

Recreational Dance in Ireland 1940-1960: Politics and Pleasures

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in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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Jan 2014

DECLARATION.

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, John and Yvonne, main guardians of the home place these days, for their encouragement on so many levels, and to my late uncle Pat who passed on his love of place.

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ABSTRACT

This investigation can be seen as an 'ethnohistory of dance' that has examined Irish society in the 1940s and 1950s through the 'embodied cultural knowledge' of recreational dance. There has been a particular focus on 'small farmers' and their culture in north Co. Roscommon. It has been established that in the dance halls around Elphin, 'modern dances' such as quicksteps and foxtrots were embraced by the majority of young people during these years. Such moves ran contrary to the thrust of hegemonic 'national-popular' culture, associated with 'Irish dances' such as céilí, and promoted by powerful groups in the young Irish state. On this basis, and challenging perceptions of cultural life at the time as sterile, insular and conservative, it can be said that Irish youths constructed a generational dance culture that was vibrant, outward-looking and pluralist. A type of counter-hegemonic subculture was activated on the basis of dance, music, space and 'deviance'. The discourses of moral panic during the period act as a marker for these tensions. At the same time, another perspective on this dance culture would see it in more conservative terms as related to the rise of the transnational culture industry, as well as to more exclusive processes around 'distinction'. Finally, other findings clearly present the pleasures of attending dances, those related to the moving body, to collective emotions and to 'being together' on the dance floor. Significantly, it has been found that both men and women were immersed in these dancing pleasures, a finding that challenges views of males as reluctant dancers.

Two main theoretical frames have been used to conceptualise dance moves, meanings and events within the research setting. The first, Gramsci's notion of 'cultural hegemony', has allowed recreational dance to be viewed as both undermining and reproducing power. The second has operated at a more microcosmic level, drawing on a critical challenge to the gramscian paradigm in the form of a 'post-hegemony' influenced by radical anthropology and anarchist cultural studies. In particular, Turner's 'communitas' and Malbon's 'playful vitality' have been critically combined to posit a more phenomenological understanding of dance.

Methodologically, the research has centred on forty-five depth interviews carried out over a period of five years of 'yo-yo ethnography'. This data has been complemented by an analysis of census returns from 1946 and 1956, as well as by an examination of the local newspaper, *The Roscommon Herald*. These methodological considerations have been located within a reflexive approach that has drawn in a deliberate fashion on the researcher's experiences in three ways - first, as a recreational dancer with an embodied understanding of the complexities of dancing; second, as the son of a man who grew up in the research setting; and, third in my role as a male researcher. Together, they have allowed me to see my role as that of 'halfie' ethnohistorian.

ACRONYMS

BCFE: Ballyfermot College of Further Education

CCÉ: Comhaltas Ceólteoirí Éireann

CSO: Central Statistics Office

CCCS: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies

DCU: Dublin City University

DJ: District Justice

DRFI: Dance Research Forum of Ireland

EC: European Community

EEC: European Economic Community

GAA: The Gaelic Athletic Association

GL: Gaelic League

ICA: Irish Countrywomens' Association

INTO: Irish National Teachers' Organisation

IRA: Irish Republican Army

OSI: Ordnance Survey Ireland

PMG: Popular Memory Group

PDHA: Public Dance Halls Act

PA: public address

RTE: Radio Teilifís Éireann

SPN: Selection from the Prison Notebooks

TAZ: temporary autonomous zone

TCD: Trinity College Dublin

UCC: University College Cork

UCD: University College Dublin

Chapter 1

First Moves

*For I have trained myself and am training myself always
to be able to dance lightly in the service of thought.*

Søren Kierkegaard, (*Kierkegaard's Writings*, VII, 2013)

1.0 Introduction

This thesis is primarily concerned not with dance as a spectacle, nor with competitive dance, but with dance as recreation. In this sense, there has been due recognition of those moves, meanings and events associated with the small farmer class that dominated Irish society during the 1940s and 1950s. As will be discussed, valorisation of a narrow definition of 'Irish dance' in the literature has obscured the real and meaningful pleasures and politics of widely popular dance forms by framing them as 'foreign', as 'low culture' and as 'dangerous'. Such processes of 'symbolic annihilation' apply equally to quickstep and foxtrot, as to clubbing in the 1990s. The generation of dancers that were interviewed between 2007 and 2013 are increasingly few in number¹, yet there has been very limited acknowledgement of their experiences, let alone a more systematic investigation. On this basis, striving towards an understanding of the place of recreational dance in Ireland during the research period has come to seem like a type of 'salvage operation' that at the same time recognises, and attempts to mitigate, this historical exclusion. This is a key basis for making a contribution to the historical and cultural literature. It has been the privilege of this researcher to gain access to a community where surviving dancers have been willing to talk about their lives and about their dancing. With this privilege has come a responsibility to be true to dancers' voices, and to draw up a conceptual frame that allows for the many and complex facets of their dancing experiences to be theorised in a rigorous and meaningful way.

The term 'dance' can refer to both embodied moves and social events. Both senses will be used, although as will be discussed in Chapter 2, the latter meaning has a broader traction that suits this

¹ Of 45 individuals that were interviewed (see Table 1), 11 have passed away since the research began at the time of writing in June, 2013.

work. In the research setting, dances were primarily 'modern' - sometimes called 'jazz' - and 'céilí'² dances, often more loosely referred to as 'Irish dances' by participants (while this latter term will occasionally be used in this dissertation, there will be a problematising of the concept of 'Irish dance' in Chapter 7). The former – not to be confused with 'modern dances' that feature in a performance setting - consisted of quicksteps and foxtrots, the latter mainly of figure dances devised by Irish cultural nationalists in the 1890s. It is notable that there was much confusion in official circles about precisely what 'jazz' music and dance was (*Down with Jazz*, 1987). According to O'Connor (2005, p.103), 'jazz-dancing was somewhat of a misnomer since it was an umbrella term for non-traditional social dance and was frequently used interchangeably with 'modern' or 'foreign' dance'. For the purposes of the research generally, jazz/modern music refers to popular musical forms of the US and UK reaching Ireland through radio, gramophone and cinema (a more detailed note on music will be included in Chapter 6). The dances were predominantly foxtrot and quickstep, both 'closed-couple' dances (See O Connor, 2003). It is the term 'modern dance' that was used in the research during the 1940s, a basis for its use in this investigation³.

The terms 'modern' and 'modernity' in their broader social meanings might usefully be addressed at this point. Among a range of definitions, those that conceptualise 'modernity' on the basis of the rise of the nation-state on the one hand, and on the basis of the rise of mass media culture and consumerism on the other (Mitchell, 2013), have the most to say to this investigation. In fact, given the tensions that arose between culture associated with the nation-state and that related to transnational media culture, it might be more accurate to speak of competing 'modernities', deriving respectively from national and international spheres of influence, a point that will be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8. Nevertheless, returning to local usage around 'modern dance', and remaining true to its association with media culture and commodification, it is the latter definition of 'modernity' used above that will be given more traction⁴.

Moreover, the term 'postmodern' can be considered in this section. Its usefulness has been queried

2 While various spellings of this word such as 'céilidhe' are extant, 'céilí' is the version that will be used in this dissertation following Cullinane (1998) (although not italicising the word as he does). Sometimes the plural 'céilís' will be used, a hybrid of Irish and English that is used in the literature and in the research setting.

3 It is important at this juncture to state that, in the broader field of dance scholarship, the term 'modern dance' refers in quite a specific way to that strand of performance dance that emerged in the early twentieth century as a reaction to classical ballet (Thomas, 2003), a sense that is less germane in work focusing on recreational dance.

4 It might be added that the 'traditional'/'modern' binary that occupies the attentions of a number of scholars of dance in Ireland (Breathnach, 1983; Tubridy, 1994; Brennan, 1999) is of less concern for this study. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, a violent hierarchy has often been constructed on this basis that posits cultural forms that are 'modern' as a debased supplement to more authentic 'traditional' forms. Normative baggage of this type limits the usefulness of these terms.

by Giddens (1991) and Callinicos (2003), who suggest that we are currently in a 'late modern' phase, rather than one that has broken fundamentally with a 'modern' period. For this investigation, use of 'postmodern' will be limited to conceptualising a more reflexive sensibility that followed the 'crisis of representation' (see Section 2.4), as well as a concern with subaltern voices (see Section 6.5). Otherwise, the definition of 'modernity' outlined above is more pertinent, both for thinking about the years between 1940 and 1960, and for analysing society and culture at the time of writing in 2013. In some ways, these temporal limits can be seen to identify moments respectively of the rise and recent crisis of broader economic patterns, as well as cultural choices made within those patterns. The question of a past-present dialectic in this regard, and an emergent 'modernity', will be addressed in Chapter 9.

In this introductory chapter, the first section will present the key research questions that have guided the investigation from its inception. These, in summarised form, constitute the 'what' of the project. In the following section, there will be a more detailed consideration of the reasons for undertaking the research, the 'why' of the project. These centre on various blind spots that exist in the historical and cultural record. Just as postcolonial theory posits 'subaltern groups' (Gopal, 2012), there are also it seems subaltern cultures, as well as complex relationships between these. In the final section, a preview of subsequent chapters will be presented.

1.1 The Research Questions

The research questions on dancing in Roscommon are as follows:

What was the dance culture of the 1940s and 1950s?

What social contexts might be useful for understanding recreational dance?

How might Gramsci's theory of 'cultural hegemony' be used to understand dance culture?

How might recreational dance be regarded as post-hegemonic?

1.2 Rationale

To begin discussing the rationale for this work, I'd like to raise three reflexive elements that have been central (the methodological implications will be worked through in more detail in Chapter 2). This study requires a degree of reflexivity in that my interest as a researcher is personal and emotional, as well as scientific. The first aspect centres on my own dance practices, what I've

termed 'dancing subjectivities'. I've participated in various dance cultures over the years as both dancer and event organiser in breakdancing (1985), indie (1986-1990), dance music - house, techno and trance (1990-2005), salsa (2005-2008) and currently set-dancing (2008 to present). As is evident, clubbing in particular has occupied much of my dancing years. Questions of the dynamics of dancing, its meanings, its relation to other social practices, its mapping onto different groups, its deviancy, its emotional content, its physicality, have all been instrumental in nudging me towards this project, initially as a participant, more recently as a scholar with the School of Communications at Dublin City University (DCU), but always as a dancer. Dance practices seem to me to be 'agency-rich' in senses that have informed the theories deployed, drawing as they do on Gramsci's hegemony theory and Turner's concept of 'communitas'. We all possess 'embodied cultural knowledge' (Buckland, 2006, p.8) that tells a story, no doubt inflected differently at various historical, geographical and ideological junctures, but unified in some respects by the thread of the moving body. This is especially true of those that have participated in dancing. The second reflexive dimension centres on the construction of 'a history from below' in a very personal and meaningful way, what I've termed 'familial subjectivities'. I am *of* the research setting through my father, John - and his 'people'⁵. He was born in Elphin, and left to pursue a scholarship studying agricultural science in University College Cork (UCC). He settled in Limerick where he now lives with my mother, Yvonne, and where we were raised. Roscommon is the place where his family comes from, where we can trace a lineage back over two hundred years, where our antecedents lived, farmed, danced and played music⁶. I've been visiting this place on and off since my childhood, meeting uncles, aunts, various other relatives and family friends. As the eldest son, my uncle Donie inherited the farm and lived there until he passed away in 1999. Another brother, Pat, moved to the US in 1959 but returned to the house for a reunion every summer. He passed away while visiting home in 2011. The third reflexive element centres on my role as a male researcher; in subtle but important ways, my entry into the field on this basis opened up particular types of engagements between researcher and researched. Equally, there were particular research concerns that I brought to the field as a man.

The other motivating factors for this investigation are more objective, related to a series of cultural and historical blind spots. These are informed by the reflexivity of the project, and 'dovetail' these elements in some ways into the consideration of a broader 'history from below'. It is through my

⁵ The term 'people' in this context refers to close relatives of the individual

⁶ In conceptualising the 'rural', I'd like to stress that this study seeks to avoid both a glib romanticism and a city-slicker's account of 'the idiocy of rural life' in Marx's (1848) memorable phrasing. Locating the study in a rural area is related rather to practicalities related to these familial subjectivities.

personal engagement with issues of dance practice and biography that I became most acutely aware of significant 'gaps' in the record of social life of the 1940s and 1950s. By talking to elders, by encountering occasional glimpses of hidden histories in newspaper archives, and by being a dancer myself, it became apparent that mainstream and official histories had excluded important elements of Williams' (2001[1961]) 'structure of feeling', that particular lived human essence of time and place. At an early stage, vivid accounts emerged of a rich dance culture taking place in houses, halls and at crossroads. Once the investigation began in earnest, later reading confirmed important gaps in the cultural and historical record, a few notable exceptions aside (Smyth, 1993; Gibbons, 1996; O'Connor, 2003, 2005). The question of why such practices have been 'casualties of history' (Thompson, (1998) has been uppermost at all times. Embodied cultural knowledge, dance-events, and the dances of certain groups have not, it seems, been deemed to be legitimate history. Moreover, in the historical context of nation-building of the Irish state, there has been the commemoration of some types of culture, and the 'active forgetting' of others. In this regard, Said (1993) has been critical of a 'nativist' conception of history that tends towards racial and cultural essentialism. Ambiguities, impurities and hybrids tend to be excluded by such histories - this investigation will seek to make space for them.

By focusing on first-hand accounts of small farmers and associated groups, and by opening a space for women, minority religions and those young at the time, a more democratic history will be constructed. The marginalised discourses, the 'fugitive forms' (Gibbons, 1996) of oral culture are harder to track down but no less important for those who lived and danced through these times. These voices, as Thompson (1998[1963]) would have it, need to be 'rescued'. In some ways, this involves a 'restoration' - not dissimilar in intent to Bakhtin's (1984) work around folk festivity more broadly – to popular dance of its own life and aesthetic, a retrieval of a hidden cultural history.

1.3 Chapter Previews

Chapter 2, 'Investigating Dance', will assess the rationale for pursuing an ethnohistory of dance, and consider a number of methods that were useful on this basis. Interviews have been central, but a number of historical methods were also deployed to complement these. The influences of a postmodern reflexive ethnography will also be established.

Chapter 3, 'Conceptualising Dance', will set out the theoretical foundations for the investigation. Beginning with a consideration of disciplinary and epistemological foundations, there will then be

an introduction to Antonio Gramsci's (1971) hegemony theory, as mediated through post-Marxist thought. A post-hegemonic theorising of dance floor experiences will be presented, involving Turner's (1969) 'communitas' and Malbon's (1999) 'playful vitality'.

Chapter 4, 'The Dancers', will outline a number of key ethnographic foundations for subsequent chapters. It will provide an opportunity for the reader to get to know the dancers by locating them in specific lived contexts and biographical details; it will open up a view of the range of dance practices and events that were available to people at this time; and it will address the question of how the spatial negotiations of people in 'getting to the dances'.

Chapter 5, 'Dance Contexts', will work from geographic foundations through issues of land ownership and economy to an analysis of the origins of small farmers in the research setting in the 1940s and 1950s. Various counter-hegemonic currents within the grouping will also be presented.

Chapter 6, 'The Dances', will open by setting out findings on the dominant dance cultures of the period as revealed through newspaper advertisements and oral histories. This chapter will also present evidence for considering modern dance as a youth culture, and investigate how this was articulated with an emergent media culture. Finally, given the vibrancy of this culture, there will be an assessment of the grounds for its historical exclusion.

Chapter 7, 'Dance and the State', will analyse the rise of a 'national-popular', as articulated through the field of dance. Following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, céilí dances were disseminated as the embodiment of 'Irishness'. Discourses around these dances and their modern counterparts were reproduced through the organs of nationalist 'civil society'. It is possible to identify creative and destructive moments in this process. Cohen's concept of the 'moral panic' has been useful in this regard, and resonates closely with hegemony theory. Particular attention will be paid to interpellations of female dancers by such discourses.

Chapter 8, 'Dance and Opposition', will draw on the rubric of gramscian⁷ cultural hegemony theory to present a basis for the dominance of modern dance between 1940 and 1960. Young people activated meanings around these moves that need to be seen in terms of those articulated around céilí dances. Fiske's (1987, 1989) 'cultural economy' has been useful for allowing an articulation of

⁷ This dissertation follows Harris (1992) in the use of the lower-case adjective in this way.

dance, media culture and resistance to be posited, and the notion of a 'perverse cultural economy' has been introduced to theorise the way that youth culture responds to 'moral panic'. An approach that presents the relationality of céilí and modern dances constitutes an original contribution to the literature.

Chapter 9, 'Dance and Incorporation', will draw on the other side of gramscian cultural hegemony, that which relates to incorporation, to theorise how the rise of modern dance served the imperatives of the anglophonic⁸ 'culture industry'. It will be argued that processes of 'distinction' were articulated within more oppressive moments of hegemony. This chapter will also include a critical evaluation of mass culture theory around culture and dance.

Chapter 10, 'Dance and Communitas', will move into a more phenomenological mode, activating the second main theoretical frame. Matters will be kept firmly on the dance-floor, and analysed in terms of collective emotion, the body and sociality. In particular, the ideas of Turner (1969, 1974) and Malbon (1999) will be brought into play to conceptualise the findings. A space will be opened for male dancing experiences and pleasures, as well as those of females in Ireland during the research period.

Chapter 11, 'The Last Dance', will return to the research questions, and present the findings under related headings. There will be a reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the project, with a particular focus on how the investigation has contributed to the literature on dance. Finally, potential avenues for future research will be set out.

Chapter Summary

Following a section setting out and defining key terms, this chapter followed by establishing the four research questions that have guided this investigation. Following this, a rationale for the project was established, involving a number of reflexive considerations, as well as a set of more objective blind spots in the cultural-historical record. Next, a summary of the chapters that comprise this dissertation was presented. The next chapter will address a methodological basis for the investigation.

⁸ That is to say, being primarily associated with the US and Britain.

Chapter 2

Investigating Dance

*O chestnut-tree, great-rooted blossomer,
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
How can we know the dancer from the dance?*

William Butler Yeats (*Among School Children*, 1928)

2.0 Introduction

Assessing the dancing experiences of people two generations ago presents certain methodological opportunities and challenges. These will be explored with a view to doing justice to the voice of the dancing community, and to their rich multi-faceted experiences of dancing. A more democratic politics of research has emerged on the basis of reflexive ethnography where the researcher is both inside and outside the research frame. Abu-Lughod's (2008) notion of the 'halfie ethnographer' has been useful for opening up and interrogating these object/subject distinctions. This concept points to the construction of a contingent 'tale of the field' (Van Maanen, 1988), not the end of the story by any means, but one story among many.

In the first section, there will be an assessment of a range of methodologies – ethnohistory, oral history and ethnography - and a consideration of those that are most appropriate for this work. Since the dance event types that feature in this investigation are no longer held, certain methodologies and methods have come to the fore. The second section will present a rationale for using the interview method. Working within an 'ethnohistory of dance', 45 interviews¹ with small farmers and related groups have been of central importance (more details on the interview durations and formats can be found in Table 1). At the same time, there will be a critical awareness of the limitations of interviews. In the next section, the complementarity of historical methods in addressing interview limits will be considered, methods that include analysis of local histories, newspapers, maps and

¹ The citation system for interview transcripts involves indicating the respondent's first name in the sentence or in brackets (where two people share a first name, the first initial of their surname has been added, as in John). As with literature citations, excerpts from transcripts have been enclosed in single quotation marks.

census data. Next, issues around reflexivity as a tool for ethnographers will be considered.

2.1 An Ethnohistory of Dance

Various methodological possibilities will be outlined in this section. These approaches have in common a concern with documenting the dynamics of groups of people occupying a particular place and time, in a predominantly qualitative manner (Bryman, 2004).

Although originally developed in the field of anthropology, ethnography has been used in sociology, cultural studies, political science, dance studies and range of other areas (Thomas, 2003; Buckland, 2006a). It might loosely be defined as follows:

In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is being said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.1)

Ethnographic methods often include participant observation, interviews and use of contextual material – statistics, maps and documents. Although some ethnographies are strictly empirical, most will involve some degree of interpretation of material through analysis, conceptualisation and, occasionally, theory (Van Maanen, 1988). Typically, there is a type of 'immersion' in the lived reality of the research setting, in the manner of Cowan (1990), who spent sixteen months living in Northern Greece to study recreational dance there. At the same time, matters are more flexible with the advent of more postmodern approaches, so that a prospective ethnographer can explore various options to suit their discipline, schedule and research objectives (Buckland, 2006a). Wulff (2008) used 'yo-yo field-work' to gather data on dance in Ireland from her base in Sweden, moving backwards and forwards for short intense bursts of ethnographic activity, and using the time between stints to reflect on and reformulate her research questions. With the current research investigation, an extended 'live' engagement in participants' worlds is largely meaningless when that world has vanished. It is 'memory-acts' (Kuhn, 2003) around dance rather than dance itself that are encountered. Given this, and given my proximity to the field, the 'yo-yo' approach has been chosen, involving staying for occasional weekends, and each summer for four consecutive years staying for longer periods of five to six weeks. There has been a total period of about six months of fieldwork, each time gathering interviews or putting various other methods to use².

2 Given my status as a 'halfie ethnographer' (see Section 2.4), in some senses I have always been in the field between 2007 and 2013, even when accessing archival records or studying in Dublin, located after all just two hours drive

Oral history constitutes another methodology widely deployed to document and understand social groups. With oral history, there is a backwards trajectory, so that is usually a period, an event or a practice from the past that is of interest. Related to this, there is an emphasis on a type of salvaging of first-hand cultural experience through recording it for posterity (Portelli, 2006). Such a rationale is especially pertinent where social groups and their experiences might have been 'subaltern' in some way. The Urban Folklore Project was initiated in 1979 by University College Dublin (UCD) as a means of recording ways of working class life in Irish cities (UCD, 2012). The Cork Northside Folklore Project was established in 1996 'as a non-profit community research archive in partnership with the Department of Folklore and Ethnology at University College Cork' to document life in the city (UCC, 2012). In Belfast, Dúchas, a project run by the Falls Community Council (Dúchas Oral History Archive Belfast, 2012), has recorded the voices of those involved in the Northern conflict. The Popular Memory Group (PMG) at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham brought a pointed activism to their historiography. For them, recording 'popular memory' is 'a dimension of political practice' (PMG, 1982, p.1) which might involve 'a more critical, more explanatory and more socialist local history, [that] may involve confronting the way in which people understand their own oppressions' (*ibid*, p.17). When the public are encouraged to be active in the history-gathering process for these projects, distinctions between academics, interested specialists, and the wider population become more porous. Equally, the question of access to findings opens up questions around the politics of research, one heightened by use of new media to distribute archived materials such as interviews and photographs. As might be expected, recorded interviews are the mainstay of oral histories, complemented by photographs and examples of material culture.

'Ethnohistory' emerged as a hybrid discipline combining the fields of ethnography and history, and draws on the more general synergies of such approaches. According to Kuhn (2002) in her analysis of cinema-going from the 1930s, 'ethnohistory emerged as a distinct field of inquiry in the late 1940s...[it] deployed ethnographic description and interpretation alongside oral historical inquiry and the historian's traditional source materials' (p.12). Dirks (1987) suggests that 'like all hybrid labels...it is most useful when it points us to the possibility of a collaborative enterprise which is both open-ended and more than simply the sum of its parts' (p.10). According to Brown (1991, p.113) 'I critique[s] historians work from an anthropological perspective and anthropologists from a historical stance' (p.117). Equally, in her exploration of the mutually constitutive fields of history

away (Dirks, 1987).

and ethnography for the purposes of studying dance, Buckland (2006a) emphasises possibilities around such disciplinary 'blends'.

In an ethnohistory, a broader range of materials can be brought into play than in oral histories to empirically 'thicken' understandings. Emergence of this methodology is related in some ways to the influence of postmodern fluidity on historiography. According to Buckland, 'since the mid-twentieth century...the discipline of history has largely rejected the former hierarchical relationship between oral and written testimonies. Historians accept that the written is not necessarily any more reliable than the oral, both being situational records of perceived realities' (2006, p.11). Axtell (1979) lists out the types of materials used in ethnohistorical projects: 'maps, music, paintings, photographs, folklore, oral traditions, ecology, site exploration, archaeological artefacts...museum collections, enduring customs, language and place names as well as a far richer variety of written sources' (p.3). Participant observation *per se* is less germane in an ethnohistorical approach, and the temporal boundaries of this research project would preclude the likes of archaeological material, while music, folklore, oral traditions and enduring customs would fit well. The 'written sources' that have been used include maps, census returns and newspapers. To summarise so far, given its gaze to the past, and its use of a range of historical methods alongside interviews, this investigation can be identified as an 'ethnohistory'³. However, the research politics of oral history also speak to the project, and will inflect the project at a number of points

In more specific ways, given its concern with recreational dance, this research points to the field of 'dance anthropology', one characterised by Buckland as 'realised through methodological and theoretical approaches drawn from feminism and postmodern anthropology to address the distinctive nature of an ethnographic practice that 'is necessarily grounded in the body and the body's experience' (2006a, p.8). This area of study makes conceptual space for the dancing body, a phenomenon that can sometimes disappear in the rush to assess the 'politics' of cultural practices (Malbon, 1999; Thomas, 2003). Dance as embodied practice has been defined by Hanna (1987, p.57) as:

Human behaviour composed, from the dancer's perspective, of (1) purposeful, (2) intentionally rhythmical, and (3) culturally patterned sequences of (4a) nonverbal body movements (4b) other than ordinary motor activities, (4c) the motion having inherent and aesthetic value . . . Within this conceptualisation, human behaviour must meet each of the four criteria in order to be classified as 'dance'.

At the same time, there is not an exact methodological 'fit' between this investigation and dance anthropology, so that the type of very specific details about dance movements that characterise the

³ When speaking more generally at some points, and reflecting its broader use in the literature, I've used the term 'ethnography'.

research of Ness (1992) and Novack (1990), for example, have been less salient for the current research project. Rather the emphasis is on 'dance' in relation to the social events that encompassed various practices including body movements⁴. This usage reflects dancers' accounts from the research setting, and resonates with a number of strands in the literature. Cowan views the dance-event:

As a temporally, spatially, and conceptually 'bounded' sphere of interaction. In the dance-event, individuals publicly present themselves in and through celebratory practices – eating, drinking, singing, and talking as well as dancing – and are evaluated by others. (1990, p.4)

It is, at the same time, the prominence and centrality of dance moves that allows for the definition of the event, and the terms are linked in important ways. In other words, people go to events they describe as 'dances' because the act of dancing is an integral part of the social occasion. Where confusion might arise in this regard, the qualifiers 'events' or 'moves' will be used. Bringing together these various strands, this investigation can best be thought of as an 'ethnohistory of dance', or loosely, as a 'dance ethnohistory'. The next section will consider the importance of the interview method for such a methodological choice.

2.2 Interviews and Ethnohistory

In this section, as an important foundation of the 'ethno' side of ethnohistory, the strengths and weaknesses of the interview method will be presented. This will be preceded by a short discussion of participant observation.

Participant observation can bring researchers very close to the experiential 'data from the dance floor' that this study is partly concerned with (Cowan, 1990; Thomas, 1997; O'Connor, 1997; Pini, 1997; Malbon, 1999; Ferrer, 2004). Malbon (2004, p.502) for example 'shadowed' clubbers over the course of a night out and identified 'skills, techniques and notions of competency and coolness' associated with clubbing. Ferrer speaks of 'casually interacting' (2004, p.402) with staff and clientele at Chinese discos as a basis for subsequent note-taking. These epistemological benefits have other, subtler effects. Malbon (1999, p.32) remarks:

I did not want to be seen by the clubbers as more of an 'outsider' than was partly inevitable. My own background as a clubber was, I believe, crucial in establishing my credentials as someone who was both genuinely interested in and could readily empathise with their experiences rather than merely someone who

4 These senses chime well both with local articulations, as well as with my own experiences of clubbing. While the activity of dancing was central to the culture, the moves themselves were rarely discussed.

just happened to be 'doing a project' on nightclubs as his 'job'.

With a dance ethnohistory, the researcher cannot be 'present' as participant-observer since the dances, and many who went to them, are long gone⁵. At the same time, some imaginative possibilities have been documented in the literature. Brennan (1999) bridged the temporal divide when her elderly respondents demonstrated dancing moves with their fingers, while seated or with the support of a chair. Kuhn (2002) describes how she sat down to watch *Maytime*, a romantic movie from the 1930s with cinema fans. Viewers were in some ways returned to their cinema-going youth, a journey especially evident through affective channels. In the current investigation, a dancer accompanied me on a drive along routes he would have followed on his bicycle in the 1940s to a dance hall. An interesting 'unsettling' of memory took place when we moved through space in this way and visited actual dancing sites. In another method, influenced by Kuhn (2002), I sat down with my parents (who would have danced in the late 1950s and 1960s) to watch Radio Teilifís Éireann's⁶ (RTE) eponymous 1982 production of the William Trevor short story *The Ballroom of Romance* (1971). They reflected on the production, discussing music, dances and courting so that it acted as an *aide-memoire*, and a reference for measuring historical accuracy. The setting was informal, and we were dealing with a representation of a representation of recreational dance. Nevertheless, O'Connor (2003) has argued 'that the drama sufficiently reflects the social conditions of the time to be useful' (p.61). Its use is further enhanced in being, at the time of writing, the only televisual or cinematic representation of Irish dance halls at this time, though there have been a number of literary representations, apart from those of Trevor (Thomson, 1974; McGahern, 2006; Barry, 2008).

Using interviews contrasts with studies of dance in Ireland based on documents such as newspapers and official papers. Sometimes, interviews are no longer possible, as in Bakhtin's (1984) investigations of dance and festivity in early modern Europe. On other occasions, researchers have chosen to use documents over interviews (Breathnach, 1983; Smyth, 1993; Tubridy, 1994; Gibbons, 1994; O'Connor, 2003, 2005). O'Connor (2005, p.102) is reflexive on the limits of more documentary-based approaches and calls for more ethnographic data on how individuals *lived* dance. Referring to the bodies suggested by newspaper discourse analysis, she remarks:

5 During the summer sessions, when talking to one elder after another, living in an environment that has changed in some ways, remained the same in others, reading and thinking through the questions, there is a nebulous sense of being temporarily removed to the past that people are talking about, another hint of participant observation.

6 The current name of the Irish state radio and television broadcaster. In its pre-television period, it was known as 2RN, and later Radio Éireann (see Chapter 6).

These bodies are ideal types and need to be considered as such for at least two important reasons. One is that there is almost no newspaper evidence on how these embodied identities were negotiated in real dance halls by either women or men.

A number of studies are illustrative of limits in this respect. Walsh (1997), discussing the appeal of disco for young people in the 1970s, concludes, 'largely it is a matter of the ambience which the disco sets out to create, which is one of sophistication and glamour'(p.113). Back remarks of dancers in Germany of the 1940s, 'the swing movement was not a self-consciously radical movement, despite the vicious suppression meted out to them' (1997, p.186). In the absence of interview data, such statements veer towards the speculative and etic in a way that weakens the validity of their findings. Without consulting dancers, research can quickly descend into a series of unfounded assumptions that say more about scholar than dancer.

Where a dance-event has taken place in the past, but within living memory, and where the possibilities for participant observation are limited, people's memories come to assume a central place in understanding dance culture⁷. In other words, an ethnohistory compensates in some ways for the 'pastness' of social phenomena by necessarily focusing on the present (though mediated) reality of interviews, the 'folklore' and 'oral traditions' that Axtell (1979) refers to. As Kuhn says (2002, p.41), 'the picture-going heyday of the 1930s generation lies within living memory, but the cinemagoer's own stories remain largely unrecorded'⁸. As was outlined in Chapter 1, something of a cultural salvage operation is required in these cases, a process of retrieval that tends towards the more urgent task of meeting those most advanced in years. The concern with this investigation is to let dancers speak for themselves and contribute to this cultural history, so that emic interpretations are important for this project. This minimises the tendency in a more detached, documentary history to read off a version of events that has more to do with contemporary interests and personal biographies. At the same time, this researcher's story has come into dialogue with those of dancers, a type of Bakhtinian dialogue between etic and emic understandings that will be discussed in more detail in Section 2.4.

Attempting to do justice to dancing, getting in some ways 'inside the dance', is facilitated by face-to-face engagement with dancers. Malbon (2004) employed interviews in his study of the clubbing

7 In the case of this project, those interviewed consisted of male and female small farmers, along with labourers, teachers, musicians, singers and bus drivers, predominantly Catholic but including a minority of Church of Ireland members, mainly rural but including people from the town too, aged between 63 and 93 (detailed biographical information is available in Section 4.1 and Table 3).

8 Kuhn (2002), though dealing with cinema-going culture, takes a step backwards some 60 years from her fieldwork to the period under review, a temporal step that matches this project (from 2000s/2010s to the 1940s/1950s).

experience and the 'oceanic experiences' that it engenders. He exposes delicate, elusive sensibilities that could otherwise be missed. One dancer remarked, 'I feel really sort of like spiritual like I don't judge, I trust, I feel cleansed, I feel...it's like a really sort of pure feeling' (p.508). Thomas' (1993) concern was primarily with dancers who performed at a London workshop, but a similarly nebulous state was revealed by her interviewees: 'it makes me feel like – I feel like there are no boundaries to me at all...it makes me feel more than I am, than I am now in a sense' (p.82). In an Irish context, and in the field of dance, Brennan (1999) collected dancing practices as well as stories about dance-events in deeply personal encounters with dancers in Co. Clare. Such rich emic interpretations can only emerge by talking to dancers.

A number of options exist in this regard, such as formal interviews, focus groups and informal interviews (Harvey and McDonald, 1993). For the most part, formal semi-structured interviews have been used in this investigation so that they have been set up in advance, involve a recorder, and involve interviewer and interviewee in a question and answer session based around looser concerns rather than set questions. At the same time, this might give an overly regimented view of how things worked in practice. As the fieldwork has progressed, 'naturalism' in the sense used by Harvey and McDonald (1993, p.176) has featured. This involves an aiming for a 'minimum of disruption by the researcher' to the research setting. Practically, this means talking to people in situations where they are comfortable, and that allow them to share memories in a way that they might do with visiting friends or relatives. For this reason, home visits have featured strongly. Brennan (1999) feels that stories emerge when actors are surrounded by memories of past events and those long deceased. Harvey and MacDonald (1993, p.122) concur: 'it is argued that the best way of [building rapport] is for the interview to take place in their homes'⁹.

Naturalism of this sort opens up local 'back room' settings (Goffman, 1959) to the research process with occasionally unpredictable consequences. In four cases, although sessions had been arranged with one person, spouses sat in and contributed to the interviews. Rather than a corruption of the data-gathering process, this was an unexpected benefit. In particular, since most couples met through dances, collective remembering was a valuable contribution to the field-work, and constituted a type of collaborative intervention by dancers. Focus groups, says Gottlieb (2006, p.55)

9 Such rapport cannot be taken for granted. Malbon (2004) comments on 'the difficulty of articulating these experiences [around dance]...particularly to someone who is not a close friend' (p.495). De Laine (2000, p.28) has suggested that ethnographers should strive to 'build collaborative, reciprocal, trusting and friendly relations with those studied and value the connectedness that forms between them and others'. Such techniques become especially apposite in view of the limits to participant observation discussed earlier, with not being 'at the dance' with these people.

'offer an intriguing variation on the individual interview'. Given the popularity in the area of storytelling, effectively a form of collective remembering, people tend to encourage, correct, challenge or affirm each other, so that richer accounts can emerge.

Another collaborative aspect of these sessions was the undermining of the interviewer/interviewee hierarchy, so that questions were often turned on me, and I often found myself telling stories or answering questions. A more conversational approach resulted that was useful for further building rapport and trust. Harvey and MacDonald (1993, p.122) suggest that 'the interview should resemble as closely as possible a structured conversation in which the interviewer leads the dialogue' (although this investigation envisions a less privileged researcher, and a more democratic conversation). Again, Bakhtin's dialogic sensibility is to the fore. Unpredictable twists and turns in these more conversational exchanges have been useful in establishing contextual frames for understanding dance, resonating with Schuman's (1982, p.24) comment in this regard: 'what is an artifact if treated naively, reflects a fact of life if treated seriously'. These 'digressions' have come to constitute an important aspect of the story of dance, and were revealing of useful contextual data. Naturalism featured in another way, so that the value of ordinary, everyday conversations as data became apparent. As a 'halfie' ethnohistorian (see Section 2.4), I found myself on many occasions discussing with relatives or friends more general historical issues. There was nothing formal or planned about these sessions. Rather, they were impromptu, unrecorded, and truly conversational. If the exchange seemed relevant, notes were made later on in private (a process that on ethical grounds involved securing the consent of the person involved)¹⁰.

There are a number of limits to the interview method. According to the PMG (1982, p.17), 'oral or autobiographical accounts are both richer and less strictly 'reliable' than has been suggested'. Kuhn (2002) points out that representations of the past are heavily mediated by the vicissitudes of memory. It is also useful to recall that 'stories', as situated discursive constructions, are not transparent accounts of reality. The PMG (1982, p.18) have pointed out some of the complex possibilities here:

Stories come also with intricate variations of form: on the one side tightly sewn up and 'closed', punctuated with a moral at the end, a particular, confident male form; on the other, more open narratives, completed rather by a laugh, often in self-depreciation, dealing with some embarrassing or difficult past happening; then again stories of a largely apocryphal status, more in the form of the proverb, often encapsulating some element of

10 Another aspect of these informal interviews is that 'a line needed to be drawn'. If every conversation along these lines were to be a source of data, this would represent an intrusion into my non-researching life that I was uncomfortable with. For this reason, such data-gathering sessions have been limited to the field, and the research sensibility has been 'switched off' when such conversations occur outside the setting if, say, at home in Limerick with my parents.

While an ethnography of story-telling is beyond the scope of this investigation, these nuances can usefully be borne in mind. Equally, access to Goffman's (1959) figurative 'back room' does not open up the literal back room. Given the morally conservative environment of Ireland at this time (Ferriter, 2009), frank discussions around sexuality have not featured. In politics, other types of silence result around, say, membership in republican organisations. Likewise, issues of class distinction are sometimes glossed over by statements such as 'we were all in the same boat' (Packie). These issues are closely related to the politics of research, to interactions that took place between older, rural dwellers and a younger, urban representative of both a local family and an academic institution of the metropolitan centre.

There is also, as the PMG (1982) have pointed out, the way in which the present colours the past. History is always viewed from a particular place, and constructions around this past-present trope need to be considered. In the research setting for example, criticisms of past behaviour of the Catholic Church may be related to prominent media coverage of reports on the clerical abuse of children during the writing of this dissertation between 2007 and 2013. Representations of harmonious relationships between Protestants and Catholics in the past might be inflected by dynamics of the Northern Ireland peace process since the mid-1990s. Ongoing and heated local debates on the downgrading of Roscommon hospital, and on curtailment of turf-cutting, might lead to an amplification of representations of 'centre-periphery' divisions between residents of the research setting and Dublin, as the source of government policy.

Talking about dance constitutes another more specific limit to interviews for this investigation. Dance practices, it has been argued, occupy a domain that is fundamentally 'other'. Ward (1997) speaks of an 'ontological faultline' in this regard, while for Thomas (1993), dance constitutes 'another voice'. In a world where rationalism and words rule, acknowledging the intricacies of dancing experiences presents certain difficulties¹¹. Perhaps though, this problem has been overstated. While Ward (1997) was struck by the reticence of Thomas' (2003) dancers, a closer reading of Thomas' study shows that, after an initial reluctance, dancers were willing to speak up. In fact, these interviews seem to offer a particularly powerful account of dancing suited for inclusion in an ultimately (verbal) analysis of dance. Though we may live in a rational and logocentric world, this

11 Part of the problem is that the academic world hinges on the written word, on writing proposals, reading literature, transcribing interviews, writing draft chapters and emails, and preparing presentations.

need not mean that there can be no talk about dance. In fact, the opposite may be true. Perhaps dance represents a refuge from rationalism and excessive thought; perhaps this accounts for the pleasure we feel when dancing; and perhaps this in turn encourages us (despite an initial reluctance) to talk freely about it, to remember it, and, as academics, to study it. At the same time, a recognition of some limits around expressing more subtle emotional states will feature in Chapter 10.

These are some of the complexities and mediations around using interviews in an ethnohistory of dance. If they accurately reflect the nuances of the situation, then the task of faithfully representing the story of dance seems daunting. There are, however, a number of ways of mitigating these problems. For a start, using a more contingent, constructivist ontology will allow searches for final 'truths' to be abandoned. As such, definitions of 'truth' should not be limited to narrow empirical definitions – truth involves the truth of feeling, of remembering, of narrative construction (PMG, 1982). On this basis, this investigation favours a post-positivist notion of complementarity and a looser 'cross-analysis' over a more rigid triangulation in combining data (Saukko, 2003). For example, each memory has its own situated truth for that person or community, and is 'real' to them. At the same time, a degree of 'factual' framing will be necessary, however contingent that is. By, on the one hand, accessing various types of historical material for purposes of cross-analysis, and on the other, assessing where there is broad agreement on topics amongst interviewees, contingent narratives can be constructed. Historical material might, moreover, be able to throw light on matters that were *not* discussed in the interviews. As will be discussed in the next section, there are other strengths that non-interview sources can bring to an ethnohistory of dance.

2.3 Historical Methods

This section will present the 'historical' side of the ethnohistorical methodology, and reflect on how a range of materials and methods can be brought into dialogue with interviews.

Saukko (2003) has suggested that an ethnography that focuses on lived experience alone constitutes a very partial representation of reality. Data gathered through interviews is always informed by and speaks of broader elements of the social formation:

A life-story is: (1) an expression of lived reality, to be understood dialogically; (2) shot through with social discourses that can be unraveled through deconstruction; and (3) articulates wide local, national and transnational politics to be analysed contextually. (2003, p3)

Experiences of dance cannot be discussed as a hermetically-sealed world, a truly 'bounded sphere'

(Cowan, 1990) where 'intrinsic factors' alone are at play. Recreational dance is inflected by social realities outside itself, and the macrocosmic is manifest in the microcosmic (Silverman, 1985; Thomas, 2003). The PMG also suggest that a focus on empirical data yielded by interviews is not sufficient in itself for understanding popular memory. Interview material is not fully activated, they believe, until it is seen as articulated within particular contexts:

The process of 'reading through' an account to its 'factual' substratum is an extremely complicated business. It depends [on] the presence of sources of relevant knowledge other than the account itself and, as important, the presence of some explicit and productive theory of social relations and of forms of consciousness (1982, p.17).

In this investigation, such 'reading through' involves locating interviews in particular cultural and social contexts. These come into focus on the basis of the theories used, to be discussed Chapter 3, as well as on the basis of interview 'digressions', as was discussed in Section 2.2.

Although much of the initial thrust of this work was to engage in as direct a way as possible with dancers through interviews, avoiding in this way the less immediate representations of newspapers and documentary records, these latter sources later proved to be important. The main newspaper read in the locality during the research period was (and continues to be) *The Roscommon Herald*. As with most newspapers, each edition consisted of a blend of editorial content, announcements and advertisements. However, an entire section of each newspaper was set aside for advertising dance events in a manner that illustrates the centrality of these cultural forms at the time. Such content provided a neat way of circumventing those discourses around dance associated with the 'national-popular' that tended to dominate this source. Ironically, the commercial imperatives of provincial newspapers have facilitated a rare glimpse into such embodied cultural knowledge. By carrying out a simple counting exercise on newspaper advertisements in the *Roscommon Herald*, I hoped to establish the relative popularity of the various dance forms between 1940 and 1960. While oral histories pointed me towards certain conclusions on this front, these could usefully be complemented with such data. For example, the pronounced increase in popularity of céilí events in the late 1950s did not register until I processed the figures of this counting exercise.

I settled first on a sample of three years – 1940, 1950 and 1960 – as marking the boundaries and midpoint of the research period. For each of these years, I sampled twelve editions - the first of each month. For each of these editions, I counted all the dance advertisements and categorised them under three headings reflecting their content. All the main types – modern, céilí and carnival - were represented. 'Modern dances' were flagged not by this term, but by the absence of 'céilí'. As such, it

might be suggested that the generic term 'dance' carries with an assumption that it was a modern dance. A similar labelling theme is evident in many of the interview transcripts. This requires no clarification, while céilí dances need to be specifically distinguished. This in itself says something about the dominant status of modern dances. Music was distinguished in a similar way. More generic 'orchestras' and 'bands' – say *The Mick Duignan Band* – contrasted with, for example, the *Gallowglass Céilí Band*. Again, more semantic work is required to distinguish the less popular form.

Based on the sampling techniques used, I made two adjustments to record the total number of dance events in each of the featured years. First, advertisements for carnivals did not always specify the number or type of dances featured within the event, but where this was indicated, they would typically include five dances over the duration of a week or a fortnight. As a means of assessing the contribution towards the total number of dances, each carnival entry counted for five dances. Moreover, carnivals can be thought of as a type of 'meta-dance', incorporating various combinations of modern and céilí dances. Considering how these events fed into the more detailed breakdown of these latter types of events was a little more problematic. Given the lack of detail in print, the oral record was of some use. John remarked that 'there'd be one céilí dance for six modern dances'. I have counted carnivals as including these dances in a ratio of one to four, striking a balance between John's estimation on the one hand and acknowledging the rise in popularity of céilí in the 1950s on the other. These figures also suit the total of five dances that I'm assigning to these events. I made one other use of newspaper data. By recording the location of each hall, I could assess the changing geographic spread of venues, as a way of thinking through issues around space, transport and mobility. The results of the analysis can be seen in Table 4 (Section 6.1). Apart from counting advertisements, attention was paid to articles that included 'dance', 'céilí', 'carnival' and so on in the headlines. Rather than a systematic content or discourse analysis as used in O'Connor's (2005) research, these articles were read in order to build up a broad knowledge of the discursive context within which dances were practised.

Census data also yielded rich dividends through figures on population, work patterns and farm acreage by county and electoral area (Central Statistics Office¹² (CSO), 1911, 1946, 1956). Appendix A contains historical data on housing from the 1911 census. A range of basic counting and averaging functions have been performed on this raw data to produce Tables 2, 3 and 5 in Chapters

12 The Irish state body for correlating national statistics.

6 and 8. The 'Elections.org' website documents the electoral results by constituency of every general election since the founding of the state, data that documents changing political loyalties, and allows for a clearer understanding of class distinctions. Maps have been useful for establishing spatial bearings, and for approximating the detailed knowledge of locals in this sphere. To temporally thicken things, and to develop a better knowledge of the small farmer class, historical maps from the Ordnance Survey (OS) Ireland website (2011) have been used. Another online source, the Roscommon-Leitrim Genealogy site (2011), includes maps as well as information that allowed for an untangling of the multiple spatial categories of the area – county, barony, Catholic parish, civil parish, townland¹³ and, occasionally, sub-townlands. Combining these materials allowed for the creation of the map shown in Fig.3.

This more official data has, as with interview data, been treated with critical vigilance. The 'sacred text' of documentary sources is occasionally presented by orthodox historians as 'objective' (PMG, 1982). Such data - while certainly valuable and relevant - is better viewed as contingent and as situated. The synthesis offered by an ethnohistory has in many ways become possible on the basis that, 'since the mid-twentieth century...the discipline of history has largely rejected the former hierarchical relationship between oral and written testimonies. Historians accept that the written is not necessarily any more reliable than the oral, both being situational records of perceived realities' (Buckland, 2006a, p.11). In this regard, it is worth stressing the instrumentality of official data for dominant groups, so that empire and state have employed tools of this nature in pursuit of dominance. According to Mattingly (2010, p.141), 'the 'road map' of the imperial [Roman] economy was the census, working on the principle that knowledge equals power'. Census returns, seen sometimes as historical 'fact', can be more critically seen in more deconstructive terms, as tools of various Foucauldian 'knowledge-power' systems. These concerns are all the more pertinent in my dual role of 'halfie ethnographer', as will be discussed in the next section.

2.4 Reflexive Ethnography

Though I've hinted at my own involvement at a number of points so far, my standpoint has mainly been that of the outsider, objectifying those within the research frame. The implications of placing the researcher within the frame will be considered in this section.

¹³ This is an important geographic subdivision still used at local level in rural areas. The origin of townlands can be traced back to various patterns of land settlement, including Cromwellian, Norman and Gaelic (Aallen et al., 1997).

Until reflexive ethnography was added to the repertoire of methods available to social scientists in the 1960s (Bell, 1993), 'harder', more positivist ethnographic approaches tended to deny, eliminate or reduce this aspect of the research, and see it as a contaminant of data. 'Detached' in this way, social scientists were supposedly enabled to get to the core of the issue, to see beyond the perspective of those immersed in the setting. The consequence could be a type of anthropological 'arrogance' (Oyertey, 1997), where any emotional involvement was seen as undermining 'purer' intellectual pursuits (Sanjek, 1990). According to Buckland (2006a, p.10), 'in the wake of postmodernism...once cherished certainties believed to be indicative of true scientific method, have broken down in the field of ethnography', leading to new epistemological tendencies such as 'new ethnography' and 'new history'. Bell (1993) adds, 'it took the postmodern proclamation of a 'crisis of representation' to put the critique of objectivity and the scrutiny of ethnographic authority onto the disciplinary agenda' (p.3). Every researcher, however ostensibly objectivist, was now seen to be 'within' the research frame (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Bryman (2004) outlines how feminist approaches challenged the androcentric valorisation of the researcher as privileged, all-knowing, above and outside those being researched, a view that resonates across all social faultlines. The researcher did not occupy a more elevated position than those he/she researched. This is consonant with De Laine's (2000) 'moral career' of the fieldworker which involves 'being with' and 'for' instead of 'looking at' participants. In the light of these tendencies, a central epistemological imperative has become to 'know thyself' (Mead, 1976, cited in Bell, 1993). As Thomas (1993, p.76) puts it, 'the idea inherent in an objectivist framework that the researcher is an invisible being who drops into and reveals the practices and ways of others (the researched) becomes redundant, in favour of a reflexivity of accounts'. She suggests that such data, once seen as a limitation to hard science, can be turned into a strength.

