIC and other Crown Forces consolidated themselves in more strongly fortified positions that were harder to overrun, the guerrillas found themselves looking for other targets. Thus from mid-1920 on, the tactic of the ambush began to replace the barracks-raid. This was well-suited to the bands of IRA 'on-the-run's' who had begun to band together in rural and remote districts abandoned by the police, for company and security. After all, the rugged country these men took to proved as useful for laying ambushes of Crown Forces patrols as it was for sheltering fugitives. These bands became the 'Flying Columns' that would come to occupy a central place in the folklore of the War of Independence, and which would carry out much of the guerrilla fighting in the terminal phase of the conflict - and again, they represented a strategic innovation brought about by the interplay of local and GHQ initiatives: the official order to local companies to form flying columns came after they had already started to emerge spontaneously.

The ambush strategy of the flying columns met with considerable success - sometimes inflicting a heavy toll on Crown Forces, such as the ambush at Kilmichael in Cork in 1920, carried out by Tom Barry’s column, which involved the wiping out of a detachment of eighteen members of the Auxiliary force - all ex-British officers. (Happening within a week of the 'Bloody Sunday' killings in Dublin, Barry's (unauthorised) action directly precipitated the imposition of
However, as under the threat of barracks-raids, the Crown Forces responded with consolidation and fortification. As the military historian Kautt (2010) points out, the Crown Forces were not slow to improvise new tactics: patrols were increased in size, becoming convoys of military vehicles; Churchill redirected supplies of armoured vehicles from other British conflict theatres to Ireland; and the British authorities put civilian Irish engineers to work affixing improvised armouroplating to ordinary military vehicles. Nets were placed over open military lorries to make it harder for IRA men to throw bombs in.

As 1921 wore on, and as the guerrillas and the Crown Forces adapted their tactics and strategies to each other, the feeling of stalemate grew. Senior IRA figures were seriously worried about running out of arms and ammunition imminently, while the British commander in Ireland, Macready, produced increasingly bleak reports on the military situation from the British point of view. Everybody on the British side agreed that they could subdue Ireland militarily if absolutely necessary, but opinions differed as to whether this would be politically possible - and on whether it would not be counter-productive in the long term. On the British side there was also considerable demoralisation due to infighting and splits over rival agendas on Irish policy - as well as due to the sense that the British approach to dealing with the War of Independence had never had a coherent policy, swinging wildly instead between harsh repression and collective punishment on the one hand, and half-hearted attempts at conciliation on the other - all the while reacting to the IRA. In July 1921 the Truce was made between the Dail and British governments. It would lead to the Treaty negotiations, the creation of the Irish Free State, and ultimately the endgame of the Irish independence struggle, in the Civil War of 1922-23.
CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was twofold: to utilise social science to better explain an important episode of Irish history that had been the exclusive preserve of historians, and to contribute to theory development in the contentious politics literature. This was to be done by throwing light on some things the thesis holds to be under-researched: the origins of transformative events, the mechanisms by which they are transformative, and the ways they beget path dependent reactive sequence. More specifically, the thesis has sought to show a particular causal route to such a transformative event or reactive sequence, even further under-researched - that hinging on the agency of contentious actors, which was illustrated through attention to the strategic interaction seen within movements as well as between movement, state and counter-movement, arguing that this makes agency a more tangible object of study than is often the case.

A defining feature of a path dependent sequence is that it is not determined by initial conditions - and that is key to how the reactive sequence of the Irish independence struggle has been presented in this thesis. It has been stressed that this episode would not have come to pass were it not for highly contingent events generated by the agency and strategic interaction of movement actors. However, that is not to say that initial conditions are unimportant. This could not be further from the truth.

For while initial conditions did not determine the contingent events on which the study has turned (that would be a contradiction in terms), they did create the conditions in which movement actors took their decisions to make these events happen - even if these decisions were highly contingent, and even if the events could just as easily not have happened.

