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The Troubles in Northern Ireland and Theories of Social Movements
Lorenzo Bosi & Gianluca de Fazio (eds.)
Amsterdam University Press, 2017, (hb) 240pp., ISBN 978-90-8964-959-1, €89.00

Out of the Ashes: An Oral History of the Provisional Irish Republican Movement
Robert W. White
Merrion Press, 2017, (pb) 488pp., ISBN 978-1-78537-093-9, €24.99

Both Lorenzo Bosi and Gianluca de Fazio's edited collection *The Troubles in Northern Ireland and Theories of Social Movements* and Robert W. White's *Out of the Ashes* constitute significant contributions to the historiography of modern Irish republicanism, and the literature on political violence and radical social movements more broadly. Bosi and de Fazio's book comprises a broad array of highly original essays on various social movements active in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. In *Out of the Ashes*, White brings together republicans' oral testimony spanning three decades, building upon his formidable past work engaging social movement theories in the study of Irish republicanism.

The Troubles in Northern Ireland and Theories of Social Movements takes Northern Ireland as "a prototypical example of a society deeply divided along an ethnonational cleavage" and draws upon social movement theories to investigate mobilisation and "trajectories of participation" in violent and non-violent movements alike. The editors' critique of a "reductionist" ethnonationalist perspective champions the need for a social movement approach which understands communities in divided societies not as monolithic or static but as dynamic and heterogeneous (pp. 12-13).

Bosi and de Fazio's collection addresses a wide range of Irish social movements and the variegated qualities of those movements. Theresa O'Keefe's chapter on republican feminism, based on twenty interviews with republican women active during the conflict, addresses highly topical discussions of gender roles within republicanism and the small groups of feminist groupings organising in republican communities (pp. 165-184), while Lee A. Smithey's essay represents a welcome contribution to the scarce academic literature on the Community of the Peace People established in 1976 (pp. 203-221). John Nagle, meanwhile, discusses a diverse array of non-sectarian social movements including LGBT groups, environmentalists, trade unionists, and peace organisations (pp. 185-201). In their discussion of divisions within the Provisional republican movement, Robert W. White and Tijen Demirel-Pegg argue that senior southern Provisionals' first-hand experience of repression in the Republic inclined many of their number to oppose the Adams leadership's dropping of Leinster House abstentionism in 1986: for veteran republicans from the Republic, "the illegitimacy of the Dublin government was immediate" (p. 138).

Consistently addressing social movements' framing processes and issues of collective memory and identity, the essays underpin the potency of ideas of community, legitimacy, and political 'inheritance' in sustaining popular mobilisation in disparate social movements. Niall Ó Dochartaigh's insightful chapter highlights republicans' adoption since the 1970s of the language of civil rights, and the invocation of the state's repression of civil rights protests in the late 1960s as justification for the republican campaign which followed (pp. 34, 36, 47). O'Keefe concludes that republican women's activism itself sparked a "process of politicisation" opening up "a new sense of identity" (pp. 169-170). Sarah Campbell's work

on Protestant identity and collective action draws attention to the “interactive process of selecting, processing, and organising past events or periods within a framework that grants them political or social significance” stimulating Protestant mobilisation in 1974 and 1985 (p. 94). Neil Ferguson and James W. McAuley’s study of loyalist accounts of mobilisation, demobilisation, and decommissioning “illustrate[s] the importance of social identity and shared emotion” in their interviewees’ “lifelong... political socialisation” (p. 113).

Several of the essays focus on media portrayals and popular and elite perceptions of various social movements, addressing important questions regarding the situation of movements within wider society. Locating Northern Ireland’s civil rights movement in the context of the global New Left (p. 75), Gregory Maney demonstrates the changing media representations of the NICRA, especially in the USA, in the late 1960s and early 1970s: “When some student civil rights activists vocally asserted their socialist agenda, the content of media coverage outside of Northern Ireland became increasingly negative”. Maney charts the “image problems” NICRA faced into the mid-1970s (p. 83). Discussing Stormont’s response to NICRA activism, Erin-Beth Turner and Gianluca de Fazio argue for the consideration of “emotional and ideological costs” in evaluations of regime responses to protest movements (p. 54). Denis O’Hearn addresses the dynamics of the republican prison population and the protest movement outside the jails during the anti-criminalisation protests of the late 1970s and early 1980s (pp. 147-164).