Buckland (2006, p.16) has commented that, since postmodernism, 'within ethnographic and historical texts...authentic representation of experience has been a driving factor...bringing to prominence the native ethnographer and historian' (while recognising that 'the concept of authenticity in contingent areas of...practice is, at the same time, subject to intense critical scrutiny' (*ibid*). Closely related to the 'native ethnographer', the term 'halfie ethnographer' was coined by Lila Abu-Lughod (2008) to refer to how her hybrid Arab-American identity influenced the work she carried out with Arab women. As an academic who nevertheless identified strongly with the women interviewed, she encountered a powerful sense of the potentialities for reflexivity. For Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), reflexivity constitutes a valid and important strand of contemporary ethnography: '[the researcher] is the research instrument *par excellence*' (p.19). For Bell (1993) 'we

(ethnographers) do fieldwork by establishing relationships, and by learning to see, think and be in another culture, and we do this as persons of a particular age, sexual orientation, belief, educational background, ethnic identity and class' (p2). We are thus located in many ways by our (embodied) selves.

At the same time, moving towards an understanding of the researcher as subject should not completely abandon the notion of the objective researcher. Buckland (2006a, p.11) stresses that 'recognition of an engagement with issues and dilemmas raised by post-positivism...should not necessarily lead to anarchical clouds of unknowing in the pursuit of ethnographic and historical methodologies in studying dance'. A delicate balancing act always takes place. In the practice of participant observation for example, there is always a dialectic between its constituent elements. The researcher is 'subject' in that they participate in particular practices, whether inside and/or outside the research frame, but also 'object' based on the observing gaze. Participation is always qualified by observation. The researcher is neither fully 'native' nor 'other'. One can move more or less closely to actors' lives and dancing experiences, but never quite arrive. As a westerner at a dance-event in Shanghai in the 1990s, Ferrer (2004) attracted particular types of attention from other dancers.

More generally, as both Silverman (1985) and Thomas (2003) indicate, resolving subject/object dilemmas involves walking a fine line between opening up to actors and their experiences through our own humanity, and avoiding the dangers of 'going native'. If one of the tasks of the ethnographer is, as Hammersley and Atkinson put it, 'to treat [the research setting] as 'anthropologically strange' in an effort to make explicit the presuppositions he or she takes for granted' (1995, p.6), this task becomes of paramount importance in the liminal world of the 'halfie'. Recognising such post-positivist ambiguities around objectivism and subjectivism frees us in some ways from the need to establish an epistemological end-point, and one route to that point. For Saukko (2003), these various perspectives are not right or wrong; they are each specifically situated and valid - in their own terms - ways of thinking about the question. She speaks of research 'validities' rather than 'validity'.

A range of dance scholars have drawn on their dancing experiences (see Miller, 1990; O'Connor, 1997; Brennan 1999; Malbon, 2004; Foley, 2004; Ness, 1992). Ward (1997) has pointed out that, because of the fluidity between observer and observed at many of these types of dance events, they are particularly suitable for a subjectivist ontology. This can involve both parties being on the dance

floor together, or simply sharing the more general embodied knowledge that comes with being a recreational dancer. Brennan (1999) nourished a friendship with Willy Clancy during her field-trips to Clare, built through a mutual exploration of dance by two dancers, united by a desire to preserve the popular dances of the area. There are other ways though, besides dancing, that subject/object boundaries can be crossed, and the next section will assess some ways in which I am 'visible' in this project.

2.5 Three Subjectivities: Dancing, Familial and Gender

In this section, there will be a discussion of how recent tendencies in reflexive ethnography have come to inflect this dance ethnohistory. Three types of subjectivity will be presented, those relating to my dancing, my family and my gender.

Buckland (2006a, p.13) remarks that:

The 'I' persona as a source of data, dancing and reflecting on sensation and meaning, has produced a significant extension and alternative to earlier objective modes of analysis...the process affords an opportunity to explore embodied cultural knowledge as temporally and spatially dynamic, situational in its meaning, and creative in the interstices of personal and communal histories that research across experiences of researcher and researched.

As a dancer (breakdancing, set-dancing, clubbing), my body potentially acts as a vehicle grounding and thickening understandings of recreational dance. An initial impetus for this work was my involvement in clubbing in Dublin and Limerick in the 1990s, as participant and event organiser. I began participating in these events during my time working in the bulb factories of Holland in 1991. When I returned to Dublin, I moved further into the nascent scene there at that time, attending early house clubs such as Sides, The Temple of Sound and Alien. In subsequent years, our collective founded a production company, Shakedown, to host one-off events in various clubs in Dublin; the Temple Bar Music Centre (now the Button Factory), Mono (now the Village) and the Ocean Bar. Throughout this period, many of my friends and much of my social life revolved around the clubbing subculture. One of its 'symbolic axes' (Thornton, 2004) was the club, but also the domestic space of the house party. This dance culture kindled my interest in pursuing a study of recreational dance (see Shanagher, 2012b).

In a quite self-conscious manner, we felt that we were transgressing dominant norms by staying out dancing until dawn to music that differed strikingly from 'mainstream' music, from thumping

aggressive 'techno' to the lush sounds of 'house'. More fundamentally, our 'second life' (Bakhtin, 1984) was marked by a pronounced hedonism, reaching its apogee on the dance floor when music, dance, lights and conviviality blended into an experience of 'communitas', a sense of unified collective joy, one that we felt was outside the experience of dominant groups. An awareness and appreciation of the pronounced 'otherness' of this experience was heightened by media campaigns that sought to close the scene down. Our 'cultural resistance' was a source of dynamism, pleasure and mobility. Rushing from club to house party to beach party, we were constructing a new reality in the 'here-and-now' (Bey, 1985).

A second type of subjectivity involves those that have been termed 'familial' in this dissertation. My links through 'kith and kin' to those that live in the area have shaped this research in many ways. For a start, the house in Ballysundriven townland where my uncle resided until he passed away in 1999 has become what I have termed the 'home place' (see Chapter 5, Fig.3), the house that acted as an emotional and material hub for the project, and was the base for my field-work. Most of those interviewed live within a few miles of the familial base (see Fig.3), although others now reside in nursing homes in nearby towns, or have moved to Galway, Limerick and New York. As such, familial subjectivities have framed the 'community'¹⁴ that concerns this project. Several enjoyable conversations with an elderly farmer, Packie Carney, who lived across the road from my father's family provided the initial spark for my interest in popular memory in this setting. Often infused 'anecdotal memory', Kuhn (2002, p.239) says that 'memory-stories...are a reminder, much-needed in an ageist society, of the cultural treasure that lies in our elders' memories'.

The selection of dancers for interviews was based largely on suggestions from my father, from a cousin of mine, John-Joe, who farms locally, and from contacts suggested in turn by these interviewees - a form of snowball sampling. John-Joe in particular, has acted as a key informant in this regard. Geertz (1961) is critical of this type of sampling, believing it to be influenced by the class position of the initial informant. With an appropriate degree of reflexivity however, this need not be too problematic. Based on my growing understanding of community and interviewee demographics, it now seems that the group of dancers are quite representative of the larger social group they live within by gender, class and religion. They are mainly male and female Catholic small farmers, the dominant group locally and nationally around this time (Arensberg and Kimball,

14 'Community' exists in this case as the network of family friends, contacts and relatives who radiate out from the home place. This is not a 'natural' or 'essential' body of people, rather it is a notional one, defined by research needs and priorities. At the same time, during the 1940s and 1950s, when mobility was limited, there would have been limits to how far people travelled each day, and a consequent familiarity with those living nearby.

2001[1936]; CSO 1911, 1946, 1956), or professions related to these. Deliberate efforts were made to seek out local Protestants since snowball sampling was not as effective in accessing this part of the community. Finally, there has been a *de facto* selection on the basis of age. Those interviewed were young dancers in the 1940s, while older dancers from the period would not be alive.

Familial subjectivities have eased my passage into the community, and minimised the difficulties associated with building rapport that were discussed in Section 2.2. On this basis, familial subjectivities perform a compensatory role, giving an affective thickness to the interview process¹⁵. Such processes have thrown local life into relief in a manner that might be more difficult for a 'full' outsider to access, and equally has heightened ethical issues. Apart from de Laine's (2000) 'informed consent' around confidentiality, it has been incumbent upon me at times to acknowledge local sensitivities. I recall registering unease on the part of some locals when the question of religious divisions were raised, and of consequently 'changing tack', rather than pressing on as a more detached researcher might have done. Historical methods are better employed in such potentially contentious cases. These ambiguities have also sharpened my awareness of the politics of research. For example, people in this area were noted for their solidarity and reticence following a number of high-profile agrarian assassinations in the mid-nineteenth century (Coleman, 1999). On the one hand, some of these local people were my antecedents. On the other, as (half an) 'outsider', I needed to respect the social dynamics of 'enclosure' against the 'outside' that arise around these sensibilities.

Gender subjectivities have also shaped research relations. Bell (1993, p.2) speaks of a 'gender-inflected voice, which cannot masquerade as universal: they have a standpoint and cannot pretend otherwise' and asks 'why has mainstream anthropology been so recalcitrant in acknowledging that gender makes a difference to ethnography?' (*ibid*, p.3). She focuses on research as a feminine practice, and challenges the way that 'what are for the most part male standpoints [are] presented as the 'norm". Bell's (1993) problematising of a 'gender blind' research speaks to this research. Not only am I a recreational dancer, I am a *male* recreational dancer. I have participated in and witnessed engagement by males with a range of forms¹⁶. In a very fundamental way, this project has

15 Many of the older dancers knew Tom, my grandfather and Maggie, my grandmother, who both died before I was born. Both were fiddle players. Tom features in a folk song around a house dance (see Appendix B). Packie recalled the way he used to stamp the ground with his feet as he played. Charlie remembered him singing a song at a wake in the 1930s. Mícheál was good friends with my father in the 1960s and showed me photos of the group of friends at a fleadh in Thurles at that time.

16 These include my brother performing the difficult 'windmill' breakdance move on a roll of lino to tunes by Chakha Khan and Kraftwerk in 1985 (he has written of these experiences (Shanagher, 2012a); male clubbers swinging their

been shaped by a desire to place men *alongside* women in academic representations, just as they usually are on the dance floor. Moreover, during the research, women and men would speak to me in quite particular ways. This was evident in male-to-male talk about sport, courting and politics. Detailed discussions of female fashions during the 1940s and 1950s were not a feature of my interviews with women, although this is likely to have inflected their dancing experiences. Such an absence could be related to a reticence to discuss such a feminine topic with a male researcher, or a tendency on my behalf to discuss other areas. Gendering of the research process has worked in other ways. When I discussed potential interviewees with my main informant, John-Joe, he supplied a list that included more men than women. For him, and many older people locally, 'local history' (in the terms used for this investigation when talking to local people) was primarily a male pursuit, chiming with O'Connor's (2005) suggestion that it was often men in rural Ireland who were regarded as 'tradition-bearers'. To counter this, and to include women, I paid particular attention when either my informant, or interviewees themselves, revealed the names of women. On a number of occasions, when I had arranged interview sessions with a male dancer, their partner was present, and were interviewed then or at later date. As can be seen in Table 1, male and female dancers were quite equally represented.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has set out the methodological choices that have informed and shaped this investigation. From a number of options – ethnography, oral history, ethnohistory, dance anthropology – it was decided to frame the project as an 'ethnohistory of dance'. This foundation allowed clear choices to be made on suitable methods. Interviews assumed a central role, while participant observation was less relevant. At the same time, key limitations around interviews were set out as a basis for introducing historical methods that could be used to complement the data, and to establish a series of relevant contexts. These included census returns, newspaper archives and local histories. Finally, influences from postmodern ethnography were used to locate the researcher inside the research frame on the basis of three types of subjectivity, related to dancing, family, and gender. The next chapter will deal with the key theoretical considerations that have informed this research project.

arms and cheering with joy in front of a DJ podium crowned by Sasha; men dancing out the intricate steps and figures of set-dancing in the Cobblestone.

Chapter 3

Conceptualising Dance

At the dances I was one of the most untiring and gayest. One evening a cousin of Sasha, a young boy, took me aside. With a grave face, as if he were about to announce the death of a dear comrade, he whispered to me that it did not behoove an agitator to dance. Certainly not with such reckless abandon, anyway...I did not believe that a Cause which stood for a beautiful ideal, for anarchism, for release and freedom from convention and prejudice, should demand the denial of life and joy.

Emma Goldman, (*Living My Life*, 1931)

3.0 Introduction

Buckland (2006a, p.17) has suggested that 'the study of dance as representative practice requires the skills and perspectives of history and ethnography, not only to explore legacies of colonialism and nationalism, but also to interrogate the continuing impact of globalisation and the politics of identity articulation'. The rise of modern dance reveals the emergence of multiple, overlapping and contradictory embodied subjectivities. Two over-arching theoretical approaches have been used in this regard - 'gramscian cultural hegemony theory' and 'post-hegemony theory'. A number of 'middle-range theories' have been incorporated under these broader headings. Cohen's 'moral panic', Bourdieu's 'distinction' and a range of theorists of subculture can be seen to fit within a broader gramscian frame (Thornton, 1995; Back, 1997; Bennett, 2000). Turner's (1969, 1974) concept of 'communitas' and Malbon's 'playful vitality' can be theoretically located within a 'post-hegemonic' frame. Theoretically, the primary influences are from cultural studies, although the discipline of anthropology has also been influential. Underlying these theoretical considerations, a pluralist ontology informed by recent currents in radical anthropology will be deployed. Thomas' (2003) division of dance studies into those focused on the 'intrinsic' (aspects of dancing that relate to the particular event) and those that are 'extrinsic' (relating to broader social processes and entities) have been influential in establishing this conceptual frame. Cresswell (2006) likewise proposes that the 'microgeography' of the moving body is always located in particular social and cultural contexts, while Silverman (1985, p.15) suggests that 'a small-scale ethnography can raise the broadest macro

issues'. Such explorations will, it is hoped, open up a type of inter-critical synergy between theories arising out of these different areas.

The first section of this chapter will think through some of the issues raised by inter-disciplinarity by reflecting on the pluralist ontology deployed. In the next section, there will be a setting out of the broad thrust of Gramsci's (1971) theory of cultural hegemony, of its strengths and weaknesses, as well as its relevance for this investigation. This theory allows for a 'janus-faced' cultural politics, so that culture can be seen to both perpetuate and challenge power. The work of 'post-Marxists' Laclau and Mouffe (1986) will be introduced in the following section as a means of nuancing aspects of gramscian thought. Next, the relations between two types of cultural hegemony will be considered, those pertaining to the 'national' and 'transnational' spaces. In the final section, there will be an introduction to recent critiques centred on the notion of 'post-hegemony' that seek to decentre cultural politics from the limits of the 'hegemony/counter-hegemony' frame. In this regard, Turner's (1969, 1974) 'communitas' and a number of related concepts will be introduced.

3.1 Inter-Disciplinarity and Pluralism

This section serves to locate the theories that will be used in subsequent sections within an inter-disciplinary framework, and will consider the strengths of adopting a more pluralist approach in this regard.

Kellner (2012) says that the discipline of cultural studies 'analyses society as a hierarchical and antagonistic set of social relations characterised by the oppression of subordinate class, gender, race, ethnic, and national strata' (p.3). Implicit in this definition is a materialist, ethical ethos that has constituted a useful starting point for this investigation. A number of consequences follow from his formulation. First, there is a concern with structural variables that point towards a broader social context. Theory is located within a network of power differentials. Related to this is an interest in the ways that social groups come into conflict in political and cultural terms – a more consensual, functionalist view of culture is less relevant here. This definition of cultural studies adopts a normative stance that focuses on the interests of less powerful groups such as women, the working classes and youth. Where there is an unequal distribution of power, along with repression, there is the potential for emancipation. 'Culture' in the gramscian terms that will be used in this investigation is neither an essential 'thing', nor an expression of shared interests, meanings and

practices in a contractual social arrangement. It is rather a site where various groups in society generate, perform and contest identities.

Useful though Kellner's definition is, it describes matters before the advent of poststructuralism and postmodernism and the 'crisis of representation' that it posed. Callinicos has criticised these tendencies on the basis of the lack of a normative 'centre', their constructivist ontology leading even humanist questions of value open to deconstruction. Taking on board some elements of this radical undermining of epistemology, it does seem possible to retain a degree of humanism, a degree of 'taking a stand' on certain moral imperatives, while allowing for an ontological uncertainty. In the opinion of Callinicos (2003), the early years of the 21st century have witnessed the superceding of more nihilistic concepts of culture and politics by a new humanism, albeit one qualified by a degree of contingency about what constitutes ontological and moral truth.

While remaining open to a poststructuralist contingency, the sources that have been favoured in this research engage with their subject matter on the basis of various types of 'democratic' value (Gramsci, 1971; Bey, 1985; Laclau and Mouffe, 1986; Gibbons, 1996; McGuinness, 1999, Williams, 2001[1961]; Holloway, 2003). In an Irish context, Luke Gibbons (1996) favours a loosely 'socialist' approach, while eschewing the certainties of a strain of universalising classical Marxism. On this basis, he makes conceptual and political space for 'fugitive forms', diverse, radical cultural and political formations that elude the net of official histories (Bey, 1985). There are resonances in his thinking with the type of contingency that will be discussed later in this section. This investigation maintains a concern with value, with emancipation, with real human needs, so that this constitutes at least one ontological 'centre', a type of normative reference point. Cohn's (2011) 'anarchist cultural studies'¹ involves an assessment of popular culture for its liberating 'emergent or potential realities' (p.20). Graeber has spoken of 'a series of diverse perspectives, joined together by their shared desire to understand the human condition, and move it in the direction of greater freedom' (2004, p.8). In other words, a moral centre is combined with a looser, more contingent combination of theoretical perspectives, one that sits well with his anarchist politics: 'applied to theory, this would mean accepting the need for a diversity of high theoretical perspectives, united only by certain shared commitments and understandings' (p.6). In this spirit, Jessie Cohn's (2011)

1 Williams (2010) has teased out some of the ways that poststructuralist theory has entered into a useful synergy with anarchist politics, a blend that he claims allowed for the emergence of 'post-anarchism': 'as...thinkers loosely grouped together under the rubric of poststructuralist theory tried to make sense of...forms of resistance...the result was that, by the late 1990s, there was enough evidence to claim that a paradigm shift had occurred within the anarchist tradition (p.111).

'plural conception of the real' seems to be germane for this investigation. Pluralism of this type allows for a more positive reading of the postmodern crisis of representation that Hammersley and Atkinson have spoken about:

On what grounds do we choose one form of analytic understanding over another? In the past, the answer would have been: by appeal to the evidence. However, not only has there been increasing questioning of what counts, and should count, as evidence, but it is also clear that many forms of understanding are incommensurable – not least because they are addressing different questions and, as a result, rely on different presuppositions. This means that evidence cannot easily be used to judge among them, since each requires evidence of different kinds (2007, p.233).

Their solution involves a recognition of critical 'fallibility' and contingency. No standpoint has all the answers, but each has a type of 'situated' reality that it can bring to research projects, and that can be critically combined with other *partial* truths. In this investigation, a critical combination of 'small-scale', microcosmic theories associated with the anthropological tradition will be used along with the more macrocosmic scope of gramscian cultural studies. This project does not seek to resolve matters under a totalising perspective, and remains sensitive to the limits as well as potentialities of theoretical approaches. Such a contingent epistemology also recognises *my* limits – both as an individual and as an academic - in attempting to represent the many and varied voices of those interviewed, as well as the many voices that inflect the literature on recreational dance. Complementing these pluralist epistemologies, this investigation is contingent on questions of cultural value² and employs a broad definition of culture so that 'culture is ordinary: that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning' (Williams, 1989[1958], p.5). The next section will introduce one of the main theoretical frameworks for this investigation.

3.2 Gramscian Cultural Hegemony

This section will outline the nature of the theory of cultural hegemony as theorised by Gramsci, and consider its relevance for this research.

Cultural hegemony theory operates as a useful tool for thinking through the fraught cultural politics of Ireland in the 1940s and 1950s, insofar as it theorises an unequal distribution of political and cultural power. Antonio Gramsci operated as a revolutionary scholar in Italy during the early years

2 Such contingency resonates with a pluralism of cultural practice that characterises dancers' tales, an aspect of rural culture in Ireland at this time that also interested Gibbons (1996) who speaks of a contrast with official cultural practices. This will be discussed in more detail in Section 8.4.

of the twentieth century. Following the publication in English of his *Prison Notebooks* (as *Selection from the Prison Notebooks* (henceforth SPN)) in 1971, and with the rise of the New Left, anglophonic academia found a critical sensibility in his work that could be effective in developing Marxist thought.

Though heavily influenced by classical Marxism, Gramsci's 'praxis of philosophy' sought to transcend the former body of work in a manner summarised by Gray, who suggests 'that Gramsci provides an indispensable point of approach. The necessary theoretical advances will come from deploying the resources he provides in concrete historical research, with a conscious effort to purge conspiratorial and mechanistic formulations from the vocabulary of Marxist analysis' (1981, p.235). As a type of dual-use theory, Bennett (1998) has commented on the value of gramscianism in transcending the structuralist-culturalist binary that split cultural studies in the 1970s. Likewise, in a study of recreational dance in Greece, Cowan (1990) favours 'hegemony' over 'ideology' because she argues that it connotes a broader, less economistic definition of culture. The former concept:

Opens up a way to understand the relations between consciousness and sociopolitical authority that differs from both the models of consensus and contract in classical political theory and the model of false consciousness in orthodox Marxism. (Cowan, 1990, p.12)

This reading of hegemony theory posits a flexible, constructivist model for thinking through the ways in which culture is inflected or articulated in the interests of various groups. In Mouffe's terms (1981), cultural hegemony must be understood as a political strategy that characterises both dominant and subordinate groups in various moments of both resistance and incorporation. In this context, cultural forms and practices in themselves are politically neutral, and do not come packaged with inherent meaning. They must, rather, be *made* to mean.

Storey (2006) and Barker (2008) suggest Gramsci's impact lasted from the 1970s 'until the...recent challenge of postmodernism' in the 1990s, one that problematised its more materialist concerns with a focus on the destabilising influence of language on cultural analysis. In recent years, and in the face of a crisis of neoliberal capitalism, a revived left has in turn critically interrogated postmodern thought, and sought to reintroduce a radical 'centre' to studies of society (Callinicos, 2003; Graeber, 2003; Cohn, 2011; Kellner, 2012). Some approaches have synthesised poststructuralist and gramscian thought, as in the writings of Laclau and Mouffe (1986), who have identified in the latter tradition a constructivist sensibility that they found useful, as will be discussed in Section 3.2.

The concept of hegemony precedes the work of Gramsci and, according to Raymond Williams (2013, p.144), 'hegemony' was most likely derived from the Greek 'egemonia', whose root is egemon, meaning 'leader, ruler, often in the sense of a state other than his own'. Gramsci's use of the term is distinguished from more classical Marxist definitions of 'ideology' in its focus on 'leadership' as a mode of exercising power, a mode that is occasionally replaced by coercion when hegemony fails to secure the interests of powerful groups. As leadership, a degree of consent is essential for the smooth functioning of hegemony. It is incumbent on dominant groups to secure the support of allied groups through taking their interests into account. According to Hall et al. 'the capitalist state tends towards founding and establishing its dominance over civil life and society through the combination of modes of consent and modes of coercion, but with consent as its key, legitimating support' (1978, p. 209). Thus, they add, 'consensus is therefore important for the operations of the modern state. We can define it as the form in which the consent of society is won. But won for whom? By whom?' (Hall et al. 1978, p.215). With these latter questions, they open up the critical question of power, and more specifically of inequalities in political and cultural power. Power thus envisioned involves a degree of acquiescence to non-dominant groups centred on 'a series of alliances in which one group takes on a position of leadership' (Barker, 2008, p.81).

Gramsci's paradigm operates firmly within a nation-statist ontology, 'on the classical terrain of the parliamentary regime' (Barker, 2008, p.80). Consequently the model has potential for thinking through cultural processes associated with a consolidation of the Irish state in its early incarnation from Irish independence to the period 1940-1960. Drawing on Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Gramsci referred to political ideology in terms of 'the creation of a concrete phantasy which acts on a dispersed and shattered people to arouse and organise its collective will' (SPN, p.126). Such a 'collective will' understood in gramscian terms includes a strong normative emancipatory thrust. It involves a 'practical-political task...of making more unified the collective will of a people, should that coherence become unhinged or, for whatever reasons, not yet exist in reality' (Golding, 1992, p.xvi). The collective will, in other words, refers to the broad emancipatory tendency that unites various groups into a 'historical bloc'. This bloc is the contingent alliance of groups that forms in order to further the collective will. In Italy in the 1930s, a society riven by class conflict, he envisioned a counter-hegemonic project centred on a specifically 'national-popular collective will', aiming 'towards the realisation of a superior total form of modern civilisation' (SPN, p.133). The 'national-popular' is another central concept in gramscian thought and refers to a more specific cultural aesthetic, one aiming for a widespread appeal that would be instrumental in producing social change through the emergence of a collective will. In the pursuit of counter-hegemony,

cultural transformation would 'move through a 'national' stage before it can become genuinely internationalist' (Forgacs, 2000, p.391).

In Ireland, two stages can be identified in this regard. The years preceding independence in 1922 involved a long-term project of developing a 'national-popular' collective will to challenge British imperialism, a process that can be dated back to centuries of revolution and unrest. Gramsci alludes to this evolving, diachronic formation: 'a social group can, and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to lead as well' (SPN, p.5). The second stage, in the post-independence period, leading up to and including the research period of 1940-1960 is indicative of the emergence of a new political paradigm, a new hegemony, where successful aspirants to power consolidated their gains. Closely related to this process was the rise of a 'rural ideology' (Goldring, 1987) that sought to define Irish identity in terms of a pastoral myth harking back to a pre-industrial era. It involved a complex articulation of 'Irishness' with Catholicism, morality and a cultural purity linked to the national-popular. This ideological formation inflected a range of practices that served to legitimise and consolidate the new Irish state.

In post-independence Ireland, it should be noted that the particular articulation of the national-popular was on the basis of a bourgeois rather than proletarian revolution (Goldring, 1987). This is in no way to devalue the significance of this process, a successful transformative programme that shattered British imperialist power in Ireland. It is simply to point out that an Irish national-popular was different in key respects to that envisioned by Gramsci for Italy in the 1930s. From the late 1920s, when the (bourgeois) revolutionary moment had passed, and when counter-revolution set in, the national-popular took on quite a different hue.

For Gramsci, the 'State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules' (SPN, p.244). He identifies two aspects of the state: 'civil society' and 'political society', remarking that the 'state = political society + civil society, in other words, hegemony protected by the armour of coercion' (SPN, p.262). These aspects of the state can be understood by stressing their respective roles in perpetuating power. A more draconian coercion is executed through organs of political society such as 'the army, the police, the prison system' (Storey,

2006, p.82). The subtler workings of hegemony operate through civil society, a formation that Gramsci characterises as 'private': 'the 'State' should be understood not only by the apparatus of government, but also by the 'private' apparatus of 'hegemony' or civil society' (SPN, p.261). Such entities could include schools, the Catholic Church and trade unions.

Commenting on the difference between political and civil society, Forgacs (2000) and Gray (1981) propose that this is 'methodological' rather than 'organic': 'although the two levels must be analytically distinguished from one another, they must also be seen as intertwined in practice. One might illustrate this by saying that a state education system is at one level clearly part of political society...but this does not mean that everything which takes place in schools is subservient to the state or reflects ruling class interests' (Forgacs, 2000, p.224). In this way, Gramsci avoids the traps of both liberal and functionalist reductionism which would see education as, respectively, completely autonomous or completely defined by economic and class considerations. Insofar as it allows for a degree of autonomy of civil society, Gramsci's model could be seen to be more fluid and less totalising than other strands within the Marxist tradition, such as Althusserianism (Forgacs, 2000; Barker, 2008). Moreover, it is interesting that certain aspects of civil society are seen to be more autonomous than others. In this regard, a focus on education is evident in the notion of the 'ethical state'. In an Irish context during the period, the important role of religious organisations in education in Ireland means that they can be seen as both involved in the exercise of hegemony, but also exercising a degree of autonomy³.

Even before the foundation of the Irish state, the Catholic Church came to assume an important position not just in the dissemination of religious orthodoxy but also in the provision of education and health services (Ferriter, 2009). In the pre-independence imperialist state, rejected by various nationalist organisations, the effective absence of a democratic Irish state meant that 'hegemony over its historical development belong[ed] to private forces, to civil society – which is 'State' too' (SPN, 1971, p.261). As such, the Catholic Church, its educational institutions, and various institutions associated with cultural nationalism and militant republicanism played a central role in the formation of an 'ethical state' that strove 'to raise the great mass of the population to a particular moral and cultural level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes' (SPN, p.259).

3 At the time of writing in 2013, the current Minister for Education, Ruairí Quinn, has outlined plans to secularise elements of the education system, a policy that is indicative of the extent of Catholic Church involvement right up to the present day.

By stressing the role of civil society in the production and reproduction of power, Gramsci opened up the realm of 'cultural politics' for investigation. Storey (2006, p.83) refers to hegemony as 'leadership of a cultural and general ideological nature'. Barker suggests Gramsci's influence is related to 'the central importance given to popular culture as a site of ideological struggle' (2008, p.82). A narrow economic definition of power is, in this way, supplanted by one that acknowledges the importance of culture, not simply as a reflection of the base, but as an important force in its own right. This focus on culture allows for a number of related theories to be introduced. It will be argued in this investigation that Bourdieu's concept of 'distinction' is closely related to hegemony in its incorporative moment:

Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed. (1979, p.6)

As an embodied phenomenon, 'taste...raises the difference inscribed in the physical order of bodies to the symbolic order of significant distinctions' (p.174). In this way, embodied cultural knowledge serves to reproduce broader social hierarchies. Equally, hegemony theory overlaps significantly with Cohen's (2002[1971]) reflections on the nature of the social anxieties that arise around novel subcultural movements. He coined the terms 'moral panic' and 'folk devils' to account for the representation of mods and rockers in British media in the late 1960s. Moral panic emerges when a 'condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests' (p.9). According to Cohen (2002[1972], p.1):

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnosis and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible in the moral panic model. Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself.

Gramsci was keen to engage his theory with lived, experienced reality and his definition of hegemony is 'not separate from the practical activities of life. Rather it is understood to be a material phenomenon rooted in day-to-day conditions' (Barker, 2008, p.80). This is the realm where 'the 'spontaneous philosophy' which is proper to everybody' (SPN, p.323) can be identified. Importantly in this respect, as hinted at in the degree of autonomy accorded to some organs of civil

society, the type of leadership exercised by hegemony is not unproblematic. Gramsci suggests that 'each man...outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a 'philosopher', an artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought' (SPN, p.8). A democratic, non-elitist tendency is evident in such conceptualisations. They involve an opening out from the rarefied sphere of scholarly investigation into real lives played out 'on the ground'. After all, 'we are all philosophers' (Callinicos, 2003). 'Spontaneous philosophy' is articulated through:

1. Language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content.
2. 'Common sense' [conventional wisdom] and 'good sense' [empirical knowledge].
3. Popular religion and, therefore, also in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the name of 'folklore'. (SPN, p.323)

Barker (2008, p.81) emphasises the categories of 'good sense' and 'common sense', contradictory forms of thought that inflect our consciousness. Whereas the latter of these is related to an internalisation of hegemonic norms, the former holds a critical, interrogatory potential. There are overlaps with autonomist Marxist John Holloway's (2003) later dialectical conception of consciousness as both 'reified' and as 'moving-beyond-reification'.

In work that focuses on 'resistant' hegemonic moments, a negation of dominant culture is paralleled by an affirmation of subordinate culture. Notable in such approaches is a concern with, and sympathy for, the practices of marginalised groups. As Lears puts it 'the overall picture that Gramsci provides is not a static, closed system of ruling-class domination. Rather, it is a society in constant process, where the creation of counter-hegemonies remains a live option' (1985, p.571). He adds that 'the maintenance of hegemony does not require active commitment by subordinates to the legitimacy of elite rule. Less powerful people may be thoroughly disaffected' (*ibid*, p.569).

In Gray's (1981) terms, the existence 'of hegemony' can never be taken for granted, as a datum of political life, but is reproduced through political struggle in every historical conjuncture' (p.241). Equally, 'the adoption...of a language drawn from the ideological practice of the dominant class always implies a shift in the meanings of that language' (Gray, 1981, p.243). Herein lies the basis of a 'counter-hegemony', and a demonstration of Gramsci's sensitivity to a popular 'spontaneous philosophy'. It is not only the all-seeing 'Knower' within the academy who enjoys a status as a 'critical-revolutionary subject' (Holloway, 2003). In cultural terms, actors and their culture could

now be envisioned as 'resistant'.

These various definitions also reveal the other crucial side of hegemony, its role alluded to earlier, in perpetuating power and oppression. Hegemony theory thus envisioned involves the inflection and re-inflection of culture in a dialectical manner, so that moments of resistance alternate with those of incorporation. For Cowan, the concept of hegemony 'opens up the question of how members of different social groups – variously positioned – accept, manipulate, use, or contest hegemonic (that is, dominant) ideas' (1990, p.13). As such, Gramsci posits a 'compromise equilibrium' where opposing interests are balanced. Viewed in this way, 'civil society is...at once the political terrain on which the dominant class organises its hegemony and the terrain on which opposition parties and movements organise, win allies and build their social power' (Forgacs, 2000, p.224).

Gramscian hegemony theory is flexible enough to acknowledge the various configurations and re-configurations that can take place around cultural forms. The paradox of hegemony theory lies in the fluid, polysemic and multi-accentual potential of cultural forms and practices. Such thinking posits a dynamic, non-essentialist view of culture. In the subtle balancing of interests that it envisions, it is not the case that dance is being articulated in the interests of *either* dominant *or* subordinate classes. As with the music and dance of the west coast counterculture (Storey, 1998), a 'compromise equilibrium' exists when culture can simultaneously and paradoxically represent the interests of more and less powerful groups, by the respective manner in which they articulate and express meanings around these forms (Gramsci, 1998[1971]). These articulations and re-articulations take place in a tightly balanced political and cultural relationship. As Wa Anderson said of his Afro Reggae band/movement in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro: 'culture is a vehicle' (*Favela Uprising*, 2005), a tool that can be deployed in many ways by various subaltern groups, and indeed by dominant groups. In the realm of the moving body, Cowan (1990) says there is a 'dancing out' of these cultural politics, especially in the realm of gender politics. A dancing body on this basis can be transgressive or disciplined, it can be 'moulded' or can evade such 'moulding' (O'Connor, 2005). These sentiments open up the possibility of both a 'critical body' and a 'conservative body'.

At the same time, the gramscian 'compromise equilibrium' is, in the 'last instance', rigged in favour of groups that are dominant in the capitalist mode of production: 'there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such a compromise cannot touch the essential; for though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive nucleus of economic society' (SPN, p.161). As will be discussed in Section 3.2, essentialism of this sort, and the related

variant around a working class that 'is both ontologically and politically privileged in its 'centrality' (Barrett, 1994, p.246), was later problematised by post-Marxists such as Laclau and Mouffe.

These types of cultural politics, especially in their resistant moments, have been salient in the field of dance anthropology, where there has been a 'rhetorical association of bodily expressivity with non-dominant groups (Fraleigh, 1998, p.155).' In its view of an active, politicised culture of festivity, Bakhtin's (1984) theory of the carnivalesque is also resonant. These ideas were formulated as part of his PhD thesis on Rabelais' *Garganua and Pantanal*, an early modern French novel. This work became a departure point for a more general theory of popular festivity. Carnival celebrations were seen as the 'second life' of the people, a cultural space whereby a highly embodied, visceral and satirical conception of human nature was given free rein, part of a long tradition of groups deploying festive forms to interrogate official norms. Written as a dissident intellectual in exile in Kazakhstan in the USSR under Stalin (1984), it is not surprising that his work is so inflected. Festivity on this basis was very much spontaneous philosophy in motion. Although the carnival event was of a temporary nature, it involved the cultivation of a critical spirit, one that Bakhtin suggests infused the literary form of the novel, and cultural forms more broadly. As will be discussed in Section 3.2, such thinking is also useful for a post-structuralist interrogation of cultural politics.

While gramscianism seems to grant social actors a high level of agency, there are some limits in this respect. Although in our 'spontaneous philosophy' as was related in Section 3.2, we all possess both 'good sense' and 'common sense', Gramsci speaks of 'organic intellectuals' associated with both dominant and subordinate groups who can speak for and lead the groups they represent:

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economics, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields. (1998[1971], p.212)

Brooker (1999, p.3) contrasts these with 'traditional intellectuals', who 'are thought to be disinterested and to rise in the name of reason and truth above sectarian or topical interests' (although arguing for such absolutism and universalism would jar with the more constructivist sensibilities that reign in the social sciences today). Cowan (1990, p.13) speaks of Gramsci's 'alternative hegemony of the working class, under the leadership of those he referred to as 'organic intellectuals'. It is organic intellectuals that take the raw material represented by the collective will, and use it as the basis for the formation of a historical bloc that represents 'an order in which a

common social-moral language is spoken, in which one concept of reality is dominant, informing with its spirit all modes of thought and behaviour' (Cowan, p.12). Holloway (2003) is critical of the notion that counter-hegemonic organic intellectuals are separate from and superior to the subjects they seek to 'liberate'. We are all of us, rather, infused with the contradictions of capitalism, and intellectuals do not occupy a privileged position 'outside' society. As the next section will discuss, later developments of gramscian theory accentuated its more constructivist tendencies.

3.3 Post-Marxist Gramscianism

This section will assess the more flexible notion of 'struggle' that emerged in the engagement between post-structuralism and gramscian theory.

Laclau and Mouffe's (1986) contribution to the long-running debate within Marxism on the greater or lesser importance of 'base' or 'superstructure' in determining social life, involves a poststructuralist emphasis on relationality between these spheres in an organic whole. For them, terms such as 'base' and 'superstructure' involve, not objective, static formations, but rather linguistic strategies that emerge in particular places and times, though located in real antagonistic relations between specific social groups. 'Opposition' could therefore be seen as operating in the world of meaning and language. At the same time, they recognise the material reality of those social structures that are generated through discourses. On this basis, their paradigm retains a normative foundation that is concerned with a 'radical democracy' linked to the struggles of various 'new social movements'. Laclau and Mouffe see themselves as making explicit tendencies in the work of Gramsci, and they remark on 'the increasing centrality and area of operativity of the concept of 'hegemony'....which 'transcends the 'either/or logic of determinism' (1998, p.157). At another point, they speak of 'the intuition that lies behind the gramscian historical bloc: historical movement is explained not by laws of motion of history but by the organic link between base and superstructure' (p.86). What distinguishes hegemony as theorised by Laclau and Mouffe from other post-structuralist theorists such as Foucault, is an emphasis on the active subject, a subject who in Holloway's (2003) terms 'screams', negates, and embodies a type of 'anti-power' that can challenge dominant discourses and practices:

In the case of Foucault, [his approach] leads...to a focus on talking, on language. This perspective certainly allows him to elucidate the enormous richness and complexity of power relations in contemporary society...However, the richness and complexity is the richness of a still photograph, or of a painting...Thus, in Foucault's analysis, there are a whole host of resistances which are integral to power, but there is no possibility of emancipation. (2003, p.19)

Within the broader ambit of poststructuralism so, there are more and less subjectivist positions. On this basis, Lears (1985, p.569) criticises Foucauldian poststructuralism in the following terms: 'a resolute anti-subjectivism not only fails to account for resistance and transformation in 'discursive practice', but also threatens to degenerate into as monocausal and mechanistic a model as the economic determinism that Gramsci criticised so effectively' (p.593).

Articulating a type of humanist foundationalism, Laclau and Mouffe's work has been labelled by Storey (2006) as 'post-Marxist' to distinguish it from more anti-humanist structuralist and poststructuralist positions. For Storey, it is important to think about how this term is accented: 'to be *post*-Marxist is to seek to leave behind Marxism for something better, whereas to be *post-Marxist* is to seek to transform Marxism, by adding to it recent theoretical developments from, especially, feminism, postmodernism, post-structuralism and Lacanian psychoanalysis' (2008, p.85). Again this is consonant with the writings of Gramsci himself who, though he recognises the importance of language, nevertheless carves out an ontological space for the 'humanly objective'. Fiske's (1987, 1989) notion of the 'cultural economy' has been influential in theorising resistant inscriptions of media products. The point of 'consumption', in other words, is the beginning rather than the end of processes of generating meanings around culture.

These more subjectivist notions of cultural power have sometimes been critically received on the basis that the currency of 'resistance' is devalued, so that all activities carried out by 'the people' are, by default, 'progressive', a position taken to theoretical extremes by Fiske when he examined the oppositional meanings of shopping (Duncombe, 2002), producing what some Marxist theorists have suggested amounts to a celebration of capitalism. McGuigan (1998) remarks:

Fiske merely produces a simple inversion of the mass culture critique at its worst. Thereby reducing television viewing to a kind of subjective idealism...never countenancing the possibility that a popular reading could be anything other than progressive. (1998, p.588)

There is, he suggests, an 'abjectly uncritical complicity with prevailing 'free market' ideology and its hidden powers' (p.591). Graeber is also aware of the limits of this use of 'resistance': 'what's disturbing...is the degree to which this logic [of cultural populism] comes to echo that of global capitalism...advertising agencies after all claim to be providing material for members of the public to appropriate and make their own in unpredictable and idiosyncratic ways' (2004, p.99). In the field of historiography, Lears is also critical: 'discovering nearly inexhaustible resources for resistance to domination, many social historians have been reluctant to acknowledge the possibility that their

subjects may have been muddled by assimilation to the dominant culture - perhaps even to the point of believing and behaving against their own best interests' (1985, p.573).

Laclau and Mouffe's 'discourse theory' envisions a construction of self, of collectivity, and of social action through language, a sensibility that chimes with Gramsci's suggestion that 'every language contains the elements of a conception of the world' (Lears, 1985, p.569). Viewing power through this more linguistic, post-Marxist lens opens a conceptual avenue to a more Bakhtinian mode of thinking about the cultural politics of hegemony: 'it is the role of hegemonic practices to fix difference, to put closure around the unstable meanings of signifiers in the discursive field' (Barker, 2008, p.84). Conversely, counter-hegemonic practices will seek to destabilise, undermine and pluralise these more closed systems. There are clear parallels in this instance with a Bakhtinian 'heteroglossia':

Existence itself is heteroglossia, is a force field created in the general ceaseless Manichean struggle between centripetal forces, which strive to keep things together, unified, the same; and centrifugal forces, which strive to keep things various, separate, apart, different. (1994, p.171)

A stasis and centralisation of centripetal cultural forces is countered by the dynamism and pluralism of centrifugality. In the field of dance, dance practices that conformed to standards established by powerful groups contrasted with those 'popular' practices that tended towards diversity and unpredictability, a formulation that also chimes with Bourdieu's (1984) 'popular aesthetic'.

In Laclau and Mouffe's terms, the collective will that cements a Gramscian historical bloc is a more contingent entity than the objectified concept of 'class' favoured by classical Marxism. There is rather a more unpredictable articulation of overlapping interests in a 'metaphoric surplus', a loosely unifying collective project (Arditi, 2006). As with Laclau and Mouffe, Lears (1985, p.571) believes that this contingency inheres in Gramsci's original writings:

The idea of historical bloc departs significantly from notions of class embedded in the Marxist tradition: it promotes analysis of social formations that cut across categories of ownership and non-ownership and that are bound by religious or other ideological ties as well as those of economic interest.

For others, his position retains a classical Marxist emphasis on the centrality of the proletariat. According to Mastroianni (2012), there is no doubting the class basis of these alliances, even if in his view 'Gramsci's prison writings sometimes typically avoid using Marxist terms such as 'class', 'bourgeoisie', and 'proletariat' (because his work was read by a Fascist censor)', preferring instead

'international class' for the latter term. Barrett (1994) remarks that it is the very liminality of Gramsci's work, straddling classical and poststructuralist Marxism, that makes him a 'pivotal figure for Laclau and Mouffe':

He represents the furthest point that can be reached within Marxism and the intrinsic limitations of the theoretical problematic. For even the 'articulatory' role of the working class is, in their reading of Gramsci, assigned to it on the basis of economic location, and thus has a necessary rather than their preferred contingent character. Gramsci's view is therefore, in the last analysis, as 'essentialist' one. It is essentialist with regard to the privileged position of the working class, and with regard to 'the last redoubt of essentialism: the economy. (p.247)

By thinking in this way about the contingency of 'class', and consequently of 'struggle', Laclau and Mouffe (1986) eschew an essentialising of specifically *proletarian* struggle. They see struggle as a more flexible, plural affair that can accommodate various types of politics articulated along gender or ethnic lines, or through ecological concerns, *as well as* via class.

Laclau and Mouffe's formulations make space for consideration of groups such as small farmers as a dynamic, and potentially counter-hegemonic group. This can once more be seen to derive from the liminality of gramscian thought. Even if, as Mastroianni suggested (2012), Gramsci's interest was primarily with the urban proletariat, Forgacs (2000) and Gibbons (1996) identify in his work an interest in a counter-hegemonic alliance of this class with the 'peasantry', a view that perhaps reflects his experiences growing up in rural Sardinia. According agency to small farmers in this way can moreover be conceptually thickened by making space for gender and generational struggles.

On the question of gender, Barrett (1994) identifies a bind that confronts socialist feminists, a position that 'has remained problematic, since that theory is itself embedded in an analysis that not only argues...the primacy of class but also normally construes ideology in a determinist model such as the metaphor of 'base and superstructure' (p.255). Again, Laclau and Mouffe's work, broadening the concept of struggle, 'struck at the heart of this problem' (*ibid*) and for Barrett provides a way of positing an articulation of gender, class and other struggles in a 'chain of equivalences'. These more fluid positions have been used for the purposes of theorising recreational dance. Cowan (1990, p.12) deploys 'the concept of 'hegemony' which Gramsci originally developed to investigate the question of class consciousness, and applied it to the sphere of gender...to make sense of the social relations between multiple yet not equally powerful spectators'.

Since post-Marxist hegemony theory opens up the possibility of a plurality of struggles, an

intersection of different hegemonic 'axes' can come into play. Cowan (1990) has expressed an interest in such synergies, and it is worth maintaining a sensitivity to the types of complexities that can emerge. As McRobbie notes in relation to the meeting of working class subcultures and gender politics, 'cultural gestures often appear in partial, contradictory and even amputated forms...questions around sexism and working-class youth and around sexual violence make it possible to see how class and patriarchal relations work together' (1981, p.112). The next section will assess some of the possibilities and limitations of gramscian hegemony theory for teasing out other types of 'intersections' between 'national' and 'transnational' hegemonies.

3.4 Intersecting Hegemonies

Various types of hegemonic intersection can be posited, either on the basis of social ontologies such as gender, class or generation, or on a more macrocosmic premise of national and transnational spheres. It is the latter type of intersection that will most concern this section.

Drawing on the more macrocosmic notion of intersecting hegemonies first, it might be useful to return to the SPN for a classical gramscian perspective in this regard. It is apparent that this work is predominantly, though not exclusively, centred on a nation-statist conception of cultural politics. Gramsci was primarily interested in a counter-hegemonic challenge to the 'capitalist state', a process he sees as a 'stepping stone' towards international change. This research investigation requires a fleshing out of hegemony theory to account for its transnationalist dimensions, as well as the relations between national and transnational spheres. Interestingly, Gramsci shared a view of the 'foreign' that overlaps significantly with the post-independence perspectives of powerful groups in the young Irish state. Although in the service of widely divergent political programmes, these tendencies shared a view of the 'foreign' as a threat. Thus, Gramsci comments, 'why does the Italian reading public read foreign literature...instead of its own?' (Forgacs, 2000, p.367). The output of the anglophonic culture industries represents an 'outside' of this type of cultural hegemony, a morally debased irrelevancy: '[the Italian public] undergo the moral and intellectual hegemony of foreign intellectuals' (*ibid*).