While the reactive sequence commencing in 1916 represented just one set of possibilities among many, the initial conditions present immediately before the Easter Rising did set certain parameters for what was possible, what was not
possible, and what was not possible to avoid at these political conjunctures. For instance, the coming together of certain long-term socio-economic structural changes and medium-term political developments meant that by the years leading up to 1916, some kind of new settlement to the Irish question was practically inevitable. The common understanding that the status quo was no longer viable, and that something would have to give, was baked into the initial conditions of 1916. Ruling elites were gradually and grudgingly accepting that to one extent or another, they were going to have to face up to the necessary evil of reform of the status quo. But try as these elites might to grasp the nettle of reform, much more reactionary forces to their right flank were simultaneously digging in their heels against any such eventuality. Intransigent unionist elements were loath to yield so much as an inch on the demands of nationalists or Catholics. Thus, the unhappy coupling of an increasing sense that things could not go on as they were, with the determination of entrenched reactionary elements to resist change, made some kind of stand-off impossible to escape. It also made the vaunted reform efforts look like they might well be still-born - calling to mind Gramsci’s (1971:276) description of the acute species of crisis to be seen when "the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."

Supercharged with morbid symptoms as this period was, though, one must resist the temptation to retrospectively view the Irish independence struggle as springing from them inevitably. This thesis has attempted to show the contingency of the events in question by focusing on the agency and strategic interaction that lay behind them - the argument here being that events look a lot less inevitable when one considers how hard their instigators had to fight to make them happen, and when one considers how easily they could have failed, and their competitors prevailed.

What happened after the Rising of 1916 illustrates an important rule of reactive sequences: unlike other types of path dependent sequence, reactive sequences are generated by the often unpredictable reactions to contingent events, and the escalating, reinforcing cycles that these create - which are often rich in
unintended consequences. Accordingly, this thesis has sought to reinstate the role of agency of movement actors in initiating the reactive sequence launched in 1916. On the other hand, however, while they had the power to start it, that does not mean that these movement actors remained in control of the reactive sequence once it was in motion.

Although the strategic actors behind the transformative event of 1916 got, in a sense, what they wanted - a renewal of armed conflict with the British state, leading eventually to partial victory - this was arguably against all the odds, and arguably due as much to chance, and to the fudged strategic and tactical decisions of their opponents, as to their own strategic prowess. If the British Army had handled the Rising differently - for example, by not using artillery in central Dublin, not killing perhaps hundreds of civilians, and not turning the rebel leaders into martyrs through unpopular death sentences handed down by kangaroo courts - the post-Rising wave of sympathy for the rebels might not have happened, and Irish nationalist public opinion might not have been so alienated from the British state.

All of this illustrates how a reactive sequence can take on a life of its own, and be difficult to control or stop once initiated. But beyond this, are there any takeaways from this that might be of wider relevance? We can say that in Ireland, the provocative and confrontational action of a small and relatively marginal group of militants was enough to elicit a brutal backlash from their opponents - in particular, from the state - and that this brutal reaction was enough to lead to a wave of sympathy for the militants from the social constituencies to which they had sought to appeal, but to which they had previously been marginal. Reaction and counter-reaction quickly escalated into a dramatic renewal of old antipathies, along well-worn inter-communal lines, in which armed conflict came to trump everything else.

And herein lies the structure-agency paradox touched on by the study: the thesis has argued that the events at the centre of the study represented bursts of agency and contingency rupturing the status quo - creating moments in which it
appears that the course of history is being determined more by agency than by structure. However, as contingent events give way to reactive sequences, this dynamic changes: the actors who so dramatically ruptured the status quo and set a reactive sequence in motion, lose control of that reactive sequence just as quickly; and as that reactive sequence takes off, it reflects long-term structural tensions much more than the strategic initiative that started it. Thus, after a moment in which agency is in the ascendant, structure lurches back into a dominant position - albeit to reassert itself in a way that would not have happened had it not been, quite paradoxically, for a contingent, agency-driven event. This oscillating dynamic might be described as the 'rebound' of structure.