Constituting the first book-length work engaging social movement theories to take Northern Ireland as its primary focus, these essays provide a salutary inspiration for future research on social movements in divided societies. The book’s greatest strength lies in its discussion of social movements’ framing processes and the conceptions of shared identities and collective memory with which such frames interact. In their afterword, Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd remark upon contesting social movements’ presentations of “alternative cognitive schema” and allude to “the formation of interplay of interest and identities” (pp. 229, 233-234). It is now incumbent upon scholars to probe further into how issues of collective memory and social identity, as well as the cultural significance of place, interact in mobilisation and activism, in Northern Ireland and beyond.

White’s oral history *Out of the Ashes* draws upon a rich body of interviews with republicans conducted chiefly in three phases in the mid-1980s, mid-1990s, and late 2000s. In 2007, White interviewed for a third time seventeen of the original sixty-three interviewees from the Provisional movement (p. 327). *Out of the Ashes* is the most recent in White’s considerable body of work – much of which utilises oral testimonies as well as documentary evidence – including his *Provisional Irish Republicans: An Oral and Interpretive History* (1993) and his biography of former Sinn Féin president Ruairí Ó Brádaigh (2006).

The bulk of *Out of the Ashes*, embodying Part 2 of the book, chronicles the career of the Provisional republican movement from its genesis in 1969-1970 through to the cessation of the Provisional IRA’s (PIRA) armed campaign in 2005. White is concerned largely with the heterogeneity of the movement (p. 39), and to this end he sets about debunking simplistic binaries which have tended to hold sway in the literature. There is an interesting extended quotation, for example, from former PIRA chief of staff Seán Mac Stíofáin, interviewed in 1990, which destabilises portrayals of Mac Stíofáin as a “conservative Catholic”. Instead, Mac Stíofáin’s politics emerge as a complex combination of socialism, Third Worldism, social conservatism, and personal religiosity combined with hostility to the institutional politics of the Church (pp. 45-46). White also warns against reductionist accounts of the nascent Provisionals in 1969-1970 as a youthful, northern-dominated movement, pointing

instead to the prevalence of senior southern republicans on the first Provisional executive (p. 68).

Extended quotations from former Sinn Féin (SF) Director of Publicity Danny Morrison, interviewed in 1988, highlight a sea-change in Provisional thinking since the late 1980s: Morrison is quoted as perceiving the British government remaining in Northern Ireland “for their own strategic interests... They want to dictate the political complexion of this island” (pp. 249-250). Today, when arguing for the viability of a constitutional path to Irish unity, SF supporters, Morrison included, often quote then-Secretary of State Peter Brooke’s November 1990 assertion that the government had “no selfish strategic interest” in Northern Ireland.

While White dispels oversimplified understandings of the Provisional movement, some parts of the book would have benefited from greater elaboration. It is, White argues, “too simple” to frame the development of the Provisional movement in the late 1970s around the emergence of “young Northerners” such as Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. White offers little in the way of alternative conceptions, though, save for noting that Adams and Belfast comrade Ivor Bell were in Long Kesh when the ‘Staff Report’ rearranging the structure and operation of the movement was implemented, and suggesting that elder republicans such as Joe Cahill, Billy McKee, and Ó Brádaigh were “probably on the Army Council” still (pp. 150-151). Similarly, White contends that Belfast republicans Adams, Danny Morrison, and Tom Hartley were responsible for shifting the Provisional movement to the left in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but no elaboration is offered (pp. 163-164). Situating the Provisionals’ move away from political violence to constitutionalism as part of a wider phase of decline and adaptation for movements such as the Red Brigades, ETA, and PLO, White’s assertion that “the Irish case shows that, with enough time, even radicals will choose to become moderates” lacks elucidation (p. 390).

White is courageous in his attempts to unravel divisions within the Provisional movement. Discussing the split over Dublin abstentionism in 1986, the author conceives of four sub-groups within the movement: northerners and southerners, and those who joined the republican movement before and after 1969 (pp. 229-236). Such a discussion is not without value, of course, but also provokes further questions as to the differences between urban and rural republicanism, for instance, and the pre- and post-1969 categories are somewhat unwieldy. How did the mobilisation process differ through the twenty-five years of conflict which followed 1969? White’s close attention to the makeup of the Sinn Féin *Ard Chomhairle* and PIRA leadership is helpful (pp. 150-151, 230, 280), but it remains for scholars to investigate further grassroots Provisional responses to discussions within this remarkable social movement.

Both of these books advance social movement-oriented inquiries into Northern Ireland’s Troubles. Highlighting the variegated quality of social movements in Northern Ireland, in an international arena in which political ideologies are transferred, transmuted, and repackaged for divergent publics, these books suggest fruitful lines of enquiry for subsequent scholars interested in the heterogeneity of social movements operating in the tumult of the Irish conflict.