As is clear on this basis, Gramsci did acknowledge the transnational sphere of cultural hegemony. He suggested 'every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship and occurs not only within a nation, between the various forces of which the nation is composed, but in the

international and worldwide field, between complexes of national and continental civilisations' (SPN, p.350). Equally, as Forgacs (2000) remarks, he proposed an 'East/West' distinction between Russia and the 'advanced capitalist societies', viewing Italian society blending elements of both, 'with its large areas of semi-feudal agriculture, its immature parliamentary traditions, and its powerful priesthood' (p.223). Also, in the chapter dealing with 'Americanism and Fordism', Gramsci seems open to the possibility that innovative economic methods, linked to a limited range of superstructural effects, might be of interest to the European proletariat. Ultimately though, a relatively uniform conception of the cultural politics of the capitalist nation-state emerges, one that for all its usefulness, is limited in some ways for addressing the complexities opened up by this investigation. A fuller understanding of 'civil society' emerges if it is considered in both its national and transnational aspects, as well as in the dialectics between these. There is little attempt in the *Prison Notebooks* to theorise these intersecting spheres, these different types of hegemony.

In the research setting, it seems that two types of hegemony were active - a 'nationalist hegemony' associated with the Irish state and the national-popular, and a 'transnational hegemony' associated with 'foreign intellectuals' (or at least 'foreign cultural producers'), the 'culture industry'⁴ and an emergent ethos of consumerism from the 1930s on (O'Connor, 2003). The Irish state, though situated within the folds of global capitalism, nevertheless articulated a nationalist-inflected cultural politics in opposition to international cultural forces (including those of the late imperial power). Ferriter (*Judging Dev*, 2008) and Brown (2002) speak of the attempts of the Irish state in the 1930s under De Valera, as a response to the Depression, to create an economically self-sufficient state, a capitalist state certainly, but one accented in various ways by an anti-imperialist ethos. That is to say the 'capitalist state' can be inhabited by a range of cultural agendas, those that are more or less consonant with the demands of international capital.

There appears to be an exclusion of mass media forms from consideration under Gramsci's conception of 'good sense' (Forgacs, 2000). Though cinema and radio were popular at the time the *Prison Notebooks* were written, they are not considered by him to be useful for articulating cultural politics (Forgacs, 2000). It may be that the Italian theorist was reflecting the concerns of mass culture theory that were active at that time (in Britain for example in the work of F.R. Leavis

4 The term was coined by Adorno and Horkheimer in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) to refer to emerging industrialised system for production, distribution and consumption of culture through the mass media. The term 'mass culture' would be closely related to this, and 'mass culture theory' is an analysis of popular culture that proceeds from this premise.

(1998[1930]), a critical standpoint that valorised the written word). Forgacs speaks of a 'conception of hegemony and intellectual and moral reformation as a process of acquisition of a critical outlook, of logical capacities, of 'coherent and systematic thought', all of which [Gramsci] tends to identify with writing and the print media' (2000, p.363). Given his interest in culture as a site of counter-hegemonic struggle, and seeking to 'establish the terrain upon which cultural transformation might take place' (Forgacs, 2000, p.363), the written word is clearly privileged over other types of culture. This is in spite of Gramsci's ostensible pragmatism when he speaks of 'the necessity for cultural change to start from below, from where people really are in cultural terms'. Such openness seems to be heavily circumscribed. Only on the basis of intellectual, literary works can 'good sense' be harvested from the divided consciousness of the oppressed.

Regarding the 'foreign' media with distrust as he does, since it interferes with the drive to generate a national-popular, obscures the possibility that more internationalist currents of foreign music and dance might have had very different meanings for less powerful groups when considered in the specific historical-geographic juncture of the research setting. When Gramsci suggests that 'the entire 'educated class' with its intellectual activity, is detached from the people-nation...the indigenous intellectual element is more foreign than the foreigners' (Forgacs, 2000, p.368), he is speaking of a situation that needs to be overcome in order to create a national-popular. In a situation that *follows* the construction of a national-popular, albeit a bourgeois one, a similar fragmentation and disconnect may occur. At issue are relations between nationalist and transnationalist hegemony. The tensions between these cultural politics could form the basis for various counter-hegemonic projects. As Gibbons (1996) has pointed out in relation to the Jim Gralton episode in Leitrim in the 1920s and 1930s (see Section 7.3), an internationalist sensibility directed towards 'foreign' culture can act as a vehicle for radical politics. On this basis, a type of 'dual hegemonic' formation has been useful for guiding this investigation, related to 'national' and 'transnational' spheres. Limits in this regard are suggestive of other ways that gramscian hegemony theory, for all its breadth, flexibility and complexity, can be brought into a critical synergy with the 'post-hegemonic' approaches that will be discussed in the next section.

3.5 From Hegemony to Pleasure

This section will outline a number of limitations of gramscian theory. A type of post-hegemonic retrieval of dance culture will be presented, one that might allow for other meanings of dance to

emerge from behind the incorporating, logocentric tendencies that sometimes characterises 'high theory'. On this basis, this investigation will endeavour to be sensitive to the complexity and subtlety of dancers' experiences.

The second main theoretical angle of this investigation draws on a post-hegemonic critique of gramscianism, influenced by currents within radical anthropology and anarchist cultural studies. Bennett (1998) remarks that 'the gramscian theory of hegemony...is liable to the criticism that it is too accommodating and expansive a framework, over-totalising in its analytical claims and ambit' (p.222). Ardit (2007), in an overview of Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist hegemony theory, suggests that there is no ontological 'outside' of hegemony and counter-hegemony, so that the theoretical net is all-encompassing. A type of 'hegemony of hegemony' results, so that alternative political conceptions are marginalised. Graeber (2004, p.43) remarks on this basis that:

Totalities...are always creatures of the imagination. Nations, societies, ideologies, closed systems...none of these really exist. Reality is always infinitely messier than that – even if the belief that they exist is an undeniable social force.

There is no denial on this basis of the materiality of discourses, and the impact of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic struggle. Rather, in the contingent spirit that characterises radical anthropology, Graeber seeks to problematise epistemologies that operate on the basis of ontological certainty. He is more concerned with the 'interstices' of state power that Simon Critchley (2009) refers to. For these theorists, Laclau and Mouffe's contingency does not go far enough, and is blinded to its own limits. Williams (2010) speaks on this basis of 'a rejection of essentialism, a preference for randomness, fluidity, hybridity and a repudiation of vanguard tactics' (2010, p.111) by post-hegemonic approaches. Cultural politics in these terms constitute a more fluid, slippery phenomenon, related to a 'radically contingent' politics, one that opens the way for a performative mode of resistance. Holloway (2003, p.152) refers to a dialectical 'not-yet-ness' that is in the process of becoming:

This not-yet-ness can be seen not just in overt political militancy, but in the struggles of everyday living, in the dreams we have, in our projections against the denial of our projections, in our fantasies, from the simplest dreams of pleasure to the most path-breaking artistic creations.

Modulating and mitigating the teleology of revolution that characterises classical Marxist approaches, such cultural politics operate within a more modest transformative frame, one that might envision a space within which dancing 'decisions' (Ness, 1992) can be made in relative freedom, where there is a 'right to party' (Bey, 1985). Cohn (2011) considers, via the writings of

Proudhon and others, how a more phenomenological approach can address the construction of more autonomous 'publics' that need not be reduced to their relevance to a future-directed Marxism. According to Proudhon:

In the shadow of political institutions, out of the sight of statesmen and priests, society is producing its own organism, slowly and silently; and constructing a new order, the expression of its vitality and autonomy, and the denial of the old politics, as well as of the old religion. (2007[1923], p.243)

Williams (2010, p.112) traces these more contingent approaches back to the influence of poststructuralism:

Poststructuralist theory focuses on the productive or creative aspects of power, the sort of power that occurs within and engenders a multiplicity of practices. In the hands of such theorists as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, political thinking and acting no longer occur on the large scale associated with narratives ending in a cataclysmic political and social event—'the Revolution.' Instead, they occur on a small scale, over a variety of local domains and language games.

In this regard, while it is always tempting to reduce matters to incorporation or resistance, the danger of reductionism is ever-present. Moving beyond the 'dual hegemony' totality that has been used so far, where something of an 'either/or' dichotomy has been used to consider the way 'battles' over meaning rage around dance forms and events, Jessie Cohn seeks to 'prise apart' an epistemological space for 'anarchist cultural studies':

Debates within cultural studies have so long shuttled back and forth between two poles that most seemed to have assumed that the question of cultural studies' politics can only be a matter of finding the right ratio between them. (2011, p.1)

He criticises a 'sceptical dismissal' (p.3) within cultural studies of the possibility that there can be anything beyond the 'resistance/reification' binary. In his view, a framing of popular culture as *either* a step on the path to a socialist future, *or* the perpetuation of structures of oppression, is a 'cynical reflex, the symptom of cultural studies' institutional origins as 'a product of revolution blocked'. A high degree of intellectual 'heat' in critical debates is, in his view, substituted for 'light' that might guide a more authentic and engaged politics. He hopes that researchers will find a way through this discursive bind, one that will unblock theoretical and political possibilities.

Thinking this critique through, while 'hegemony' would seem in many respects to describe the cultural intentionality of dominant groups as articulated by organic intellectuals, the term 'counter-hegemony' as deployed by Cowan (1990) and Storey (1998) is problematic in some respects. In

both orthodox and post-structuralist gramscianism, the concept operates within a framework of antagonistic interests competing within the field of state power. Cultural processes around recreational dance could certainly be said to have existed *within* this social frame to some extent, but there is also a sense of dance existing 'alongside' or even 'outside' these more orthodox politics. Thus, while it may be that dance involves a body that moves in opposition to state power, or in compliance with it, other dimensions of the dancing body may transcend such neat reductionism.

In some studies, there is a de-centring of the state, a sidestepping of it, a moving beyond its ontological horizon. Williams (2010) suggests that 'there are ways of doing politics that bypass the neo-gramscian logic of hegemony and counter-hegemony characteristic of most of what is usually inventoried under the name 'politics' today, progressive or otherwise'. Shifting the standpoint away from the state as the central focal point for struggle allows other modes of cultural politics to be identified. Johnson (2007) believes that 'post-hegemony' is an unnecessary construct, so that those practices that supposedly characterise it, can be contained within a hegemony/counter-hegemony framework. Ardit (2007) and Williams (2010) counter that a distinct politics, operating outside a nation-statist political ontology, are germane. Importantly for this investigation, more fluid thinking of this nature need not exclude gramscian thought, so that in a plural, Bakhtinian spirit, Ardit (2006) seeks not to reject hegemony theory, but rather to reassign it a type of 'de-centred' place as one among a diversity of theoretical approaches, a type of theoretical 'heteroglossia'.

In these formulations, there is an 'excess' of sorts, an 'outside' of hegemony theory. Sidestepping its limitations seems to take matters in a direction that might be fruitful for aspects of this investigation, interested as it is in problematising a 'vague and ill-conceived' body politics' (Thomas, 2003, p174) in both its conservative and radical aspects. Docker (1995) points out his unease with ascribing meaning to other people's activities, whether conceptual or practical:

A range of phenomena called 'ultimate realities' are hence 'ideologically obscured'...there is the magisterial assumption of knowledge of audiences and their true psychic needs. There is the ascription of a central meaning to a whole form, a meaning which yet always turns out to be outside the texts. (1995, p.220)

Holloway (2003) also objects to a type of reification of theory by an all-seeing 'knower' typically located inside the academy. Ward (1997) agrees that the experience of dancers themselves in its entirety (insofar as this is possible) must be taken into account when thinking about what dance means. The democratic potentialities evident in gramscian 'spontaneous philosophy' are on this basis taken a step further. In many ways, the focus in previous sections of this chapter has been on

aspects of dancing related to *Körper*, that is on a body defined variously by identities related to class, youth, generation and gender. Within a broadly conflictual framework, such experiences have been framed as involving cultural 'resistance', 'incorporation' and/or 'distinction'. As Novack suggests, an exclusive focus on such extrinsic aspects of the body can mean *Lieb*⁵ - the sensual, subjective body - is glossed over, and in a sense, theorised out of existence. There do seem to be subtle, unlanguageable (Pini, 1997) aspects of dancing that transcend or challenge more orthodox discussions of cultural politics. Fiske (1989, p.6) proposes that:

[Popular culture]...often centres on the body and its sensations rather than on the mind and its sense, for the bodily pleasures offer carnivalesque, evasive, liberating practices – they constitute the popular terrain where hegemony is weakest, a terrain that may possibly lie beyond its reach.

Thomas (2003) calls for researchers to pay attention to 'intrinsic' aspects of dancing, those connected to moving, feeling and sensing, and suggests that an over-focus on 'resistance' glosses bodily techniques in the rush to find the political potential of subcultures. Such threads in the literature point to dancing as a more intrinsic, self-directed phenomenon. These less tangible, more phenomenological aspects of the dancing experience suggest grounded, e-motional experiences that, simply, may not be 'political' in the sense of the term used until now. Though hegemony theory opens up a fluid conception of cultural politics, it seems somehow to be limited in some respects for understanding the more subtle pleasures of dancing. Harris' (1992) criticism is germane for this discussion. He is critical of gramscian cultural studies as involving an over-politicised, etic inscription of popular cultural forms. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that its definition of 'politics' is simply too narrow. If cultural politics are at play, these could be said to be 'a politics that doesn't look like politics' (Duncombe, 2002), practices that constitute a politics of creativity, pleasure and autonomy.

The activity of dancing can be highly enjoyable, liberating and conducive to conviviality⁶. A focus on the active embodiment of dancers leads to questions of 'pleasure' that may sometimes elude more conflictual paradigms. In a number of studies of dance, there is a recognition of the immediate, sensuous and social pleasures of dance, as revealed by dancers themselves (O'Connor, 1997, Thomas and Miller, 1997). These studies reveal, not the static, Cartesian body that Novack (1990) suggests bedevils some approaches to 'the body', but the living, intelligent, dynamic, emotional, sensuous and sensing body that occupies the dance floor. There is an appropriation, deployment and experiencing of one's own body. This investigation is especially interested in how techniques and

5 *Körper* refers to the socially constructed body; *Lieb* to the lived, experienced body.

6 Perhaps it can be seen as a 'tool for conviviality', in Illich's (1990) terms.

technologies of the body can lead to particular existential and social states that can be transformative on various levels. More than a passive object, and more than a supplement to the verbal sphere, the dancing body may itself be determinant, a force for change and an agent. Interrogating a Cartesian ontology further, one could posit a more phenomenological *lived* body, involving a Husserlian 'being-in-the-world'. We *are* bodies, we *have* bodies but perhaps more to the point, the being and having can be seen in more singular terms.

These approaches offer possibilities for moving beyond and critically interrogating, gramscian cultural hegemony theory by focusing on dance as a contained, playful phenomenon. By opening up a more fluid conception of cultural power, they acknowledge that, while 'battles' over dance constitute part of the picture, popular dance practices might have involved more than either an acceptance or a rejection of the imperatives of powerful cultural arbiters. Shifting into a more phenomenological mode, and focusing on kinaesthesia, emotion, collectivity, music, pleasure, play, the body - there is a more complex type of 'negation' at work. In fact, the very positive accent given to such elements of dancing by dancers raises questions about whether this can be seen as 'negation' at all, since the latter terms involves a discursive subordination to the 'positivity' of oppression. Rather, dancing gestures seen from this perspective are inherently 'positive' and affirmative. Malbon (1999, p.87) has outlined some of the broader possibilities opened up by a more phenomenological approach in relation to clubbing:

Dancing within clubbing can be about fun, pleasure and escape, about being together or being apart, about sexual interaction or display, about listening to the music, and even a form of embodied resistance and source of personal and social vitality.

These subtle and ineffable pleasures can be completely missed by more objectivist approaches, or work that focuses on a narrower, more traditional definition of politics. Mark Moore of the dance music act S'Express, reflecting on the meaning of disco for its participants in the 1970s, describes it as a 'bliss-making machine' (*The Joy of Disco*, 2013). There is evidence on this basis of a different type of critical approach, where critique is viewed 'as immanent to society' (p.18), and resides not just in the etic conceptualising of theorists but in 'collective action', so that pleasure itself can be seen to be political. On this basis more logocentric, serious interpretations make way for a more Bakhtinian (1984) take on matters. A poststructuralist contingency can on this basis be extended from linguistic uncertainty into the realm of the body, into its feelings, pleasures and kinaesthetic dynamics. Whether there can even be said to be a 'meaning' in such cases is not certain. In some ways, the lived dancing body does not point anywhere – it 'is what it is', there is no signified, only a

'floating signifier'. These activities have an 'autotelicism' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), a value in-and-of-themselves, that defies easy political categorisation.

To move into more specific post-hegemonic theory in this regard, the concept of 'communitas' emerged as a means of conceptualising various types of collective ritual. It has been defined as a state where 'egalitarian and co-operative behavior is characteristic, and in which secular distinctions of rank, office and status are temporarily in abeyance or regarded as irrelevant' (Turner, 1974). In more general terms, Ehrenreich (2007, p.10) says that communitas involves 'the spontaneous love and solidarity that can arise within a community of equals' and says the state 'appears to flood [its] subjects with affect' (p.128, 2007). The state results in what Turner (1969), drawing on Buber, calls an 'essential We', a type of existential liminal zone where boundaries between self and other are blurred. Malbon (1999, p.107) remarks:

The experience of in-betweenness or liminality – of being somehow taken outside oneself, especially while dancing – is a characteristic of many crowds and particularly of the closely packed, sensorially bombarded dancing crowds of clubbing.

Chiming with these definitions, Malbon (2004) speaks of 'anonymised identities' as a way of parsing the dissolution of individual ego boundaries at clubs. In Pini's (1997) ethnography of clubbers, there was a similar blurring of boundaries. She interviewed dancers who spoke of a 'wholeness' or 'oneness' that emerges on the dance-floor (p.121). Csikszentmihalyi speaks of a broader breakdown 'between self and environment, between stimulus and response, or between past, present, and future' (1975, p.36). The emphasis in these dancing experiences is on a dissolving of self into other, a surrendering of ego to collective, and the pleasures that follows this. There are parallels too with the Buddhist state of *metta*⁷ (Paramananda, 1996), an opening out to and solidarity with the world, its people and objects, and a leaving behind, or at least an interrogation, of individualism, separation and isolation. Such interpretations of recreational dance suggest that class, gender and generational distinctions are temporarily set aside. A different definition of culture emerges as a set of 'shared symbols, beliefs, values, ideas' that has much in common with a functionalist analysis (Cowan, 1990, p.15). Represented in this way, recreational dance appears in some ways less combative, less conflictual, more cohesive than from the perspective of gramscian hegemony theory.

Some related concepts tease out the kinaesthetic experiences of groups of dancers. McNeill's (1995)

⁷ This term refers to a sense of non-individualised 'loving-kindness' directed towards the world and the beings that inhabit it.

'moving together in time' offers a very embodied - even physiological - understanding of how collective physical activities can act as a type of social cement. His work focuses on cultural performances where groups of people flexed and released their 'big muscles' in unison to a given rhythm provided by music or other auditory stimuli. His interest was sparked by his experiences on the military drill-field, and later extended to dance. This 'keeping together in time' for him led to 'muscular bonding', a kinaesthetic gelling of the group, and a consequent 'vaguely euphoric tone' (*ibid*, p.37) that is powerful enough to bind groups together, and to overcome tensions and conflicts between individuals. McNeill places particular emphasis on the rhythmic side of this, drawing on evolutionary and physiological considerations. What he calls 'community dancing' takes place when 'an indefinite number of individuals start to move their muscles rhythmically, establish a regular beat and continue doing so for long enough to arouse euphoric excitement shared by all participants, and more faintly by onlookers as well' (1995, p.13) (a bifurcation of the intensity of experience between participation and spectatorship is revealing). These ideas have been useful for conceptualising the pleasures of dancing that will be discussed in Chapter 10.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has defined the theoretical frame used in this investigation. First, there was a broad outline of Gramscian theory as outlined in the *Prison Notebooks* (1971), a set of ideas that posits, not just hegemonic 'leadership', but also a 'spontaneous philosophy' that could form the basis of a counter-hegemonic challenge. This theoretical strand was also useful for conceptualising the cultural balance suggested by the concept of 'compromise equilibrium'. Following this, the work of post-Marxist theorists Laclau and Mouffe (1986) was used to tease out some of the constructivist tendencies in Gramsci's work, particularly those that allowed for non-proletarian forms of struggle. Then, a number of approaches that were critical of the totalising tendencies of hegemony theory were discussed under the rubric of 'post-hegemony'. On this basis, the final section focused on a more phenomenological mode, one that chimes with Turner's (1969, 1974) concept of 'communitas'. The next chapter will set out the first set of findings related to the small farmer stratum that dominated Irish society between 1940 and 1960, and constituted its largest section of dancers.

Chapter 4

The Dancers

*You are the Dancing Queen, young and sweet, only seventeen
Dancing Queen, feel the beat from the tambourine
You can dance, you can jive, having the time of your life
See that girl, watch that scene, digging the Dancing Queen*

Abba (*Dancing Queen*, 1979)

4.0 Introduction

This chapter will move into a more specific focus on findings around dance related to the research setting. Such considerations will lay an important ethnographic foundation for subsequent chapters. The particular methodology deployed, with a particular emphasis on interviews, has allowed a detailed and intimate representation of life in Elphin during the 1940s and 1950s, focusing especially on the dancers themselves, the dances they attended, and their means of getting to the dances.

The first section will sketch out biographies of all the dancers that were interviewed. More impressionistic than systematic, such details will nevertheless allow for a fuller appreciation of quotes attributed to these people, by grounding such statements in particular lived contexts, social positioning and dance preferences. Next, the central consideration of those dances that were practiced during this time will be addressed, incorporating historical context, ethnographic details from the 1940s and 1950s, and a simple typology of dance moves and events. Finally, in conjunction with the map presented in Fig.3, an outline of practices around mobility and dance will be outlined, underlining shifting patterns in 'getting to the dances'.

4.1 An Introduction to the Dancers

What follows is an introduction to the dancers who were interviewed for this research project. Local people were almost universally welcoming, and provided a warm and hospitable environment for the interviews, a point that will be made in this section rather than for each description that follows.



Fig. 1 Location of Co. Roscommon in Ireland

(Source: www.leitrim-roscommon.com)



Fig.2

Co.Roscommon

(Source: www.leitrim-roscommon.com)

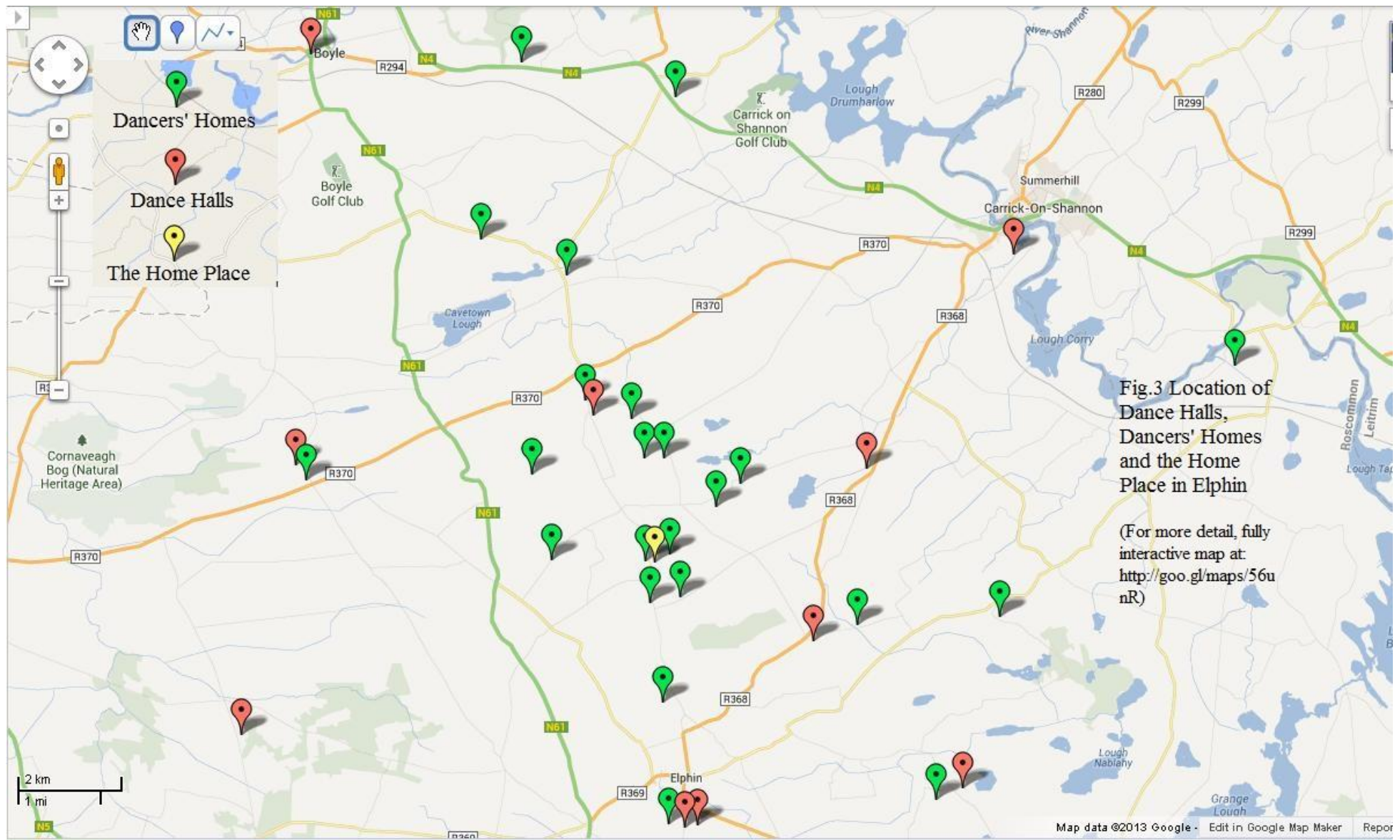


Fig.3 Location of Dance Halls, Dancers' Homes and the Home Place in Elphin

(For more detail, fully interactive map at: <http://goo.gl/maps/56unR>)

During the 1940s, people were 'dancers' by default – it seems that, of the 45 people I interviewed, there were no non-dancers, itself an indication of the centrality of these practices. At the same time, as will be discussed in Chapter 10, some dancers were more enthusiastic than others. 'Farmers' refers to those keeping dry stock cattle unless otherwise specified – without access to data on acreage, house size might be taken as a rough indicator of respondents status as small or big farmer. In the past, the former tend to reside in more modest cottages, the latter in larger two-storied buildings. Unless otherwise stated, respondents are Catholic. Many of those interviewed, particularly the small farmers, would have received limited formal education, leaving school before their Leaving Cert. Notes of dances attended by each person will be included. Respondents below are listed in order of their interview date, with the exception of the last four (that is John and Yvonne, Pat, Kathleen and John-Joe). These latter encounters can be characterised as 'informal interviews' and were carried out throughout the research process. All other sessions were semi-structured interviews. The chart at the end of this section presents a schematic outline of the information presented in these section, and includes additional material on number and format of interviews.

A good friend of my father's, **Charlie** was the first local person I contacted to request an interview. He was born in 1923, raised in Lecarrow townland (Lecarrow is in the parish of Elphin but he goes to mass in Croghan) about a mile from the home place, where he lives in a modest cottage with his son. He began dancing in the 1940s and attended house dances, carnivals and hall dances. Only in later years did he attend the Gaiety dance hall in Carrick. A longtime friend of my father's, they still meet at social occasions. A small farmer and widower, he is also acknowledged as one of the historians of the area, noted for his memory, his storytelling skills and his sense of humour. He is an avid reader of history books, and books about the locality, and we regularly exchanged material during my time in the field. He featured in *Looking West*, a radio documentary presented by Jim Fahy on RTE in the 1980s. Local people regularly ask, 'have you spoken to Charlie?' Neighbours would often drop by for a chat while an interview was in progress. Very much embedded in community activity until his very recent illness, he would be seen at all social occasions. **Packie and Babs were** the closest neighbours to my father's family, physically and emotionally, and lived in a modest cottage on the opposite side of the valley from the home place. It was Packie who found my uncle Donie when he passed away in the house in 1999. Packie and Babs were born in 1919 and 1922 respectively. They met at a 'farmer's dance' in Croghan in 1944 and raised four children. Both attended modern dances and carnivals. Unlike Babs, Packie went to maypole dances. He remembered his brother emigrating to England, the last occasion that he saw him. Babs originally

came from Cloonshaghaun, lived most of her youth in Cavetown, went to school in Knockroe, and spent a few years in England before settling down. Both small farmers, I was well acquainted with them over the years, and Packie's stories were instrumental in kindling my interest in oral history. They moved from their cottage into their son Peter's nearby house, built in 2007. Not long after the interview, Packie began to suffer from dementia. I visited him in the nursing home. He passed away in late 2009. There was a further interview with Babs the following summer. She passed away in 2010. Peter and his family continue to live at this place. One of the younger dancers, **Rita** was born in 1944. Like Charlie, she was known as a local historian. A small farmer, she was well known to our family, and lived in a house a few hundred yards away with her daughter's family. There are records in the Griffith Evaluation of 1857 of ancestors of both Rita's and ours holding land in common. Her father, Pat, hosted a renowned 'rambling house' in the 1940s that was regularly mentioned in stories. She attended carnival dances and modern dances at the Reynolds brothers' ballrooms. She was active in community projects such as the local Youth Cafe where I attended a charity card drive with her. Rita passed away in early 2009 and I attended the funeral on behalf of the family. Her daughter Fiona and family now live in the family house.



Fig. 4 Rita (Source: Shanagher, 2013)

Born in 1928 in Croghan village 4km away, **Jimmy** lives in an old two-storied stone house there, one of those originally constructed by the Lloyds for its labourers. A brother-in-law of Babs (who first suggested contacting him), although a widower since 2001, he is renowned for his knowledge of music and entertainment. This is related to his musical skills, his playing at house dances, his involvement with Croghan Hall – 'I loved that hall' he says – and his ability to recall old

poems/songs composed for the rambling house by a local man, Barney Dowd. I have enjoyed chatting with Jimmy, and sharing a cigarette and cup of tea. He is unique among the interviewees in featuring on Youtube (reciting 'The Croghan Goose', recorded in Dicky Beirne's pub). He worked in Dublin as a bus driver before moving back to Croghan. His father and grandfather worked as blacksmiths for the Lloyds who lived in Croghan House, now demolished. The old blacksmith's pound has been renovated for the Tidy Towns competition. The house he lives in was built by the Lloyds, all along one side of the road as he told me, so that residents of the 'big house' would not have to look at the back gardens of their tenants. I got to know Jimmy, and we have gone for drives around the sites of the old halls, where he showed me photos of himself in his youth, dressed for modern dances. He attended dances beginning in the late 1930s and into the 1940s and still dances occasionally in Dicky Beirne's. He enjoys telling people that he danced with President Mary MacAleese whose father came from these parts. Jimmy still takes part in amateur dramatic productions and recently played St.Patrick – he showed me the 'crozier' that he wielded for this show. Though living in Creeve, 10km away, **Ned and Maura** come from Portobello within a few kilometres of the home place. Ned was born in 1931, and Maureen in 1934 – they attended house dances and modern dances. Ned came from a well-known family that Maureen (see below) married into. Their cottage in Creeve, situated on rolling hills above lakes, was built by Ned himself, by the 'lights of his car' as he said. He suffered injuries after falling from the roof during construction. They live with their daughter and young grandchildren, some of whom have won sean-nós dancing competitions. Small farmers, Ned is a well-known musician and is mentioned by many dancers in connection with house dances. His brother John was another well-known musician, and built his own fiddle. Ned didn't play any more when I met him because of circulation problems in his hands. Having met Maura while interviewing Ned, I interviewed them together the second time around. Ned passed away in 2012, and I commiserated with Maura with her daughter at a 'blessing of the graves' service in one of the local graveyards. Living just inside the gates of the old Rockville estate beside an avenue lined with tall lime trees, **Bill and Liz** raised a family of 7 daughters and 4 sons in this place. Will's father received a plot of over 90 acres when the Rockville estate was divided by the Land Commission – they had to clear 27 acres of land that had reverted to scrub. Their home is 6km away from the home place. Will was a fiddle-player, as was his father before him. He later formed a band that would play a mixture of modern and céilí music. The couple attended house dances, modern dances and carnivals. Bill attended dances at Rockville House, and knew of maypole dances and even events in handball alleys. His family ran a pub and shop in Elphin that a number of other respondents mention, and that still opens the odd time, according to Maureen. They were born in 1926 and 1929 respectively. Bill's name was suggested to me by John-Joe, and

fortunately Liz was available on the night too.

Born in 1935, **Teresa** lived with her husband Ivan in a modern two-storey house at the top of Portobello hill 4km from the home place. The name 'Portobello', Teresa told me, derived from an old 'big house' located nearby, of which no trace remains. She attended carnivals and some of the later hall dances. Reared at a cross-roads, this had been a meeting point for cyclists on their way to dances, although cars were coming in at this time too. Teresa spent some time in England before getting married, and after marrying, moved to Canada with Ivan from 1960 until the early 1970s when they returned to farm the land of his family. She commented that their holding is a decent size. Ivan, her husband, is still active on the farm, and has an interest in vintage tractors, taken out for the St.Patrick's Day parades. They have a son they adopted when living in Canada, who now lives in Meath with their grandchildren. Theirs is a mixed marriage, and Ivan is Protestant. Though Teresa apologised for her poor memory, but she provided a detailed account of attending carnivals and modern dances. The interview was originally scheduled with Ivan, known to our family, but as his hearing was poor, he felt unwilling to take part. Teresa passed away in 2013, and I attended the wake. Born in Ballysundriven in 1930, just a few hundred metres from the home place, **John** farmed until very recently, but his sons have taken over in the meantime. He regularly called around to 'ramble' with my uncle Pat when he came back each summer from the US. John attended house dances, céilí and modern dances, as well as carnivals. He met his wife at a dance, and he and two friends accompanied their partners to a fleadh in Thurles in the late 1950s. A third cousin of ours, John farms a large holding to the back of our house. He has consolidated his farm over the years, including land sold to him by my uncle Donie when he retired from farming, and is now one of the larger landholders in the area. One of the last of the living elders in the vicinity, he is regularly mentioned these days as a local historian. Originally from Corgarve 3km from the home place, **Maureen** was a sister of Brian and Roddy, and from a small farmer background. They had three other siblings who are no longer living. Maureen went to house and modern dances and carnivals, but not to maypole dances. She married a 'Lee man' and they lived beside the hall in Croghan. Her husband was on the committee for the hall. After being widowed, she lived in a cottage in Elphin town, where her children regularly came to visit, and where photographs of her family were all around her. She came from a notably religious family. Brian – her sibling - is a Christian Brother. Initial contact was suggested by a good friend of hers, my aunt Kathleen. Maureen passed away in 2012.

An aunt of my second cousin (and key informant) John-Joe, **Bridie** lived near him, 5km from the

home place in a small cottage. One of the older dancers, she was born in 1918 into a small farmer background. I grew fond of Bridie, who seemed much younger in spirit than her years suggested. By chance, I visited her on the 30th anniversary of her husband's death. She gave voice to an interesting 'popular philosophy' around life and death that allowed us to bond. Her dancing memories stretched back further than most, and she remembered dances not mentioned by others. While she went to some house dances and modern dances (though not to maypole dances), she also went to bonfire dances on a hill nearby, and was aware of some obscure dance venues. She remembered dancing in Rockville house. She spoke with great enthusiasm and generosity over the course of two interviews. One of her daughters dropped in during the sessions. Unusually among the respondents, she attended secondary school at the convent in town and learned the piano and violin there, though she didn't rate herself as a musician. She took an active part in Age Action activities organised through the nursing home in Elphin. Bridie passed away in early 2010. A bachelor, **PatK** lived in a cosy, old-fashioned cottage located up several back roads. A gentle, softly-spoken man, he played the accordion in Dicky Beirne's pub (and invited me up there for the launch of a local man's CD in 2010) and was mentioned by Bridie as playing at the Elphin nursing home. He was a farmer all his life, except for a period of nine years spent in England. Born in 1933, he hailed from Carrownamaddy, 10km away, and could recount detailed local histories, referring in passing to the *Annals of the Four Masters* that were composed nearby. He had poems published in the *Roscommon Herald*. He attended house and modern dances, as well as carnivals and maypole dances. I was put in touch with PatK through my cousin John-Joe. PatK passed away tragically after a traffic accident in 2010. **May** is from Mohill, Co. Leitrim and worked in a garage/shop, was well-known as a singer in her day, and travelled through the country on this basis. She still sings in Dicky Beirne's sometimes, and sang with gusto during the interview, one that turned into a long, convivial and entertaining evening. Her husband **Johnny** is also from Leitrim and came from a shopkeeper's family. They live in Woodbrook House, the subject of a 1972 book, *Woodbrook*, by David Thomson, and are in the process of renovating it. On the evening of the first interview, Johnny met me at the gates to the estate. They were both very down-to-earth, and well acquainted with the culture, music and song of the area. They knew of John McGahern and his family, who lived nearby. They were 'keen' céilí dancers, but attended modern dances too. They were born in 1940 and 1942 respectively. May was recommended to me by James, a younger man with historical knowledge, who in turn had been recommended to me by John-Joe. Johnny happened to be available that evening for a joint interview.

Brian comes from Corgarve and is a brother of Roddy and Maureen. I first met Brian when he

called up to the home place on New Year's Eve 2007. Knowing our family, he had seen a car outside the house, and dropped in 'on spec' to visit. Born in 1930, he is irrepressible and drops into song or poetry at the drop of a hat. At the same time, his perspective, informed by his education, tended towards considerable historical detail. He remembers harvest dances amongst the neighbours during wartime, but didn't attend hall dances (modern or céilí) or carnivals as he left the area to attend college. He settled in Galway to teach after he joined the Christian Brothers. While living there, he attended set-dance events. Well educated, he has a keen knowledge of local history and its politics and class nuances. He has published a poem about the return of Mick King, a local man killed in the Korean War, who was brought home accompanied by a full US army military escort for burial. He lives in a house with two other Christian Brothers in Galway. He phoned me on several occasions when my uncle was in hospital, regularly comes back to Elphin, and we still meet up for a chat. Originally from the town of Elphin, **Mícheál** currently lives in a two-storey house in the town of Ballingare, 12km away, with his wife and daughter. He was good friends with my father, and showed me photos of them at a fleadh in the early 1960s. Born in 1931, he trained to be a teacher in Summerhill at much the same time as Albert Reynolds, the future Taoiseach. He was involved in setting up a branch of the CCÉ in Elphin, and getting the fleadh up and running there in the late 1950s. He has maintained a keen interest in traditional music. On dancing, he mainly went to modern dances. He has written history articles and books, including one on the dance hall in Mantua, as well as pieces on cycling trips during his teens. He holds strong and well-articulated opinions on a range of matters, including a passionate critique of some strains of republicanism. His name was suggested to me by his good friend Johnsie, who couldn't do the interview. Johnsie in turn had been recommended to me by John-Joe. **Norman** lives with his family at Estersnow, in an old two-story rectory up a tree-lined driveway. He farms and breeds bulls on a plot of good land a few kilometres north of Croghan. He was the first member of the Church of Ireland that I interviewed, and his people once lived in the now-derelict Cavetown House nearby. He had some material to show me the on dances that were held there. A warm and modest man, his demeanour is very 'local', although he specified that he rarely takes a drink. He was enthusiastic when I indicated an interest in visiting the Protestant church in Croghan. He was the youngest of the interviewees, born in 1953, and as such was more familiar with the showband scene than with the modern dances of the 1940s and 1950s. While his dancing memories do not reach into the research period, he was helpful in informing me about the local Church of Ireland congregation, and put me in touch with some of its members. He has helped Rory out on his farm. His name was suggested to me by John-Joe, my cousin.

Attracta comes from a small farmer background in Kyleglass, and was a postmistress by trade until the local post office in Ballinameen closed in 2008. She was born in 1937 and remained single. I met Attracta by chance when I was out for a drive with my parents, looking for the site of the old dance hall. She still lives in the village, a short distance from where the old hall used to be, in a modest two storey house. Her nephew dropped by when I visited. Ballinameen is 10km from the home place, on the western bounday of the research area. Attracta danced from aged 20 until 40, attended modern dances and carnivals, and knew of house dances. She had a good local knowledge of nearby halls and of local history. Displaying a cautious manner, it took some persuasion to encourage her to do a second interview, but she soon warmed to her topic. **Rory and Pearl** were born in 1933 and 1942 respectively, and living in a fine two storied farmhouse on a rise visible from the main Carrick-Boyle road, 8km from the home place, their residence is surrounded by good land. Rory worked on the committee for dances in St. Patrick's Hall in Boyle, and has a photo taken of the committee in 1950. Both had been to station dances, modern dances, the bonfire dances at Cox' Cross, and carnivals. Pearl indicated that she travelled good distances by car to go to some dances. She came from outside the area, from Kilmore, near Roosky. They are both members of the Church of Ireland. Their demeanour was very local, and they were warm hosts. During the interview, Chris, an ex-guard and friend of theirs, dropped by for a chat. For a second session, I intended to talk to Pearl alone, as I felt I needed more solo interviews with women, but Rory sat in and made welcome contributions. I was put in touch with the couple by a local member of the congregation, who in turn had been recommended by my father.

Marty was one of two interviewees I visited in the Sacred Heart Nursing Home in Boyle, where members of my family continued to visit him. Although warned that he might be a 'ball-hopper' (something of a trickster), I found him open and generous with his recollections. A bachelor born in 1918 to a large family he worked as a farmer until he recently sold the 60-acre farm. From Knockroe, 4km from the home place, he was well known to our family, and could tell me stories about my grandparents. I knew his brother, Mick, next-door neighbour to my uncle Donie. He went to Boheroe school with Packie. In his youth, he had worked as a barman in one of the pubs in Croghan, but farming was clearly his main interest and he could talk at length about it. He had won a scholarship to attend secondary school in Longford but his family could not put up the portion of funds needed to secure a place. He attended house and modern dances. Marty had an interest in history and republican politics, and another brother of his had spent time interned in the Curragh in the 1940s. He was still a fit and mobile man until shortly before his passing in 2012. **Tom** also stayed in the Nursing Home in Boyle in a private ward. A widower, he was known to my aunt and

uncle, who would visit him there. His parents had emigrated to the US where he was born during the Depression in 1930, before returning to Ireland. He spent his youth in Turlough, not far from Marty. He recalls a certain bemusement among locals, watching his parents, the returned emigrant couple, walk hand-in-hand. Tom's life trajectory was unusual among those interviewed. He was notable as one of the only car drivers in the 1940s. He had a keen interest in engineering when young, and as with Marty, built a radio set to tune into modern music. He studied engineering in college in Galway, before briefly working as a teacher. He then went to Canada, where he completed a Masters and PhD in engineering, and then returned to Ireland to work in TCD. Probably as a result of this, he was very supportive of me in this project and gave me many tips. We got on well and exchanged music. Though he knew of house dances, Tom's main interest was in modern dances in the more luxurious ballrooms in Carrick, Galway and Dublin. He loved music, had a CD player in his room, and spoke of contemporary groups playing various types of music. In the first of two interviews, he played music for me that he had danced to in his youth. A photo of his deceased wife stood on his bedside table. He had been ill when I met him in 2011, and passed away in 2012.

A vivid memory of the fieldtrips was driving up back roads in South Leitrim to meet **Annie**, a descendant of the Lloyds, big landowners within the research setting until the early twentieth century. Annie was very local in her sensibility and lived in a fine old two-storied house on the farm where she and her husband, now deceased, had worked. Their children lived nearby and happily took part in the interviews when they dropped by. Annie worked in a big house in England as a maid before the Second World War, and returned to marry a local man and settle down to have nine children. She went to house and modern dances and had some keen insights into class distinctions around these. Though there had been a big 'do' in 2010 to celebrate her 90th birthday, she betrayed few signs of her age, a vivacious and humorous woman who sat for two interviews. Annie mentioned the poor condition of the Lloyd graveyard a number of times, with a view to getting it renovated. Though living 20km from the home place, I included her in the interviews because of her interesting family history and her membership of the Church of Ireland congregation. She had been recommended to me by the local vicar, after I found his phone number on an information board outside one of the local churches. Recalling her family history, Annie was keen to stress the ways that her family supported local tenant farmers during the difficult years of the famine. Living 7km from the home place in a fine two-storied house set back from the road on a long driveway, **Irene** was originally from Castlerea. The house is located near Norman, in an area on the Plains of Boyle where a number of local Protestants live. She has another son who is a rector in Bushmills. A

somewhat reluctant interviewee at first, she later relaxed. Her speech was more 'refined' than locals. Born in 1922, she had been involved with the local ICA branch in her youth. She didn't have too much to say about dancing, but did attend house dances. Norman originally suggested I contact Irene, an elder of the Protestant community in Elphin, and she had plenty of interesting insights into the history of this congregation locally.

Hailing from Lecarrow, 4km away from the home place, and a good 'mate' of my uncle Pat who passed away in 2011, **Dan** would regularly call around to the house to 'ramble' with him and John during the summer. He had a key to the door of the home place, and kept an eye on it for our family. With his wife Margaret, he made several visits to the hospital in Galway in 2011 when Pat was ill. Dan went to maypole dances and modern dances, and knew something of house dances. From a small farmer background, he had worked with the county council in his youth, and travelled with my uncle Pat to work in Glasgow and Newcastle, before going to London. He worked with the council there, while my uncle went to New York. He attended the Galteemore dance-hall in London. He and his wife Margaret returned to live in a modern two-storey house in Elphin town in 2001. Seeming much younger than his years suggested – he was born in 1937 – we were surprised to hear of his passing just a few months after my uncle Pat in late 2011. Many remarked that he died doing what he loved, dancing at a local event. I often visit Margaret, a Donegal woman, when I'm back at the home place, and she has told me stories about her dancing. Brother to Maureen and Brian, **Roddy** lives on the old family homestead at Corgarve, where he was born in 1936. I recall a long, relaxed interview in the home place, with the sun setting across the valley late in the evening. We had an enjoyable, humorous chat. He was never an avid dancer, but went to some modern and carnival dances. He preferred hunting to dancing in his youth and spoke much about farming. As with his brother Brian, he has a good historical knowledge. In common with both his siblings, he was religiously inclined and had been involved with the local sodalities in his youth, as well as with the Pioneer movement (a religiously inspired group that takes a 'pledge' not to drink alcohol - fund-raising events for the organisation were sometimes held in dances). He was recommended to me for interview by his sister. Living in Rathallen near the Four Provinces pub, or the '4Ps' its called locally, **Jackie** is a bachelor and was born in 1936. He has two sisters. His land, in his own words, is 'not great'. It is planted these days with forestry where deer are occasional and unwelcome visitors. He lives in an old bungalow on a cul-de-sac off the main Roscommon-Boyle road, where his grandfather and great-grandfather lived. The house is perhaps 200 years old. There was a library in the corner with history books and historical fiction. We had a long and enjoyable chat. He attended carnivals and modern dances. He has a strong interest in republican politics and loaned me

two books on the topic. There was a depiction of the 1916 Rebellion on the wall of the hall. He showed me paperwork related to his family from the Strokestown Heritage centre, as well as postcards from his nephew. Although he knows my family, we made contact initially in a chance meeting outside the church in Croghan. A distant relation of ours, **Vincent** lives with his wife in a two-storied house 7km away from the home place in Killapogue on the back road to Croghan. He was born in 1942 and, unusually for the interviewees, had attended university. He eventually worked as a geography teacher, while also running a farm. He attended modern dances locally and in Dublin. Known to my family, I was put in touch with him by my cousin John-Joe.

Monica and I were put in touch through Ruth, her sister and the daughter-in-law of Babs and Packie. Ruth felt Monica would know more about the period, and about the career of her mother, Phyllis Glancy, a band-leader, singer and musician in the 1940s. Monica was born in 1944. The interview was unusual in being concerned with the life-story of somebody who had been heavily involved in the dance hall scene during the 1940s, as relayed by her daughter. Monica lives in a two-storied house by the beach in Strandhill, Sligo, although her family come from Jamestown, about 15km from the home place. She was a gracious host and had prepared written notes to give to me before the interview. She has travelled widely around the world with her late husband on various placements with the oil companies he worked for.

Jack and Yvonne, the researcher's father and mother, were born in 1940 and 1942 respectively. He lived in the home place until the early 1960s, when he left to study agriculture in UCC on a scholarship. She left her home place of Louisburgh, Co. Mayo to train to be a teacher in Dublin, before returning to Mayo. They met at a modern dance in Castlebar in the early 1960s. In 1966, they settled on one of the new housing estates being built around Limerick city. He worked as a creamery manager, she as a primary school teacher. They raised two daughters and two sons. Both of them are strongly interested in Irish culture, and my Dad in particular has an interest in history and republican politics. He has always displayed a marked pride of place around his origins, demonstrated most clearly through his twin love of Gaelic football and traditional music. Both of them helped over the course of this investigation by acting as 'sounding boards', describing their dancing years and keeping me company when our trips to Elphin coincided. They also introduced me to cousins, various relatives and friends who have eased my passage into the community. My father provided useful details during informal conversations throughout the research period. My uncle **Pat** and his wife **Bridget** met among the emigrant Irish community in New York shortly after arriving there in the late 1950s. He worked as a foreman on a building site and was heavily involved

in trade unions. Their apartment became a stopping off point for generations of emigrants and visitors to the US. As with my father, Pat showed a strong interest in traditional music, history and politics. With no children of their own, and with my siblings and I as Pat's only nieces and nephews, we were always close to them. We kept in regular contact by phone, and always met up on their annual visit to the home place. Pat passed away during a visit to Elphin in 2011 at the age of 74 and is buried in the graveyard attached to Elphin church. As with my father, we had numerous informal conversations over the research period that helped me to understand local sensibilities.