How can we make sense of this paradoxical rebound of structure? To answer this question fully would be beyond the scope of this thesis, but some possible directions for future research can be suggested. A fundamental consideration turns on the question of what kind of puzzle it is that we are dealing with. The thesis has argued for the Irish independence struggle to be seen as a path dependent sequence, and these are usually understood as unique phenomena: chains of events that play out in a particular way because of certain contingent happenings, and for which reason are unlikely to recur in quite the same ways again. This emphasis on contingency could be seen to present some challenges, if we are interested not just in explaining the peculiarities of particular cases, but also in explaining common patterns across cases.

However, just because a particular sequence is contingent, does not mean it is entirely unique. If we accept the principle that, rather than being necessarily 'one-off' happenings, path dependent sequences relate stochastically to initial conditions, and if we accept that similar sets of initial conditions recur from time to time, it is reasonable to think that at least some of those times, similar path dependent sequences will occur - even if they are, strictly speaking, individually contingent; that is, they could very easily have not happened. This is an elaborate way of saying that it would be intriguing to engage in comparative research geared towards finding out if similar sequences to the Irish independence struggle - contingent and path dependent as it was - have occurred elsewhere.
Debates have raged within historical sociology as to how to understand similar sequences that recur across different cases. In a more probabilistic mode, some scholars have called for attention to "robust processes", while others in a more positivist mode have called for the elaboration of "general laws" to explain sequences that tie similar outcomes to similar conditions (Goldstone 1990, 1998).

However, such cases would have to be found first. If interesting comparisons were to be found, though, they would have to be understood on the basis not of a static set of 'initial conditions' expected to lead to a particular type of outcome; rather, the somewhat paradoxical idea of 'recurring contingencies' would be that when conditions of a particular kind are ruptured by a very provocative contingent event - and a particular kind of reaction to that provocative action occurs - a particular kind of sequence is likely to emerge. Such a hypothesis, laid out in four 'steps', might look something like the following:

1) In a deeply divided society, where regimes lack full legitimacy and are prone to widespread political violence and establishment repression, [where] the inter-group conflict is widely understood as a zero-sum game, where one group is clearly subordinate, while another group is closely linked to the state;

2) In a medium-term conjuncture marked by high tensions over inter-group competition;

3) If an event occurs whereby members of a subordinate group take highly provocative action that leads to backlash from rival groups or from the state;

4) A reactive sequence is likely to get underway - namely a cycle of violence along traditional lines of societal or ethno-national cleavage, involving further polarisation and radicalisation of the population around gung-ho elements. This cycle of violence will be difficult to stop.

Needless to say, further research would be required in order to establish whether such a hypothesis were really viable. One possibility is that the hypothesis could be tested in various other deeply divided societies (Guelke 2012). Obvious
candidate cases would be societies split by intractable socio-political cleavages - especially along ethno-national or other identitarian lines - where there is a deficit of regime legitimacy, and extensive violence and repression.

This thesis has sought to contribute to debates about the roles of structure and agency in contentious politics by building on the eventful approach pioneered by a number of scholars in recent years. Taking off from what this author considered to be various gaps in the eventful account of contentious politics, the thesis suggested that more could be done to show where transformative events come from in the first place - proposing that to do so might in some cases reveal an untold story of agency underlying the events in question - and by extension, the medium-term and in some cases long-term changes that transformative events produce. Empirically, this was done through analysis of the most important episode of contentious politics in the history of twentieth century Ireland. Since agency is an elusive concept, it was traced through the strategic interaction of the contending political actors.

However, this was not just a story about agency. The process under consideration was regarded as path dependent - and as involving complex interactions between structure and agency. Indeed, in the transition from transformative event to reactive sequence that follows it in a path dependent way, the thesis observes the slippage from a moment in which agency overrides structure, to a moment where structure powerfully reasserts itself - in a way that is, quite paradoxically, all the more forceful for the very burst of agency that previously overpowered it.

It is hope that, in a modest way, this can build on recent efforts to better understand the relation between structure and agency in contentious politics, and to contribute to future research.
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