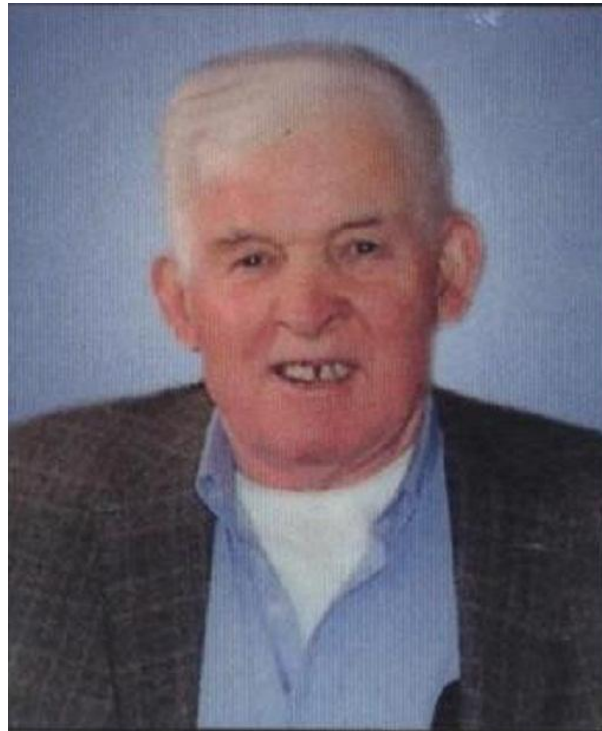


Fig.5 Pat (Source: Shanagher, 2013)

Sister of Jack and Pat, **Kathleen** trained as a nun with the Order of St. Joseph of Cluny. She studied for a chemistry degree and taught for over 40 years on the missions in the Caribbean, first in St. Lucia and later in St. Vincent. She returned to Ireland in 2005 and settled in the retirement home for her order in Mount Sackville, Chapelizod. As with her siblings, she retains a keen interest in history and politics, as well as in the home place, and enjoys telling stories about her upbringing. My second cousin, **John-Joe** acted as a key informant and was of invaluable assistance in introducing me to local people. Running a medium-sized cattle farm, he is always ready to discuss local history.

Table 1: Summary of Respondent Biography

Dancer (No. of Interviews)	Gender	Born-Died (Deceased in Bold)	Occupation	R*	M**	Townland	F***	Mins	Pages
Charlie(2)	M	1923	Farmer	C	N	Lecarrow	A	40/60	11/27
Babs/ Packie(2)	M/F	1919-2009 1922-2010	Farmer/farmer	C	N	Boheroe	A	45/40	22/16
Rita	F	1944-2009	Farmer	C	N	Boheroe	A	15	13
Jimmy(2)	M	1928	Bus driver/actor	C	Y	Croghan	T/A	90/90	3/7
Ned/Maura	M	1931-2012 1935	Farmer- labourer/farmer	C	Y	Portobello/Creeve	T	35	2
Liz/Bill	M/F	1926/1929	Farmer	C	Y/N	Rockville	T	60	4
Teresa (2)	F	1935-2013	Farmer	C	N	Portobello	A	40/45	19/20
John (2)	M	1930	Farmer	C	N	Boheroe	A	35/55	23/27
Maureen (2)	F	1931-2012	Farmer	C	N	Corgarve	A	45/45	25.5
Bridie (2)	F	1918-2010	Farmer	C	N	Aughrim	A	80/60	26/22
Paddy	M	1933-2010	Farmer	C	Y	Creeve	A	20	10
Johnny/May	M/F	1940/1942	Farmer/singer	C	N	Mohill/Ardcarne	A	50	19
Brian	M	1930	C.brother	C	N	Corgarve	A	60	17
Mícheál(2)	M	1931	Teacher /historian	C	Y	Boheroe/Ballinagare	A	40	14/23
Norman	M	1953	Farmer	P	N	Cavetown	T	45	5
Attracta(2)	F	1937	Postmistress	C	N	Ballinameen	T/A	60/30	7.14
Rory/Pearl	M/F	1933/1942	Farmer/farmer	P	N	Erris	T	85/60	6.9
Marty(2)	M	1918-2012	Farmer	C	N	Knockroe	A	60/35	20/16
Tom(2)	M	1930-2012	Lecturer TCD	C	N	Moheedian	T/A	55/60	5.22
Annie(2)	F	1920	Farmer/maid	P	N	Drumboher	A	45/60	14/23
Irene	F	1922	Farmer	P	N	Cavetown	T	60	9
Dan	M	1937 -2011	Council worker	C	N	Cartron	A	60	19
Roddy	M	1936	Farmer	C	N	Corgarve	A	90	28

Jackie	M	1936	Farmer	C	N	Rathallen	A	90	15
Vincent	M	1942	Farmer-teacher	C	N	Killapogue	T	75	7
Monica	F	1944	Singer/musician	C	Y	Drumsna	T	60	8
		Subtotal: 31 individuals 38 formal interviews						2060 min (33h)	590
	T:40								
Informal									
John-joe		1950	Farmer	C					
Pat		1937-2011	Construction worker	C					
Jack/Yvonne		1939/1941	Creamery Manager/Teacher	C					
Kathleen		1935	Nun	C					
	1F/4M								
	+5								
		Total=45 individuals							

***R=Religion** (C for Catholic, P for Protestant)

****M=Musician** (Y for Yes, N for No)

*****F=Recording Format** (A for Audio, T for Transcript)

He lives with his brother Eamonn in a converted RIC station at a local crossroads. We have had many chats, attended fleadh's together, and the brothers have acted as a type of familiar anchor for me in the research setting.

4.2 Dancing in Elphin: A Historical Context

A useful place to begin thinking about recreational dance in Ireland is with the popular culture of the nineteenth century, since most of the forms that were prevalent in the first half of the twentieth century have their roots in this period (Breathnach 1983; Brennan 1999; Tubridy 1994). The culture of this former period has been characterised as 'an intense and distinctive vernacular culture, a culture expressed in music, song and dance...[amongst] a self-contained community of pre-industrial proletarians in a vast rural congested slum' (MacLochlainn 1983, p.31). Connolly too defines Irish popular culture between 1650 and 1850 as 'the culture of the common people: not necessarily illiterate but primarily dependent on the spoken word, governed by custom and ritual, community-minded and conservative' (Connolly 1998, p.10). It is opposed to 'an elite culture defined by transmission through the printed word, its access to the world of high politics, and its observance of a particular code of politeness and behaviours' (ibid, p.10).

It should also be said that other groups besides the 'proletarians' shared this popular culture - correlation of class and culture is rarely a one-to-one relationship. Carroll (1999), for example, has documented the participation of the 'strong farmer' class in patterns (see below) and, as such, in the social dances that were an integral part of these events. For the most part though, this was the orally transmitted culture of the rural poor, and with endemic illiteracy (Waters 1977), there are few first-hand accounts of dances of the day. The various commentators, some sympathetic, many unsympathetic, tended to cross class or national boundaries to gather their material. Brennan (1999) summarises the accounts of 'gentlemen' travellers such as Arthur Young, John Carr and Joseph C. Walker and it seems fair to conclude that at this time dancing was very popular among the wider population (Brennan, 1999). Foley (2006, p.34) has concluded that 'in the nineteenth century, dance, song and storytelling were integral to the rambling house in rural Ireland. Step dance would have taken place together with set dancing and miscellaneous couple dances'.

The occasions for these dances were varied and colourful. They took place indoors and outdoors, in private homes and at larger public gatherings such as fairs, races and on village greens, crossroads, bonfire dances, in pubs and houses and at the 'merry wake', the latter term indicating less sombre

proceedings such as song and dance (see Friel 2004; Brennan 1999; Breathneach 1983; Evans 1977; Connolly 1982 and Malcolm 1983). As with European fairs, their Irish counterparts 'preserved carnivalesque traits (Bakhtin 1984, p.230)'. William Carleton, rare insofar as he was originally a member of the rural proletariat, comments on a pattern dance at Gougane Barra in 1854. These were rowdy affairs combining celebration, piety and occasionally faction fights. Malcolm (1983, p.41) suggests the emphasis was firmly on 'food, sex, violence'. Events often began with pious observance by participants at a holy well, a site for vernacular religious celebrations. Shortly afterwards, 'the same individuals may be found in a tent dancing with ecstatic vehemence to the music of a bagpipe or fiddle' (Connolly 1982, p.144).

As to the dances, a myriad of forms seem to have reached these shores and either hybridised with local forms or vanished. The quadrilles arrived in 1816 (Brennan 1999) and over the course of the century, became the 'sets' that are still familiar today. The dancing masters were instrumental in this process, introducing dances to young people and modifying them in the process. Breathnach (1983, p.12) has dated the arrival of the sets in Clare and Kerry to the 1880s and 1890s. Their arrival in Longford is described as follows: 'Big Mike Newman who used frequent the ordinary kitchen dances...introduced the sets into Ballinalee, Co. Longford. This happened about 1870'. It seems fair to surmise that the sets arrived in the adjacent county of Roscommon at much the same time. At the same time, it is clear that house dances had a long pedigree in and around the research setting. Babs remarked that her parents went to house dances - given that she was born in 1922, these dances can be dated to at least the beginning of the twentieth century. Keenahan (2006) cites an elderly respondent discussing rural life in the 1900s in Roscommon: 'the rambling houses, the country house dance and card playing...were the principle pastimes of people long ago (p.316)'. Other dances - the waltz, mazurka, polka, barndance - were also introduced from Britain, France and Poland and incorporated into local repertoires. There seems to have been considerable traffic of popular dances around Europe at this time and Ireland, far from being an isolated backwater, was wide open to these cultural flows although it should be noted that, within Ireland, there were regional variations in the incorporation of dance. Limited evidence about dance in the research setting during the period means more specific conclusions cannot be drawn.

Many of the dances, including the quadrille, originated in a ballroom setting, amongst the ascendancy or urban bourgeoisie and slowly made their way to the rural proletariat. Tubridy (1994) describes how the Knight of Glin employed dancing masters to spread the quadrilles out from the 'big house' to the cabins of local people. The dance masters as the midwives of this process

modified the dances in a number of ways. They conferred supposed 'refinement' on the practices as they transmitted them so that arm movements and finger-clicking, for example, were discouraged (Brennan 1994). Steps were changed to suit the existing popular repertoire, and there was a speeding up the timing to suit jig and reel tempos (Tubridy 1994). Ballroom dances in turn were often influenced by popular dances (Brennan 1999) so that an originary moment, in geographic or class terms for dances is difficult to establish. Another source for popular dances in the nineteenth century in Ireland were British military garrisons. The names of some sets – *Lancers*, *Victorian* and *Caledonians* – suggest this possibility (Tubridy 1994). Any analysis of dance during this period is necessarily an account of change, transformation and hybridisation. What Connolly has said of the pattern could equally be said of social dance: 'the body of custom and belief which surrounded the pattern was a living tradition, not an inflexible inheritance from the past' (Connolly 1983, p.144). At the same time, the social occasions for dance began to change over the course of the century, so that a decline was evident in patterns and fairs, and of the dances that would have featured at these events. Connolly (1983) dates this decline to between 1800 and 1850. Wilde recounts how in Roscommon the patterns declined between 1830 and 1850 (1972 cited in Malcolm 1983). Malcolm herself suggests the changes took place before, during and after the famine.

4.3 Dance Culture during the 1940s and 1950s

Dancing was one element in a larger spectrum of entertainment practices in the research setting during the 1940s and 1950s. Generally, with the scarcity of cars in the country, mobility was limited to cycling and walking and, consequently, entertainment tended to be localised. There were visits to 'rambling houses' with story-telling, exchange of news and games of cards, largely attended by men. These were similar to the *cuaird*, described by Arensberg and Kimball in Clare during the 1930s (2001[1936]). Gambles or card-games were occasionally held in houses to raise money if, for example, a family was going through hard times. Plays and concerts took place in the local halls. Sports, particularly the GAA, were a prominent feature of social life. Public houses were social centres, though to a lesser extent than in more recent years. Recreational dance complemented and synergised with these other forms and yet, even when it took place on a frequent basis, retained the character of a 'special occasion'. People, as Teresa said, 'lived for the dances'. Considerable efforts went into organising even the smaller events and, it might be said, dances marked a highlight of night-time social occasions. More will be said on the popularity of dance in Chapter 10.

4.3.1 House Dances

Moving from this historical perspective into an assessment of dance during the research period, house dances might first be considered. By the 1940s, it could be said, using Williams (2001[1961]) schema that these were residual dance events, counterposed to the dominant modern dances of quickstep and foxtrot¹. Rita and Mícheál said house dances had ended by the time they were dancing in the late 1950s, though there were occasional temporal 'outliers' of the form. Healey (1999) says that a house dance was held in Roscommon town in the early 1960s. Parallel to this decline, the sets that were so intimately associated with house dances waned towards the middle of the twentieth century but enjoyed a revival in the 1980s (Tubridy, 1994, O' Connor, 1997), though usually in venues such as pubs or community halls rather than houses. Nevertheless, they constituted a widely discussed and popular form of dance, co-existed for a time with modern and céili dance, and constituted a type of background against which these latter practitioners can be understood.

It should first be noted that these events have not been historicised in the same way as the various types of hall or carnival dances that registered their presence in the advertising columns of local newspapers. A few exceptions aside – in Ireland, Brennan (1999), Breathnach (1983), and Tubridy (1994); and in Louisiana (Spitzer, 1986) – researchers must rely on oral accounts to shed light on such forms, the 'fugitive forms' that Gibbons (1995) was interested in. Respondents indicate that house dances still took place, rotated from house to house over the year. In Clare, most of the dances took place during the relative lull in farming between Advent and Epiphany, and this seems to have been the case the research setting too, with long weekends such as at Easter time also featuring prominently. House dances were distinguished by being set in the private, domestic sphere. When a number of dancers were asked to list out names of families locally that hosted these events, together with household head first names for clarification, several dozen names featured. It seems on this basis that house dances were commonly held at this time in a number of local houses (although in the absence of household data after 1911, moving from this point to more specific conclusions about how widely dances were held in the community is more problematic). These local dances were held in kitchens and featured informal groups of musicians rather than the 'bands' that played at hall dances. Those who provided this service were part-time 'musicianers' (as the colloquialism goes) working as farmers or in related occupations, and playing in the context of a broader sense of reciprocity rather than for a fee (Arensberg and Kimball, 2001[1936]). At the same

1 A good candidate for an emergent dance form towards the end of the 1950s would be a new type of modern dance - the jive

time, with hosts often supplying musicians with drink, there was a tacit acknowledgement of the labour (and pleasure) involved (Packie, Will). Instrumentation would typically include fiddle, flute and melodeon. The style of traditional music in north Roscommon would be contiguous with south Sligo, and included such well-known musicians as Peter Horan, Fred Finn and Josie McDermott. Popular tunes included *The Connaughtman's Ramble*, *Dowd's Favourite* and *The Pigeon on the Gate*.

By the 1940s, following many years of land reform by the Congested Districts Board and Land Commission (Bill) most houses locally and the lands around them were in private ownership. House dances were held in homes similar to those listed under the Class 2 and 3 categories of the 1911 census (see Appendix A). At the same time, dances could be hosted in more or less well-off houses - there is an account of a dance at Woodbrook House in the 1930s (Thompson, 1974) and Norman had a flyer for a dance after a coursing meeting in nearby Cavetown House where his ancestors lived, also in the 1930s - these would both be Class 1 houses. Equally, Charlie recalled a dance in a 'shooky house' (poorly built) rented by a local knitter for the working season, where rain leaked in through the thatch, likely a Class 4 house.

When a dance took place, a few days notice would be given, porter sourced, some tea and food prepared. Most importantly, musicians were notified. These were key figures given the centrality of dance and dance music and usually local people who banded together for such occasions, with instruments typically including flute, fiddle and sometimes melodeon. With the musicians in a prime location by the fire, the dance would proceed. Dances might be held in the kitchen while other activities - card-playing, story-telling, cake-eating - might take place in a bedroom opened up for the purpose. Larger crowds were not unknown and people could be turned away, particularly if they were not from the immediate area. Dancing could take place until four or five in the morning and sometimes till dawn. On busy weekends such as at Easter time, people would move from one house dance to another. Sometimes money might be charged to cover the cost of hosting the party.

There appear to be three main factors as to why dances were held. Notable social events such as weddings or the return or departure of emigrants; occasions when the community would pull together to support a family going through 'hard times', through the proceeds of a gamble where a turkey would be offered as a prize (Charlie said large families with young children would benefit at Christmas time by this tradition); and finally, a looser reciprocal arrangement for holding dances so that houses would take turns hosting the events (Babs and Packie). In this latter instance it seems

that a selection of houses - perhaps those traditionally associated with music and dance - shared the hosting of dance events. There are some similarities with use of private homes for the purpose of holding stations (see Chapter 10). In this case, hosting duties rotated through the houses in each townland with two events each year. In a townland of fourteen houses so, there would be a seven-year cycle. The principle of reciprocity was summarised by Jackie: 'it was a dance in one house one time, and a dance in another house another time. You know they [would] rotate it you know'. It could be said that such patterns in dance culture illustrate the existence of a process of 'mutual aid' (Kropotkin, 1972) related to dancing. When the three reasons for holding dances are taken together, it is clear that many houses could potentially be used by families as venues for house dances. As Jimmy said, however, there were houses that never had dances. Charlie said that 'there was only certain houses. There were houses and there was never a dance in them or nothing else'.

Music was usually played for 'set dances' (although waltzes, other couple dances such as the *Stack of Barley* or waltz and solo dances could feature too), a term used locally to include both a form of the group reels appropriated by cultural nationalists, as well as variants of the quadrille-based forms that were discussed in the previous section - the latter is the usual sense of 'sets' or 'set-dances' as defined by Breathnach (1983), Tubridy (1994) and Brennan (1990). Dancers in the research setting had difficulty naming the specific sets danced locally, for the simple reason that there seems to have been just one generic set. It is likely however, as Brian remarked, that the *Roscommon Lancers*, or a version thereof, may have featured. Sets then and now are danced to jig, reel and polka rhythms, amongst others, and usually involve four couples (or two couples in a half-set), each occupying the middle of one of four sides of a square. There are between three and six 'figures' with short breaks in between. Each figure involves a series of changes of position and body movements and might include any or all of the following - swing, lead-around, dance-around, retire and advance, little and big 'Christmas', crossover and passing though (see Shanagher, 2013). O' Connor's (1997) study includes instructions for the *Clare Lancers* in her work on Dublin set-dancers. Particular foot movements or steps accompany these figures throughout. Unlike céilí dances, (or, in Ireland at least, modern dances) there was no institutional systematisation of these practices. Some types of house dance were given a boost during the Emergency of the 1940s. Marty said the government required farmers at this time to till one eighth of their land to boost food production. Harvest dances were closely related to house dances and were held when neighbours had helped out with this labour-intensive job of harvesting oats or potatoes (Brian). Generally though, house dances were in decline by the late 1940s (Pat).

4.3.2 Outdoor Dances

Operating outside the realm of advertising, as with house dances, oral accounts are invaluable in opening up these practices for the research project. According to Charlie, 'but sure in them years there was nothing only sort of country house dances and crossroad dances and so forth like that in them times'. Other points of commonality with house dances are that outdoor dances had a long pedigree in dancing culture in Ireland and featured predominantly sets and half-sets, as well as the other dance types commonly associated with these in domestic settings. Finally, their appears to have been a co-terminous decline in both house and outdoor dances. With the exception of the 'bonfire dance' at Cox's Cross, all outdoor dances seem to have ended by the 1940s and 1950s (John).

The term 'crossroad dance' was sometimes used when talking in general terms about various types of outdoor dances, and in fact the term usucrossroad dances constituted a somewhat miscellaneous range of events including not just dances at or near crossroads, but also 'maypole dances' and 'bonfire dances' as well as dances in handball alleys (Bill, Bridie) and on lake-shores (Babs). The term 'bonfire dances' was used to refer to both older events on Lavelle's Hill or at the gate to one of the local big houses (such as Lissadurn House) in the 1930s by Bridie, as well as to revivalist events in the 1960s (Marty, Rory, Bridie). The former of these would seem to represent a trace of older outdoor festivals, so that there may be an association with midsummer festivals held on St. John's Eve on the 23rd of June (Evans, 1977). This is still regarded as 'bonfire night' in Roscommon, and I recall seeing a blazing fire outside a house in the summer of 2010. Revivalist bonfire dances were held in the 1960s, organised by cultural nationalists and featuring céilí dances (Monica). Indicating the rarity of motorised transport during the period, another '[would] be on in the middle of the [Carrick-Boyle] road and they'd only have to move once for one or two vehicles (Rory)'. 'Maypole' dances involved the construction of a wooden platform beside the road, usually for dancing sets (Brennan, 1999), and can be seen in some ways be seen a re-location of house dances outdoors to avail of more clement summer good weather. They were sometimes known as 'platform dances' and were held for commercial purposes (Paddy), organised by local committees or entrepreneurs. Drink and refreshments were provided and there was a charge for the event. In some cases, as in the case of McGrath's hall in Creeve, the owner of halls simply set up an outdoor platform in summer-time for paying customers.

4.3.3 Hall Dances

There is a sense of hall dances eclipsing and replacing house dances in Jackie's recollections. Though his father attended house dances, 'I don't think he was ever in a hall'. He might also have spoken of the decline of crossroad dances. The dance space of the hall was notably a *public* space, as alluded to by the *Public Dance Hall Act* (1935) that sought to regulate and control these spaces. As such, such 'public-ness' tended on the one hand towards greater inclusiveness, but this came with a price tag, and attracted the interests of various agents and institutions concerned with morality.

Visual culture has been helpful for identifying early examples of dance halls in rural areas. There is a series of 1911 paintings by Paul Henry of a hall dance in Achill Knitter's Hall, Dooagh in 1911 - *The Irish Dance*, *Old People Watching a Dance*, and *The Dance* (Kennedy, 1987, p151). This is the oldest instance of the use of a hall for dancing encountered during this investigation. Since Achill Island lies at the far western fringes of Ireland, it seems reasonable to surmise that halls further east were using spaces in this way from an earlier date (given Ireland's geographical orientation, with Dublin on the east coast facing Britain and Europe, cultural forms often travel from east to west, as was the case for set dances during the nineteenth century (Breathnach, 1983)). In Elphin, dancers reaching into the limits of popular memory pointed to halls operating from at least the 1900s (Bridie, Will). Once the period of construction of halls had begun, it appears they were built in a sporadic manner over a broad span of years. Hall dances at the local venue in Croghan were dated to at least 1924, as depicted by a poem about a 'leap-year' dance recited by Jimmy (the full poem has been included in Appendix B). Mantua Hall was built in the 1940s (Mícheál)(see Fig.17). Rory dated the construction of St. Joseph's in Boyle to 1950, and Mícheál said the Muintir na Tíre hall in Elphin town was built in 1954, while the '-land' chain of ballrooms (such as Cloudland in Roosky) were built by the Reynolds brothers 'around 54/55'. By the 1940s, as well as recreational dances, film screenings, plays and competitive dance competitions were held there, so that these venues operated as *de facto* community cultural centres.

Facilities in halls were variable: some were little more than sheds (Rita), with rough concrete floors (Bridie), and the smooth reversion of many disused halls back to agricultural use for storing bales of hay suggests something of their character. Others boasted good floors, colourful lighting, separate dressing-rooms and spaces for eating. In any case though, alongside business concerns, the dance-hall served an important purpose as a nexus for fund-raising by various voluntary groups. In some ways, this might be seen as a local institutionalisation of the charitable intentions of earlier house

dances, and indeed a formalisation of sorts of the principle of mutual aid. Some of the buildings are still in existence. A photo of Drumlion hall [*] shows a compact building, much the same size as a house. As Johnny remarked 'the facilities were basic enough'. Dances were held on Sunday nights throughout the year and often organised by local sporting groups, the Red Cross, Pioneers or other community groups as fundraisers. Newspaper ads and first-hand testimonies agree on the boundaries that set one type of dance apart from another. There were 'modern dances', held in halls and featuring professional 'bands' or 'orchestras' (RTE, 2008) playing tunes influenced by both the Anglophonic recording industry. There were céilí dances, likewise taking place in halls, and likewise with professional 'bands', this time playing 'traditional' Irish music: jigs, reels and so on. Such details are more than superfluous. The type of dance held in a hall involved in quite contrary definitions of 'the dance' emerging.

4.3.4 Céilí Dance

Associated with cultural nationalism, céilí dances were more recently developed practices than sets, emerging from the early 1890s through the practices and discourses of cultural nationalists (Brennan, 1999). Specific dance practices included the *Siege of Ennis*, the *Walls of Limerick*, and various step-dancing moves. Dances involve couples lining up opposite each other, performing swing, little Christmas and crossover movements, before passing under the arms of the opposite couple and reforming a line with the next two couples. Each pair of couples moved forwards or backwards through the overall formation by thus 'passing through', akin to American *contre* dance. As such, everybody got to dance with everybody else, and there were no limits to the size of the group. The moves of céilí dance were less complex than set-dancing, and would consist of only one continuous 'figure' as such, although similar steps were performed in the two dance types. Because of their form, involving long lines of people and 'passing-through', these dances were designed to be danced in halls or at carnivals. In common with set-dancing, céilí dance was performed to traditional Irish music. On the other hand, as with modern dances, music was supplied by professional 'bands', this time playing jigs, reels and so on over amplified public address (PA) systems. Instrumentation would be a blend of traditional and modern: fiddle, flute, banjo, accordion but also drums, piano and perhaps brass (Walsh, 2001).

As will be discussed in Chapter 7, these dances and events were associated with various organisations involved in the promotion of cultural nationalism. Such moves were regarded by cultural nationalists as more 'Irish' than the sets in early debates within cultural nationalism,

although their 'origins' were, in part at least, overseas. To the degree that Ireland was an open society with extra-national cultural, trade and military relationships, there was no essentially 'Irish' form of dance. Such constructions though were useful for nationalist-minded organisations in the early years of independence, and the period immediately preceding this, as part of a more general social process of nation-building at the time (O' Connor, 2005). Emerging as they did before and during the construction of the Irish state, they can be seen to have emanated from the national centre of Dublin, although the Irish diaspora, especially in London, was also centrally involved in the process. Moves were systematised during the 1930s into a very particular set of moves that could be documented and used for the purposes of instruction. For all this, by the 1940s, modern dances came to assume a dominant position in dance culture. Ballroom dances such as the quickstep and foxtrot in particular (and dances such as the samba and tango to a lesser extent), were popular in the US and Britain at the time, and were very much associated with the new sounds reaching people on the airwaves, and through gramophones (*Down with Jazz*, 1987).

4.3.5 Modern Dances

In Britain, ballroom dance was popularised between 1850 and 1920, moving beyond the elites who originally favoured it. It 'took place on Saturday evenings at a local town hall in urban areas or in the village hall in rural areas' (Thomas and Miller, 1997, p.103). The study divides ballroom into 'modern' dance and 'old-time' where the former included tango, one-step, and foxtrot; the latter, rotary waltz, polka, quadrille and lancers. The spark for transforming 'old-time' to 'modern' appears to have been the 'global dance craze': 'fast-tempo ragtime music in 1910 led to social dancing on an unprecedented scale' (Uba, 2007, p.145). Uba identifies a similar classificatory system to Thomas and Miller in use in competitive international ballroom dancing manuals, although waltz is categorised as a modern dance. Old-time would seem to correspond to sets in Ireland, with the possible exception of waltz.

As will be discussed in Chapter 6, modern dances drew on contemporaneous moves and practices from the US and UK, mediated through mass media, although complemented in important ways by oral transmission – emigrants, proficient dancers and so on. As with céili events, dance-events featuring modern dance culture took place in all types of halls, but also at carnivals and occasionally in houses. Modern dances were entry points for American popular culture into Irish society, anticipating in many ways the ballrooms and showbands that came later. People danced foxtrot and waltz, couple dances where men would usually ask women to dance, and the events

themselves would often last until 4am in the morning. These events were ostensibly alcohol free although O' Brien (1941) describes a night which suggests that frequent trips to nearby bars were common. Certainly, these events were monitored by agents of church and state of the day, reflecting concerns about youthful decadence. A number of guards regularly attended at least one of the dances and the priest might occasionally drop by. Some modern dances took place in more 'upmarket' venues at the Gaiety in Carrick. In the research setting, few local people attended these events since they were more expensive and more difficult to get to, before the advent of mass motorised transport. The country people largely found their dance entertainment in the houses and nearby villages, while the townspeople and more affluent rural groups kept to the urban dance-halls.

Modern dances were couple dances, and might be described as formal, when compared to later more improvised couple dances such as the jitterbug or jive (Back, 1997; Thomas, 2003). In the UK, the Imperial Society regulated modern dancing for competition culture, to create the 'English Style' (Cresswell, 2006) although the unregulated version continued to be performed in, for example, the Mecca chain of ballrooms. This looser version was probably influenced by cinematic representations of the day. Uba (2007) describes a 'free-style democratisation' of dance in the US around this time by films featuring Astaire and Rogers. Kuhn (2002, p.169) talked to British cinema-goers who responded to Astaire's 'invitation to dance': 'Oh I think you entered right into the film, you know. I used to see a lot of them, Fred Astaire. And on the way home we used to dance along the pavement [laughs] like this. But you know, you really got into it, didn't you?'

The local paper described 'foxtrots and two-steps, and even the....Paul Jones' (*Roscommon Herald*, 1940, p.5). Tom said dance schools operated in Dublin and instruction books were available, although he could never make much use of them. For most dancers, informal methods were to the fore. Mickey Duignan recalled, 'they got in on it when they saw other people at it...they picked them up when they were looking at them. They were shy for some time but eventually they picked them up' (*Down with Jazz*, 1987). 'We were just brought up with them you know', said Babs. In the 1950s, according to Teresa, 'they just went in and if somebody was a good dancer you'd watch them and you'd see how they danced around - you'd learn fast'. Bridie said that in the 1930s 'we'll say foxtrots and that you just learned them. You learned them from schooldays...I mean that lunch-hour...we had our lunch eaten early we'd be out - you'd have friends roundabout and you'd be dancing in the yard you know' (laughing). In Britain, the Imperial Society regulated such dances for competition culture, to create the 'English Style', although the unregulated version continued to be performed purely for pleasure in the Mecca chain of ballrooms (Cresswell, 2006). It is likely that

popular dance in Ireland was related to these latter, less regimented versions. With little centralisation of dancing 'authority', and limited evidence of printed instruction manuals, moves could evolve in a relatively informal fashion, as sets had for an earlier generation.

4.3.6 Carnivals

Carnivals can be seen as a development of the maypole dances, insofar as they were held in specially-constructed venues (in this case, marquees) at four or five locations over a period of days or weeks once a year, usually in summer time (the Croghan carnival was held at Easter time (Rita)). At the same time, they were considerably larger and accommodated far more people than the maypole dances. These events can be regarded as a dance festival, although they featured other events such as card games, concerts, sports and other competitions. They were prominent for a few years in the 1940s and 1950s, although running into later years in some districts, and were specifically commercial ventures where attendance figures were at a premium. Carnivals involved about eight dance-events over a fortnight, and mainly featured modern dances, although céilí dances would feature too. As will be discussed in Chapter 9, these events can be seen as precursors to the ballrooms of the 60s. The Reynolds brothers, for example, were involved in organising carnivals and later in the ballroom industry. Music was provided by much the same bands as played the halls, with occasionally a bigger name from outside arriving. Such more famous acts resulted in a larger entrance fee. By the 1950s, priests had 'jumped the bandwagon', as one dancer put it, and had realised that such events could generate revenue for local projects such as building churches. Carnivals went on until late in the night, were often held near the dance halls and sometimes availed of the facilities in these latter venues, as when the marquee was blown down one year at Croghan. On other occasions, dances would spill out onto nearby 'streets' or lanes and continue until the early hours. These events declined in the late 50s.

4.4 Getting to the Dances

Until the 1960s, private cars were rare and most people travelled either by foot or by bicycle. In Clare in the 1930s, according to Arensberg and Kimball, 'small farmers [did] not own motor cars (2001[1936], p.280)'. Marty recalled, 'divil a many cars was out that time anyway'. Given the prohibitive costs of automobiles at this time, there was a class basis for such choices of transport. In the earlier part of the period, even bicycles were rare. Packie recalled how groups of local people, young and old, would walk *en masse* the four mile round trip from Boheroe to the church in Elphin

on Sunday. He and a friend once went by foot to Carrick-on-Shannon to the cinema, a fourteen-mile round trip. In relation to dances, some of the older dancers recalled arriving in an 'ass and cart' (Charlie). Packie sketched out the boundaries of his dancing practices, and described how he would walk several miles to dances. He often went to Croghan, Ballinameen, Drumlioni and Mantua by foot, distances of an hour or five miles, sometimes using pathways across the fields as shortcuts. Roddy mentioned even more impressive feats of walking to dances: 'I knew a man from/not so far back/from Rosaville and he used to go back to Kilmavee to the house dances', a distance of over 20 miles each way. Thomson (1974) in his memoir relays similar epic pedestrian journeys. One individual walked 30 miles to attend a dance in Woodbrook House north of Croghan. Ned, in his nineties, suggested a possible link between house dances and walking before the research period: 'there was not that many country people used to go the hall dances', because of 'the transport'.

According to Daly (2006), the rise of dance halls was intimately connected with the introduction of new forms of transport: 'commercial dances involved an admission charge and probably transport – a bicycle or a hackney car – to a nearby town or further afield (p.57)'. Dancing memories underscored use of new transport possibilities as a 'technology of pleasure' (Collin, 1997). Younger dancers uniformly emphasised how the bicycle was the preferred mode of transport. Not all dancers had bicycles, and they were sometimes shared, particularly when men would offer lifts to women, but the centrality of this new machine to everyday life was obvious even in the 1930s, as recollected by Patrick Kavanagh of his youth in Monaghan:

The bicycles go by in twos and threes -
There's a dance in Billy Brennan's barn tonight,
And there's the half-talk code of mysteries
And the wink-and-elbow language of delight.
Half-past eight and there is not a spot
Upon a mile of road, no shadow thrown
That might turn out a man or woman, not
A footfall tapping secrecies of stone

(Patrick Kavanagh, *Inniskeen Road*, 1935)

Bicycles had been available amongst affluent, urban dwellers from the nineteenth century (Griffin, 2006), were in use by rural RIC men in South Tipperary by the 1890s (Bourke, 2006), and seem to have slowly permeated the travel practices of other groups in subsequent years. That many rural locals still travelled by foot in the late 1930s and early 1940s suggests that bicycles were not completely dominant at that time. Later though, this latter mode became dominant.

Vincent said 'you ran or cycled everywhere that time'². From the early 1940s right through to the mid-50s, the bicycle was the main transport technology on the roads around Elphin, and facilitated new types of freedom. A bicycle exchange and repair shop was opened in the town. According to Mickey Duignan, 'in Mantua [hall], they had special frames made for the bicycles...there was no such thing as a motor car at that time' (*Down with Jazz*, 1987). Jimmy recalled this set-up at Mantua, and remembers cycling there with a group of friends from Croghan. Several dancers remembered being stopped by gardaí for travelling without lights on their bikes. By the late 1950s Teresa, who lived at a crossroads, recalled cyclists converging outside her house: 'there'd be about 18 or 20 people...we were at a crossroads and they came north east south and west and they met at the crossroads at our house and they'd say 'where will we go tonight?'. Her statement conveyed some of the excitement and sense of new possibility that accompanied the rise of the bicycle.

There was a subsequent expansion of the geography of dancing (see Fig.3) to include carnivals six or seven miles distant: 'these were all within cycling distance you know', said John. Monica said people would cycle the ten miles (15km) from Mohill to Carrick. There was also a greater ease, comfort and pleasure in travelling these distances, though this was sometimes qualified by comments on the poor state of the roads. Vincent said it was five miles to Carrick from his house, but you might have cycled ten by the time you'd gone around all the potholes. The sealing of local roads in 1949 enhanced conditions for all types of travellers (Pat). At this point, muddy, gravelled tracks gave way to recognisably modern roads with a tarmacadam 'blacktop'. In addition to widening their range, dancers enjoyed other types of flexibility: 'they'd go from one dance-hall to another', said Dan. If people did not have bicycles, they would share with those who did. 'Oh yes and two would come or three would come on some bikes. One standing on the carrier/oh it used be awful (both laughing)', Maureen told me, indicating mixed feelings in this regard. For all their potentialities, bicycles had their spatial limits: 'Mantua now and Ballinameen and Croghan and Frenchpark. It was seldom you'd go to Frenchpark', she said. Such boundaries became more apparent with the rise of automobiles.

A few people began to acquire cars in the 1950s, particularly priests, teachers, solicitors and doctors. In the early 1940s, the creamery manager 'was pretty well comfortable let's say, we'll say well off, and he'd have a motor car that time....not many had cars then (Annie)'. In 1937, there were

2 It also indicates the relative impoverishment of many people locally, and accounts in some ways for the love affair with the car that characterises local travel these days. My cousin Pudsy covers considerable distances in his van, visiting homes, going to the shops and travelling to vintage car rallies.

still just over 10,000 cars registered in the state (Brown, 2004). John remembered the local teacher as one of the first car-owners in the area. According to Cronin (1994), many big farmers had cars. Apart from its value as a status symbol, it operated in more instrumental terms to open up space in a way not permitted to those with bicycles. The more distant urban ballrooms were out of reach for most people in the research setting. For example, more affluent dancers would drive to 'up-market' events distributed more widely than the smaller local halls attended by small farmers. According to Daly, 2006, p.58), for those who could afford them, 'cars...lent enchantment and anonymity.'

Tom, college-educated and relatively affluent was a rare early adopter of the new technology for the purposes of attending dances, and recalled a highly mobile dancing 'career'. In the 1940s and 1950s, 'down the country I used have my own car from an early age and I used to drive – [the] first dance I ever drove to in the car was in Termonbarry (about 20 miles (30km) away) and a friend of mine'. His dancing geography incorporated towns such as Roscommon and Galway, up to eighty miles distant. On this basis, it might be suggested that during the period, small farmers used bicycles to get to smaller, more basic, local halls while more those from more affluent backgrounds experienced a distinct geography of dancing, frequenting better-equipped halls spread over a wider area. Among the small farmer class, the first to embrace the new technologies were professional musicians. Interviewing Mickey Duignan, a small-farmer/band leader, Keenahan (2006) records that musicians transported their instruments to venues on bicycles³. Monica recalled her mother, the well-known singer Phyllis Glancy, travelling with the Frank Murray Band to places as far afield as Donegal in the 1940s and 1950s. John remembers 'the band might come with a car'. Mass use of the motor car first registered through the use of 'hackney cars' (a type of taxi)(Daly, 2006). In interviews, such transport registered in accounts from the 1950s, doing a number of runs to bring people from Frenchpark to Croghan - a round trip of some fourteen miles (28km) - in Maureen's account. In subsequent years, small farmers began to purchase their own automobiles. Those in regular paid employment were 'first off the mark'. In the late 50s, 'Paddy had a job in Gilmartins in Carrick and...he was the first to get a car round this country', said John. As with bicycles, when some individuals began to acquire cars in the late 1950s (John), these were sometimes shared with friends. If one fellow had a car, you 'piled in', according to Vincent. By the early 1960s, cars were becoming more common. Mícheál mentioned 'a pal of mine Seamus Murray in Elphin...he used to travel 50 and 60 miles to hear [the Clipper Carlton Band]'.

3 The bike had another useful function. As Mickey Duignan said: 'the fellows had bikes and they brought them on the bar of the bike to the dance and they had to leave them home again naturally.' Clearly the link between courtship and dancing at the house dances was maintained in the new context.

These tales of travelling to dances chime nicely with advertising in newspapers at the time, particularly between 1950 and 1960. There would seem to be a clear correlation between the far more widely dispersed venues - extending as far as Ballyhaunis and Roscommon town - in the later editions and the rise of motorised transport. A significant change was taking place in the 'dance map' analogous to the shift that accompanied the rise of small halls, and the bicycles used to reach them. Equally, the relative stability of the dance map between 1940 and 1950 seems to point to sustained and continuous use of bikes across the 1940s. There was also a gendering of this process, so that men were more likely than women to acquire bicycles, and later, cars.

In the earlier part of the period, all dancers attest to men carrying women to dances on the bars of their bicycles, a key strand of the courting process. Bridie remembered a dance in Rockville House that ended on a cool May morning: 'the only way I got home was on the bar of a bicycle (both laughing)'. In later years, though many women now had their own bicycles (Teresa), it was the car that was implicated in gender relations. Teresa, a younger dancer, recalled 'if [the man] found a girl for the night they'd take her out and go outside somewhere and get to know her and then when the rest of the carnival would be over, he'd have - she'd have to go home because you went by a car maybe and they wouldn't be waiting for you'. In this case transport options act as a brake on the unfolding of romance, but equally, cars seem to have offered some cover for young people in their sexual practices. Jack tells a story about how a priest surveyed the cars parked outside the dance for this reason, until he was tackled by the male owner of one of these vehicles. Annie traced the rise of new transport technologies used by her partner: 'the fella I was knocking around with had only a bicycle for a couple of years and then he got a motorbike and then he got a good job and he got a car and I could go where I liked then only I couldn't go only where he wanted to go'. She expressed her regret that she didn't learn to drive, and regards this as a handicap that increased her dependency on her partner.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has set out a number of key ethnographic contexts for throwing into relief later chapters. First, the dancers themselves have been introduced, of central concern to a project of this nature that deals predominantly with lived experiences, and is concerned with the politics of research. Next, a dancing foundation was established by presenting a detailed description of the dancing practices that were available to people at this time, as well as a historical assessment of

local dance. Finally, given the emergence of various new transport technologies over the research period, there was a discussion of new and old forms of mobility between dances, practices that were implicated in the rise of modern dances.



Fig.6 A Hall Dance in the late 1950s (Source: irish-showbands.com)



Fig.7 Couple at Frenchpark Carnival, late 1950s (Source: Sheila Durr)



Fig. 8 Dancers at Frenchpark Carnival, 1950s (Source: Sheila Durr)



Fig.9 Female Dancers at the Ballroom of Romance, 1960s
(Source:www.rainbowballroomofromance.ie)



Fig. 10 Male Dancers in the Ballroom of Romance, early 1970s
(Source: www.rainbowballroomofromance.ie)

Chapter 5

Dancing Contexts

*There may be trouble ahead
But while there's moonlight and music
And love and romance
Let's face the music and dance*

Irving Berlin, (*Let's Face the Music and Dance*, 1936)

5.0 Introduction

As a step towards understanding the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic cultural politics at play in the research setting before and during the period 1940 to 1960, it will be established that the small farmer occupied a central place locally and nationally. This centrality attracted the attention of powerful groups interested in generating a national myth in the years preceding and succeeding independence in 1922. In this chapter, the historical and political background to the emergence of the small farmer stratum will be considered. Research data will be used to consolidate the argument.

Given the importance of land to a rural farming community, the geographic scene will be set in the first section in order to contextualise life, work and leisure in the research setting. The next section will examine the historical roots of the small farmer class in agrarian strife and famine, along with their important role in the struggle for independence and the emergence of a gramscian collective will. The importance of small farmers locally and at the county level between 1940 and 1960 will be emphasised in the final section, using census returns and interviews. There will be an assessment of evidence for a fragmentation of this collective will in the years after 1922, with a particular focus on the political sphere in this chapter.

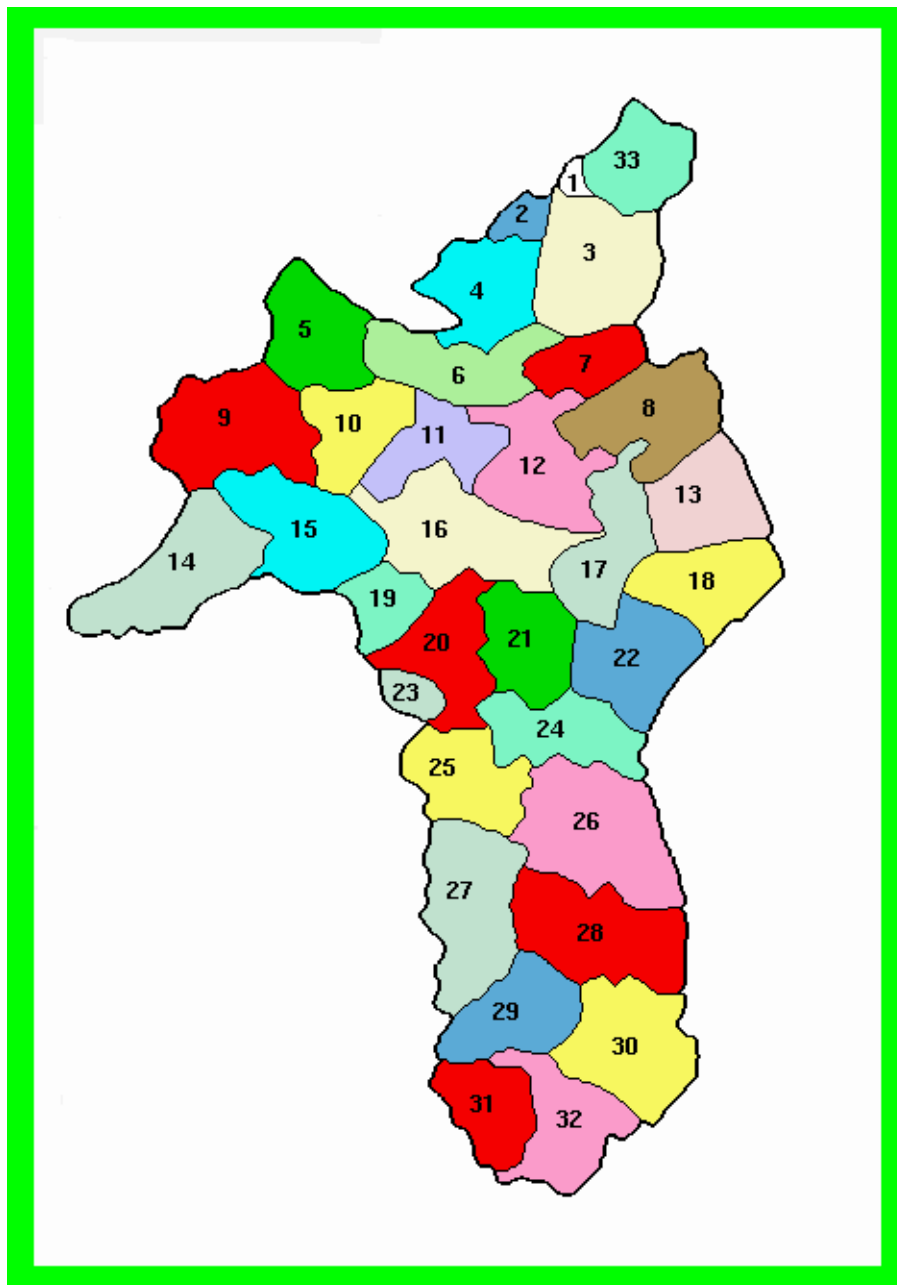


Fig.11 Catholic Parishes of Co. Roscommon (Source: www.leitrim-roscommon.com)

Key to Fig. 11 (main research setting parishes marked in bold)

- 1 Greevagh
- 2 Ballinafad
- 3 Cootehall
- 4 Boyle & Kilbryan
- 5 Ballaghaderreen
- 6 Ballinameen
- 7 Croghan**
- 8 Aughrim
- 9 Loughglynn
- 10 Fairymount
- 11 Frenchpark
- 12 Elphin**
- 13 Kilglass
- 14 Ballinlough
- 15 Castlerea
- 16 Tulsk
- 17 Strokestown
- 18 Tarmonbarry
- 19 Ballintubber
- 20 Cloverhill
- 21 Fourmilehouse
- 22 Ballagh
- 23 Creggs
- 24 Roscommon
- 25 Athleague
- 26 Knockcroghery
- 27 Ballyforan
- 28 Ballybay
- 29 Taghmaconnel
- 30 Athlone
- 31 Ballinasloe
- 32 Moore
- 33 Keadue, Arigna & Ballyfarnon

(Source:

www.leitrim-roscommon.com)

Creeve Civil Parish
 Clooncragh Civil Parish
 Elphin Civil Parish
 Shankill Civil Parish
 Kilmacumsey Civil Parish
 Ogulla Civil Parish
 Kilcolagh Civil Parish

Fig. 12 Elphin Catholic Parish (main research setting townlands marked in grey) (Source: www.leitrim-roscommon.com)

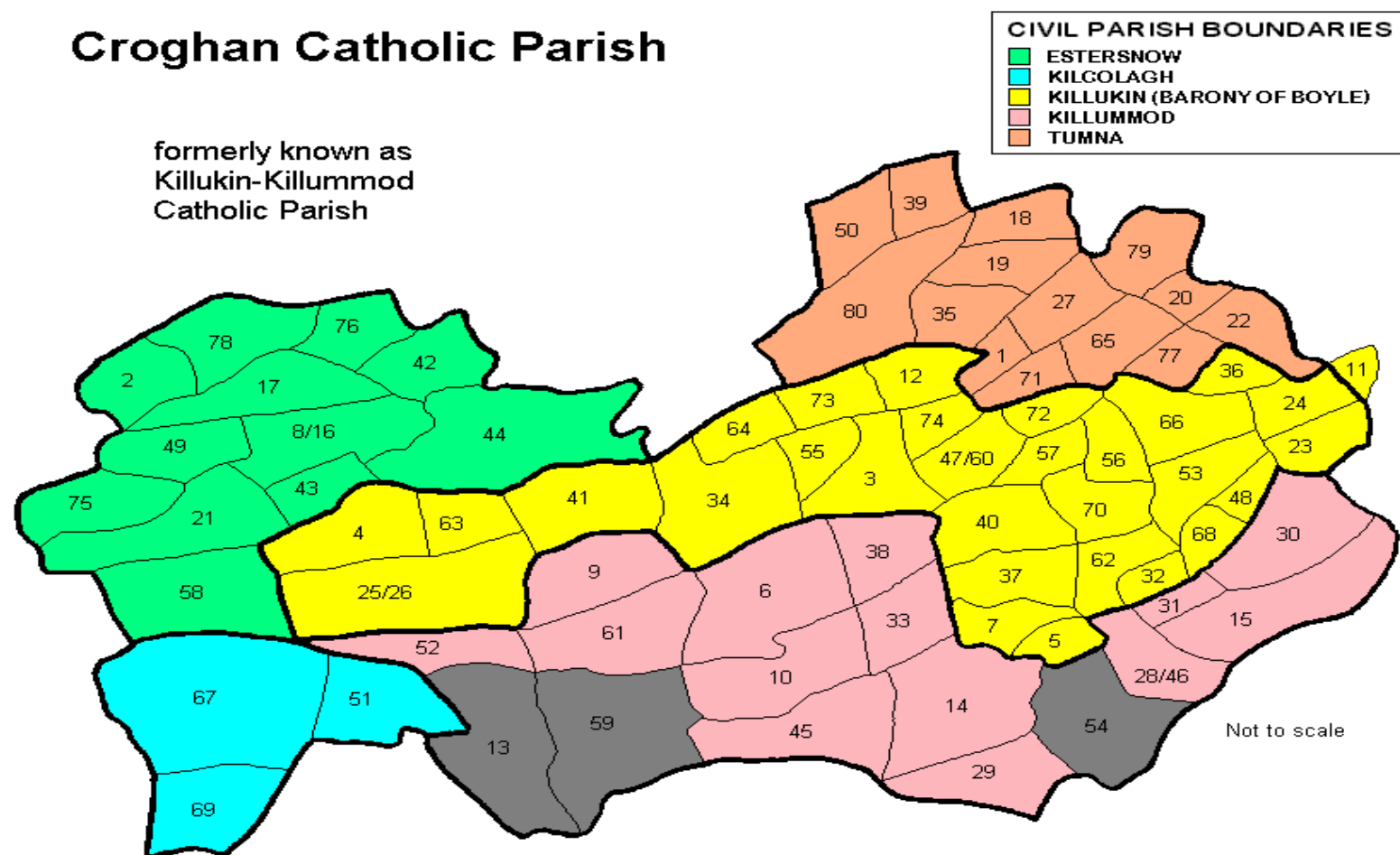


Fig. 13 Croghan Catholic Parish (main research setting townlands marked in grey) (Source: www.leitrim-roscommon.com)

Key to Fig. 12 and 13

Key to the main townlands of the research setting*

Elphin Catholic Parish

3: Assaun
5: Attiaghryana
7: Ballyollaghan
9: Ballysundrivan
11: Boheroe
31: Cartron (Creeve)
36: Castletown
52: Corbally East
53: Corbally Middle
54: Corbally West
55: Corgarve
58: Creevolan
69: Erriblagh
82: Lecarrow
86: Lismageevoge
93: Martry
94: Moheedian
98: Portobello
100: Rathardeagher
108: Ryefield or Runnateggal
120: Turlagh

Croghan Catholic Parish

13: Carrowmore
54: Killummod
59: Knockroe

*In addition, Carrowreagh townland in Aughrim parish featured.

(Source: www.leitrim-roscommon.com)

5.1 Geographical Foundations

According to Aallen et al., 'the cultural landscape is the product of a dynamic interaction between cultural components (social organisation, technology, ideology) and the natural environment (bedrock, relief, climate, soils and vegetation)' (1997, p.23). This section will locate the research project in this complex mesh of local geography, history and economics centred in the area around Elphin, Co. Roscommon. Maps to aid the reader have been included in Fig.1-3 and 11-13.

Moving in a spiral from the 'home place' that was identified in Section 2.5, to speak of space and place in rural areas then and now is to take on board a dizzying, and sometimes cross-cutting hierarchy of boundaries, legacies of various civil and religious administrations, different currents of history and changing conceptualisations related to land ownership, mobility and politics. Such geographic location of the research is central for a consideration of how people identify themselves. Local people talk fluently of these places, while those not reared in this locality, and attempting to get to grips with various statistical and archival records, must learn by untangling these spatial knots.

Setting aside the issue of sub-townlands or more informal districts, and acknowledging the importance on another level of the parish, the townland would seem to constitute a geographically fundamental unit of sorts, that which was most 'familiar', in the sense of a localised intimacy, during the research period. In the 1940s, this was the basis on which 'stations'¹ were organised. If a dozen families lived in a particular townland, they would take it in turns to host the event, with two each year performing this role (the cycle would begin again after six years). At this time too, in the earlier part of the period, groups of youths could be named after the townlands they came from when attending dances. There were the 'Boheroes', or the 'Corballys' (such descriptors were not used in later accounts, reflecting the impact of innovations in transport technologies on conceptions of community). When numbers allowed, a football² team would be organised within a townland. To the present day, this unit provides the most specific means of locating a particular family, event, or site of interest. The area that most concerns this study includes the townlands listed in 12 and 13,

1 These were religious observances held in the home where priests would attend, food would be served and dances would often be held afterwards.

2 This refers to Gaelic football. Together with hurling and handball, such games were promoted and organised by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA).

with the core area of the research constructed around the home place. Family members still visit, and a close-knit rural community linked by work, history and kinship continue to live their lives there. Most of the dancers interviewed come from within this area. If not, they lived within a few miles of it. Those places where dancers spent their youth (and where most still live) have been included in the map in Fig.3. In addition, the main dance halls are marked on this map.

Moving up the spatial hierarchy, another important unit is the parish. Thinking about this level leads to the question of religious affiliation, because there are two types of parish - 'Catholic' and 'civil'. The latter are used by the Church of Ireland and for administrative purposes in, for example, the 1901 and 1911 censuses. These are the older units, based on mediaeval boundaries. Catholic parishes, on the other hand, are later amalgamations of these (Reilly, 2000[1890]), although some civil parishes are bisected by the larger divisions that came later. The centre for this study lies mainly within the northern tip of the Catholic parish of Elphin/Creeve (see Fig.12 and 13). With the vast majority of the local population, between 95% and 99%, belonging to the Catholic church, this 'parish' is what most people refer to when talking in these terms (as will be discussed Section 5.3) - even when they occupy a smaller corner of a Catholic parish that might more naturally be described by civil parish boundaries. For example, within this parish, the central area of the research setting is fairly neatly bound by the civil parishes of Creeve (in Elphin/Creeve parish) and Killumod (in Croghan parish) although few locals would use these units. Only the townlands of Knockroe and Croghan lie over the boundary with Croghan parish. Practical use of space consolidates these world views. The main Catholic churches lie to the south in Elphin town, and in Croghan village to the north. Smaller numbers would use the church in the Catholic parish of Aughrim (sometimes called Rodeen locally) to the east. Members of the Church of Ireland community have their own church in Croghan for services. Further to the north, there are churches for Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists in the town of Boyle. There was a Protestant church at Aughrim which has fallen into disuse.

Parish loyalties were and are central to religious practice, and to important social occasions related to these – baptisms, first communions, confirmations, marriages and funerals. Importantly for this investigation, given its focus on nationalist civil society, Catholic Church involvement in education means that local primary and secondary schools could be situated within the administrative framework of the Catholic parish. This would have encompassed both larger schools in the towns,

and a large number of rural schools during the 1940s and 1950s (in the townland of Boheroe for example)³. At this time, fund-raising activities related to schools, such as variety shows, would have taken place on this basis, and particular types of dance culture would have been promoted. It is at this level too that the presence of the GAA was most keenly felt now and in the past. There were three main local teams in the 1940s, Elphin, Shannon Gaels and Boheroe (the first two of these still field teams these days for both men and women). Local fairs too, held until the 1960s and 1970s, operated in the largest towns or villages within each parish, so that they were held in Elphin, Croghan, Boyle, Carrick, Strokestown and Frenchpark in the past. Today, the co-operative mart at Elphin has replaced the fair and continues to draw large crowds for the sale of primarily cattle and sheep.

At the parish level too, one can begin to get a feel for the flow of roads through the area. The main north-south thoroughfares are the regional Elphin to Carrick-on-Shannon road (the R368) and a national route running from Roscommon town to Boyle (the N51). Three smaller local routes run along this axis - the Windmill road to the west, the Hillstreet road to the east, and the Croghan road between these two, all of these passing through Elphin, the main hub of the area. The market town of Strokestown, 9km to the south of Elphin on the main Dublin to Westport road, also occupies the spatial consciousness of people in the area. Numerous smaller tie-roads connect up these other routes and run in a predominantly east-west direction. Locally, the Croghan-Elphin road is very familiar to most of the people interviewed, connecting as it does the two main parochial centres, although on a wider scale, the orientation of the area is towards the towns of Boyle and Carrick-on-Shannon to the north and Elphin⁴ to the south, a triangle that largely framed the spatial experience of people in the 1940s and 1950s. This was related to the popularity of the bicycle for most people then⁵. Even today, when most people travel by car, these centres mark out the boundaries of the territory. Since most people interviewed live in the Catholic parish of Elphin, and given that the town itself - with Catholic church and graveyard, a number of shops and pubs, GAA club, police station – is the nearest urban centre for many people, and nearest to the home-place, the 'research

3 Closure of these smaller rural schools featured in media coverage during the fieldwork, when Mantua school, one of the smallest in the country, faced closure due to cutbacks in education funding.

4 These population centres had populations of 2,071 in Boyle, 1,497 in Carrick-on-Shannon, and 577 people in Elphin in 1946 (CSO, 1946). Since only villages with more than twenty inhabited houses are included in the census returns, it seems that at that time the village of Croghan had less than this number.

5 Having brought a bicycle down for the last two summers, I can also say that the points of this triangle mark the distance that can be comfortably travelled in this way. This impression was confirmed by Jimmy, who discussed his cycling trips in the 1940s and 1950s.

setting' can be conveniently referred to by this name in shorthand (as for example in Section 5.3 and Section 7.4). If it is the specific town rather than the broader research setting that is being referred to, this will be indicated. Such terms correspond well with 'localspeak'. 'Elphin' is still the name my family use when travelling to this part of the world, although the town is 3km distant from the house.

Circling out further again, one encounters the barony, a unit that encompasses the civil and Catholic parishes and was drawn up by the English colonial administration based on the old Gaelic chiefdoms (Lewis, 1837). The research setting sits loosely at the confluence of three baronies - Boyle, Frenchpark and Roscommon. These are the old heartlands of the McDermott and O'Connor Roe clans, names that are still notably common locally today. The 'barony' is little used in everyday discussion⁶, in contrast to the 'county'. The county of Roscommon (see Fig.2) occupies an area of 254,819 hectares (CSO, 2010), a roughly T-shaped area to the west of the River Shannon, its boundaries set in 1585 by the English administration (Lewis, 1837) to include eight baronies. Seven counties flank Roscommon. Working from the north, these are Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Galway, Offaly, Westmeath and Longford. Nestled among these territories, with the main roads to Galway, Castlebar, Westport, Ballina and Sligo traversing it, and flanking the Shannon for three-fifths of its course, it can justifiably be said to occupy a crossroads of sorts, the 'heart of Ireland' (Sharkey, 1935). The county is an important unit locally, particularly in relation to the GAA. This is 'football country' and the performance of the county team still arouses considerable passion. Some of the older dancers clearly remember the all-Ireland wins against Cavan and Kerry respectively in 1943 and 1944, a golden era for county football locally. Activities relating to the council – libraries, grants, planning permissions and so on – would also be oriented towards the county level. These aspects of life are located within the wider administrative unit of the Irish state, overseeing health⁷, education, policing, defence, taxation, social welfare, national broadcasting and promotion of culture, this latter strand in particular being salient in later chapters of this dissertation.

Roscommon county occupies something of a liminal zone when it comes to classification. Lacking a coastal strip and with relatively good land⁸, it nevertheless sits west of the River Shannon, and

6 Although a cousin of mine made a point of mentioning that his land straddles the barony, and consequently the parish and townland boundaries.

7 A well-regarded primary health care unit in Elphin town is the first port of call for many of its elderly residents.

8 Census returns list a valuation per acre for Roscommon that compares favourably with neighbouring Mayo and Galway (CSO, 1946).

was settled with refugees from the Cromwellian Plantations from other parts of the island in the seventeenth century. Coleman (1999) says, 'although regionally allocated to Connaught, [the county] probably had more in common with the midland counties adjoining it than it did with its neighbours further west' (p.7). Duffy (2007, p.4) places it in the 'lush inland sector known as the Irish Midlands', a 'lushness' that is related to high rainfall.

Water is everywhere in Roscommon and two-thirds of the county are bound by it. The area was badly affected during the floods of November 2009. Apart from the Shannon to the east, there are the Suck and Boyle rivers to the north and southwest. There are extensive lakes along these water courses - Lough Gara, Lough Key, Lough Allen, Lough Boderg and Lough Ree – as well as a scattering of smaller lakes, especially towards the east of the county. Locally, two rivers run - the Killukin to the north and the Breedogue (which becomes the Mantua) to the west. Water surrounds, flows through and defines *land*, and it is land in turn that defines in many ways the history and economy of Roscommon. This is a society dominated by agriculture.

Moving through the research area today, along the main Croghan to Elphin road, or on the less-frequented by-roads, one encounters a landscape dominated by pasture, primarily of dry-stock cattle, with some holdings of sheep. There is plenty of rainfall and where drainage is good, this nourishes the land. In less porous soil, water gathers in rushy pasture or bog that, though of less agricultural value, harbours a rich wildlife. Large dragonflies shuttle by the house sometimes, a rare sight in many places these days, and the pheasant, hare, cuckoo and skylark are regularly seen and heard. That the land is generally good, as on the Plains of Boyle north of Croghan, is down to the underlying limestone in the county (Lewis, 1837). South towards Elphin town, the land is more undulating and drumlins are common: 'these small hills alternate with hollows filled with peat, swamps, or open water connected by slow-flowing meandering streams' (Haughton, 2005, p.48). Good land is interspersed with poorer ground, shallower water-logged soils dominated by rushes⁹, and boggy areas that are left to nature or used to extract turf¹⁰. Fields are relatively small compared with the more intensively farmed land to the east of the country (although according to Jack, there has been much consolidation of holdings since the 1940s) and hedges are ubiquitous, sometimes

9 On a drive with my cousin, he pointed out the different qualities of land and spoke of how much work was required to keep the poorer land free of rushes.

10 In 2011-2012, the issue of turf-cutting came to national and international prominence, following directives from the EU curtailing such activities on environmental grounds, and contestation of this policy by local farmers.

growing into stands of ash-trees that overhang the roads. Such land-use demonstrates a degree of continuity with the past. Historically, this has been cattle or sheep country although significant amounts of tillage took place in the early part of the nineteenth century (Coleman, 1999), and again during the Emergency¹¹ in the 1940s, when farmers were required to till one eighth of their land (Marty). Though there are a number of Coillte¹² and private plantations of conifers and ash trees in the area today, in the past plantations of 'timber'¹³ would have been mainly associated with the walled estates of the 'gentry'. These walls, though reduced, are still visible today, and are symptomatic of hidden layers of history and conflict. After this broad overview of the physical environment, the next section will present a historical overview of the rise of the small farmer class.

5.2 The Emergence of the Small Farmer Class

Taking a backward glance, a historical perspective has been useful for understanding the culture and politics of small farmers.

The origins of the small farmer lie in the major upheavals of the seventeenth century that resulted in transfer of land from the local Gaelic aristocracy to British soldier-adventurers. Following the Cromwellian Plantations of the 1640s, a number of powerful landlord families with large estates came to the fore in public life around Elphin. King, Crofton, Mahon, Lloyd¹⁴ and French were names that dominated economics, law and social life until the early years of the twentieth century. These families settled on prime land and farmed locally, while 'smallholders and labourers were relegated to bogs and hillsides' (Coleman, 1999, p.19) where they rented holdings of various sizes.

An investigation of conditions on the Mahon estate, though not necessarily typical of the area, has given some insight into local manifestations of the landlord system in Strokestown, just south of Elphin. Duffy (2007) notes how a complex system of letting and subletting emerged, from landlord to Protestant and Catholic middlemen graziers (the 'squireens') and on through to tenant farmers operating on progressively smaller holdings. In the more impoverished levels in the hierarchy, there

11 This term was used to refer to the period between 1939-1945 encompassing the Second World War. Ireland remained neutral during the conflict.

12 The Irish state forestry service.

13 The term used for woodland that might be harvested.

14 Annie, though living at the outer edges of the research setting, is descended from the Lloyds. She pointed out that her family tried to help locals during hard times.

were cottiers, the '40-shilling freeholders'¹⁵ and those who incorporated themselves into collective, rundale/*cluachán* settlements, holding plots in common and co-existing alongside these individual tenants¹⁶. While both groups were ultimately beholden to landlords, the rundale system facilitated a degree of autonomy, based on collective living, and plots were rotated from family to family, with little individual gardens at the back of each house. These were documented by the Devon Commission, set up in the 1840s by the British state to investigate rural conditions in Ireland. (Duffy, 2007; Slater and Flaherty, 2009).

At another level of the hierarchy were those who worked on a precarious basis for other farmers large and small, rural labourers without land of their own, the 'spalpeens' referred to by Brian in the previous section: 'the lower levels of estate society were composed of struggling labourers forever on the edge of destitution...[who]...rarely handled money, instead swapping their labour for food or rent' (Duffy, 2007, p.28). They often travelled abroad to find work, or resorted to begging, Maclochlainn's (1983) landless 'rural proletariat'. According to Coleman (1999), this group was numerically dominant until the middle of the 19th century, and overwhelmingly Catholic.

A system based on such glaring inequalities – from mud hovels to Palladian mansions – gave rise to significant currents of resistance locally, comprising the various lower strata of tenant farmers and labourers. As early as the 1790s, the Defenders, a 'secret society'¹⁷ involved in agrarian agitation, were a notable presence in the area. A plaque on the bridge at Drumsna indicates that several thousand members gathered there in 1795 to protest around issues of land distribution. In 1798, the United Irishmen, a group inspired by developments in revolutionary France, instigated a country-wide revolution. Its subsequent defeat, and the death of 30,000 people, saw Ireland incur the highest *per capita* casualties in Europe in the fallout of the French Revolution (Doyle, 1990). The Act of Union of 1801 saw the abolition of the Irish Parliament and integration of its territory into the United Kingdom. By the 1840s, the county of Roscommon – and particularly the north of the county around Elphin - was distinguished nationally by a considerable level of social unrest, in large part due to such inequalities, in 'a war of Poverty agit (sic) Property' (Coleman, 1999, p.27). While this had its constitutional manifestation - 'The Liberator', Daniel O'Connell held a 'monster

15 40-shillings rent was the threshold holding size required to vote in elections to Westminster. By granting tenants land on this basis, landlords such as the Mahons could maximise their votes.

16 My great-great grandfather rented 20 acres from the Crofton estate near the home place in the middle of the nineteenth century, according to the Griffith Valuation of the 1850s.

17 Bound by oath to silence about their activities as these groups were, they were illegal organisations.

meeting¹⁸ in Strokestown in August 1843 - there was a more militant tendency too. In 'riotous Roscommon' traditions of agrarian agitation down through the years were embodied successively by other secret societies - Threshers, Ribbonmen and Molly Maguires¹⁹. By the 1840s, Duffy (2007) suggests the latter group commanded widespread support among landless labourers, smallholders and cottiers desperate for conacre at a time of increasing population and imminent hunger (Duffy, 2007): 'on a day in early 1845, three thousand people stood on the road in front of a Strokestown farmer's property on the Mahon estate and demanded that the pasture be turned into conacre plots'²⁰ (p.57). Duffy (*ibid*) suggests a broad-based popular support on this basis for groups such as the Molly Maguires.

Two high-profile assassinations of local landowners - Major Denis Mahon and Parson Lloyd - took place in the desperate famine year of 1847 (Coleman, 1999, Duffy, 2007), events that are discussed locally to this day. Local magistrates regularly complained about the deafening silence during their investigations into these incidents. As Duffy remarks, 'the entire population...was complicit in the conspiracy' (p.57). MacLochlainn's (1983) 'rural proletariat', the cottiers and landless labourers, as well as the tenant farmers, stayed silent. Such powerful solidarities come to mind sometimes when in the field, an outsider in some ways - albeit a halfie (Abu-Lhugod, 2008) - especially when the thorny issue of local republicanism featured in interviews.

The catastrophe of the famine put this initial wave of agitation to rest. County Roscommon as a whole saw the single highest drop in population in the country from 253,591 to 173,430, a drop of 31.61% between 1841 and 1851 (CSO, 1946). The nearby parishes of Kilglass and Aughrim registered some of the steepest declines in the country, partly due to a policy on the Mahon estate of 'assisted emigration' – in reality, clearance of people from the land (Coleman, 1999). Before the struggles of the Land Wars of the 1870s and 1880s, while Catholic tenant farmers did not own their land, they operated on relatively large holdings and on a commercial basis that distinguished them from those subsisting as cottiers, and from labourers dependent on employment. This provided a degree of insulation from An Gorta Mór/The Great Hunger. It was the rural proletariat, the labourers

18 So-called because of the enormous size of the crowds that would attend.

19 These were one of the more well-known groups involved in agrarian agitation in Ireland in the middle of the nineteenth century. Their activities were transposed to the US by emigrants to the coal-fields of Pennsylvania (Loy, 2009). Peter Carey's Booker Prize-winning *A True History of the Kelly Gang* (2001) features a passage where young Ned Kelly, the Australian outlaw, is confronted with the accoutrements of his father's years as a member of the Molly Maguires in Tipperary.

20 Small plots of land sufficient for subsistence farming, usually based on potatoes.

and cottiers, who bore the brunt of this human tragedy (MacLochlainn, 1983).

OSI (Ordnance Survey Ireland) maps covering the period 1840 to 1890s illustrate a dramatic gulf between the classes, as well as the changes that occurred and set the tone for much of the twentieth century. For the first series of maps (OSI, 1829-1841), a number of large demesnes are scattered through the setting, with wooded areas, avenues and large houses. Along the roads at the edges of the estates lived the labourers, herders and cottiers, subsisting on small plots of lands, and whatever work was available servicing the needs of the ascendancy, or in some cases the more affluent of the tenant farmers. Larger holdings of tenant farmers are also visible. Tillage was more common at this time, and a number of corn mills were located in the vicinity for producing flour. Tenant farmers worked the land in much the same way as small farmers today, working a comparable, though smaller, acreage rented from the landlord or from a middleman. The *cluachán* (anglicised as 'clachan'), although they were mainly associated with the western seaboard, areas that were highly 'congested' at the time, were also evident in Elphin, marked as tight clusters of houses that form a distinctive pattern on these old maps.

By the 1890s when the next series of OSI maps were drawn up (OSI, 1897-1913), these latter settlements – so characteristic of pre-famine Ireland - are not to be found; entire roads once lined with labourers' cottages have vanished; tillage has given way to pasture; land holdings have been consolidated, and a system of dispersed small farmer holdings has emerged - one that, apart from further consolidation of holdings, has not fundamentally changed to the present day (Aallen, 1997). Lee (1979) contends that the roots of class structure among farmers during the 1940s and 1950s lie in this post-famine period. According to Waters (1977) between 1840 and 1910, the number of farm holdings decreased, the size of those holdings increased, there was a decrease in the number of farm labourers, and pasturage largely replaced tillage. By 1911, there was a high degree of uniformity of dwellings among small farmers (see Appendix A).

In the years following the famine, an active and politicised tenant farmer class played an important role in the Land Wars, involving the Land League²¹ founded in late 1879, an organisation under the leadership of Michael Davitt, that 'undertook a long and bitter land war against unjust rents and evictions', so that 'by 1881, the [British] government was pressurised by the League's popularity to

21 Landless labourers founded the 'Labourer's League' at this time (Hartnett, 2012).

introduce land reform measures to pacify Irish tenants' (Maguire, 2012). The newly-established Congested Districts Board financed division and buyouts of the larger estates and the work of land distribution continued for the next 40-50 years, straddling the periods before and after independence. Under the Free State²² in 1923, the Land Commission – a reincorporation of the Congested Districts Board - 'put into effect the Land Act which finally converted even the poorest tenant into an owner-occupier' (Brody, 1973, p.68).

In subsequent years, along with the urban working class, and elements of the Catholic middle classes, small farmers formed a historical bloc that, following the 1916 rebellion, emerged to secure an overwhelming victory for the main republican party, Sinn Féin, in the 1917 elections to the first Dáil²³. Conflict with the British state ensued with the War of Independence, which featured in some dancers' stories. Charlie could relate stories about arms being hidden under the bed in his family home during searches by the Black and Tans. One of the local dance venues, the Sean Connolly Hall at Mantua, was named after an Irish Republican Army²⁴ (IRA) commander from Longford who had operated in the north midlands during the conflict, and was killed in Co. Leitrim. Anglo-Irish hostilities were brought to an end following the signing of the Treaty with Britain that granted independence for the 26 counties of the Free State, but maintained the northern six counties in the United Kingdom.

A historical overview of the rise of small farmers indicates the fraught political and economic circumstances of their birth as a social group. Surviving the famine relatively intact, they went on to form an important strand of the anti-imperial struggle preceding the establishment of the Irish state. The next section will present a view, based on census records, of the status of the grouping during the research period.

5.3 The Small Farmer in Elphin Between 1940 and 1960

The importance of the small farmer in Elphin is notable today, as it was in the 1940s and 1950s. Following the upheavals of the nineteenth century, this group numerically dominated Irish society

22 The English translation of Saorstát na hÉireann, the official name of the Irish state before it became a republic in 1949.

23 The Irish House of Parliament.

24 The dominant armed republican group then and later, it underwent a number of splits in subsequent years.

for much of the post-famine period, and is of central concern for an ethnohistory of dance.

The numerical dominance of the small farmer group in the research setting is borne out by census data, a rationale for foregrounding it in this research (sub-strata *within* this group, defined in gender, generational or class terms, will be assessed, as well as relations between small farmers and other groups). Only in the 1960s and 1970s, following accession to the European Economic Community²⁵ (EEC) and the rise of policies that encouraged larger holdings (*The Home Place*²⁶, 2012), as well as a shift towards a more urbanised society, was this position challenged. Even today, after forty years of consolidation of holdings, a drive through the area reveals the relatively small, dispersed family-run units of grazing cattle that are so characteristic of small farmer life.

'Small farmer'²⁷ is a term that, along with 'big farmer'²⁸, was used by Arensberg and Kimball in their ethnography of rural Co. Clare (2001[1936], p.xlvi), and accords well with local utterances. Teresa says, 'we were all small farmers and if you hadn't a machine to do something you'd borrow it from me. That's how they did it'. It was as part of Earnest Hooton's *Harvard Irish Survey* between 1932 and 1936 that the two young American sociologists arrived in Clare to document rural life at the time, dominated as it was by small farmers working plots of between 15 and 30 acres. These were family-run units engaging in both subsistence farming and some selling of cattle to big farmers for export to Britain²⁹. Census records yield useful data on farm sizes (CSO, 1946; 1956). Within a total of 2,856 male and female farmers, the results have been processed as follows:

25 An early incarnation of the contemporary European Community (EC).

26 An online broadcast, not to be confused with the term used for the fieldwork base.

27 In French, the term is 'paysant' as employed by Bourdieu (2008[1960]), but the English translation 'peasant' is never used locally, and would be seen as a derogatory term with colonial overtones. This has not stopped numerous theorists and historians from employing the term over the years, among them, Evans, (1977), Waters (1977), Maclochlainn (1983) and more recently, Brennan (1999).

28 Although the term 'large farmer' is also sometimes used by these authors and other sources.

29 Manning (1971) suggests that when the 'Economic War' began in 1932 on the issue of repayment of land annuities by Ireland to Britain arising out of land reform, 'it was most keenly felt by those in the livestock trade' (1971, p.109), by the big farmers who exported cattle to Britain. There would though have been a trickle-down effect that impacted on the small farmers who supplied of cattle to this group.

Table 2: Stratification and Small Farmers in Boyle No.1 Electoral Area³⁰ (EA)

(Source: Shanagher, 2013)

No. of Farmers	Size of Holding (acres)	Percentage of Total (%)
585	1 to 15	20.5
1265	15 to 30	44.3
663	30 to 50	23.2
274	50 to 100	9.5
56	100-200	2
13	200 or more	0.5
Total: 2856		100

Arensberg and Kimball [2001[1936] suggest 200 acres as the boundary between small and big farmer. On this basis, 99.5% of famers in Co. Roscommon would be categorised as 'small farmers'. Such a yardstick seems too crude for local circumstances, where so few holdings were in the upper range. Teresa spoke about the typical size of holdings locally: 'they were all different but you wouldn't go anything over - not many over 50 acres.' Her statement indicates not only that the 'small farmer' is an emic category, but also that it plays a useful role in distinguishing social classes. If this is taken as a more meaningful threshold in Elphin, then 88% of holdings, those below 50 acres, could be regarded as small farmers (this figure chimes well with the number of Class 2 and Class 3 dwellings (90%) in 1911 discussed in Appendix A). 12% of farmers were 'big farmers' by this measure, although those farming holdings of above 100 acres, just 2.5% of the total, would be regarded as local 'graziers' or 'ranchers', operating on quite a different economy of scale to those with smaller holdings, and in a manner more akin to their colleagues on better land to the east of the country (Arensberg and Kimball [2001[1936])).

Mícheál said that what distinguished small from big farmers was the ability to employ labourers, a categorisation that chimes neatly with that proposed by Arensberg and Kimball (2001[1936])). For the former, farm work was mainly carried out by the farmer and his or her family, the classic rural productive unit (*ibid*). By the 1940s, people from this group were growing potatoes and oats, keeping a pig, and running an account with a local shop to keep them supplied with certain goods – tea, sugar, white flour – that were not produced locally. Accounts would be settled when cattle were

³⁰ This refers to a sub-unit within an electoral constituency.

sold on at the fairs. In Elphin in the 1940s, respondents suggest many families were largely self-sufficient.

The category of small farmer can be unpacked further. Commenting on the situation in the 19th century, Coleman (1999) sets a threshold separating impoverished from more comfortable tenant farmers at 15 acres. Although there would have been some changes in farming practice in the intervening period, the figure provides a rough yardstick. In 1946, there were 20.5% of farmers with holdings below 15 acres, and an additional 23.8% farming 15-30 acres, just above this threshold.

Land in the locality is of variable quality so that while there are good fields on higher ground, there are also plenty of 'rushy' sites. Since smaller holdings were often located on this poorer ground, such data provides a basis for the widespread talk of poverty when local people discuss this period. Accounts by Charlie and Bridie of thefts of the proceeds of a house dance, and from a co-operative store, undermine notions of harmonious cosy homesteads eulogised by De Valera in his 1943 radio broadcast (see Appendix C). It should also be said in this regard that, though the Free State remained officially neutral during the Second World War³¹, the specific conditions of 'The Emergency' did involve hardship, rationing and 'making-do' (Kuhn, 2002) that might account to some extent for these stories. During this time, with supply lines threatened, rationing of a range of commodities - tea, butter, petrol – had very material effects on those in the research setting. Horses and carts reappeared in areas where they had been replaced by tractors. Introduction of compulsory tillage meant that farmers had to allocate a portion of their land for the growing of food rather than the rearing of cattle (Brown, 2004). At the same time, though this was not an economy that was awash with money, self-sufficiency ensured that basic needs were taken care of.

Table 3: Analysis of Employment by Occupation in 1946 in Co. Roscommon

(Source: Shanagher, 2013)

Occupation Type	Percentage of Total (%)
Agricultural	80.2
Other Producers	8.7
Other	11.1

³¹ Unofficially, there was more support for the Allied position. For example, if military aircraft crashed on Irish soil, Germans soldiers were interned in the Curragh prison, while their British counterparts were repatriated. Equally, fire engines were sent over the border to Belfast to help after German bombing raids on the city (*Judging Dev*, 2008).

To think through stratification in rural society, data on occupation was examined for the county level. This is presented in Table 3. Drawing on census data from 1946, 80.2% of those employed were listed under 'agricultural occupations', a figure that underlines the dominance of the local economy by farming. 8.7% were listed as other 'producers', a group that would include builders, tailors, smiths and craftsmen. 11.1% were otherwise 'occupied', a group that comprised shop attendants, barmen, bus-drivers, priests, doctors, guards, pub-owners and teachers, an amalgam of workers in the towns, and more affluent members of a non-farming town-based petit bourgeoisie. Although useful for the broader brush-strokes, such data reveals little about divisions within these non-farming occupations, or of overlaps between the more affluent farmers and those running businesses in the towns, such as pubs, shops and butchers³². Other non-business strands of this town-based petit bourgeoisie – teachers, priests, doctors – would have formed the basis of the 'rural intellectuals' that Goldring (1987) identified, and that were so important for dissemination of the rural ideology that was discussed in Chapter 3.

Within the agricultural sector at the county level, 'farmers' and 'relatives assisting' accounted for 89.8% of the workforce. The remaining 10.2% would be comprised of labourers³³. Local histories and interviews confirm that labourers and travelling tradespeople were to be found in much smaller numbers than during the nineteenth century. Cross (1971[1942]) describes the situation of the 'Tailor' and Ansty, a labourer and his wife, near Gougane Barra on the Cork/Kerry border: 'their cottage is one of the many built under the Labourer's Cottage Act of 1880. For its four rooms and outhouses and its acre of mountain land the Tailor pays, with rates, four pounds five shillings a year' (p.120). Brian, one of those interviewed, remembered a particular 'spalpeen'³⁴, in this case a *female* labourer, who came to help a farmer split seed potatoes. Travellers³⁵ regularly passed through the area, camping at selected spots. John and Teresa remembered most of all the poverty experienced by this group who lived in 'a small tent, you couldn't stand up in it', with hay for a bed. They would call to local houses seeking flour or second-hand clothes.

32 Local respondents agree with Arensberg and Kimball's findings (2001[1936]) on this aspect of rural petit bourgeois life. It was a natural progression for some farmers to establish delivery points for their produce in the towns, or to set up a 'travelling shop' where goods were delivered and collected by van or other transport. Even today, the local butcher runs a farm just outside the town of Elphin.

33 In Boyle EA, there were 353 labourers compared to 2864 farmers, or 12.3% of the working population, slightly higher than the county figure.

34 Derived from Irish, 'spailín'.

35 A social group that travelled the country carrying out various types of labour, such as mending pots, and often staying at temporary encampments by the roadside.

A high degree of social homogeneity is evident from an analysis of religious affiliation. Although there were Methodists and Presbyterians in Boyle (and according to the 1911 census, at least one family in Boheroe townland near the home place too), 'Protestant' is primarily used locally to denote the Church of Ireland congregation. Local accounts and material evidence (through abandoned estates) testify to the decline of a higher stratum within this group, so that by the 1940s, the ascendancy had largely vanished as a class, their houses for the most part burned down or demolished in the years following independence eg. Rockville House and Croghan House³⁶, Lissadurn and Rockingham. According to Bill, a local Catholic who was assigned a holding by the Land Commission just inside the gates of the old Rockville estate, there wasn't 'a trace of them left'. According to Jack, Rockingham House was burned down by its owner for insurance purposes, but local IRA units were responsible for some local 'big house'³⁷ burnings. Given the symbolic power of such residences, built on the proceeds of rent paid by tenant-farmers, hidden behind high walls and plantations from all except those locals employed within as servants, herdsman, smiths and so on, such 'erasures' from the landscape are subtly presented by Bill as releasing centuries of frustration³⁸. Jimmy, on a driving tour of the area, remarked on the poor wages local people received working on the estates – his father had been employed by the Lloyds as a blacksmith.

In 1946 (CSO, 1946), 5% of the population in Boyle EA were listed 'Protestant'. The town of Boyle a few miles north had the highest concentration, while in rural districts to the south the figure was 2.8%, and in Roscommon generally 1%. This was largely constituted by a lower stratum of Protestants that survived the challenges of the period after independence, and that still flourishes in the area, living in relatively modest houses such as *Mount Erris* and *The Rectory*³⁹. Members of this group often emphasised the ways in which they are different from the older, elite section of the ascendancy, a type of 'distinction' from below. Two local Protestants, Irene and Norman, spoke of

36 Croghan House was unusual in that it was occupied by Catholic landlords. Maureen also remembered that while most farms in her time were ten acres, one local Catholic family, the Donnellans, had a more substantial farm.

37 The colloquialism for the residences of the ascendancy.

38 Although occurring at a much later stage, there are some parallels with the situation in revolutionary France when these prominent symbols of a feudal order came under attack (Doyle, 1989). At the same time, some locals today express regret at the destruction. These tensions bring to mind 'the old conflict between aesthetics and ethics' (Hesse, 1947, p.125) that runs through Irish post-colonial life. Of the remaining houses, a number have been purchased by the Irish state or private interests, to be reopened as museums, gardens and cafes. Notable in this regard are Strokestown House and King House, that after periods of decline, abandonment and dereliction, have reopened to the public, the former as the Famine Museum in Strokestown House.

39 Ruane and Butler (2007) studied the crisis faced by Protestants in West Cork after independence, when a significant number of the community emigrated, although the majority remained and became more integrated into the wider community.

the excesses of this other, more privileged class. According to Irene, their behaviour had the effect of tarnishing local perceptions of the congregation, and Protestant virtues such as 'modesty', 'humility' and 'thrift' were in short supply with them.

Religious and class distinctions were sometimes intertwined. Monica remarked that at her school, local Protestant children had great packed lunches, while some Catholic students came to school barefoot. Annie came from a Protestant family: 'they were...gentleman farmer[s]...they would have had over a hundred acres...back in their time most farms would have been made up of about 10 acres or 12 acres or 20 acres'. Marty, a Catholic, made much the same point from the other side, recalling that 'they had all the good land, the Protestants. The Cox's now and Vaugh. There was three Cox's there now in the townland we lived in Knockroe and they had...the pick of the land. One had 180 acres, the other had 100 and the other had 107'. Both John-Joe and Bill voiced a surviving knowledge of the 17th century plantations, when those loyal to Cromwell were given larger farms on the 'Plains of Boyle', an area of notably fertile land between Croghan and Boyle (see Fig.3). On other occasions, class awareness seemed to trump religion. The French family had their own pew in Croghan church according to Dan and Pat, until the priest 'got rid of that'. This family were among the first in the locality to own a television, acquired to view the coronation of a new British monarch in 1953, said Vincent.

Given the dominance of local life by agriculture, Babs provided a useful outline of the activities over a typical year. Winter would have been a relatively quiet time in the fields, with more time for dancing and 'rambling'⁴⁰ by local men (though not women), who would play cards, tell stories, sing songs and recite poems. Both Arensberg and Kimball (2001[1936]) and Cross (1970[1942]) note this pattern for rural Co. Clare and Gougane Barra respectively. The busy time of the year in Elphin began in spring, when the cattle were moved out to the fields and calving began. Crops were sown around this time, and turf cut. As the summer advanced, the hay was saved and crops were harvested and threshed, occasions for the *meitheal* and celebrations that would often follow. Cattle were sold on from July through to early December. The main annual fair in Croghan, the bull-fair, was on the 28th of October, a big day for all, when there would be plenty of socialising, deals done and goods sold.

40 Gatherings in houses involving groups of local men who would sing, tell stories and play cards.

During the research period, while it is clear that Catholic small farmers were the dominant group at both local and county level, stratification was evident both within the group, as well as in the rural society that they belonged to. The next section will assess shifting loyalties among small farmers towards the collective will in the post-independence period when it seems there was the re-emergence of a more contentious politics, this time directed towards the Irish state.

5.4 Fractures in The Collective Will 1922-1960

An overview of the political field during and immediately before the research period has been instructive for considering cultural shifts in later years. It is possible to propose parallel fractures of the collective will in this regard.

Goldring (1987) has termed the Irish state in the immediate post-independence period as a 'bourgeois hegemony'. He relates the rise of a Catholic middle class to a series of events in the formative period of the Free State. Shortly before the signing of the Treaty that sought to end hostilities, rumblings of revolutionary Russia were echoed in Ireland, and influenced workers and small farmers to take actions such as the establishment of the Limerick Soviet, takeover of creameries and 'cattle-drives'⁴¹. Locally, a district near Elphin achieved a degree of prominence in the early 1920s when Jim Gralton, a member of the Revolutionary Workers Group, was involved in agrarian unrest just over the county border in South Leitrim, and in establishing the Pearse-Connolly Hall, part of the 'Gowel Soviet' (Feeley, 1987; Gibbons, 1996) where various revolutionary workshops and events were held. Gibbons suggests that Gralton 'touched a raw nerve in the connective tissue of both Catholic and nationalist ideology' (1996, p.106) revealing significant 'cracks' in the collective will. There was, in effect, a 'counter-community', an important local support base for Gralton amongst local republicans and socialists: 'underneath the official community was an alternative form of solidarity, a clandestine network which eluded the forces of both church and state and supported this man on the run for five months' (p.106, 1996)⁴². Radicalism and interest in socialist ideas among local people may have been related to the

41 Feeley (1986) describes the phenomenon of cattle-drives, where small farmers would herd their cattle onto the larger holdings of big farmers in a form of direct action related to campaigns for land redistribution.

42 Gralton was rewarded for his activism with deportation in the more conservative years of the 1930s. He 'enjoyed the invidious, distinction of being the only emigrant who was forced to leave Ireland at the behest of the Irish government' (Gibbons, 1996, p.98). A measure of the esteem in which he is still held locally can be found on a plaque on the main street in Carrick-on-Shannon.

movement (and return) of people to England and elsewhere, to search for work (Goldring, 1987), but they would also be need to considered as the continuance of the long-running traditions of militant agrarian activity referred to in the previous section (Gibbons, 1996)⁴³.

Goldring (1987) suggests that anxieties around these developments led elite elements to settle matters, before they got 'out of hand', through the signing of the Treaty to end hostilities with Britain in 1922 and the establishment of the Cumann na nGaedheal government. In this way, a potentially broader revolutionary transformation was adjusted and controlled to suit bourgeois needs. 'Freedom' was thus on the terms of powerful groups. Hall et. al posit a similar dynamic in Britain following universal male suffrage in the late 1860s: 'the working classes were to be at one and the same moment enfranchised...and contained' (1978, p.212). According to McGuinness:

The Irish bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie, through their leadership of Irish nationalism and republicanism, have always been clear on the role of rural/urban working class men and women in the struggle against colonialism/imperialism. By their virtual silence on the issue, they have upheld the view that the working class should be encouraged to play its part in the national movement, but wait its turn to reap the democratic and material benefits in some never-never land.(1999, p.10)

The Treaty narrowly passed a popular vote, and allowed for the formation of the Free State, governed initially by Cumann na nGaedhal, a grouping that broke away from Sinn Féin. In other words, this can be seen as a 'bourgeois settlement'. As a result, significant elements including many remaining Sinn Féin activists, remained opposed to the agreement, demanding a full 32-county republic. Such divisions led to open Civil War between 1922 and 1923, and engendered tensions that inflected national and local life for many years. Coogan (1976, p.84) has referred to a 'cleavage in the life of the country' between small and big farmers on this basis, with many small farmers taking an anti-Treaty position. Amongst these anti-Treaty forces, another split followed leading to the formation of a new political party, Fianna Fáil, that secured victory in the 1932 elections and subsequently held power continuously until 1948. On one level, these developments provided an electoral outlet for many anti-Treaty republicans, including prominently the small farmers (Curran, 1996), so that significant changes were implemented in the early 1930s. There was a public housing programme, annuity payments to Britain arising out of land redistribution were cancelled, and the oath of allegiance to the British monarchy required by the Treaty was dropped (Collins, 1994).

⁴³ It should also be noted that individual Catholic clergy, such as Rev.Michael O'Flanagan (president of Sinn Féin after the split with De Valera's Fianna Fáil in 1926) and Fr.John Fahy from Loughrea in Co. Galway, were notably active in this more activist, progressive strand of rural life (Cronin, 1981, Madden, 2013).

In other ways though, latent conservative tendencies came to the fore. While a number of anti-Treaty republicans had been excommunicated by the Catholic hierarchy during the Civil War (Ferguson, 2012), the hosting of the 1932 Eucharistic Congress of 1932 symbolised the 'coming in from the cold' of the one-time 'Diehards', groups that until then had rejected the Treaty settlement. This period marked an increasingly intimate relationship between Fianna Fail and the Catholic Church (Manning, 1971, *Seven Ages*, 2002). The rural ideology that had been articulated for a number of years as an element of a nationalist collective will was given full rein (Goldring, 1987). Discourses around a rural, Gaelic, Catholic Ireland inflected, for example, De Valera's 1943 'Ideal Ireland' speech (see Appendix C), which emphasised the essence of 'Irishness' - frugality, morality, and spirituality. On these grounds, it is possible to speak of attempts to establish a 'cultural republic'. According to McGuinness:

Fianna Fail under Eamon de Valera's leadership articulated the interests of the native bourgeoisie and the new Catholic middle class prior to the 1960s. Its clearest articulation was a fusion of economic and cultural/political nationalism, with a strong input of Catholic social philosophy. Under the cloak of cross-class populism and a series of economic and social reforms, the party won a significant section of both rural and urban working class to its fold. But de Valera's concept of 'frugal living,' which needed no elaboration for those living in the slums of Dublin, was never shared by all, least of all by himself. (1999, p.11)

IRA opposition to the Irish state continued throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and can be regarded as a counter-hegemonic force. Asked today about political loyalties locally during the period, John says simply that the area was 'republican'. Easter lilies are still sold to mark the 1916 Rising each year, and there is an annual Easter commemoration in one of the local graveyards (this changes from one year to the next, rotating through each of the dozen or so small local sites), prominently advertised in the local newspapers, the *Roscommon Herald*. During the 1950s, republicans 'on the run' from internment or imprisonment could rely on a network of 'safe houses' in the area where they would receive food and shelter. At the turn into Elphin town from the N51, there is a monument described by White (2006, p.116): 'beginning in 1950, Roscommon Republicans had begun to erect a memorial to the county's patriot dead. The huge monument, which had an eighteen foot base and three twelve-foot high figures, was unveiled at Shankill Cross, Elphin, in September, 1963⁴⁴'. It is reflective of the notable republicanism of the area that it hosts a monument on this scale, one of the largest of this type in the country, in such a prominent position near the entrance to the town (see Fig.14).

44 My uncle, Donie Shanagher, and grand-uncle Pat McKeon, were on the organising committee for this construction.



Fig.14 Elphin IRA Monument (Source: Shanagher, 2013)

In the early 1940s, as part of De Valera's policy of maintaining Irish neutrality, the imperatives of the Emergency played out in relations between state and IRA. A number of local men were amongst two thousand IRA volunteers interned in the Curragh over the course of the 1940s, following a bombing campaign in Britain and the consequent execution of two volunteers, Barnes and McCormick (Coogan, 2002). Marty recalled, 'there was a brother of mine in for a year and a half'. De Valera, intent on preserving the military neutrality of the state, set out to destroy the IRA, an organisation that he had deproscribed as recently as the election victory in 1932 (although reproscribing it in 1936). In 1940, Longford commanding officer Barney Casey was shot in the Curragh. In 1941, Richard Goss, 'the IRA's North Leinster-South Ulster Divisional Commanding Officer (White, 2006, p.29) was executed in Port Laoise prison. It is notable that these men came from what might loosely be termed the 'north midlands', an area that would include Roscommon. A number of other deaths during these years at the hands of the state, whether through hunger strike or execution, made the 1940s a tense time in republican areas (White, 2006).

White (2006, p.55) argues that the IRA '[in the 1940s], as now, was primarily composed of people with working-class and small-farmer backgrounds. Relatively few were university educated'. While the ostensible aim of republicans was to secure a 32-county republic, he argues further that 'a

fundamental element of Irish Republicanism is a commitment to social change in favour of people who have been underprivileged, oppressed and victimised by the powers that be, whether they be landlords, employers, or Irish or British politicians' (ibid, p.49). Matt Brady, father of Rúadhírí Ó Brádaigh (who will be discussed later in this section), and an independent socialist republican councillor in Longford during the 1930s and 1940s, would have typified such a sensibility, working with tenants under threat of eviction in Edgeworthstown, Co. Longford at this time. Though diminished in numbers and in strength when internment ended in Autumn 1950, ongoing IRA activity in the following decade saw a professionalisation of the organisation ahead of the Border Campaign between 1956 and 1962⁴⁵, when imprisonment without trial was re-introduced (White, 2006). With the intention of securing an all-Ireland Republic, this campaign sought to destabilise conditions in the six counties north of the border by attacks on police and military installations. Rúadhírí Ó Brádaigh was teaching in Roscommon town at this time and was interned in the late 1950s⁴⁶.

Also, a *religious* conservatism expressed through loyalty of small farmers to elements of Catholic practice need not have precluded a certain political radicalism⁴⁷. Sometimes, a teasing apart of the apparent unity of religion, nationalism and culture is required in this regard. Though locals may have attended Catholic mass and expressed nationalist sentiments, they also subscribed to what Gibbons (1996) has referred to as 'fugitive forms' relating to folklore, local history and agrarian agitation. In this regard, in largely Catholic Ireland, there was always a degree of ambiguity around associations with 'communism', even amongst activists who were concerned with issues of social

45 A number of local men took part in the Border Campaign.

46 Ó Brádaigh was active in establishing the Provisional IRA, the group that later became heavily involved in developments north of the Border, after a split from the Official IRA in 1969. A meeting to formalise this process was held in 'north Roscommon' around the issue of voting abstention, as well as a perceived leftward drift of the more urban-based Officials (known as 'Stickies')(White, 2006). As White remarks, (2006, p.152) 'the core of the Provisionals were southern Republicans living in the west and in rural areas...the Official IRA was based in Dublin...The Provisionals were the traditionalists in the countryside'. Ó Brádaigh was arrested again in 1972, and it was on the steps of Elphin town courthouse that he greeted his supporters on his release after fourteen days of hunger strike. These militant currents continued into the 1980s. I was surprised to learn that one of two quietly spoken elderly brothers, small farmers, that I met over the research period had served six years in Portlaoise Prison in the 1980s for storing IRA arms. Typically, this information was divulged not by himself, but by a neighbour of the man. Splits with the Provisional movement in the 1980s, and after the ceasefire of 1994, have attracted limited support nationally or locally. People in the area seem to be satisfied with the 1998 Good Friday Agreement negotiated following the cessation of hostilities in the North.

47 White (2006) describes how Martin McGuinness, actively involved in the Derry IRA during the Troubles and interned during the early 1970s, was seen by a cellmate to wear a leather cross around his neck, an accoutrement associated with devout Catholicism.

justice so that while locals rarely called themselves 'communists', they could sing the *Red Flag*⁴⁸, were frequently critical of powerful organisations at the time - including landlords, 'big business', and the Catholic Church⁴⁹ - and seemed to be more comfortable with the denomination 'republican', or occasionally, 'socialist'.

In related developments, the late 1940s saw a breakdown of *Fíanna Fáil* hegemony in the electoral sphere. Two 'Inter-Party' administrations were formed between 1948-1951 and again from 1954-1957, headed by John A. Costello of *Fine Gael*, and counting on the support of Labour, *Clann na Talmhan* and *Clann na Poblachta* (Electionsireland.org, 2010). These latter 'flash parties'⁵⁰ (Carty, 1981, p.48) made significant breakthroughs in Elphin during this decade to challenge *Fíanna Fáil* hegemony. Two independent⁵¹ TDs – John Meighan and John Beirne, who owned what is now Mullally's shop in Croghan, were elected in Roscommon's three-seater constituency in 1943, of a total of eight independents elected nationally. In 1948, *Clann na Talmhan* and *Clann na Poblachta* each returned one TD in what was then a 4-seater – the latter party came close to returning a second TD. In 1951, two of the four local seats went to *Clann na Talmhan*, of a total of six *Dáil* seats for this party. The notable successes of *Clann na Talmhan* are perhaps not surprising given that this was a 'farmers' movement' with a strong base in Connaught, especially among voters rejecting *Fine Gael* and *Fíanna Fáil* dominance (Carty, 1981). Those of *Clann na Poblachta* in 1948, 'campaigning on a platform combining radical and nationalist appeals' may be more so. The party was strongest in Dublin, and success in rural areas was relatively unusual. Besides Roscommon, only Cavan, and Tipperary North/South returned TDs from this party, who can be regarded as tapping into strong republican and socialist currents locally⁵².

Tentative signs of change were emerging at other levels. Noel Browne, Minister for Health and a *Clann na Poblachta* representative of the first Inter-Party government between 1948 and 1951, attempted to enact the 'Mother and Child Scheme', a programme to provide state support to young

48 As sung by my father.

49 It could be said that a type of 'folk Catholicism' held some traction (*Zydecon*, 1986). My father told a story about a local man who stood up during the middle of a sermon by a Missioner to satirise a poorly-delivered homily, and attracted admiration in some quarters for this.

50 This name was given to a range of new, smaller political parties that arose for a few brief years around in the 1940s and 1950s (Carty, 1981).

51 Individuals running for election that are unaffiliated with political parties.

52 It is interesting to note that south Tipperary and Roscommon had both been identified as flashpoints during the agrarian unrest of the middle of the nineteenth century (Maclochlainn, 1983).

mothers, although he was faced down by the clerics (allied with the Irish Medical Association (IMO)) who saw this as undue interference in domestic life by a welfare state (*Seven Ages*, 2002). Likewise, pressure by Dublin's archbishop, John McQuaid, was instrumental in ending the Irish National Teacher's Organisation⁵³ (INTO) strike of 1946, when teachers demonstrated on the pitch during the All-Ireland football final (*Limits of Liberty*, 2010). However 'interrupted' these currents were, they are nevertheless symptomatic in some ways of significant counter-hegemonic currents in Irish society. For Brown, the 1940s witnessed a shift: 'Ireland has undergone the experience of a widespread rejection of the conditions of rural life similar to that which has characterised most Western European countries since the end of the nineteenth century' (p.171). He saw a tentative 'opening of the windows' after a period of cultural and economic isolation in the 1930s, as the Fianna Fáil government was forced to engage with international circumstances in the post-war period. As such, the 'petit bourgeois state expressing the prudent and inhibiting values of farm and shop' (2004, p.124) was being challenged in different ways, and from different quarters. Matters seem to have fragmented politically in the years following independence, and an undermining of the collective will was evident. It could be said that counter-hegemonic challenges to the national-popular were being posed in a number of ways across culture and politics during the 1940s.

Chapter Summary

The small farmer stratum is central to an investigation of culture in Elphin before and during the period 1940 to 1960. The landscape itself speaks of the rise of this grouping. Their numerical and political power was significant in a range of struggles preceding and following the birth of the Irish state, as part of a project to construct a collective will to contest British imperial power. By 1940, drawing on a range of official measurements, it seems that about 80% of the working population in Roscommon was directly involved in agriculture. The majority of these, about 90%, were small farmers. The data also shows some differences in holding size, a finding that illustrates heterogeneity within the group. After 1922, a number of faultlines in the collective will became apparent, so that it is possible to speak of a 'fracturing' in this regard. These changes are useful for thinking about the dominance of modern dance moves during the period, dance practices that can be seen as part of a broader 'ensemble' of oppositional practices. Such processes have been important for positing parallel processes in the cultural sphere, and specifically in the field of recreational

⁵³ The main trade union for primary school teachers.

dance. It is this topic that will concern the next chapter.

Chapter 6

The Dances

*What you doin' on your back aah
What you doin' on your back aah
You should be dancing, yeah
Dancing, yeah*

Bee Gees (*You Should be Dancing*, 1976)

6.0 Introduction

A 'dance craze' hit Irish shores in the 1940s (O'Brien, 1941). This chapter will establish the empirical evidence for this phenomenon, and seek to make a contribution to the literature by according it due recognition, one that respects the central role given it by young people at the time. These important 'dancing voices' have been neglected until this study, and this dissertation seeks to write them into the record. A significant gap in accounts of life and culture in Ireland between 1940 and 1960 has been addressed in this way by interview data, complemented by documentary sources.

In the first section, newspaper data and interviews will be critically combined to establish the relative popularity of the two main dance forms/events – modern and céilí. Next, there will be a discussion of the salience of a 'generation gap' in Irish society, one that can be used to think about whether modern dance constituted a youth movement. Closely related to this, the following section will present findings related to the rise of media culture during the research period. Finally, given the evidence for a dynamic and vibrant modern dance culture, there will be a discussion of various bases for its exclusion from the cultural history of Ireland. Remembering modern dance has tended to fall between two stools, between hegemonic dominant memory associated with the rural ideology on the one hand, and a metropolitan, intellectual reading of history on the other.



Fig.15 Keenan's Hall, Elphin town (currently a hardware store) (Source: Shanagher, 2013)



Fig.16 The Store (currently a shed) (Source: Shanagher, 2013)



Fig.17 Mantua Hall (currently a shed) (Source: Shanagher, 2013)



Fig.18 Mantua Hall, interior (Source: Shanagher, 2013)



Fig.19 The Social Centre, Elphin (Source: Shanagher, 2013)



Fig.20 Croghan Hall (Source: Shanagher, 2013)



Fig.21 Drumlion Hall (currently a residence) (Source: Shanagher, 2013)



Fig.22 The Researcher and his Father, Ballinameen Hall (Source: Shanagher, 2013)



Fig.23 Interior of a Carnival Marquee (Source: Source: irish-showbands.com)

6.1 Modern Dance as Dominant

Brown (2004) contends that a dominant ethos of cultural nationalism at official levels reflected a broader tendency among the population in the 1930s. This investigation will present evidence that will allow for a clarification of this issue in the field of dance in Elphin.

To begin, a casting of the analytical net back to before the research period may be of use for throwing the findings into relief. Significant developments in this earlier period include the anti-jazz campaign of 1933/1934, the Public Dance Halls Act (PDHA) (1935), and the banning of jazz music on 2RN¹ between 1935 and 1945 (*Down With Jazz*², 1987), episodes that have a direct bearing on the period in question and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. Although a detailed analysis of newspaper coverage before 1930 is beyond the scope of this investigation, there are intriguing glimpses of a type of modern dance culture dating back locally to at least the 1920s. The local paper suggested that 'jazz is comparatively modern, and is the successor of a popular form of dance called rag-time which many readers of middle age will recall. It depends for its success upon instrumentation and rhythm' (*Roscommon Herald*, 1940a, p.6). What is clear in this account is that people who were middle-aged in 1940 were practising a variant of modern dance in their youth.

Various sources concur that céilí dances were popular before the 1930s. Breathnach (1984) has described the inter-war period as a high point for céilí dances, remarking that, 'between the two world wars, the old Irish social dances, notated from old dancing masters, and now designated as céilí dances, enjoyed a revival' (p.29). According to Pat Duignan, a member of a modern dance band, 'jazz was very rare when I started. It was all kind of céilí music³' (*Down With Jazz*, 1987). In the research setting, Jimmy said that Croghan Hall (see Fig.20) had been used for céilí events before the arrival of jazz, and that the Gaelic League⁴ (GL) organised these dances. Annie, Marty and

1 The Irish state radio broadcaster during this period. The station was renamed 'Radio Éireann' in 1937 (RTE, 2008).

2 This documentary presents valuable oral accounts of dances near Elphin in the 1930s.

3 Other sources are more ambiguous. Tubridy (1994) suggests that in some regions céilí and set-dancing overlapped, but there were other places that Irish dances simply did not reach. Brennan (1999) refers to a Gaelic League organiser who travelled by bike around Meath and Cavan in 1917 'to carry out the good work'. He says céilí dances 'were popular for a few years, they were a novelty, but eventually they fell away' (p.42). In the absence of a systematic newspaper analysis, nothing conclusive can be stated in this regard.

4 An organisation promoting Irish culture established in the 1890s, it is sometimes called by its Irish name, Conradh na nGaeilge.

Bridie all recalled the arrival of modern dance by the 1930s when 'jazz then came in you know - that sort of racket' (Marty). Although called 'jazz' by some commentators (Smyth, 1993; Gibbons, 1996; *Down with Jazz*, 1987), and by some older dancers such as Marty and Jimmy, younger dancers more commonly talk about 'modern' music and dance so that terminology appears to have shifted in this regard by the 1940s (as was outlined in the introduction, it is the latter of these terms that has been used in this dissertation). These began to eclipse not only céilí dances but also house dances. Keenahan (2006) spoke to a Roscommon dancer who said that jazz replaced céilí music: 'in those times [the 1930s], it was all céilí music and the people were getting tired. You could not expect them to stand a whole night of céilí⁵ music' (p.283).

Such pronouncements provide some evidence that céilí dances declined as modern dances increased. As early as 1930, of a total of 304 dance advertisements, almost 90%, were for modern dances (see Table 4). There is little doubting the extent and popularity of the dance 'craze' by the 1940s (see Fig.6 for an image of a modern dance). According to Flann O'Brien⁶(1941, p1):

To-day there are roughly 1,200 licensed halls in the 26 Counties, accounting for perhaps 5,000 dances in a year. Golf and tennis clubs, Volunteer halls and the like do not require a licence. In all, it is a fair guess that 10,000 dances are held in a year, an average of three a day⁷. In terms of time, this means that there is a foxtrot in progress in some corner of Erin's isle throughout the whole of every night and day.

According to Charlie, 'well the early 1940s I started dancing. I went dancing at Croghan round about 11 times and I went to Drumlion (see Fig.21) but they were more modern dances – then we went to the céilí house dances or the house dances'. John remembered that most hall dances featured 'old-time waltzing and foxtrots. You might go to a céilí an odd time. A céilí would be Irish dance music'. If six or seven dances were held in Croghan, one of them might be a céilí – held on a Wednesday rather than a Sunday night, he says. As a minority taste, these dances were held away

5 Some caution is required around terminology. Marty said of his early dancing days in the late 1930s and early 1940s, 'they were generally céilís then... they were nearly all country dances that time'. There is a clear conflation of two types of dance event and sets of moves, that is set dances taking place at house dances, and céilí dances that were held in halls. Charlie also used the phrase in the former sense. In a related way, Annie said 'and now, that'd be in 1937 that I'd be that age that'd go céilí-ing'. In this case, the verb was used in the context of attending house dances. Sometimes this was not problematic, as when Jimmy referred to céilí dances in halls. Specifying venue type largely cleared up ambiguities. At other points though, where talk is more vague, a strict interpretation of 'céilí' to mean 'Irish dance' could lead to an overestimation of its importance.

6 A well-known satirist and columnist with the *Irish Times* and contributor to *The Bell* journal, he was also known as Myles na gCopaleen, amongst other pseudonyms.

7 In fact, by this calculation, there were 30 dances a day.

from the peak weekend slots. According to Mícheál:

It was all modern music. You wouldn't - there was very little - there was the odd céilí and old-time but very odd and you found it hard to get crowds (unclear) we were all modern that time... céilís you'd have - Mantua used to run an odd céilí. It'd be a very odd one that I can remember in Elphin [town] now.

Old-time waltzes by this time featured as a kind of lure to compensate for the lack of popularity of Irish dances: 'well céilí went with old-time because you'd get people to go with the old-time whereas they wouldn't go for the céilí' (Micheál).

The popularity of modern dance is often contextualised in terms of a comparatively barren leisure sphere. It occupied a 'virtually exclusive position in terms of leisure activities for young people' (O'Connor, 2003, p.64). Asked why she went dancing, Pearl said simply that there was nothing else, that this was the main entertainment of the people at that time. Likewise, Teresa remembered dance in the 1950s: 'it was number one...oh that's all we had... there was no...you know all the stuff that's around now. There was nothing. The dance. That was it. End of story'. According to Mícheál, 'the dances were packed that time but they had no other - we had no other - there was no television - radios were battery so it was basically speaking dancing'. Pearl, Teresa and Mícheál would have danced in the late 1950s, but older dancers such as Liz similarly recall dance being 'all they had' in the 1940s.

On this basis, the central role of dance was related to the lack of other entertainments. Although cinema and radio were popular, and the dawn of television was imminent, the sphere of leisure had not been mediated and commodified in the way that is familiar today. Sometimes, there is a sense in the 'making-do' identified by Kuhn (2002) in her accounts of 1930s cinema-goers, of a tendency to highlight the poverty of the past in relation to a 'softer' present. In this case, it is possible that a real lack is benefiting from a degree of embellishment. In order to provide another perspective on the popularity of the different forms of recreational dance at this time, the *Roscommon Herald* has been useful for generating data. Even before presenting this data, the centrality of dancing to culture at this time can be noted by the extent of promotion involved – one or two entire pages of a sixteen page publication were specifically devoted to dance advertisements. The findings are as follows (1930s figures have been included for reference purposes):

Table 4: Advertisement Figures for the *Roscommon Herald* 1930-1960

Year	Total Advertisements	Modern Dances (%)	Céilí Dances (%)
1930	304	89.9	10.1
1940	600	92.7	7.3
1950	944	94	6
1960	1364	80	20

(Source: Shanagher, 2013)

Parsing this data, an increase from 600 to 944 entries constituted a 57% increase between 1940 and 1950. Between 1950 and 1960, an increase from 944 to 1364 advertisements amounts to a 45% increase. Comparing the figures for 1940 and 1960, there was a total 127% increase. Extending the time frame from 1930-1960 shows a 348% increase. A more differentiated review of the figures allows modern and céilí events to be considered separately. In absolute terms, modern dance advertisements increased from 556 in 1940, to 888 in 1950, and to 1092 in 1960. Céilí dances increased from 44 in 1940, to 52 in 1950, and to 272 in 1960. That is to say, almost the entirety of the increase in total dance advertisements in the 1940s, and a considerable portion of the increase in the 1950s (204 modern to 220 céilí advertisements) was accounted for by modern dances⁸. This data suggests that the dominant 'social fact' in the field of dance at this time was a boom in modern dance. Advertisements for these events exceeded 90% of total advertisements for most of the research period, local preferences were very much tilted in favour of the quickstep and foxtrot, and people were quite literally voting with their feet.

By way of introducing some caveats, the type of direct correlation posited between advertisement numbers and event frequency might be interrogated. The appearance of an advertisement in a newspaper says little about the success or otherwise of a dance, whether modern or céilí. In oral memory, the successes - where the spectacle of the 'carnival crowd' (Bakhtin, 1984) was in full flow

⁸ It should also be noted that the rise in numbers of céilí dances from 6% to 20% over the period 1950-1960 represents a proportionally significant increase. As will be set out in the conclusion, for reasons of space, a more detailed exploration of this phenomenon has not been included in this research project, but might be addressed in further research.

– are those that register most, discussed, celebrated and remembered over the ill-attended, obscure, and poorly organised. There are rare glimpses of more low-key events. Some house dances might involve 15-20 people, said Roddy. Speaking of modern dances, Johnny remarked 'if there was place, there was too much place - there was no one there'. Maureen remembered, 'I went to a dance at the hall in Elphin [town]⁹ (see Fig.15) with Jack Bruen. There were only 9 people there. They went instead to a dance at a house in Killumid'.

It may also be the case that a freer circulation of cash after the 'privation' (Jimmy) of the 1940s allowed more money to be spent on advertising by promoters of all types of dances, so that actual increases may have been amplified somewhat. Related to this, there may have been a culture of differential expenditure on advertising for the different dance forms, so that modern dances were advertised more than céilí dances. Evidence for this comes from an apparent antipathy displayed towards the commercial model by those involved in céilí dance and music, so that professional musicians were not permitted to play at *fleadhanna* in the early years of Comhaltas Ceólteoirí Éireann¹⁰ (CCÉ). According to Mícheál, 'there was a lot of it in Comhaltas too at the start - that thing of - you know if you played in a band you couldn't enter competitions'. If this was the case, then the popularity of Irish dances might be underestimated.

Next, as dancers suggested, and as was discussed in Chapter 4, innovations in transport led to far greater mobility by 1960, a fact that is borne out by mapping the venues featured in newspapers. There was a shift from local to more widely dispersed venues that included east Mayo, south Roscommon, and south Sligo. In this case, advertisements may reflect a spatial expansion of 'dancing territory' rather than an outright increase in dances. Even so, oral histories indicate that bicycles were still dominant throughout the research period, a fact reflected by the continuing presence of many local hall advertisements throughout the period. Only in the early 1960s did more widespread car usage register in Elphin, although they might have been shared in previous years, or used by hackney drivers (Maureen). Although these processes are difficult to quantify, it does not seem that the 127% increase in dance advertisements between 1940 and 1960 can be explained solely by issues of mobility and advertising revenue.

9 This was also known as Keenan's Hall.

10 A non-state organisation set up in the early 1950s to promote Irish culture, often simply known as 'Comhaltas'. Its full name translates as 'Gathering of Musicians in Ireland'.

Moreover, thinking through the relative popularity of modern and céilí dances, it should be acknowledged that the venues that register in later advertisements are larger, modern facilities that could hold many hundreds, or even thousands of people, as in for example the chain of ballrooms constructed by the Reynolds brothers (Ryan, 1994). While céilí dances featured in smaller halls, they were less likely to be danced in the new ballrooms. An absolute increase in modern dance advertisements from 888 in 1950 to 1092 in 1960 needs to be understood in this light, and suggests that the ratio of modern to céilí dances might be skewed to some degree in favour of the latter.

These caveats aside, documentary and oral sources concur on a key finding: that various attempts by organs of nationalist civil society to prescribe céilí dances for young people at the time were, for the majority, not successful. The modern dancer made his/her definitive debut locally and nationally in the 1920s and, in the face of opposition from powerful quarters, assumed a position of dominance throughout the research period. This amounted to a significant rejection of the national-popular as articulated around dance practices. It could be argued that the domination of modern dance, if the term is taken to encompass all non-'Irish dances', has proceeded apace to the present day, incorporating disco, line-dancing, various 'club cultures' (Shanagher, 2012b), salsa, tango, lindy hop and many more along the way. These findings are suggestive of a fracturing of the collective will in the sphere of recreational dance, one that paralleled the broader faultlines that were evident in the political sphere, as was discussed in Chapter 5. Advertisement figures and dancing stories show that the majority of dancers embraced quicksteps and foxtrots. In the next section, links between modern dance and youth culture will be presented.

6.2 Youth Culture and Modern Dance

As was discussed in Chapter 3, Laclau and Mouffe's (1986) development of gramscian hegemony theory allows for an investigation of counter-hegemonic currents associated with small farmers. Moving to modern dances was indicative of an embodied cultural knowledge that ran against the grain of the national-popular. This section will present the evidence for a generational basis of modern dance culture.

A useful notion in this regard is that of the 'generation gap' that emerges during periods of

accelerated social change, resulting in cultural antagonisms between young and old. Hall and Whannel (1998[1964], p.62), speaking of youth culture in Britain in the 1960s, have stated:

When we have, on the one hand, parents occupied with making the adjustment to a new tempo of life, and on the other, a young generation which is itself the product of those changes to which adults are adjusting, the gap in social and feeling between the generations can become dangerously wide.

Dancers that were in their 70s, 80s or 90s when interviewed between 2007 and 2013 were in their 20s anywhere between the early 1940s and early 1960s. Those who were elders, or even middle-aged, *during* the 1940s and 1950s have long departed so that their views of matters cannot be gleaned from primary research, although their voices are present in stories told about them by younger dancers, or in the literature. Of necessity though, as was discussed in Chapter 2, the passing of time has conferred some representational limits for this investigation so that findings are centred on a group that is relatively homogenous by age, united in the sense of growing up with modern dance as a *fait accompli*.

Assessing the age of people who attended dances, Ned said, 'you'd lose interest when you had the family, that was your job them times'. There is an evident conflation of the process of courtship and dancing for many participants. At the same time, this link was stronger for some dance event types than others. In their wide-ranging study of life among small farmers in Clare in the 1930s, Arensberg and Kimball, 2001[1936], p.173) suggest house dances were an 'institution' of the young who could only think about when the next event would be: 'country dance belongs to the young people' (p.189). For elders in their study, house dances were regarded as 'codology'¹¹ (p.188). Early indications of a generation gap were manifest in Corca Dhuibhne, Co. Kerry, where 'the old people had contempt for the sets'. They supposedly involved 'ignorant people throwing their feet every which way (Brennan 1999, p.26).' New culture has probably always aroused a degree of suspicion on the part of elders (Hoggart, 1998[1957]).

In Elphin though, house dances were frequented by elders. As Charlie remarked, 'there was old people...and there was an old woman she was a Mrs.Brennan, and she was married a few times and she was there in it'. John remembered 'ah there'd be old fellows there smoking a pipe', who would

11 A colloquialism for 'foolishness'.

occasionally take to the dance-floor. As in Brennan's (1999) account of dancing in Meath, there was a degree of cross-generational participation at house dances. Perhaps this broad appeal was related to the more local and familiar inflection of house dances, drawing on perhaps a few dozen dancers comprised largely of friends and neighbours from a limited catchment area (Rita). In other words, these more intimate events would have been more akin to family and neighbourly get-togethers with a broad cross-section of ages present.

Divisions along generational lines were more evident around modern dances. Marty commented on local elders in the 1940s who encountered quicksteps and foxtrots: 'they weren't that taken in with it like do you know...but then a younger crowd came on and they - they took it over and after that then it went ahead'. John concurred on this point: 'the older generation had no heed on the modern dancing at all'. Will recalled how 'the old people weren't in favour of [modern music and dance]' and his father, a musician, would not play it.

The findings do not suggest that *only* the young attended modern dances. Attracta, who remained single, dated her dancing years from aged 20 to 40. William Trevor's (1971) fictionalised account of a rural modern dance, *The Ballroom of Romance*, features as its protagonist a woman in her mid-30s who is approaching the end of her dancing days (see Fig. 8 for an image of an older dancer). Other older dancers - male and female - feature, presented as being engaged in a desperate last throw of the dice in the game of love. Setting aside the bleakness of this representation, informed as it is by socialist realism (O'Connor, 2003), Trevor's casting of older dancers as figures of ridicule and fun might point in an indirect way towards a more general association of modern dances and young people. The 'romance' featured in the title of the short story and television production would seem to accurately reflect the greater emphasis on courting at these dances that interviewed dancers speak of. A focus on the 'dyadic' (O'Connor, 1997) could involve a premium being placed on the 'young, free and single'¹². This might have constituted a basis for exclusion of older dancers, although such sentiments were never expressed directly to me. Thornton (2004) has referred to ageist exclusions in clubbing in the 1990s, where 'handbag house' was a term used for second-rate house music, given that older participants were likely to be seen with this accessory. Whatever the sentiments involved,

12 On rarer occasions, courting took place among elders. A granduncle of mine married late in life, and to a woman older than himself. At the same time, the humorous tone in which this story was relayed is revealing of certain norms articulating dance, romance and youth.

a generational bifurcation of dance culture was more pronounced for modern than for house dances in Elphin. Such an association may have been related to the hall space more generally, but a 'romantic' element seems to have been conflated with modern rather than céilí moves and events, as it was with other couple dances (Middleton, 1997; Walsh, 1997). This would also seem to account for the hostility directed at such moves through media-generated moral panics, as will be discussed in Chapter 7.

It seems an opportune moment to identify this generation of dancers as among the first to come into their adulthood and dancing years after the 'troubled times', in the words of Charlie, centred on the War of Independence and the Civil War. The parents, uncles and aunts of many of those interviewed had been directly involved in this conflict - this was after all a largely republican area, according to John. Those interviewed can, in some ways, be seen as the first post-independence generation. Unlike their parents, for these young people, national citizenship was a given, the rural ideology was hegemonic, and the national-popular was associated with official interests in the young Irish state. Moreover, the 'generation gap' was heightened by the role of media in shaping dance culture, a point that will be taken up in the next section.

6.3 Media Culture, Music and Dance

According to Reed (1998), 'the influences of...media, especially electronic media...on the production and reception of dance have only recently received attention from dance and movement analysts' (p.514). By the 1940s, recreational dance in Ireland was practised in an environment permeated by mass media forms, an impression that is sometimes not conveyed in literature on the period. In this section, there will be a discussion of how the rise of a novel media culture facilitated the rise of modern dance.

Arensberg and Kimball's (2001[1936]) ethnography of small farmer society in Co. Clare barely hints at media culture in rural life. While this was a pre-television era, one not yet subject to the important changes that this medium would bring (McGuinness, 1999; Corcoran, 2004), media played a significant role in social life in Elphin in the 1940s and 1950s. In some ways, the very embodiment, the notable 'presence' of dance conceals the fact that it is heavily intertwined with

media forms and representations. Brown (2004) suggests that significant changes were evident from as early as the 1920s and 1930s:

Countryside, town and city were...alike addicted in the 1930s, as were masses throughout the English-speaking world, to the Hollywood film. In village hall and city cinema in Ireland the 1930s was the decade of an enthusiastic discovery of celluloid dreams from California. (Brown, 2004, p.11)

In 1930 there were 149 cinema theatres in Ireland (Miller, 2010), and Byrne (1997) has written about the utopian appeal of cinema for women in Waterford in the 1940s and 1950s. Locally, there was a cinema in Carrick-on-Shannon in the 1940s and 1950s, and films such as westerns and musicals - including those featuring the famous dancing duo of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers (Jimmy) - were screened in the hall in Elphin town, a venue also used for dances (Packie). 2RN, the first Irish state radio station, began broadcasting on 1st January, 1926. The construction of a high-powered transmitter in Athlone in 1933 allowed people in Elphin to receive radio transmissions from Dublin. While 'much of the repertoire was dull, and listeners soon tired of the seemingly endless selection of parlour songs and Edwardian ballads', the 'sponsored programmes' of the late 1920s and early 1930s offered a little more excitement and colour, bringing jazz or modern music¹³ to Irish ears (*Down with Jazz*, 1987). Between 1940 and 1960, radio registered strongly in the research setting. At the same time, Will and John remember people crowding around neighbours' sets to listen to broadcasts at the time, indicating that in the early years of the period, the technology was still relatively rare in Elphin. Tom and Marty built two-valve receivers themselves to pick up national and international broadcasts from BBC, Radio Toulouse, Radio Luxembourg and the Armed Forces Network. 'The sound production was perfect', said Tom. He recalled that his sister would be up half the night listening to Pete Murray's popular show on Radio Luxembourg. According to musician and band leader Mickey Duignan, leader of the eponymous band, from Drumlion outside Carrick-on-Shannon, 'the wireless came in then and brought in the jazz thing and I got in on it at the time'. Radio continued to exert a significant influence on local music into the late 1950s, according to Mícheál:

Well you see the showbands¹⁴ what they did was - the radio was in vogue that time - you know the radio was in vogue - now they - a tune would become popular on the radio - a hit tune - now they'd listen to it and they'd

13 Music played for the quickstep and foxtrot.

14 These were larger, more commercially-orientated musical units that were associated especially with larger venues that opened in the late 1950s. They will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9.

play it exactly - and they were good enough to play it exactly as it was played on the radio by the big bands and they'd come in and the people - we all listened to the radio that time so it crept in that way.

Closely related to the rise of radio was an increased availability of gramophones. Since the 1920s, imported gramophones¹⁵ had been available in Elphin (Marty). Local musician Pat Duignan said 'we got copies of jazz music...from a lady in America. She was May O'Brien' (*Down with Jazz*, 1987). Healey's (1999) local history featured an account of dancers playing modern dance records at a house party. Annie remembered her time as a type of prototypical disc jockey (DJ) at a house dance in the 1940s:

I used to go to my neighbour's house up the road and they used to have a gramophone and you can stop, there'd be all those songs - His Master's Voice [now HMV] was the name on every record and my job was to put on the records and the neighbouring chaps would come in and there was girls in that house and they'd take the floor as they call it...I'd be 14 now at the time but I'd be putting on the gramophone and these'd come in and they'd be dancing - waltzes - they'd be dancing waltzes and one-steps and quicksteps and all that.

This emerging media culture had a significant impact on local tastes and practices. With a background in traditional music, 'the new sounds fascinated [the Duignan brothers]' (*Down With Jazz*, 1987). Pat Duignan remembered that:

A brother of mine Mick...he was a violinist...and he asked me would I learn the clarinet and I started off on the clarinet...that would be between 1933/34 and we started then we got a few locals and we started up a group: trumpet, clarinet and...accordion...we called ourselves the Nevada¹⁶.

They mastered novel instruments such as clarinet, saxophone and drums (although those in local pipe or army bands would already have been acquainted with some of these). According to Tom, these new 'bands'¹⁷ would pick up on the music and play them for the foxtrot or waltz (see Fig. 24 and 25 for images of a modern band). Dancers could list out dozens of local bands that played during the period¹⁸. Tom remarked that the music that was played bore little similarity to African-

15 A number of people locally, my grandparents among them, had gramophones and were familiar with the recordings of Michael Coleman and John McCormack, as well as modern music.

16 Later renamed the Mickey Duignan Band.

17 These were sometimes known as 'orchestras', and photographs of the time show groups of formally dressed men seated behind music stands (Irish Showbands, 2012).

18 A musical pluralism (or commercial pragmatism) was evident in band repertoires. As early as the 1930s, they 'began to include a mixture of...céilí music numbers also in the repertoire to please all tastes' (*Down With Jazz*, 1987). Will formed a modern dance band in the 1940s. Accordion, fiddle, flute and drums featured and they would play mainly waltzes as well as a little céilí at the halls. Equally, he continued to play traditional music at house dances.

American¹⁹ music at the time by the likes of Scott Joplin or Bear Café Orchestra, music that he termed 'pure jazz'. This parallels musical preferences in the 1930s in Britain, where 'hot jazz' inspired by African-American forms and the 'Harlem Renaissance', was very much a minority pursuit, and a cooler, 'whiter' form of jazz music and dance with more formal orchestration was favoured by most dancers (Cresswell, 2006). The sedate music that featured on Victor Sylvester's BBC broadcasts would have been typical fare in Britain at the time, and these were received in Elphin, according to Tom. Even after the 2RN ban on jazz by the national broadcaster (see Chapter 7), those various stations referred to earlier - BBC, Radio Toulouse, Radio Luxembourg and the Armed Forces Network - continued to deliver jazz. Tom also recalled the big band sound in the 1940s - Humphrey Littleton, Arty Shaw and Glen Miller from the US. Other popular American artists were Judy Garland, Guy Mitchell and Rosemary Clooney (Jimmy, Tom). Listening to a CD player in his room at the Sacred Heart Nursing Home in Boyle, Tom tapped his foot, immensely enjoying waltzes and foxtrots he said were typical of the day - *Are You Lonesome Tonight?*, *The Loveliest Night of the Year* and *Around the World in 80 Days*. While talking, he distinguished these slow waltzes from 'old-time waltzes', or 'Strauss waltzes'.

Interesting hybrids appear to have emerged when modern music was played in smaller, local halls. O'Brien (1942) has noted a repertoire shaped by 'vague recollections of Irish airs...[in] three-four time' where, if modern tunes were attempted, 'they are mysteriously transformed into *Terence's Farewell to Kathleen*²⁰' (p.5). According to my parents, as we sat viewing RTE's (1982) *Ballroom of Romance*, the production accurately reflected the music they had heard at dances in such halls. The music of Percy French²¹ featured prominently. There is evidence on this basis of a 'popular aesthetic' involving carnivalesque hybridisations and transgressions of genre (Bourdieu, 1984; Bakhtin, 1984). With bands acting as intermediaries for the new music, modern dancing boomed. Given the enormous popularity of dance, it would seem reasonable to expect that a body of literature would exist dealing with the phenomenon. The next section will consider the reasons for its exclusion from the cultural-historical record.

19 The exact term used was 'darkie music'. Although official pronouncements around this time could be starkly racist in nature (*Down With Jazz*, 1987), it would be wrong to ascribe such tendencies to dancers who, after all, would simply have been unfamiliar with people of colour.

20 A well-known popular Irish tune composed by Percy French.

21 A notable composer of tunes that fused 'Irish' and popular American/British musical sensibilities through songs.

6.4 Hegemony and 'Cultural Amnesia'

This section will deal with the exclusion of modern dances from 'dominant memory' (PMG, 1982) using the same gramscian hegemonic framework that has been deployed to conceptualise dance practice.

Studies of modern dance (Smyth, 1993; Gibbons, 1996; O'Connor, 2003, 2005) are remarkably few in number, and usually focus on the spectacular campaigns against jazz rather than with an evaluation, or even a recognition of, its success. Historical amnesia is a hegemonic process, a selective remembering and forgetting, and in this regard there are 'dominant' and 'popular' memories (PMG, 1982). The former is associated with powerful groups, the latter with more subtle, oral histories of ordinary people. Goldring (1987) has spoken of a Catholic bourgeois imperative to offer a unifying nationalist vision, to universalise the ideology of urban intellectuals as a national ideology and to resolve contradictions thrown up by class conflict. Silences in the dominant cultural history of Ireland, especially in the field of dance, speak volumes. Such retrievals of the experiences of 'subaltern groups' have been linked to the emergence of 'postmodern cultural studies':

Many feminists, people of colour, gays and lesbians, multiculturalists, postcolonialists and others have deployed a 'postmodern cultural studies' to stress difference and marginality, valorising the culture and practices of individuals and groups excluded from mainstream culture, generating a 'cultural studies' of the margins and oppositional voices (Kellner, 2012, p.11).

Goldring (1987), McGuinness (1999), O'Connor (2003, 2005) and Ferriter (*The Limits of Liberty*, 2010) are among those who have sought to introduce a more plural view of Irish history. The PMG, working out of the CCCS in Birmingham, deployed the category of 'popular memory' in a practical way to encourage recording and retrieval of subaltern voices (Gopal, 2012), as well as to work out their leftist activist prerogatives (1982). In such historical 'corrections', there are the seeds of a local variant of Zihn's (2003) *A People's History of America*.

The story of small farmers as a socioeconomic group might be included in such histories. Although *numerically* dominant, this very numerosity made representation of this group by dominant interests an intensely political act. De Valera's speech of 1943 (see Appendix C) embodies, not the reality of small farmer life, but a very particular representation of such lives, in the service of power, nation-

building and an official nationalist consensus embodied in the rural ideology and the national-popular. Gibbons (1996, p.96) has commented on this process:

This conscription of the local into an avowed nationalist project is so pervasive as to suggest that the attribution of harmony and simplicity to small rural communities is partly a retrospective invention of idealist forms of nationalism, a construction imposed on the periphery as a foundation myth for the centre.

For this investigation, a disarticulation is required, a de-mystification of cultural practice of the period, and a retrieval of it from behind the mythology of successive generations of nationalist obfuscation, as well as reactions to this.

Such considerations are sometimes articulated with a more general 'othering' of dance practice. Ward (1993) accounts for its neglect by the sociological imagination, so that it was regarded as an irrational, body-centred activity. Anthropological studies articulated dance as the preserve of various 'primitive' societies, rather than as an activity that 'civilised' people engaged in. Ward suggests that this neglect arises from the non-verbal nature of this cultural form, since the 'Logos of the Socius' finds it easier to handle verbal discourses. Polhemus (1998) also criticises the logocentrism of the Western worldview and the implications this has had for social science. Foley (2006) refers to the 'violent hierarchy' of the mind/body binary that has dominated cultural thought on dance. O Connor (2003) has highlighted the neglect of dance and sexuality in Ireland by sociologists. Carter (1998, p.2) has underlined the possible class and moral aspects of these types of exclusion:

The low social status of dance, the equation of its sensual nature with its sexual potential and the difficulties of studying such a transient event have all contributed to the lack of a substantial or seriously considered scholarly heritage.

For example, Coogan (1976) has suggested that Ireland was something of a cultural desert until the 1960s. He typifies an approach that stresses the insular nature of life before this time, motivated by the economic realities of war-time, as well as by a rural ideology that sought refuge in culture associated with the national-popular (Coogan, 1976; Lee, 1979; Banville, 2004). Only in the 1960s, this narrative goes, did modernity break through the walls of official, monolithic culture to replace, in Coogan's terms, the 'old-style céilís' of the countryside. O Tuathaigh (1979, p.118) refers to the 'claustrophobia of the 1940s'. Banville (2004, p.25) comments on the 'stagnation of Irish life' from

the 'early 1930s to the 1960s'. These perspectives tend to draw on a more logocentric and literary analysis of society, and are certainly salient given the impact of the Censorship of Films Act of 1923 and the subsequent Censorship of Publications Act of 1929 on Irish culture and society, stigmatising and banning 'offensive' films and publications. From the perspective of a dissident, urban intellectual, the dominance of official culture may have seemed all-consuming.

However, dancing does not register in these histories, despite its enormous popularity during the period. Coogan's conflation of all social dance before the 1960s into 'old-style céilís' is indicative of this problem. Such terms and categories do not accurately reflect the diversity and pluralism of practices on Irish dance floors at the time. Even when the importance of modern dance to Irish culture is acknowledged, representations are less than rosy. Commenting on William Trevor's (1971) short story *The Ballroom of Romance*, and the RTE television production that followed it in the 1980s, O'Connor (2003, p.62) recommends vigilance against 'an aesthetic ideology of social realism which pervades the work and which functions to represent rural Ireland in a bleak and unfavourable light (as a reaction to the romantic nationalist cultural aesthetic which preceded it)'.

It seems that small farmers' less literate and more embodied stories have in many ways been sidelined from the historical record. Duane (2006, p.111), drawing on Bourdieu (1984), discusses 'the distance-immersion continuum', a class-based structuring of the field of art. Paintings, books, and opera exhibit what Laura Mulvey (1973) has labelled 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. Metropolitan middle class aesthetic experiences involve standing back, detachment, intellectual reflection, the visual. Those of less powerful groups are immersive, experiential, collective, and involving all the senses. In terms that are reminiscent of Bourdieu's (1984) 'popular aesthetic' (which will feature in Section 8.4), Ang (1998) speaks of how popular culture can be understood as being 'based on an affirmation of the continuity of cultural forms and daily life...on a deep-rooted desire for participation, and on emotional involvement' (p.181). 'Art', with all the values and meanings this term connotes, has often been used exclusively for the first of these sets of signifying practices, those more 'ocular', distanced understandings (Malbon, 1999). In the realm of music, Malbon speaks of an 'ideology of listening' that 'typifies the high cultural ideal of the last 200 years or so and is far removed from the everyday listening practices that most of us utilise in our enjoyment of music' (1999, p.84). This is especially true for recreational dance, a highly active, stylised and

embodied form of listening to, as well as expressing music. Another way of thinking these issues through is by using Turner's (1969) notion of 'structure'. In relation to culture, this involves formal, administrative and rule-governed practices; those that are more informal, and outside the remit of official bodies, are devalued on this basis by more official groups.

As the findings presented in this chapter have indicated, impressions of a 'cultural desert' (Coogan, 1976) present a very partial picture of life at the time. Ward (1997, p.19) suggests that an epistemological exclusion needs to be addressed in order to acknowledge the importance ascribed to dance by participants. Polhemus (1998, p.171) calls for a re-engagement with what he terms the 'physical culture' of dance. Dance for him represents 'the metaphysics of culture' (*ibid*, p. 174), a level of cultural meaning and experience that exceeds the limitations of verbal culture. A history of dance can reveal the limits of less embodied, more logocentric accounts. The findings outlined in this chapter show that there was a vibrant dance culture, and open up other representational possibilities. For Tyler and Anderson (2012, p.12), 'the dancing body is a significant site worthy of academic attention...it is through the body's corporeal interpretations that the musical-historical moment is often revealed – especially when it is subversive in nature'.

Even if embodied cultural knowledge does feature, other types of exclusion may be deployed that speak of a hegemonic distortion of history. Brennan's account of 'Irish dance' is largely silent on modern dance. References to the 'dance craze' (1999, p.127) sweeping the country in the late 1920s and 1930s, similar to the dances of 'London or Paris' (*ibid*, p.125), are dealt with in very tangential terms. Likewise, Breathnach (1983, p.41) refers only to 'freshly imported varieties' of dance and, at another point, discussing the failure of the PDHA (1935) suggests 'since modern or foreign dancing, or whatever one wishes to call it, had almost wholly taken over the commercial dance halls by [the 1950s], we need not pursue that line further' (p.46). Modern or jazz dances are the great unmentionables and constitute an epistemological blind spot of these studies. A corollary of the neglect of modern dance has been an over-emphasis on various types of 'Irish' dance (Breathnach, 1983; Tubridy, 1994; Brennan, 1999; Foley, 2001; Wulff, 2008). This is all the more remiss given that just one couple amongst the forty-five people interviewed indicated a preference for céilí dancing. The remainder preferred modern dances, and even this latter couple, despite their

preferences, attended modern dances²².

There is comparatively little material on modern dances, on how they arrived, why they became so popular and, most importantly, how they appear to have maintained this popularity despite (or even because of) clerical and state pressures. The stir created by these dance practices is of relevance to studies of recreational dance generally, and to 'Irish dance', however defined. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, 'Irishness' is a highly contingent category, and equally, the notion that a supposedly 'Irish' form of dance is of greater value than that which is 'foreign' or 'non-Irish' is problematic. If 'Irish dance' were redefined as 'dances practised by people in Ireland', then a very different story emerges. Without this, there is a perpetuation of the hegemonic histories of orthodox nationalism and a reflection. In this regard, addressing *all* the dances that were popular at this time offers a means not only to circumvent, but to challenge, the 'romantic nationalist cultural aesthetic' referred to by O'Connor (2003)²³. As such, it will be argued in this investigation that the dances people attended at this time should be seen in relational terms, that the meaning of modern and céilí dances are related, and that a holistic picture of the 'dancescape' is more fruitful than a more purist concern with particular types of supposedly more 'authentic' forms.

Related to these considerations of subalternity is the question of access to the historical record. Even where modern dance has been accorded space, studies focus primarily on the clerical campaign to ban jazz (Smyth, 1993; Gibbons 1996). O'Connor's (2003, 2005) research alone accounts in a more positive way for the popularity of quickstep and foxtrot, although she points out the limits of her own study in this respect, suggesting 'there is almost no newspaper evidence on how these embodied identities were negotiated in real dance halls by either women or men' (2005, p.14). Such research, though valuable, tends to frame dance culture as distorted by those moralistic, clerical condemnations of the time that began to register in the Lenten pastorals of 1924 (Smyth, 1993). Other documentary evidence used includes newspapers, court records and council meetings.

22 Another way that this distortion is manifest is in a noted tendency to misquote De Valera's 'Ideal Ireland' speech. The (mis)-quote - 'the laughter of comely maidens dancing at the crossroads' – did not feature in this speech (see Appendix C). The mistake is made on sources as diverse as The Guardian, a review on The John Hopkins University Press website and indymedia.ie. This linkage is suggestive of certain types of conflation and simplifications in representations of the period, so that all dance in Ireland at that time was supposedly 'Irish' or 'traditional'.

23 In fact, a broadening of the term 'traditional arts' to include forms that could more generally be described as 'vernacular' (Buckland, 1983) would allow cultural historians to document modern dance as well as the salsa and clubbing practices of Irish society today as legitimate and meaningful forms of expression.

While useful, it is within these more literate forms that discourses associated with the rural ideology found a natural home, so to speak. In other words, as a highly verbalised, intellectualised form of 'knowledge-power', the rural ideology tends to be over-represented in accounts of the period. According to Smyth (1993), 'one obsession remained constant [over the decade-long campaign]...the dangers attributed to...dance halls and unsupervised dancing of any sort'. Another obsession that remained constant, and that is central to this investigation, was the desire to dance.

As McRobbie (1981) remarks, 'conceptually it is important to separate popular public images and stereotypes from lived experience, the range of ideological representations we come across from daily empirical observation and sociological data' (p.121). In many ways, these latter approaches perpetuate social inequalities by ascribing too much power to those who happened to have access to contemporary media, to those who produced what regarded as more 'prestigious' sources (Portelli, 2006). Various types of exoticism may also come into play in this regard. Apart from the issue of access, newspapers might have been especially sensitive to moralistic announcements emanating from powerful groups, and even aware of their sensationalist value, in a manner reminiscent of the appeal of the 'missioners' (see Chapter 7). Cultural historians in turn may tend to tune into these more spectacular discursive elements, rather than to more mundane aspects of everyday life. According to O'Connor (2003, p.52):

There is much more documentary data available on the institutional control of dance for the 1920s and 1930s because of the frequent pronouncements on dance from Church and State sources and/or contemporary media reports of them. This means that for this period there is a greater amount of data available on the normative aspects of dance and an absence of data on the cultural experience of dancing.

When complemented by interview data, these highly visible interventions can be viewed from another perspective. According to Daly (2006), 'the volume of denunciation and its stridency might suggest that this message was not being heard' (p.132). The clearest fact to emerge from the plethora of pamphlets, newspaper diatribes and court records holding forth on the evils of modern dancing is that these practices had become well established among young people. Daly (ibid) adds that the clerical campaign was 'singularly unsuccessful' so that 'as a moral safeguard the Act proved a disappointment', with Lenten pastorals against all-night dance halls required again in the 1950s. The specific conceptions of culture that underpinned these hegemonic histories will be outlined in Chapter 7.

Chapter Summary

Modern dances came to shape the embodied culture of local dancers in a dramatic fashion between 1940 and 1960. The findings presented in this chapter provide stark evidence for this, and for the relatively limited appeal of céilí dances, with about 90% of dance advertisements being targeted at those attending modern dances. There was a generational basis for this culture, so that it was primarily local youths who were 'tuning in' to the new music and moves. Novel media forms, especially radio, were used by dancers for the construction of this new dance culture. Despite this, modern dance has received little attention in studies of dance in Ireland, perhaps because it has not been perceived to be uniquely 'Irish' in the way that other forms have. Studies of dance, culture and society in Ireland tended to focus on forms that were marginal (Breathnach, 1983; Tubridy, 1994; Brennan, 1999), or as worthy of discussion primarily on the basis of destructive intervention by powerful groups (Smyth, 1993; Gibbons, 1996). Data on the popularity of modern dance indicates emphatically that this was the dance of the vast majority of the people, a truly popular dance that allows a 'fracturing' of the collective will in the cultural sphere to be posited. Equally, it is evident that there were two parallel dance cultures²⁴, the basis for a relational analysis and discussion. Such considerations will inform the remaining chapters. In the next chapter, there will be an assessment of the rise of a national-popular culture, with a particular focus on how it was experienced in Elphin.

²⁴ This is in no way to diminish the importance of house dances. Quantitative assessment of the popularity of this dance event type is not possible by assessing advertisements, although oral histories have been of use. Though the form continued to be popular locally until the 1940s, it thereafter declined in importance. Related to this, 'towards the middle of the twentieth century, there was a decline in set-dancing. The Clare musician and dancer Junior Crehan has said that the Public Dance Halls Act of 1935, which outlawed unlicensed hall as well as house dances, was a contributory factor. Other sources suggest this legislation had more limited effects and other factors – emigration, modernisation, novel musical and dance forms – were more relevant' (Shanagher, 2013).



Fig. 24 The Maurice Mulcahy Band, 1950s in front of their van (Source: irish-showbands.com)



Fig.25 The Maurice Mulcahy Band on stage, 1950s (Source: [Source: irish-showbands.com](http://irish-showbands.com))

Chapter 7

Dance and the National-Popular

Sometimes even in the habitual course of life, the reality of this world disappears all at once, and we feel ourselves in the middle of its interests as we should at a ball, where we did not hear the music; the dancing that we saw there would appear insane.

Madame de Staël, (*The Universal Magazine*, 1814)

7.0 Introduction

During periods of major political change, powerful groups have often focused their sights on the dancing body. In an Irish context, and against a background of a successful challenge to British power, deliberate and systematic steps were taken to categorise, value and disseminate moves and meanings in a way that served to validate and consolidate the national project. Within the broader cultural field, céilí dance was positioned as the epitome of Irish identity. These were part of a broader repertoire of dances available to Irish people at the time, practices that were accented in markedly different ways in dominant discourses. This chapter will view recreational dance through the prism of the cultural imperatives of the new Irish state. Powerful cultural arbiters - both before and after independence - engaged in the construction of a gramscian national-popular to legitimise its interests. An understanding of these processes can be enhanced by using Cohen's 2002[1971] moral panic theory.

The first section will assess the basis of the type of cultural nationalism that emerged in Ireland in the period preceding independence. Next, there will be a more specific consideration of the shaping of the field of recreational dance by cultural nationalism that involved the development of céilí dance in what might be defined as creative moments of nationalist hegemony. The following section will present the more destructive facet of such processes, manifested through attempts to proscribe and control modern dance. Such efforts are consonant with Cohen's (2002[1971]) moral panic. In

the subsequent section, there will be an assessment of articulations around dance by nationalist civil society in Elphin. In the final section, findings relating to a 'profoundly gendered' (O'Connor, 2005) nationalist hegemony will be presented.

7.1 The Rise of the National-Popular

What follows in this section is an exploration of the cultural manifestation of the collective will that was constructed in the cultural sphere. It will focus primarily on the period leading up to 1922.

Given that hegemony theory, as stated earlier, operates on 'on the classical terrain of the parliamentary regime' (Barker, 2008, p.80), the role of the nationalist state would seem to require consideration. After many years of struggle, the formation of the Free State in 1922 constituted a revolutionary challenge to a British colonial hegemony in Ireland¹. With its cultural roots in the Revival of the 1880s and 1890s, an 'Irish-Ireland' movement that valorised a particular type of Irish identity across a range of cultural activities - including dance, language, sport, literature and drama - occupied a central role in the revolutionary imperatives of the nascent Irish state. These developments can be seen as involving the creation and consolidation of a nationalist hegemony. In this way, culture associated with the national-popular was articulated with broader political processes at this time.

A number of factors contributed to the new sensibility. Most relevant was the perceived challenge of 'anglicisation' and the dilution or loss of a native culture in the face of modernity. Hyde's (2013[1892]) pamphlet, *On the Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland*, captured this mood and set the tone for the establishment of the GL in 1893, and the wider 'Irish Ireland' movement². Closely linked with the geographical and political definition of a separate Ireland was a project to define a unique and distinct culture, a 'cultural island'. According to Coogan, there was 'a maladroitness attempt

1 This is no way to gloss over non-revolutionary currents within nationalism at the time, such as the constitutional nationalism associated with John Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary Party, a group that campaigned for Home Rule at Westminster, and attracted significant support before the 1916 rebellion. In the context of the current discussion though, it is the more radical currents that sought full independence from Britain that are germane. For such groups, promotion of a distinctively 'Irish' culture was most urgent and cultural independence was viewed as underwriting political independence (Lee, 1979).

2 A movement that sought to legitimise and activate a specifically Irish national identity on the island of Ireland.

to create a cultural and intellectual greenbelt around Ireland' (1976, p.166).

Of central importance in this process were the organic intellectuals, those groups responsible for elaborating and representing the interests of the emergent Catholic middle classes, and for cementing a collective will through articulations of national-popular culture. Several strata can be said to have constituted this group. There were urban intellectuals associated with the metropolitan centre such as politicians, white-collar workers, small traders and professionals of the city, a group that comprised the bulk of the early leadership of the GL (including emigrants living in London) (Waters 1977). Alongside these were 'the men of letters' (Goldring 1987, p.9), the poets, dramatists and artists drawn from the ascendancy and Catholic middle class who delved deep into the historical past in search of symbols and mythology. Yeats, Synge and Pearse might be included in this category. Such groups were instrumental in *devising* the rural ideology. 'Rural intellectuals' - priests, teachers and other cultural activists – played a key role in *disseminating* these discourses (Goldring, 1987).

These groups ensured that the nationalist project was retrospectively (and poetically) justified. This was more than a journey across time, it had its spatial trajectory too, so that the legacy of the Gaelic past was seen to reside specifically in the 'West'. Consequently, collectors in search of cultural antiquities travelled to remote areas to collect the remains, as they saw it, of the Gaelic past, still alive despite the ongoing threat of modernity. This was in many ways an exotic culture, a cultural language made all the more attractive by its 'otherness' (MacLochlainn 1983). Gibbons (1996) elsewhere has discussed the enduring appeal of this construct for the Irish bourgeois imaginary. Buckland (2006a, p.7) remarks that 'the concept of the folk has been revealed as an ideological construct whereby rural communities and their older practices were perceived by the intelligentsia as survivals from an ancient, pure culture...it was deemed essential to collect the signs of primitive and folk cultures for posterity, before they became contaminated by modern civilisation and disappeared in the wake of urbanisation'. The PMG (1982) propose that 'historical ideologies work most powerfully in relation to general conceptions of social improvement or decline' (p.31). A century and more of modernity and industrialisation in Britain had led to theories of mass society, informed by the Romantic movement, and deeply sceptical of changes wrought by the Industrial

Revolution. The position combined 'fear of the city with reverence for the countryside' (Ó Giollain 1999, p.167). The rural and the premodern were combined in this symbolic system. In Ireland, although there was a relative lack of industrialisation, the mass society critique acquired a great potency amongst nationalists when aligned with the perception of a lost Gaelic heritage in the past (and in the countryside). These strands came together in the rural ideology.

The work carried out by organic intellectuals in the years before and after the founding of the Irish state involved a 'reinvention of tradition' (first formulated by Hobsbawm (1983), and later applied by Brennan (1994) to the field of dance in Ireland), whereby largely middle class interests articulated particular cultural practices, including recreational dance, in the interests of the 'nation'. Forms previously associated with subordinate groups were loaded with meaning, and used for the activation of certain, pointedly 'Irish' identities. Popular culture was trawled to articulate and legitimise the current interests of powerful groups. This was a highly selective process: 'these intellectual movements somehow ignore the real, vivid and concrete way of life' (MacLochlainn 1983, p.31) and 'it would be wholly wrong to equate the Gaelic and the 'popular' (Connolly 1998, p.116). That is to say, lived small farmer culture often clashed notably with representations of it by powerful groups. Goldring (1987) speaks in this regard of 'fact' and 'sign' respectively, while Coogan (1976, p.204) has referred to 'folk culture of the forced pretentious sort'.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, it is important to stress the modernity of this aesthetic on one level. The nebulous concept of 'tradition', of a backward glance towards the premodern, was employed in a deliberate fashion to develop a quite new culture, one connected with late nineteenth century romantic nationalism (Ó Giolláin, 1999), one associated with the urban centre, and one used to galvanise participants towards political ends. Williams' comment, already cited in Section 6.4, is worth restating: 'the real and powerful feelings of a native formation have been pressed into an essentially political and administrative organisation, which has grown from quite different roots' (Williams 1983, p.181). On this basis, it might be said that Irish identity was of particular interest to those most distant from its supposed fountainhead, so that enthusiasts were often urban-based, and upwardly mobile, and a type of 'exotic gaze' came into play. The 'otherness' of elements of popular

culture for this group was such that it had at times to be tamed to suit bourgeois sensibilities³.

After 1890, emergent elite groups in Ireland became increasingly aware of their cultural and political power and developments were 'indicative of a new culturally militant mood among the Catholic middle classes' (Goldring, 1987, p.65). Suggestive links also emerged between cultural politics and nationalist politics. Before the Rebellion of 1916 that led to the War of Independence, GL branches held events to raise funds for various nationalist organisations such as Cumann na mBan⁴ and the Volunteers⁵. Eamonn De Valera recalled, 'it was in the GL that I realised what our nation was and what had to be done to get the freedom that was necessary to realise ourselves again' (Ferriter, 2008). Equally, other groups such as the urban proletariat, as represented by socialist activist James Connolly's Irish Citizen Army, and small farmers, were drawn into the gramscian historical bloc that was thus constituted with the specific purpose of establishing an independent Irish state, although it should be said that such groups had their own long histories of opposition to the British state and/or other dominant groups. These processes correspond with Gramsci's contention, cited in Section 3.2 that 'a social group can, and indeed must, already exercise leadership before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to lead as well' (SPN, p.5).

The construction of a canon of official nationalist culture between the end of the nineteenth century up to and including the early years of the research period amounts to a type of exclusion, a setting apart of Irish culture as uniquely moral and pure. Bourke (2006) suggests that the roots of this logic lie in campaigns by anti-Home Rule⁶ factions in Britain during the 1880s to discredit 'Irishness' ahead of the defeat of such legislation at Westminster. The intention was to promote the idea that Irish people could not be entrusted to run their own affairs, and required a paternal guiding hand

3 On Irish state radio after independence, for example, 'sean-nós songs [a form of unaccompanied traditional singing] were broadcast using arrangements in conventional European harmonic style for trained singers with piano accompaniment' (Brennan 1999, p.38).

4 This translates as 'The Society of Women'. The organisation was founded as the women's branch of The Irish Volunteers (see below).

5 The Irish Volunteers were an armed nationalist grouping constituted as a response to the formation of the Ulster Volunteers, set up to defend the Home Rule project. Elements of the group were later involved in the 1916 Rebellion.

6 The Home Rule campaign sought limited legislative autonomy for Ireland from British rule.

rather than any form of self-rule (see also Curtis, 1994). To counter such discourses, nationalists went to the other extreme, so that impossibly lofty representations were used in an inverse manner to justify self-government both before and after independence.

Ironically, in seeking to counter colonial prejudice, cultural nationalists sometimes drew on elements associated with imperialist discourses. The cultural strategies of Irish urban and rural intellectuals can in many ways be seen as one element in the articulation of a 'taste culture', a dynamic that mirrors the strategy of the British bourgeoisie to establish an elite national culture to distinguish them from an unruly mass culture (Stallybrass and White, 1986). Maclochlainn (1983) adds that nationalist discourses in Ireland demonstrated an interpellation by their imperialist counterparts in their focus on a journey into the past to emphasise an aristocratic Gaelic legacy, the supposed heritage of the Irish bourgeoisie⁷. Said (1993) has commented on how nativism amongst aspirants to national liberation serves to perpetuate colonialist discourses. Elite groups in Irish society were instrumental in developing a novel cultural formation that clearly expressed a striving towards independence⁸. In many ways 'modern', this could be regarded as a cultural manifestation of the collective will, albeit one that differed from popular cultural practices at the time. The next section will present the specific ways that recreational dance was inflected by these discourses.

7.2 The National-Popular and Recreational Dance: Creative Moments

This section will investigate how cultural nationalism influenced recreational dance practices, both before and after independence in 1922, by concentrating first on what have been termed 'creative moments'.

On the more creative engagement by cultural nationalists with recreational dance, an ideal dancing body can be identified. Although established for the purposes of promoting the Irish language as part of the broader intention to 'de-anglicise' Ireland, promoting Irish dance became a key aim of the

7 Lee (2007) has commented of De Valera's 1943 speech that 'his vocabulary...was that of one of the last great Victorians' (p.364) (see Appendix C).

8 It should also be acknowledged, as Lee (1989) remarked, that various elites held power in the turbulent years following independence. Nevertheless, these were predominantly drawn from the same stratum of the Catholic middle classes.

GL after its foundation. On this basis, a distinct form known as 'céilí' emerged⁹. This process is indicative of a Foucauldian 'productivity' of power in the context of the demands of anti-imperialism and nation-building in the nascent state, amidst considerable cultural, economic and political pressures in the first half of the twentieth century (O'Connor, 2005). Said himself (1993), while critical of distortions of history, recognised that 'nativist' mythology had its place during the formative periods of new states. A novel form had been added to the repertoire of dance in Ireland. Articulated as an embodiment of the national-popular, céilí moves could thus be seen as the dances of 'official Ireland'.

By the 1930s, key institutions of nationalist civil society - education, the Catholic Church, the institutions of cultural nationalism - were involved in attempting to 'mould' Irish bodies at this time, and several sources attest to the links between civil society and Irish dance (Smyth, 1993; Brennan, 1999; O'Connor, 2003, 2005). According to O'Connor (2003, p.3):

Dancing activity became the site *par excellence* for public moral policing, and can be viewed as part of the process of nation building with the objective of moulding individual bodies so that they would reflect an ideal body politic aspired to by the dominant cultural groups in the new nation-state in the 1920s and 1930s¹⁰.

These discursive battle-lines can be understood in the context of a wider process of nation-building within the young Free State by the generation who had taken part in the War of Independence and had been through the traumatic conflict of the Civil War.

It is against this cultural background that céilí dance moves were selected and tamed to suit bourgeois tastes both before and after independence. As with broader cultural processes, Brennan (1999) describes how elements of popular dances gathered in remote areas were adopted and adapted by organic intellectuals and re-presented as more authentically 'Irish'¹¹. This however is not to suggest that events unfolded unproblematically. Even within the realm of Irish dance the process of establishing a canon was not a smooth one. According to Brennan, a 'cultural civil war' (1999, p.21) took place over those dances that would be included and excluded. By the 1940s, matters had

9 The term itself was not coined until the early 1930s (Cullinane, 1998).

10 At the time of writing in 2013, a type of moral policing of women's bodies, and challenges on this basis, have featured in debates around abortion in the wake of the recent death of Savita Halappanavar (see for example the *Irish Times* during February and March 2013 for coverage of this issue).

11 In relation to a bourgeois appropriation of step dance, Foley (2001) has studied how its competitive element was amplified.

largely been settled, and the end of the eighteenth century was established as temporal boundary for qualification as a native dance. In her study of Indonesian dance, Hughes-Freeland (2006, p.56) refers to 'making history' in this regard: 'writing history was also about writing the future. Even before and during the colonial period, Javanese historians became adept at re-presenting the past to represent the present, drawing on particular [dance] patterns and excluding others that did not support the orthodoxy'¹². As such, the names of the new dances reflect their pronounced 'Irishness' - *The Walls of Limerick*, *The Siege of Ennis* and *The Waves of Tory* (Tubridy 1994; Cullinane, 1998). Jigs also fell within the category, since age had conferred the aura of 'tradition' on these. The waltz, barndance and highland schottische and even reels were initially rejected (Brennan, 1994). Arbitrary though these temporal boundaries were, they were usefully employed in discourses of the period to make the case for a unique national culture, a key legitimising agent for the new Irish state.

As in the broader field of culture, there was a clash of 'sign' and 'fact', so that the search for Gaelic dances filtered out a range of popular dances, in many cases with a long tradition of acceptance by the community, such as set-dances. Arriving in the late nineteenth century, these dances were regarded as foreign, or as British¹³. Class was centrally implicated and Brennan (1999, p.37) quotes a letter in *An Claidheamh Solais*¹⁴ on 24th February 1906:

English dances [ie. sets] may be carried on by decent, sober, self-respecting people without perhaps any harm but among rough, ignorant folk, and with country youths bubbling over with animal spirits, they will never be conducted decently.

In the 1930s, the GL continued its appropriation and transformation of popular dances. 'An Comisiún Le Rincí Gaelacha'¹⁵ was established in 1929 to exercise control over the world of Irish dance' (Brennan 1999, p.38). *Cumann na Muinteoirí Rince*¹⁶ was the body that represented dancing teachers. *Ár Rincí Foirne*¹⁷ was the official handbook for Irish dance, published in 1939 (Brennan, 1999). Work proceeded in a deliberate fashion between the 1890s and 1930s, and involved

12 Orwell's reflection on modern power from his novel *1984* comes to mind on this basis: 'who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past'.

13 The rise of the GL came very soon after the arrival of sets in more remote parts of the country, where the elusive quality of authentic 'Irishness' was to be found and to be most fanatically defended (Brennan 1999; Tubridy 1994).

14 Translates as 'The Sword of Light', the newspaper of the GL.

15 Translates as 'The Irish Dancing Commission'.

16 Translates as 'The Association of Dance Teachers'.

17 Translates as 'Our group dances'.

categorisations, exclusions, standardisation and centralisation, the dissemination of handbooks, airing of propositions, disagreements and resolutions on dance in An Claidheamh Solais, holding of classes in céilí dance at GL branches, and of dancing competitions at Feiseanna¹⁸. These processes provide stark evidence for the cultural dynamics of 'closure' theorised by post-Marxist theorists of hegemony. Meaning and moves were carefully circumscribed in the interests of consolidating centralised political and cultural power (Hughes-Freeland, 2006). Again, the modernity of céilí, discussed in the previous section, was to the fore, and was enhanced by the rise and consolidation of the (modern) nation-state and the cultural institutions that sought to legitimise it (Goldring, 1987). While Feiseanna featured competitive dance, there were also outlets for recreational dance at the annual Oireachtas na Gaeilge¹⁹ (*An Coimisiún Le Rincí Gaelacha*, 2011) as well as at less formal events organised in local halls.

These processes were by no means unique to Ireland. In morris dancing in England, the perceived pedigree of dances was a central concern for participants (Buckland, 2006a). Hughes-Freeland (2006) investigated the construction of a classical tradition of dance in post-colonial Indonesia. Back (1997) discusses a sanitised version of the foxtrot that allowed Nazis in Germany to express their particular brand of politics in the 1930s. Snape (2009) studied English folk dance and its largely middle class practitioners in the first half of the twentieth century. The English Folk Dance Society engaged in an active process of shaping meanings around this dance form over the period: 'it was constructed in line with an imagined though not fully articulated Englishness and a celebration of the pastoral in response to industrialisation, the dances of the urban music hall and a nascent nationalism in other countries within Great Britain' (p.308). As in Ireland, class was often centrally implicated in these processes. 'Morris dancing increasingly since the 1920s came to be perceived as a somewhat anachronistic affair, revived by aficionados who came from a far more privileged background than that of its former practitioners, who were principally drawn from the labouring classes' (Buckland, 2006b, p.202). Boundaries of acceptability were sometimes shifted to embrace certain types of modern dance. Cresswell (2006) studied recreational dance in the UK in the 1930s when the battle-lines were now drawn *within* modern dance, between supposedly more and less 'civilised' forms. The Imperial Society devised versions of ballroom dances that were

18 Festive events where 'Irish' culture such as dance featured, often in a competitive format.

19 Translates as 'Gathering'. An annual national meeting of Irish culture enthusiasts held since the 1890s.

'graceful', 'dignified', 'uniform' and 'lilting' (p.72), dances that embodied a resistance to a new manifestation of modernity in the form of popular commercial dance (Cresswell, 2006). Construction of meanings around modern and céilí dances are, it is argued in this investigation, best seen in relational terms. This leads to a consideration of more destructive moments associated with nationalist hegemony.

7.3 Cultural Nationalism and Recreational Dance: Destructive Moments

Running parallel to these creative processes involving the emergence of novel, supposedly more 'authentic' dance forms, there was a more destructive process whereby modern dances were targeted.

Coogan refers in this regard to 'the revolutionary zeal' (1976, p.169) of the new administration. There was a type of 'evangelistic' response to crisis, of the type theorised that Gray theorised in Britain a century earlier:

One response to the social crisis of the 1830s and 40s [in Britain] was an 'evangelistic' (in both a specifically religious and general metaphorical use of the term) drive to assert control over the urban masses. This is especially clear in the concern with education, whose ideological assumptions were stated with an explicitness that seems remarkable to anyone accustomed to the more veiled terms of such discussions nowadays. (Gray, 1981, p.244)

In a predominantly agricultural society such as Ireland, it was the 'rural masses' that were the object of concern. The more destructive aspect of cultural nationalism had been in evidence from an early stage so that a carnivalesque 'other' assumed different forms over the years. Céilí was presented by dominant groups as superior to other dance forms, characterised as degenerate, cosmopolitan, miscegenated, impure and immoral (O'Connor, 2005). At the turn of the twentieth century, set dances were 'deviant' (Brennan, 1999). By the 1930s and 1940s, when sets had declined, modern dances such as quicksteps and foxtrots had taken on this role in dominant discourses (O'Connor, 2003, 2005). In the perpetuation of a post-independence national-popular, conservative forces mobilised against new dances, seeking to preserve the authentically 'Irish' from 'foreign' incursions. Smyth (1993) quotes the Lenten Pastorals from 1924 that condemned 'indecent dancing, cinema exhibitions, drink, strikes and lockouts' (p.51). By the 1930s, the importance of 'othering' dance

practices in the service of the national-popular was clearly evident and a 'discourse of ruin' can be identified in newspapers. This has been defined as a discursive formation that conflated modern dances and moral degeneracy, particularly with regards to female dancers (O'Connor, 2003, 2005). According to one commentator at this time:

Drastic steps are urgently needed to ensure that public amusements generally shall be national in trend and influence, and that degrading, suggestive or de-nationalising public amusements shall be forbidden...questionable forms of dancing are not infrequently included at public entertainments, and foreign modes in dancing, that easily lend themselves to insinuating variation, are taught and practised. (Hanly, 1931, p.165)

It is notable in some of these pronouncements that radical political activities are mentioned in the same breath as dance in a broader deviant formation. Although it preceded the period by a few years, the dance hall at Gowel, established by Jim Gralton, part of the 'Gowel Soviet' that functioned as a 'revolutionary community centre' (Feeley 1986, p.10) might be noted in this regard. Located about six miles from the research setting, Gowel was 'the cockpit and recognised centre of the agrarian agitation in South Leitrim' (*ibid*, p.25) and Feeley notes that modern dances were held in the centre. This is the first instance noted in this investigation where modern music (in this case, recorded music) was played at hall dances for a young audience. The initiative did not escape the attentions of prominent local interests including clergy, State and conservative elements within the IRA. Various attempts to close the hall finally succeeded in the early 1930s with its destruction, and the deportation of Gralton to the US.

Notable organic intellectuals took a prominent role in subsequent developments. The 'anti-jazz campaign' in 1933/34 was led by Fr. Peter Confrey, who had been transferred to Cloone, just a few miles from the recent headquarters of the Gowel Soviet, a timely development given that the deportation order on Jim Gralton was being served in late 1933. The new parish priest was the perfect embodiment of the spirit of the national-popular, being involved with the GL, in favour of all things 'Irish', establishing the Cloone Céilí Band, and encouraging Irish home industries (*Down With Jazz*, 1987). 3000 people attended a rally organised by the GL and clergy in Mohill, Co. Leitrim on New Year's Day 1934, marking a new stage in the campaign²⁰. Letters were distributed

20 It should, though, be noted that some participants were there for the music, excitement and even the historical importance rather than a necessary aversion to jazz. Pat Duignan for example attended even though he played in a

nationwide calling on the government to ban jazz from the sponsored programs on 2RN, and to close dance halls at 11pm (*Down With Jazz*, 1987). According to Gibbons (1996), 'the rally was of nationwide interest, attracting messages of support from Cardinal McRory, President De Valera and the local Bishop McNamee' (p.102). Civil and political society closed ranks to defend itself from foreign dance, characterised variously as 'bolshevik', 'African' and 'pagan' (*Down with Jazz*, 1987), the subversive, exotic others to capitalist, white, Christian Ireland.

A concern with the supposed integrity of the national space became the basis of a moral 'geography of mobility' (Cresswell, 2006). In Britain during the 1930s, places viewed in negative terms on this basis in discourses around dance 'included Africa, Latin America, the United States, the American South and New York at one level and so-called 'third- or fourth-rate places' such as jazz clubs at another' (p.71). Ó Giolláin suggests 'the notion of Americanisation revived elite fears of the destabilising influence of low-brow culture, particularly on the heels of the cataclysmic social changes that followed the First World War' (1999, p.168). In 1935, the broadcasting authorities banned jazz from 2RN, a decade-long ban that was widespread and indiscriminating in its force. There was a substitution of nationalist-inflected or classical music (*Down With Jazz*, 1987). The passing of the PDHA in February 1935 is also understandable in this context. As Forgacs (2000) suggests, a blurring of the lines of agents of 'cultural' and 'political' power seems to be apparent, with the Gardaí acting to ensure that modern dances (as well as house dances) were operating within the permitted parameters.

By way of understanding the urgency of such hegemonic interventions, Brennan (1999), Foley (2001) and O'Connor (2005) have studied how Irish nationalist organisations sought to tame and 'civilise' dance practice. As O'Connor (*ibid*) remarks:

A perusal of Church and other documents and statements relating to dance from the early years of the twentieth century through the 1930s will reveal a number of dominant and often combined discourses of 'nation', 'sexuality', 'social class/ respectability', and 'gender'. Since this period was marked by cultural nationalism preceding and following on the birth of the State, it is not surprising that the discourse of 'nation' is the primary one in which the others are embedded.

jazz band (*Down With Jazz*, 1987) and continued to play jazz for years afterwards.

According to Reed (1998, p.512), 'regulating purity and authenticity in folkloric dance in a patriarchal and protective mode is a common feature of state and elite interventions, often indexing notions of a defensive culture under siege' (there will be a further discussion of the impact of such patriarchal intervention in Sections 7.5 and 8.1) Reed (*ibid*) refers to studies of similar processes in Catalonia, Cuba and India. These practices would seem to be an integral part of constructing a national identity, a national body politic, especially in post-colonial societies (Freeland-Hughes, 2006) interested in projecting a particular image to the international community.

O'Connor (2003) has suggested there were broad concerns 'with the moral state of the nation and with the conduct of its youth in particular' (2003. p.54). These developments reflected a degree of inter-generational hostility manifested in a pronounced and virulent form in the 1930s, one that spilled over into the 1940s and 1950s. Ó Giolláin (1999) specifically links these fears to the rise of new media. He remarks that 'media panics are both an attempt to re-establish a generational *status quo* that the youthful pioneers seem to undermine and part of a cultural struggle by elites whose status as cultural arbiters is being undermined by modernisation' (p.169). There are clear parallels with moral panic²¹ as theorised by Cohen (2002[1971]).

Such media campaigns have often unfolded around recreational dance. Back (1997) deals with the hysteria that arose around 1930s jitterbug dances in the US. An anti-disco movement associated with white, straight males mobilised fears around gender, race and sexuality in the US during the late 1970s (*The Joy of Disco*, 2013). Malbon (1999), Thomas (2003) and Thornton (2004) have investigated how this process played out in the context of raves in the UK and US in the late 1980s and 1990s. O'Connor (2003) has written of the reaction to waltzes in Ireland in the early 19th century in this light. Gibbons (1996, p.100) specifically suggests that the moral panic frame might be used to account for the anti-jazz episode. He comments:

In retrospect, it is difficult to grasp the intensity of the opposition to dance halls mounted by moral crusaders as diverse as the *Irish Times* and the Catholic hierarchy and more work needs to be done to sketch out the volatile cultural climate of the period to account for such moral panics.

21 Devereux has commented on 'the gallery of deviant post-war figures...violent schoolchildren, drug users, paedophiles, single mothers and asylum seekers (2011, p.60).

Although initially played out in the discursive sphere, the reaction to such a perceived threat will, according to the model, take a material form when official interests respond in various ways. The model has been applied, for example, to the Leah Betts case in the UK, where a young female clubber died in circumstances that were initially unclear, and were further clouded by the symbolic and material apparatus of a moral panic (*Moral Panic*, 2004). Speaking of the outcome of media hysteria around dance music in Britain in the 1990s, Malbon suggests:

Clubbing is...notable because of its systematic demonisation within the media and the introduction of new legislation inhibiting clubbing, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994) for example and the widely publicised, although somewhat over-hyped, involvement of illegal practices, such as drug use. (1999, p.6)

Such 'illegality' can involve behaviour that is already outside the law. Alternatively, by drawing new legislative boundaries, the process of moral panic involves *placing* practices that are regarded as deviant or transgressive outside the law by generating new legislation. In the UK in the 1990s, the Criminal Justice Bill for the first time sought to criminalise a genre of music based on 'repetitive beats' after a series of large, outdoor raves in and around London (*Moral Panic*, 2004)²².

This dialectic within moral panic theory, where a media campaign for action is followed by a response from the authorities, which in turn re-frames the original 'problem', reveals overlaps with Gramsci's hegemony theory, and its positing of resistant and incorporative moments in a compromise equilibrium. Moral panic theory is narrower in that it focuses specifically on media institutions and the coercive agents of political society, rather than the broader organs of civil society, but it can at the same time be encompassed by gramscian concepts. Hall et al. (1978) have worked through the parallels between these two theories in the context of a media campaign around crime in Britain in the late 1970s, and suggested that moral panic can be regarded as a key component for maintaining hegemony. It seems reasonable on these grounds to speak of a hegemonic process around jazz dance and music in Ireland before and during the research period. These processes have an intentionality that can be seen as involving incorporation, a requirement, in cultural terms, and in terms of dance, to 'stay in line'. It is evident that the construction of an 'Irish'

22 In 2012, following a number of violent incidents at a dance music event featuring the Swedish House Mafia in the Phoenix Park in Dublin, a debate is ongoing on the dangers associated with this type of music. A Garda report sent to Minister for Justice Alan Shatter requested that no more 'electric music' (dance music events) be held there (RTE, 2012).

dancing body was of paramount concern to powerful groups before and after the establishment of the Free State. These concerns led to the ascription of quite different meanings to céilí and modern dances in dominant discourses. Whether such prescriptive moulding of bodies inflected local dance practice and discourse will be considered in the next section.

7.4 Civil Society and the National Popular in Elphin

First-hand accounts of life in Elphin during the period provide intimate details of school-going and encounters with the Catholic Church that are indicative of the strength locally of nationalist civil society. This section will present findings in the research setting on this basis.

In order to consider articulations of the national-popular around dance in Elphin, it was necessary to investigate how dancers experienced its presence in their lives. Their stories provide an empirical basis for a nationalist civil society. Of immediate interest are two key institutions of nationalist civil society - the Catholic Church and the GL. Jimmy said that this latter organisation was active in promoting céilí dances in Croghan Hall in the 1920s²³. Although he recalled the group was no longer active in the 1940s and 1950s, other cultural agents had taken up the cause. Moreover, the power of the Catholic Church had increased considerably in the post-independence paradigm (*Seven Ages*, 2002), and it consolidated its hold on the education system.

Some dancers recounted how they were encouraged to learn and practise Irish moves at home as children, showing that for some families at least, the domestic sphere was implicated in the processes of cultural hegemony. For the most part though, dancers spoke of céilí enthusiasts among the clergy, and particularly among teachers (Annie, Bridie, Maureen, Brian)²⁴. Several people recalled learning Irish dances that were performed for competitions or shows organised to raise funds for schools, and held on the school premises or in halls (Bridie). Rural intellectuals disseminated discursive and embodied practices conceived and elaborated by organic intellectuals

23 It is clear that cultural nationalism had made a significant impact in the area at quite an early stage. A local history source mentions how 'the late Canon Mannion...gave a lecture to the Elphin branch of the GL on 3rd January, 1903' (Gormley, 1994, p.5).

24 A notable exception in this regard was the Grammar School, a secondary school founded and run by Protestants, although many local Catholic children, including my father, attended it during the years under review.

in the metropolitan centre for the purposes of constructing a nationalist imaginary. Brian, a Christian Brother who grew up locally, spoke eloquently of this formation:

I like the [Irish] language and I would attribute it not just to the teacher but to the whole environment where you heard your father singing songs about Ireland where you heard - you learned your history, where you went to the church and you associated religion and your history and your forbears - all that....There was a whole milieu there or a whole area that kind of integrated in the/in the school and in the - in the rambling house and you got the whole - you got the whole thing there.

A type of 'holy trinity' of State, church and cultural nationalism is evident in this account²⁵. These terms are strongly supportive of the national-popular aesthetic, and more broadly of a rural ideology. Although Brian and his two siblings would be among the more religiously inclined of those interviewed, the widespread labelling by dancers of céilí moves as 'Irish dances' suggests that most locals were internalising dominant discourses to some extent.

Equally, local media outlets were involved in perpetuating the national-popular through the activation of discourses of moral panic, a situation that mirrors media coverage in neighbouring Leitrim during the 1930s (O'Connor, 2005). An account of a large 'céilídhe' featured transcripts of speeches given on the day by organic intellectuals such as clergy, teachers, GL members and politicians. According to a member of the GL, 'many young people did not seem to realise what sacrifices had been made [in the fight for independence]...was the youth of today going to sabotage that work, and literally stab Irish nationhood in the back?' (*Roscommon Herald*, 1940c, p.1). In another piece, the outgoing GAA president at this time lamented the fact that 'of the scores of dances held [in south Leitrim] last year, I would venture to say that you could count the céilídhe on less than four fingers' (*Roscommon Herald*, 1940d, p.6). He continued, 'for remember, there are other forms of defence besides military defence for safeguarding a nation's life from foreign interference and domination'.

Spoken shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War, statements of this sort speak of dance as

25 Although, as in earlier periods, matters were more complex than this. Brown (2004) has described a parallel liberal Protestant tradition at the time. Besides this, writers/dissidents such as Seán Ó Faoláin, writing in *The Bell* acted as an ongoing 'thorn in the side' of official Ireland, and publications such as the Jesuit quarterly *Studies* proffered a critical eye.

a site for hegemonic and counter-hegemonic articulations of dance. Discourses tend towards polarisation and 'violent hierarchies'. There were 'shoneens' who attended modern dances, and 'Gaels' who attended céilí dances. These commentators locate dancing in terms of a cultural battle between 'national' and 'foreign' elements. Such antipathy can be understood in light of the 1935 ban on jazz on 2RN that extended into the 1940s, the continuing implementation of the PDHA (1935) to regulate hall dances, and other echoes of the anti-jazz campaign. The parallels between cultural hegemony and moral panic are apparent in these instances. Such hegemonic moments were also played out in the sphere of education. Interview transcripts do not feature any instances where teachers or clergy promoted modern dances. On the contrary, Bridie remembered that she and her friends were reprimanded for practising foxtrots in the convent schoolyard.

Even though the various institutions of civil society seem to have operated in concert to some extent, there are occasional 'cracks' that allow for fleshing out of both theories of cultural hegemony and moral panic. Criticisms have been levelled at Cohen's model (*Moral Panic*, 2004) on the grounds that it does not account for a more pluralist, diverse set of media discourses. Speaking of the Leah Betts case, Murji (2004) has commented:

The moral panic model as it's used by some people implies that the media or the media reaction constructs a kind of consensus around a particular issue that we all agree about. I think we need to ask ourselves more carefully whether such a consensus actually exists or not. It's not as if we can regard the media as a homogenous entity that is one thing or the other thing. It clearly reflects within it a variety of diverse positions.

Within cultural hegemony theory, the relative autonomy accorded to elements of civil society can accommodate these strands. As Gray (1981) remarks 'the power bloc should not be seen as monolithic. In every social formation the State apparatus has important internal social contradictions, but also specific modes of cohesion as an apparatus' (p.240). Forgacs (2000) and Gray (1981) allow for these complexities, and neither cultural hegemony nor moral panic theory can be taken to have operated in a monolithic way.

At times for example, contributors to the *Roscommon Herald* spoke in terms that ran against the grain of the national-popular. A centrally-located editorial piece on jazz music was highly critical of a local District Justice:

Nobody questions the sincerity or good faith of District Justice Goff, but his persistent denunciations of jazz, coupled with his passionate advocacy of Irish dancing may be misunderstood in certain quarters...the [PDHA] never intended that District Justice should exercise a personal predilection for a particular form of dancing, however admirable, to the prejudice of another admittedly popular. (*Roscommon Herald*, 1940e, p.5)

He proceeded 'our best maxim in this matter is every man to his taste, and everything within reason' (p.5). The author, although his preference was not for jazz music or dance, respected the rights of young people to enjoy themselves and presents a carefully argued case as to such dances need not be a cause of alarm: '[modern dances] are all tarred with the same brush as the doubtful dances which ancient crusaders found it desirable to suppress in the early days of the Roman Empire. In common fairness we must have clear thinking on this question' (*ibid*). Given the prominence of advertisements for dances, and the significant revenue that must have been generated, these more pluralist discourses could have been a pragmatic adaptation by sections of the local press to commercial imperatives, a microcosmic illustration of macrocosmic processes that will be addressed in Chapter 9. Alternatively, it may be that the writer is revealing a sensibility that reflected a broader 'popular aesthetic', as will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Other examples act as a warning against reductionism. The expression of outrage by an outgoing GAA chairman in south Leitrim described earlier in this section can be re-read as a reflection of the popularity of modern dances among some members of GAA clubs, a notably nationalist organisation. Some government figures were, it seems, inclined to respond to the pleasures of modern dancing so that Minister Seán Mac an tSaoí was accused in the 1930s of having a 'soul steeped in jazz' (*Down with Jazz*, 1987) (although the accusation originated in a speech given during the anti-jazz campaign, and would need further verification). Certainly, individual priests tolerated quicksteps and foxtrots (*Down with Jazz*, 1987). In many ways though, there was a powerful convergence of clerical, nationalist and State interests through the organs of nationalist civil society in promoting Irish dances. A national-popular related to dance did inflect local discourses and practices to some extent. At the same time, these findings were qualified by a degree of pluralism in media outlets such as the *Roscommon Herald*, which occasionally offered a critical space for celebration of modern dance culture, underlining a more flexible conceptualisation of cultural hegemony theory posited by Gray (1981) and Forgacs (2000). In the next section, the specific experiences of female dancers in relation to these discourses will be considered.

7.5 Gender, Moral Panic and the National-Popular

O'Connor (2005) and Thiel-Stern (2008) have finessed moral panic theory on the basis of gender. These approaches have been useful for considering gender and dance in Elphin in this section.

A gendering of public space in Ireland noted in the literature (Byrne, 1997; O'Connor, 2003, 2005) was experienced by women in Elphin in a very tangible way, so that the discourse of ruin acquired a material reality²⁶. Annie recalled that, on her way to a dance in the 1930s, her partner dropped into a pub on the way for a drink and invited her to join him. Rather than enter (or more to the point, be seen to enter - a surveillance of sorts by figures in the local community was apparent in her account) she went to the dance on her own and had to deal with the consequences later when her partner arrived and expressed his displeasure. Such restrictions may account to some extent for the appeal of dances, in that they acted as rare non-institutional sites that were equally open to both sexes unlike, say, activities associated with the church, or Irish Countrywomen's Association²⁷ (ICA) (Irene).

The same concerns that limited access by women to many public spaces in Ireland during the research period (Byrne, 1997; O'Connor, 2005) would seem to account for anxieties mobilised around dancing spaces by powerful groups. It is notable on this basis that gender often featured in a particular way with moral panics around dance so that young, female dancers were subject to these anxieties. Thiel-Stern (2008) studied the impact of ragtime music and dance in the US between 1910 and 1915, when up to 250,000 young people were attending weekly events in New York alone. On the resulting moral panic, she suggests 'these practices...served...not only to maintain the status quo among the middle and upper classes, but to maintain social control over the marginalised' (2008, p.5). Specifically, these gendered moral panics, where control masquerades as concern, 'serve to disenfranchise girls and maintain a patriarchal order' (p.8).

26 The 1937 Irish Constitution, for example, promoted a narrow definition of femininity associated with maternal duties and the home. Articles 41.2.1 and 41.2.2 respectively state 'in particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved' and 'the State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home' (Ó Cearúil, 1999).

27 This was an organisation set up for women in rural Ireland by training them with skills they could use in the home, as well as organising social events (Irene).

Within a more general hostility directed towards the practices of young people in Ireland, O'Connor (2005) has identified the centrality of gender, so that women were doubly targeted by the discourse of ruin constructed by official institutions around modern dances. In Ireland, as part of broader attempts to direct the sexual instinct of the young towards reproduction and marriage, women had a dual role in official pronouncements of the time, as both temptress and potential victim. These signifying practices were 'profoundly gendered and activated keen anxieties around sexuality and the female body' (*ibid*, p.5). Discourses of 'nation' were articulated with sexual discourses, linking moral sexual behaviour and patriotism.

These types of concerns may have been related to a shift in practices relating to marriage. Although Arensberg and Kimball had found that arranged marriages were common in Clare in the 1930s (2001[1936]) it seems that matchmaking was increasingly rare in the research setting. While Babs, one of the older dancers, recalled that 'there was several of them made up, you know', most dancers suggest these practices were in decline. As Annie said, 'they were gone away from this thing what they used call make-up marriages now...you know before my time...matchmaking'. Jimmy says 'no, you picked your own'. As a result, dances had become the main venues for meeting partners, and several interviewees met their spouses in this way. Dances seem to have represented a site of relative freedom for engaging in romantic liaisons, a practice of increasing importance where men and women entered into relationships with a greater degree of autonomy than their predecessors. It is this very freedom that appears to have activated the apparatus of a gendered moral panic. While dancers generally spoke of freedom of choice in this regard, parental concerns and the related economic imperatives that underpinned matchmaking cannot be completely discounted in agricultural societies at this time. Instead of clear categorisations, there are grades along a continuum. There may also be some reticence from respondents that mask or conceal these issues, so that class-religious interests might intersect with gender, particularly where young women were concerned. Although they may not have been prohibited from going to dances *per se*, certain dances were off limits, dances where the 'wrong' kind of partners were to be found.

Gibbons (1996, p.100) quotes a Lenten Pastoral issued by Bishop Morrisroe in 1929 that dealt with the rural dance hall: 'for [Satan] seems to preside at some of the dark rites enacted there. We have in

mind the rural dance hall, owned by a private individual, conducted with no sort of responsible supervision, a cause of ruin to many innocent girls'. The 'structured absence' of the predatory, male stranger is clearly visible, the most obvious candidate for the type of 'folk devil' that Cohen (2002[1972]) has envisioned. A contemporaneous source related this figure to concerns around an emerging freedom of mobility as was discussed in Section 4.4:

The more isolated is the district, the greater the danger. In the larger towns, which are well-lighted and where the dancers move, as a rule, from the dance to the home along the lighted streets, there is not so much harm done. But in lonely country places the dangers are too obvious to need description...when it is open to all and sundry who come from many miles away, and who are complete strangers, then a new element of danger becomes only too apparent. (Devane, 1931, p.170)

Smyth (1993) has outlined the connection that was made between dance halls, illegitimacy and prostitution by moral guardians of the time. These invisible, informal but powerful controls must have contributed to considerable tensions around sexuality that made dances sites of both fear and desire, illicit or otherwise, for both sexes, but particularly for women.

Confirming in some ways that the related discourse of ruin (O'Connor, 2003) did inflect local practices and discourses, it is notable that female rather than male dancers speak of restrictions around attending dances. As such, it seems that hegemonic discourses of moral panic in newspapers did have material effects for local women. The Catholic Church was often implicated in policing these gendered boundaries around dance. Annie told another story about a friend of hers who had spent some time in the US and attended a hall dance on her return in the 1930s. She was denounced by one Fr. Confrey as she sat in the pews:

He was so upset and absolutely disgusted to think of somebody who was brought up in the parish of Cloone - brought up as she was - to behave so immorally to go to this dance and she let the parish down - let herself down by dressing so immorally at this particular function but she never went back to Cloone - she went to where a different priest had mass.

This young woman's 'presentation of self' (Goffman, 1959), based on an encounter with popular culture in the US, was linked to her attending modern dances (as well as dressing in the latest style) by this particular priest, already referred to in Section 7.3 and noted for his extreme promotion of 'Irish' culture. Charlie related a story of how, in the 1930s, a group of people from a neighbouring town intended to hold a dance in Elphin town. Amongst the company were a number of women who

had had children out of wedlock. A denunciation from the altar followed 'that nobody in any place would be welcome to it...and there was no people the good at the dances in it [ie. attended the dances]'. Moral and cultural boundaries were marked in a very tangible and embodied way. The pulpit, as a powerful, public platform accessible only to priests for ruminations on matters of the day, could in some cases be used as an effective channel for the dissemination of discourses around the dancing body. There was no right of response, no room for dialogue, and the prospect of such aggressive deployment of power in front of family, friends and neighbours must have been an effective deterrent for many people. The domestic sphere was also instrumental in the control of young women, and parental anxieties often registered in dancing stories. Bridie remembered her parents' concerns around who would accompany her to modern dances²⁸.

The gendered stories above are largely confined to the 1930s and the earlier part of the research period, those closest to the zenith of the anti-jazz moral panic. Even by the 1950s though, the 'profoundly gendered' nature of these discursive games were in evidence. Maureen recounted the story of the devil's appearance at the hall in Toureen in east Mayo in the late 1950s, an episode that has been covered in the TG4²⁹ documentary *Diabhal ag an Damhsa* (2009). At this time, a local cleric, Father Horan, and dance entrepreneurs the Reynolds brothers, were engaged in a type of cultural turf war in Toureen, running competing dance halls, and spreading rumours to damage the business of their competitors. The villain of this piece was a dark, seductive stranger, one who could be seen to constitute a parallel in social discourses to the imaginary 'folk devils' of the moral panic of the 1930s, those predatory, unknown males travelling from distant areas (O'Connor, 2005). Echoing down to dancers of the 1950s, such archetypes embodied the anxieties circulated by clerics and parents, and were instrumental in perpetuating a patriarchal social control (Thiel-Stern, 2008). On this basis, a specifically gendered moral panic of the type that features in Thiel-Stern's (2008) study of rag-time dancers in New York in the early twentieth century, appears to have been more effective than the broader generational moral panic that was articulated alongside it. As this latter

28 Sometimes, a broader conflation of 'degeneracy' and 'ruin' with other dances is evident. On Bridie's reasons for not attending house dances she said 'well no you probably didn't think it worthwhile (laughing). I don't know what was the idea behind it now. Yeah I don't know would we be let go. That kind of thing. There was that supervision too in those days'. Likewise, Annie was discouraged from going to house dances. As such, it may be that dance *per se* constituted a realm of perceived danger for some parents.

29 The State television broadcaster in the Irish language, founded in 1996. An Irish-language radio station, Radio na Gaeltachta had already been broadcasting for a number of years.

study suggests, gendered media panics can be understood in terms of control masquerading as concern and, in this way, there was a perpetuation of a patriarchal hegemony. As with the broader nationalist hegemony within which it was located, the organs of civil society were to the fore, with a particular emphasis on the Catholic Church, as well as on the domestic sphere. In the former case, cultural politics were sometimes deployed in a very public and painful manner through the pulpit by local priests, organic intellectuals in this case defending patriarchal norms.

At the same time, the operations of patriarchal hegemony did not always run smoothly, and acts of transgression occur, as in Bridie's schoolyard resistance discussed in Section 7.4. The same woman told of how some young women escaped parental surveillance by leaving through their bedroom windows to attend dances. At least one dancer eloped with a man who did not meet with the approval of her parents, even though penalties for such behaviour might involve disinheritance, a serious concern in a society where one's livelihood and status were so intimately interwoven with land and acreage (Arensberg and Kimball (2001[1936])). Equally, the well-known story about the devil appearing in Toureen (*Diabhal ag an Damhsa*. 2009) was told by Maureen in a humorous and ironic way, and it is possible that something of this pretended 'terror' would have been enjoyed at the time too. In this regard, it is notable that rumours of the appearance of the devil at Tureen did not drive dancers to the less diabolic hall of the Reynolds brothers. On the contrary, there was a macabre rush to investigate the truth or otherwise of the stories, and Fr.Horan's hall boomed. In his memoir, John McGahern (2006) hints at these more ambiguous feelings around clerical outrage in the 1940s. At the 'Missions'³⁰ in his local church, zealous young priests were expected to frighten and terrify their 'audience'. There was general disappointment if they failed to deliver, and a perverse pleasure when the performance was to expected standards. In other words, the pulpit could be seen as imaginatively linked to the spectacle of horror films and, on one level, there was an evident glee in being scared. This is in no way to take away from the pointed gender politics of the pulpit referred to earlier, rather it is to suggest that such pronouncements were located within a broader ambience where the agency of local people needs to be considered. In other words,

30 In a paper that studied the Redemptorist Missions between 1920 and 1937, McConvery (2000) has commented, 'since their arrival in Ireland in 1851, the Redemptorists have become synonymous with a certain kind of vigorous mission-preaching, often described by its critics as 'fire and brimstone'. The study proceeds to critically finesse matters.

hegemonic utterances were not uncritically absorbed, and counter-hegemony was ever-present in a dialectical relationship. In various ways, and extending across the research period, discourses and practices of dance can be seen to some extent as sites for the exercise of patriarchal hegemony and a gendered moral panic, as well as a degree of resistance to this.

Chapter Summary

It has been established that organic intellectuals played an active role in the period preceding independence in establishing a national-popular culture, one that embodied the aspiration towards political independence from Britain. Such processes were seen to cement a collective will that allowed for the emergence and consolidation of a historical bloc. 'Irish dances' can be regarded as the dances of cultural nationalism, official dances favoured by powerful interests in the young Irish state. Following independence, these dances were presented in nationalist discourses as 'moral', 'pure', and above all, 'Irish', while modern dances were constructed in an antithetical fashion, in terms sometimes reminiscent of Cohen's (1971) 'moral panic'. These hegemonic imperatives were noted as having creative and destructive moments manifested respectively through the creation of céilí dances, and the various types of control that sought to circumscribe the success of modern dance. At the same time, a more pluralist aesthetic was occasionally evident in newspapers. There is evidence of a 'profoundly gendered' (O'Connor, 2005) moral panic continuing from the 1930s into the 1940s, one that does seem to have been experienced by female dancers in Elphin. As has been established in Chapter 6 however, modern dances were emphatically dominant. In other words, local dancers were, for the most part, not interpellated by the prescriptions of nationalist hegemony. On this basis, the next chapter will tease apart the basis for a generational counter-hegemony.

Chapter 8

Modern Dance as Counter-Hegemonic

Righteous, I like that. Kinda fitting when you think about it. If we danced and shared music, we'd be too busy en-joy-in' life to start a war.

E.A. Bucchianeri, (*Brushstrokes of a Gadfly*, 2011)

8.0 Introduction

Healey (1999) interviewed a dancer who said that jazz took on a 'whole new meaning' in the 1930s and 1940s, a shift that this chapter will investigate. Dancers in Elphin in the 1940s and 1950s made dancing choices that ran quite contrary to those prescribed across a range of institutions of nationalist civil society, so that an oppositional counter-hegemony can be theorised (Gramsci, 1971; Forgacs, 2000). These findings are suggestive of culture as 'way of struggle' (Thompson, 1963), of various ways that a nationalist collective will appeared to be unravelling. In an environment permeated by emigration, a fragmentation of politics and culture, and a questioning of the type of frugal society favoured by leaders during the period, such dancing decisions constituted a stark, embodied negation of the discourses of rural ideology, a 'scream' of sorts (Holloway, 2003). It seems that such evident counter-hegemonic cultural vitality intersected in some ways with the dynamics of moral panic discussed in Chapter 7. This chapter will present a number of novel findings that contribute to the literature, including those relating to construction and control of dance halls, oral accounts of the meanings of both modern and céilí dances for participants, and a view of young small farmers as agents of modernity.

A contextual section will set out the stark details of emigration in the late 1940s and 1950s, a feature of life at the time that can be seen to frame various types of 'escape' from dominant discourses and practices. In the next section, there will be an assessment of struggles that took place over control of dance venues, one that rarely registers in histories of the period. A specific focus on

the types of meanings activated around the two main forms of dance will be presented in the following section, in order to establish the hermeneutic basis of a generational counter-hegemony. There were complex dialectical relations between the exercise of nationalist hegemony, and a counter-hegemonic resistance to this. Building on findings presented in Chapter 6, the use of media culture as a source of oppositional symbolic resources will be considered, using concepts formulated by Fiske (1987, 1989). In the following section, findings around an evident dancing pluralism will be presented. The final section will involve a 'tying together' of the articulations of cultural resistance posited in this chapter, within a broader analysis of shifts in Irish society during the period 1940 to 1960.

8.1 Dance, Media and Emigration

In this section, emigration as a central fact of life at the time will be used to tease out homologies between various types of mobility related to dance culture and media culture, a process that will be useful for contextualising the remainder of the chapter.

Emigration had been a part of everyday life in Roscommon for most of the previous century¹. The 1946 and 1956 census returns show there was a 7% drop in population from 1926-1936, and a 6.5% drop from 1936 to 1946 (CSO, 1946; 1956). By the time the 1956 census was taken, a decline of almost 9% over ten years in the previous 10 years was evident². Bridie put this process in very personal terms:

Oh my God I can go back. I remember one night as I was - I couldn't sleep you know, going round on all the people that are gone since my young days you know, and I think it was something like - up on 30 families that - in an area of 4 to 5 townlands around that had gone. Yeah. It was only down to fourteen or fifteen left.

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- 1 Over the course of the nineteenth century, in each decade from the 1860s to the 1890s, Roscommon was affected by the highest levels of emigration in Connaught, itself the province with the greatest outflow of people from the country. The total decline from 1841 to 1956 was 75%. When one considers that these figures include the towns, where populations remained relatively stable or, as in the case of Carrick-on-Shannon, increased between 1946 and 1956 (CSO, 1956), the impact of this outflow on rural areas is further underlined. The county was not alone in this regard. Similar figures can be found throughout Connaught and Ulster over this longer period. As Arensberg and Kimball (2001[1936]) have noted, 1932 was the first year in more than a century that immigration exceeded emigration. The lull was short-lived though, and related to the difficulties of finding employment in territories devastated by the Depression (Brown, 2004).
 - 2 The figures for 1946 show 72,510 people living in Roscommon county. By the time the 1956 census was taken, this had fallen to 68,102 by 1951 and to 63,710 in 1956.

Moreover, emigration affected all religious denominations³. What distinguished the wave in the late 1940s, aside from its intensity, was its quality. Before the 1940s, according to Brown (2004), a dominant trope in Irish society was a pronounced sense of loyalty to family, land and nation. He remarks on 'how strong a hold the land had on the people and how much commitment, even where circumstances were desperate, there was to survival there' (p.172). A 'hold' of this sort is echoed in literature on the period. John McGahern (2006), writing of his own upbringing in Leitrim, described 'moving house' a few miles down the road: 'each locality had its own small world, and moving to the house overlooking the bog was like moving to a different country'. Cross (1970[1942], p.87), writing of the rural life of the Tailor and his wife, Ansty, describes a self-contained universe: 'the war is a long way still from Garrynapeaka. No sign of it, beyond an increase in the price of tobacco⁴'. As Teresa said, before Irish society became more 'modern' (see definition in Section 1.1), 'we knew no better'. Little was said about the war in the interview transcripts, beyond its indirect impact through rationing, compulsory tillage and the internment of local IRA activists, who De Valera regarded as a potential fifth column (*Seven Ages*, 2002).

A degree of acceptance, even fatalism, tied people into the myths of land, place and nation. Of this 'pre-lapsarian' period, Brody (1973, p.70) suggests that between the famine and 1940:

A new style of country life which included the older folk tradition of singing, dancing, storytelling and mutual aid, is shown in the literature from 1900 to 1940...what is now termed traditional life was evidently a source of gaiety and co-operation at least until the time of the Second World War.

Beginning in the late 1940s, Brown (2004) has described a disjuncture in the life of the country, a period when 'demoralisation' set in (Brody, 1973). Particularly during the post-war period, a sense of disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the realities of frugal, highly localised, small farmer existence became germane. Referring to a government report from the period, *The Commission on Emigration 1948-1954* (Irish Government Report, 1956), Brown remarks 'it is implied that the conditions of rural life are now quite unacceptable to many country people' (p.172). He connects this decline to lack of 'sanitation...facilities for recreation and intellectual pursuits' (p.173). Brody,

3 Nationally though, there was a considerably larger decline in numbers of Protestants. In the years between 1911 and 1926, about a third of this population emigrated.

4 Even in this study though, the seeds of change were evident. The Tailor spent part of his time going to the cinema and listening to the radio (Cross 1970[1942]).

writing in the 1970s, has suggested that, 'the countryman of today usually does not want to live on the land at all, but does so as a matter of duty...for at least eighty years after the famine, life on the land was preferred to life away from the land' (1973, p.63).

Of particular relevance for this investigation is the following finding in the report: 'through the cinema and the radio, and above all by direct experience either personal or through relatives, people in such conditions are, more than ever before, becoming aware of the contrast between their way of life and that in other countries, especially in urban centres' (Irish Government Report, 1956, p.175). They now tended to compare their rural circumstances unfavourably with the exotic locales constructed in cinematic and other media representations disseminated by the culture industry. Brown remarks that : 'the report...sensed that modern communications had interfered with rural satisfaction' (2004, p.173). This dualistic sensibility was not in itself new. During an earlier wave of emigration, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Brody (1973) refers to the double-sided nature of emigration: 'flight...was enhanced by awareness of possibilities in other milieu...which nonetheless had its roots in devastation at home' (p.63). It is more a question of emphasis, and of a changing balance between 'push' and 'pull' variables. The draw *away* from Ireland seems to have been sharpened with the rise of a more widely available media culture, resulting in a type of collective disillusionment. While London and New York had long drawn Irish emigrants, the visual presentation of such places on the cinema screen at the time would seem to have added to their mythologies⁵. With the founding of the national airline Aer Lingus and the construction of well-equipped airports throughout the country (Brown, 2004), moreover, people could return for periodic visits, and the 'American wake' was no longer required. The novel presence of cash-rich 'Yanks' returning for holidays was a source of fascination, amusement, and perhaps a degree of envy, given the relative scarcity of liquidity in the local economy (Brown, 2004)⁶. Of those interviewed, one couple, Teresa and Ivan, as well as a widower, Tom, had been to Canada for a number of years. Dan and his wife Margaret spent most of their lives in London before returning to Elphin town⁷. Cinema,

⁵ My uncle Pat, leaving for Brooklyn in 1959, was part of this exodus.

⁶ My granduncle, who emigrated in 1912, was among these. He returned in the 1950s, and locals recalled him wearing an exotic gabardine coat and hat.

⁷ Such flows impacted directly on local dance culture. As was discussed in Section 8.2, a number of hall owners were returned emigrants according to Johnny. Equally, the account of young people returning from England with the latest dance moves described in Section 8.3 is relevant (Healey, 1999).

radio and gramophones, as well as improved transport options, were allowing for the emergence of a more relativist sensibility amongst locals at the time. In Elphin, electricity was 'put through' in the early 1950s (Pat, Fig.5) so that before this time, batteries or manual labour were used to power devices. Although mass media forms predated widespread electrification in the research setting, their impact must have been enhanced by the fluidity and ubiquity of the new power source. Brody (1973, p.71) suggests: 'rural electrification had reached all but the remote districts by 1948, bringing radio, cinema and eventually television, all of which must have reacted strongly upon the imagination of the potential emigrant and the social system he was leaving'.

Sometimes, media representations were seen in more instrumental terms. Ó Giolláin (1999, p.169) has discussed how mediated popular culture had educated rural emigrants in Latin America for life in the city: 'ignorant of urban life, the mass media taught them how to behave in the city and provided cultural forms that articulated their experience'. Others saw the shift as embodying a 'new jostling spirit...in the wholesale exodus from the countryside...men are leaving home who were content to stay hitherto' (Ó Faoláin, 1942, p.384). The same author makes a connection between this new more restless spirit and media representations – specifically cinema: 'it is as likely to be inspired by the meretricious appeal of the streets – glorified by the movies, which have now penetrated to the smallest villages – as inspired by healthy ambition' (Ó Faoláin, 1943, p.464). The link posited in these studies between media and 'escape' (whether material or imaginative) is important for this investigation. However, recreational dance does not feature in these cultural histories, even though modern dance in particular would be very much intertwined with these innovations in cinema and radio. Shifts in the field of dance can flesh out and provide an embodied history to complement these other historical perspectives. If the success of modern dance is factored in, a more nuanced, embodied history emerges.

Table 5: A Gendered Emigration

Location	Ratio of Male to Female in Population
Roscommon (county)	1.06
Galway (county)	1.12
Mayo (county)	1.02
Swinford (EA)	0.98
Elphin (EA)	1.18
Dublin	0.88
Boyle	1.16

(Source: Shanagher, 2013)

Of interest in this regard, as Vincent pointed out, was the gendered nature of emigration – an aspect highlighted by both Brody (1973) and Brown (2004). As Table 5 indicates, the extent of this bifurcation is underlined by census records (CSO, 1956) where it is clear that males significantly outnumbered females in all the EAs of the county. This seems to have been broadly although not universally true on a national basis. Counties Roscommon, Galway and Mayo have male/female population ratios in this regard of 1.06, 1.12 and 1.02 (the trend is reversed in some towns such as Swinford EA and County Dublin with 0.98 and 0.88 males to females). Vincent complements these rather dry statistics with some more human details – he spent some time in Dublin and says the situation there was reversed and there were more women than men. In the two districts that incorporated the research area, Elphin EA had a ratio of 1.18 and Boyle 1.16, or perhaps six men to five women, figures that are notably high by these standards, and would seem to reveal localised and gendered patterns of employment and migration. Boyle, a town of over 2000 people (see Section 5.1) might be expected, like Swinford and Dublin, to have a greater balance of the sexes. The scarcity of women even in this urban area is indicative of the impact of emigration on the research setting. More mundane factors might also be implicated, given for example the types of employment positions that opened up in Britain and elsewhere in domestic service or nursing (Annie, Bridget). It is also possible though that negation of the rural ideology was gendered, a possibility more easily understood in the light of the restrictions experienced by women in public

space at this time, and the considerable power of a patriarchal nationalist hegemony discussion in Section 7.5. Perhaps women in particular engaged in a very material means of 'escaping' such interpellations. Official discourses around emigration, constructed from the standpoint of 'departure', and in the minor tone that characterises our narratives of nationalism, often render emigration in tragic terms, but for those various groups who left, escape could be a liberating process. In the next section, there will be a presentation of how negation of dominant discourses and practices was made manifest in control of dancing spaces.

8.2 Dance Hall Construction and Counter-Hegemony

The literature is sparse on the building of dance halls, sites that acted as hubs for modern dance culture, as well as for céilís and other cultural events. This section will assess the basis for a counter-hegemony played out in these contested spaces.

Brennan (1999) connects a rise in halls controlled by the clergy to a decline in both house dances and other hall dances and remarks that: 'all over rural Ireland, the clergy organised the construction of parochial halls' (p.126). Since this comment was not cited, the source of this assertion could not be traced, although it may be based on oral histories gathered in Co. Clare, given that Brennan carried out most of her work there. Other sources paint a more nuanced picture. Gibbons (1996) quotes a clerical source in the 1930s who condemned the 'rural dance hall...owned by a private individual' (p.100). In Mulrooney (2006), an interviewee described 'An Shed', a venue set up by her father in the West Kerry Gaeltacht in the 1940s. The building had previously been used as a factory for fish-curing and salting. Daly (2006) describes how greater demand for local halls in the 1930s led to government legislation in 1941 and the issuing of grants in 1953. O'Connor (2005) suggests private and clerical interests around hall construction were 'complexly interwoven ...more...research would be necessary to provide a more detailed picture' (p.91). This investigation has afforded a valuable opportunity to establish an empirical, first-hand basis for ascribing agency around control of dancing spaces.

A variety of interests were involved in setting up halls in the area. Keenan's Hall⁸ in Elphin town was set up by a local man who began his business career by running bets between there and Frenchpark: 'John Keenan was...a kind of an entrepreneur you could say. He started that' (Mícheál). Another, The Store (Fig.16), had its origins in a cooperative shop that was later purchased by a local farmer before being used as a dance hall (Bridie). Drumlion hall was built by local family, the McKennas, on their land (Charlie). Creeve hall was run by the McGrath family – they later ran maypole dances in the field outside. Sometimes, returned emigrants were involved in setting up commercial halls, as in the case of Johnny McGivern and the famed 'Ballroom of Romance' in Leitrim (see Fig.10). John said that 'outside Ballinamore...a returned American had the right idea. He built a hall big enough'. By the 1940s, as well as recreational dances, film screenings, plays and competitive dance competitions were taking place in local dance halls, operating then as *de facto* community cultural centres.

Such private enterprises have featured in the literature (Gibbons, 1996; Mulrooney, 2006). Those venues built and run on a more collective basis are less visible. Halls in the research setting established by committee included Croghan, Ballinameen, Keadue and Mantua. Charlie's father was a 'committee man' for Croghan Hall. He speculated on the local support that led to its foundation: 'but sure they must have to try to collect the money or try to get a few pound to have them dances or to build them halls'. Mícheál had researched the locality of Mantua and its hall (Mulleady, n.d), built in a converted military Nissan Hut that became available after the Second World War. Speaking about this hall, Bridie said: 'Jimmy Flanagan was at the head of it. Well there was a committee but he was...the manager'. A committee also ran dances at Rockville House (Bridie).

The term 'parochial hall', carrying as it does implications of clerical control, was not used by dancers locally, apart from two dancers who attended events in the 1950s and were living at a greater distance from the research setting (Johnny and May). Respondents generally suggested that a mix of local entrepreneurs and committees were involved in building halls⁹. Accounts often

8 Halls are rarely described in these terms. Rather the nearest village or townland – Croghan, Drumlion, Ballinameen – operates as shorthand for halls there eg. 'I was at a dance in Croghan last night'.

9 Only Maureen demurs. Speaking of Mantua Hall, she says that the priests 'ran everything'. This need not contradict the overall pattern. Clerical involvement in hall-building was more evident in the 1950s in Elphin. A new hall - the Social Centre – built in 1954 (Mícheál) - was indirectly associated with the church, built as it was by Muintir na

emphasised the way that communities protected their dancing spaces. According to Johnny, 'well Keadue Hall was built by the people of the parish and it was never allowed to be taken over by the clergy'. Attracta emphasised that secular 'committee halls' were distinct from 'parochial halls'. Equally, more specific attempts to control dances often encountered resistance. Charlie recounted how before his time, in the 1920s or 1930s, a local man decided to hold a dance in Croghan Hall that was 'a bit bigger than an old-fashioned dance' and would go on until 4am rather than the usual time of 1am. A denunciation from the pulpit did not stop the dance going ahead. In Cloone, Doherty's Hall was closed under clerical pressure but 'the youth of the country started going to other parishes and...through time it transpired that it wasn't a good thing' (*Down With Jazz*, 1987). It reopened two years later. Pat Duignan recalled a dance at Tulsk in the 1930s where, while setting up their PA, a local priest remarked 'there'll be none of that African stuff here' (*ibid*, 1987). After some negotiation, the dance went ahead regardless. Jimmy remembered that local elders would indicate their disapproval, but would not interfere with the dances of the young. In the 1950s a 'returned American incurred the wrath of the clergy...because of the bar and his...idea of having a dance on Christmas night was another', according to May and John, when discussing a small hall in Fenaghville in the 1950s. Such wrath was not sufficiently powerful to lead to the closure of the hall. Keenahan (2006) describes how clerical attempts to stop the building of a hall in Co. Roscommon were ineffective¹⁰.

Tíre, an organisation established by a Father Hayes (Muintir na Tíre, 2011). Johnny mentioned that certain halls were set up by the Ancient Order of Hibernians, an organisation that was strongly pro-Catholic in its ethos. Otherwise, Attracta described the new hall in Ballinameen (see Fig.22) being set up in the 1950s in a converted school, owned as many were then and are now by the church. Fr. Horan's famous dance hall at Tureen in east Mayo was also built in the 1950s (Hayes, 2009). Also, as will be discussed in Chapter 9, Catholic clergy were involved with carnival dances.

- 10 It is also worth noting that attitudes towards the church were often critical in tone. Speaking of confinement of some women in laundries and asylums in the 1940s, Charlie said: 'but sure that was wrongest thing that ever was and that's what had the country the way it was and all the girls then that was put into homes that had children and to see the abuse they got/oh good god it was shocking'. Speaking of variety shows featuring competitive dance staged by the clergy, Bridie said: 'but/the priests/were very involved in a lot of this dancing...the older people all came out to it but the priests did powerful on it'. A song from the period, in its gentle irony, does seem to confirm that many were critical of a the same Fr.Confrey who has cropped up elsewhere in this study (see Chapter 7): 'God Bless you Father Confrey wherever you may go, You've set a good example to the people of Killoe, No more we'll wear the shoddy stuff from England or from France, No more at balls or concerts the immoral jazz we'll dance' (*Down With Jazz*, 1987). At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that history, oral or otherwise, is a view of the past from the present. Over the course of the interview process between 2007 and 2011, a considerable amount of media coverage was devoted to damaging allegations against the Catholic Church. It is possible that discourses of this nature coloured the retrospective views of interviewees.

There is little in the literature documenting or theorising this burst of vernacular construction of cultural venues, nor on battles – often successful – to maintain the autonomy of dance spaces. As with accounts of modern more broadly, on the rare occasions when such developments do feature in the literature, the emphasis is on oppression by clergy and other groups (Brennan, 1999). Narratives around a church-dominated society, while pertinent in some respects, need to be nuanced to do justice to the degree of autonomy demonstrated by locals in some rural areas. Blanket statements about the situation nationally need to be treated with caution and more work needs to be done to explore the balance between these forces in the cultural politics of the time. Unless oral sources are brought to bear on the question, there is a danger that the discursive power of clergy at the time, reproduced by its inscription of newspaper accounts, skews the historical view, a point related to the broader 'cultural amnesia' discussed in Chapter 6.4¹¹.

A related strand in this regard centres on the suggestion that céilí dances would have been held in rural halls, while modern dances were held in the towns. According to O'Connor (2005, p.91):

Though by no means monolithic, a pattern of association between venues and types of dance began to emerge. Traditional céilí dances tended to be organised in more local and downmarket venues by either clergy or local community leaders whereas 'modern'/jazz dances were organised in the commercially owned dance halls in the bigger towns.

This conclusion is based on work on newspapers in Leitrim in the 1930s. It has been established that there were few - if any - parochial halls in Elphin. At the same time, there certainly were céilí, and these must have been held in the private halls that dominated in the area. Equally, as has been discussed in Section 6.1, dance advertisements in the *Roscommon Herald* show that modern dances were being widely held in local, rural venues from at least as early as 1930. Keenahan (2006) has found evidence of numerous commercial dance halls in the same area in the 1930s. The Duignan brothers mentioned several rural halls in north Roscommon and south Leitrim that played jazz music during this earlier period (*Down with Jazz*, 1987), and their own band, the Mickey Duignan Band, played rural and urban venues (Keenahan 2006). On this basis, it can be said that modern dances were also popular in rural areas and crossed the urban/rural divide¹². Perhaps this is

11 This is not to discount the possibility that Elphin was distinguished in different ways from those areas in Co. Clare studied by Brennan (1999).

12 And hence the class divide between townspeople and country people, a distinction outlined by Arensberg and Kimball (2001[1936]).

associated with the distributive potential of novel media forms. Radio, cinema and gramophones extended far beyond urban areas into rural hinterlands and the emerging dance styles were perhaps less dependent on geography than previous cultural movements. Such processes mean that mapping 'modern' sensibilities onto 'urban' cultural patterns, and 'traditional' onto 'rural' becomes more problematic. Again, there are parallels with the discussion in Section 6.4, dealing with a conflation of 'sign' and 'fact' around the rural ideology (Goldring, 1987). Various types of simplification of rural life and a related urban bias would seem to be pertinent, representations that may flatter historians and cultural theorists residing in metropolitan centres. Equally, these serve to downplay examples of cultural agency by people living in non-urban locations. The next section will assess in more detail how recreational dance was inflected by counter-hegemonic currents.

8.3 The Basis For A Generational Counter-Hegemony

With the exception of O'Connor (2003, 2005), the literature is of little help in carrying out a relational analysis of recreational dance between 1940 and 1960. There are studies of set-dances (Breathnach, 1983; Tubridy, 1994), of set-dancing and céilí (Brennan, 1999) and of modern dances (Smyth, 1993; Gibbons, 1996), but none on the intimately related fields of céilí and modern moves that were dominant at this time (while O'Connor (2003, 2005) has acknowledged this dual dancing culture, her study focuses specifically on newspaper discourses). In this section, the dialectical meanings articulated around céilí and modern dances will be unpacked in the context of the rise of a new media culture.

O'Connor's (2003) discourse of ruin was, she says, largely replaced by a 'discourse of romance' around 1940 in newspapers so that quickstep and foxtrot were re-presented as desirable, glamorous, and closely related to a rising ethos of consumerism. At the same time, drawing on Williams' notions of the emergent and residual within culture (1989[1958]), she suggests that 'there were struggles and resistances to the dominant discourses and it might be more useful to conceive of emergent and residual discourses operating, sometimes overlapping, at other times struggling against, the dominant one' (p.51). Concerned as this study is with the period between 1940 and 1960, the possibility of such discursive shifts is of central concern. Although some accounts of

recreational dance in Ireland at the time tend to emphasise the Foucauldian 'disciplined body' (Smyth, 1993; Brennan, 1999), others posit a more transgressive, counter-hegemonic dancing body (O'Connor, 2005), a 'critical body' involved in the construction of more subversive moves and meanings. As has been discussed in Section 3.2, for Cowan (1990), the concept of hegemony 'opens up the question of how members of different social groups – variously positioned – accept, manipulate, use, or contest hegemonic (that is, dominant) ideas' (1990, p.13). In an ambience where 'civil society' was dominated by institutions that disseminated the national-popular, involving both creative and destructive processes, popular dance practices speak of a type of negation, a 'scream' (Holloway, 2003). Gramsci's comment, cited in Section 3.3, comes to mind: 'the entire 'educated class' with its intellectual activity, is detached from the people-nation...the indigenous intellectual element is more foreign than the foreigners' (Forgacs, 2000, p.368). It does seem to be abundantly clear that the 'people-nation' for the most part rejected embodied cultural knowledge associated with the national-popular. Small farmers and related groups were very much at home with the 'foreign' in this respect.

The politically loaded term of 'cultural resistance' has been widely deployed in studies of groups practising recreational dance. There seems to be a type of 'radical body' at the centre of such work where dance practices operate as a 'metaphor for liberation' (Thomas, 2003, p.173). On the importance of disco for the New York gay community in the 1970s, participants suggest it was nothing short of 'revolutionary', expressing a new freedom and confidence following the Stonewall riots, and legislation to decriminalise homosexuality (*The Joy of Disco*, 2013). In Ireland in the 1990s, the impact of rave is described in similarly paradigm-shifting terms (*Folklore from the Dance Floor*, 2012). Such resistant articulations are evident in Elphin, particularly in relation to the clerical wing of nationalist civil society.

This investigation is interested in a fracturing of cultural taste in the field of dance, one that might be related to a more general disenchantment with the rural ideology constructed and disseminated by the emergent Catholic middle classes. Such a critical body can usefully be conceptualised in relation to the dominant discourses of the national-popular discussed in Chapter 7, as a type of embodied 'spontaneous philosophy', one that allowed subordinate groups to challenge a dominant

'common sense' of the body. In the present investigation, the 'dancing out' of such politics will be of central concern for thinking about the oppositional significance of modern dances. A useful initial marker of such tensions has been referred to in Chapters 6 and 7, where the generational basis for dancing foxtrots and quickstep, and the moral panic that unfolded around these, was discussed.

On this basis, dancing tastes as revealed in advertisement figures in the *Roscommon Herald* can say something about a popular critical attitude, one that can be seen as constituting an embodied and 'inherent' (Cohn, 2011) cultural politics, a type of emancipation¹³ through the body. While more recent material by, for example, autonomist Marxist John Holloway (2003), has opened up a space for thinking about these more subtle freedoms, they have been trivialised as illusory by others within the Marxist traditions, oriented as they perceive themselves to be towards more 'real' considerations (see Adorno's (1941) critique of jazz-dancing). In fact, it is the very mundane, everyday nature of dance culture that renders it central to this investigation.

Perhaps the materiality and embodiment of these preferences, revealed especially in numbers of advertisements, speak the message sufficiently loudly. As an ethnographic study though, it seems important to move beyond newspaper discourses and to get a sense of how people experienced dances. There are some challenges in this respect - the politics of cultural 'decisions' (Ness, 1992), however strongly they were felt or *danced*, are not always articulated in talk (Thomas, 1993; Ward, 1993). Sometimes though, people did verbally unpack their practices. During the Emergency, against a background of considerable 'privation' (Jimmy), emigration, and the narrow cultural prescriptions of the national-popular (Goldring, 1987), it is possible to discern a process of favouring practices and discourses associated with modern dance. These were closely articulated with media representations constructed through cinema, radio and gramophones. While set-dancing was taught by dancing masters in the nineteenth century, sometimes aided by printed instructions, and céilí dance was transmitted mainly through the institutions of nationalist civil society¹⁴

13 In a similar fashion, various attempts by the authorities to circumscribe club culture in Dublin in the 1990s allowed for the mobilising of a sense of emancipation (Shanagher, 2012b).

14 It should be pointed out that the conflation presented of modern culture and radio simplifies matters to an extent. 'Nationalist' mass media also existed, particularly in the form of the Irish state broadcaster, 2RN. Paddy said 'there used be *Céilí House*. That used be on like you know Dinjo. That used to be good and that used to be very popular. Everybody listened to that...Saturday night'.

(Brennan, 1999), modern dance and music were disseminated by media culture linked to a type of 'transnational civil society' constituted through the international production, distribution and consumption networks of the culture industry, and the groups that controlled it. New media offered a glamorous, cosmopolitan movement/meaning formation that appealed to Irish youths at this time, a discourse of romance (O'Connor, 2003) that acted as a counterpoint to a rural ideology constituted by nationalist civil society, and permeated with an ethos of morality, national pride and frugality (Brian).

'Jazz and Hollywood swept the nation', said Tom. According to Mícheál, 'you'd look at a fellow if he was going to a céilí as backwards you know' - Irish music and dance at this time was 'in the gutter'. He attended smaller, rural halls in the 1950s and says modern dances were seen as 'far superior' - 'you were looked at - I don't know I suppose an old fogey if you were interested in traditional music'. Céilí dances were 'frowned on or looked down [on] as being old-fashioned'. These discourses provide further evidence of a counter-hegemonic challenge to the terms of nationalist hegemony: 'the adoption...of a language drawn from the ideological practice of the dominant class always implies a shift in the meanings of that language' (Gray, 1981, p.243). The struggles over meaning posited by Laclau and Mouffe (1986) would seem germane, centred on a type of carnivalesque inversion of meaning amongst young people - that which was 'high' was debased, while that which was 'low' was elevated (Bakhtin, 1984). At the same time, it is important to emphasise that more than language was at stake in these encounters, and that these meanings were expressed in a material way through the embodied practices of dance.

In the post-war strain of subculture theory, the oppositional practices of the young were seen to be centrally articulated with media forms such as cinema and television. These represented cultural resources that were available for the construction of identities forged along generational and other lines. Hall and Whannel made a significant advance on the 'culture and civilisation' tradition by focusing on the unpredictable uses that young people made of cultural texts and products. In their view, 'the use intended by the provider and the use actually made by the audience of the particular style never wholly coincide and frequently conflict' (1998[1964], p.62). In subsequent years, reception theory intersected with subculture theory and reached its apogee in the work of John Fiske

on television viewing in the late 1980s (1987, 1989). In this conception, the popular economy has its 'financial' and 'cultural' aspects, where the former centred on production, marketing and monetary value, while the latter dealt with various types of cultural inscription and circulation by the audience. As such:

The cultural commodity cannot be adequately described in financial terms only: the circulation that is crucial to its popularity occurs in the parallel economy – the cultural. What is exchanged and circulated here is not wealth but meanings, pleasures, and social identities (1987, p.311).

The active audience is foregrounded in this way, engaged in various processes of cultural 'resistance'. Media culture in Ireland would also appear to have been implicated in these types of cultural strategies. Tom made an explicit connection between the appeal of modern dance and the cinematic experience:

Sometimes it conveyed pictures of different things. For instance it conveyed pictures of other ballrooms in other parts of the world and so on, and of course things were poorish here so that anything that conveyed a picture that was glossier than the one you were used to - just like the cinema. That's how the cinema works.

Spiriting oneself away from a troubled social and economic climate while dancing in the local hall points towards what mass culture theorists have termed 'escape', usually in a derogatory sense (Adorno, 1998[1941]; Hoggart, 1998[1957])(there will be a further discussion of Adorno's views in Chapter 9). Countering mass culture theorists on the nature of these media experiences, Young (p.155) remarks 'it is fallacious to think of these episodes as escapes from reality'¹⁵. A more positive accenting of escape is possible on this basis, with an emphasis on the positive and liberatory potentialities of these cultural strategies. In relation to female viewing of cinema, Dyer (1992) has written of 'escape' as a creative act that needs to be understood in relation to 'that which is escaped from', as well as 'that which is escaped to'. In an Irish context, Byrne (1997) has investigated the appeal that cinema held for women in Waterford in the 1940s. In a society riven by poverty, unemployment, and patriarchal restrictions - there was plenty of grist to this mill of 'escape'. Tom's thoughts on Irish dances are relevant in this light:

15 One could go further and suggest that 'escape' is not the most appropriate word. Based on my own dancing experiences there is rarely an attempt simply to leave one world behind; there is often a recognition that return to the 'first' world is an integral part of this process, a completion of the cycle; and there may be none of the reluctance to return suggested by the metaphor of 'escape'. For these reasons, it may be more useful to speak in terms of moving between alternate modes of reality.

I went to céilí dances when I was very young and not able to dance really anything. And I started off on the céilís. They were cheap, sixpence and so on, and they got you in on the hang of it but I never made any great effort to dance Irish dancing.

His description of céilí as a 'a wild, hilarious thing' constitutes a negation of dominant discourses, so that foxtrots come to be seen as stylish and sophisticated, while Irish dances were regarded as crass and disordered. Counter-hegemonic practice of this sort, where céilí dance is seen as 'old-fashioned' and associated with 'old fogeys' would seem to involve more than a temporal distancing. It was articulated with a moral 'geography of mobility' (Cresswell, 2006), as was discussed in Section 7.3, moving in precisely the opposite direction to that constructed by dominant groups. London, New York and Paris were conferred for many young people with a type of moral gravitational pull that countered official geographies directing matters to the 'national-moral' territory. Given the continuing valorisation of all things 'Irish' during the research period, its opposite may have come to seem more attractive, as part of a dialectical counter-hegemonic moment, a 'perverse cultural economy' that will be discussed later in this section. The emigration of young people to London, New York and other metropolitan centres that was discussed in Section 8.1 might usefully be borne in mind at this juncture.

Fiske's research (1987, 1989) is also relevant in its focus on resistant articulations in relation to national-popular culture. Aboriginal youth, for example, used hip-hop music as a means of constructing transnational cultural allegiances, and to counter a dominant, white identity in Australia. There is evidence for what was termed by US band Funkadelic (1978) as, 'one nation under a groove', a culture of the dispossessed with its roots in African-American communities:

A national culture, and the sense of national identity which many believe it can produce, which is constructed by the cultural industries or by politicians or by cultural lobbyists, may not coincide with the social alliances that are felt to be most productive by subordinate groups within the nation. This Aboriginal cultural identity within contemporary Australia may serve itself best by articulating itself not with an Australian nation, but with blacks in other white-dominated, ex-colonial countries. (1998, p.514)

Although such ethnic tensions are less germane for the research setting, nevertheless an analogous sense of marginalisation on the basis of youth can be identified, and a corresponding 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) can be posited, one that transcended borders, stepping out the foxtrot, quickstep and waltz from Berlin to Paris to New York to Roscommon, and dancing to the tune of a

transnational, generational beat. This involved the construction of an alternative Irish identity, more fluid, more open, more resistant to official nationalist 'closure' of meaning in some ways. In such practices, 'Irishness' was to be associated with 'nation' rather than 'State'¹⁶ (Gibbons, 1996). Modern dance and music may have given young people the freedom to imaginatively ally themselves with youth in other countries, rather than with dominant groups closer to home. As with more politicised meanings around modern dance, these affiliations are difficult to verbalise but that they *were* felt and embodied would seem to account in some measure for the popularity of modern dance. Theories of cultural populism have been subject to criticism in contemporary consumerist societies (McGuigan, 1998) for offering a very politically dilute type of 'resistance'. They appear to gain traction in the circumstances that prevailed in Ireland between 1940 and 1960, when real attempts were being made to proscribe certain types of recreational dance, and conversely where cultural opposition was demonstrated in a very material way.

Counter-hegemonic articulations such as these had quite literal emancipatory connotations for young people in Germany in the 1930s. Back (1997, p.186) discusses how swing music and dancing was picked up by 'swing youth' and provided 'a resource for self-expression and dissent'. After repeated attempts to control this cultural movement, a number of its practitioners were incarcerated in German concentration camps. Although a quite a distinct mode of 'nationalism' was operational in Ireland during the period, one that had little in common with the brutality of fascist Germany, nevertheless the findings suggest that a political space opened up for mobilising a sense of 'freedom' for Irish youths, similar to that expressed by German swing youth and other groups subjected to cultural oppression (Back, 1997; Thomas, 2003; *Moral Panic*, 2004). Moreover, given the ongoing moral panic revealed in newspaper coverage of the 1940s, it does seem to be a possibility - as Thornton (2004) and Ó Giolláin (1999) suggest - that youth culture flourishes, not *despite* official interventions, but *because* of them.

16 It is interesting in this respect that a distinctive dance culture that was both 'Irish' and 'modern' travelled with young people to their chosen destinations. Emigrants spoke of attending dances at the Galteemore in London (Dan) and similar events in Glasgow (Margaret) and New York (Pat). An incident that bears witness to these more fluid, complex conceptions of 'Irishness', involved the death of my uncle, Pat. While he was spending a month in the home place in 2011, as he did every year to meet friends and relatives, and to get away from Brooklyn, New York for the hot summer months, he was taken ill and passed away. He had previously stated his intentions to be waked and buried in his Irish 'home', but the names of both places are inscribed on his headstone. He came from both Brooklyn and Boheroe.

Thornton (*Moral Panic*, 2004) suggests that negative, hegemonic media responses 'baptise transgression', encouraging the development of youth dance and musical movements. Ó Giolláin (1999) has suggested that 'elite opposition to American popular culture [in Ireland] helped to give it an anti-establishment value in youth culture' (p.169). While Chapter 7 presented the more destructive aspect of this cycle, this chapter is concerned with creative moments. A burst of youthful cultural dynamism leads to an oppressive reaction by dominant groups that, if unsuccessful, may reinvigorate the subculture. For example, negative media attention of raves in Britain in the late 1980s allowed participants to feel part of a larger, meaningful process (Thornton, 2004). Equally, when contemporaneous media play out the heightened emotional tensions that characterise these panics, they illuminate – not just a certain dominant discourse around recreational dance – but also the existence of distinct dance practices among marginal groups that are sufficiently powerful to trigger attempts to proscribe, curb and regulate culture.

Given the hysteria that emerges among dominant groups, marginality can generate useful transgressive identities for youth and other subordinate groups. When such differences are positively inflected as 'resistance', they are closely linked to 'freedom', a type of collective claiming of the 'right' to express and dance the culture of one's choice, a 'freedom to party' (Bey, 1985), one that becomes all the more urgent when powerful interests seek to deny it. Seen from this angle, cultural conflict between generations can be beneficial for youth culture, particularly where moral panics are of limited success in controlling the popularity of dance and music, as they were both in combating clubbing in Britain in the 1990s, and modern dances in Ireland in the 1930s and 1940s. A curious reciprocation seems to be at play, what I'd like to term a 'perverse cultural economy'.

Other transgressive elements were evident, and there is an account from Roscommon of two returned emigrants bringing jazz records to play on a gramophone at a house dance. There followed a demonstration of 'body-to-body' dancing that caused something of a stir, especially amongst older people present (Healy 1999). On the sounds of jazz, Diarmuid Breathnach has suggested '[anti-jazz campaigners] were hearing jazz, many of them for the first time and it must have sounded....and is...far more sexual than...any European music that we know of' (*Down With Jazz*, 1987). Closed-couple dances were framed as being relatively sensuous compared to Irish dances where, in the

opinion of one commentator, 'the nearest approach to contiguity is the joining of partly outstretched hands'¹⁷ (Hanly, 1931, p.166). What was novel in the new dances was not contact between the sexes but a greater *degree* of contact, a move from group forms to couples, a breaking away in some sense of the dyad from the multitude, and on this basis a more pronounced heterosexualisation of dance. While waltzes, polkas and set-dances were practised at house dances, and 'old-time' waltzes featured alongside Irish dances at céilí dance events, modern dances were unique in featuring *only* closed couple dances, with young men and women turned in on themselves, and not part of a larger line or circle, where more monitoring could take place, and where the possible intensity of male-to-female encounters might be diluted somewhat.

As a way of further prising apart counter-hegemonic articulations around dance, it has been instructive to cast a historical gaze back to the fraught cultural politics of the 1930s, and to the 'Gralton Case' discussed in Section 7.3 (Feeley, 1986; Gibbons, 1996). While the dancers interviewed were not old enough to have danced at Gralton's dance hall (although John was familiar with the family), the proximity of these dramatic developments to the research setting, their pointed politics, and their highlighting of various tensions in rural society at the time merit some consideration. Feeley (1986) records that it was the young people of the vicinity who successfully called on Jim Gralton to reopen his hall after it had been closed by the authorities in the early 1930s. Nothing conclusive can be stated in this regard, but it may be that jazz dances acquired a certain transgressive cachet at a time when nation-building was central, and the national-popular was being actively promoted by official sources.

Evidence that such processes may have spilled over into the research period comes from a piece in that includes a reference to the same District Justice Goff referred to in Section 7.4. He defined jazz as 'a thing popularised by the Jews in America: it was English and American of the worst type, and was of savage origin' (*Roscommon Herald*, 1940e, p.3). Given that discourses were in circulation around this time around 'wealthy American Bolsheviks' who promoted jazz music (*Down with Jazz*,

17 Wulff (2008) goes as far as to essentialise all 'Irish dances' as somewhat asexual, and on this basis suggests that people in Ireland lived in an unnatural universe where prudish dancers recoiled from any kind of close contact. This though is to neglect the popularity of set-dances where the 'waltz hold', 'house around' and 'swinging' all feature 'closed' moves that were performed in local sets.

1987), terms such as these leave no doubt as to the moral and political dangers and attractions involved. It might be useful to recall the types of underground currents of socialism and republicanism that pertained in the 1940s and 1950s, as were discussed in Section 5.4. Various intersections between modern dance and more explicitly 'political' activity are evident, although more work would be required to map these.

If the discourses of moral panic conferred on modern dance practices an aura of what I've termed 'compelling deviance', then this might have appealed to a generation bombarded by the discourses of post-revolutionary puritanism discussed in Chapter 7. As with the perverse cultural economy posited earlier in this section, interventionist moves by powerful groups to valorise the dances of cultural nationalism may have played a crucial role in establishing jazz as the 'other', the forbidden fruit that appealed to the young. Even if young people did not always speak in such direct terms about the nature of their dancing practices, there seem to be some grounds for (carefully) speaking for them, as befits an ethnography, without lapsing into a type of ventriloquism (Saukko 2003). If this is the case, then those who favoured modern music and dance, and comprehensively marginalised céilí forms over the period, were at some level pursuing counter-hegemonic cultural ends.

In this light, another strand in cultural studies might be usefully brought into play. Studies of 'subcultures' emerged in the post-war period in Britain as a response to new urban youth movements with distinct tastes in dance, music and fashion. This work involved a 'rescuing' of youth culture from the 'deviancy' and 'moral panic' paradigms. There was, according to McRobbie (1981) 'the ascription of a sense of dignity and purpose, an integrity and rationale, to that section of youth commonly labelled 'animals' in the popular media' (p.115). A key theoretical force was the CCCS at the University of Birmingham. They set their ideas out in works such as *Resistance through Rituals* (Jefferson and Hall, 1976), and armed with a combination of Marxism, structuralism and post-structuralism, assessed the cultural politics of working class groups (Bennett, 1999). Thornton and Gelder offer a useful definition of 'subcultures' in this regard:

Subcultures are groups of people that have something in common with each other (ie. they share a problem, an interest, a practice) which distinguishes them in a significant way from the members of other social groups (Thornton and Gelder, 1997, p.1).

As Kellner (2012) remarks: 'through studies of youth subcultures, British cultural studies demonstrated how culture came to constitute distinct forms of identity and group membership and appraised the oppositional potential of various youth subcultures' (p.4). Such cultural practices are thus understood as any expression of taste – musical, stylistic, embodied through dance – that deviate from dominant norms.

There has been little analysis of Irish culture and society in this time on this basis, with 'subcultures' typically being associated with post-war, and notably *urban* groups, as in Gelder's (2005) collection. The value of the term for this investigation lies in a problematising of the imaginary of the *gemeinschaft* (Tonnie, 2002[1957]) that is often constructed around rural life in Ireland and elsewhere (Arensberg and Kimball 2001[1936]). This investigation opens up a more fractured, conflictual picture of social life (see Section 5.4 and Section 9.2 for evidence of other types of 'fractures'). The cultural dynamics of youth culture at this time, involving the carving out of a novel, oppositional culture linked to dance, music, fashion and territory/space, would seem to fit these definitions of subculture¹⁸. Novel technologies associated with the emergent transnational culture industry – cinema, radio and gramophone – were used by young people to construct a novel dancing 'assemblage' (Jordan, 1995).

With the exception of Byrne (1997) and O'Connor (2003, 2005), studies of Irish cultural history have been slow to identify these types of media-related resistant articulations. On the contrary, Fallon (1998) and Brown (2002) draw heavily on mass culture theory in their historiography, and are notably sceptical about the value of media culture. Viewed from this angle, more literary engagements with the 'outside' are almost by default progressive, while similarly oriented cinema-going experiences, for example, constitute distraction and cultural debasement. Fallon (1998, p.11) speaks of the 'aural wallpaper of Tin Pan Alley' that featured on radio and in dance halls. 'Ireland', he says 'was hopelessly outgunned by external forces – mainly commercial – over which her leaders had little control' (*ibid*). Recreational dance does not register directly in Brown's (2002) account, despite its huge popularity, but where 'mass communications' are addressed, they are symptomatic of our status as 'a social province of the United Kingdom' (p.205). On the impact of radio and

¹⁸ The term 'subculture' has been problematised by Muggleton's (2004) ideas of 'post-subcultures' and Maffesoli's 'neo-tribes' (Bennett, 1999), concepts that posit more fluid postmodern subjectivities.

cinema in the 1930s, he somewhat begrudgingly suggests 'change, even when these technological novelties are admitted, was scarcely a dominant characteristic of years when Irish life continued to find its most appropriate expression in moulds shaped in the late nineteenth century' (p.141). He does posit a link between cinema, music and emigration in the 1940s, but 'real' change is related to more intellectual, 'artistic' engagements, forms of culture associated with cosmopolitanism and political sophistication.

Something of a double-standard is evident in these historiographies. Little attempt is made to work through the meanings of cultural engagements around music, dance and cinema for actors at the time, largely small farmers. While both sources agree that very particular conditions prevailed in Ireland at this time, a diversity of engagements with media culture by ordinary people are largely discounted. As 'commercial culture', use and appreciation of media culture lies beyond serious consideration. The possibility that more immersive, embodied experiences around dance and media culture could have been productive of social change is not considered in these approaches. Again, as was discussed in Section 6.4, it is narrow, exclusive definitions of 'art' and 'culture' that come to the fore in these analyses, a problem accentuated by the absence of the grounding effects of oral histories. For this investigation, it is important both to make space for first-hand accounts, and to 'locate' the research in spatial and temporal specificities. For this reason, Ferrer's (2005) study is instructive insofar as he posits complex engagements between dancers and social variables: 'the [1990s] Chinese disco scene in fact provides an entry point into modern, global capitalism. It could not be any less oppositional, except for the fact, of course, that this happens in China' (p.9). Just as culture associated with international capitalism can come to take on oppositional meanings in a communist state, so in an economically isolationist state that sought to propagate a rural ideology, novel counter-hegemonic articulations can arise¹⁹.

Further critically thinking through these resistant articulations, it should be added that much of the work on the active *audience*, while relevant to some extent, needs to be nuanced to account for the dynamics of recreational dance and its *participants*. Fiske's *Watching Television* (1987) is concerned

19 It should also be said that, what from one angle seems to constitute a type of counter-hegemony (that is, in relation to nationalist hegemony) can, from another perspective, be seen to lead to a type of (internationalist) hegemony. These transnational dimensions will be worked through in more detail in Chapter 9.

primarily with a sedentary body, one that watches television, and thus with 'mind', cognition, 'symbolic resistance'. There are tentative signs in Fiske's research of more active 'excorporation', as when television advertisements are integrated into children's street culture, but the focus remains on a more distanced, disengaged form of cultural engagement. In fact, at times the body features as 'beyond politics' in some ways:

[Popular culture]...often centres on the body and its sensations rather than on the mind and its sense, for the bodily pleasures offer carnivalesque, evasive, liberating practices – they constitute the popular terrain where hegemony is weakest, a terrain that may possibly lie beyond its reach. (1987, p.6)

In the context of the current discussion, there is a danger of 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater'. In other words, even if *some* aspects of dancing are 'beyond hegemony' (as will be discussed in Chapter 10), other aspects might be usefully seen in terms of cultural counter-hegemony. This opens up the question of differences between spectatorship *per se*, and the more subtle processes around media culture and dancing culture. There is a real sense of another dimension of articulation, so that a type of what I've termed 'embodied productivity' seems to be salient, one that transcends the more cognitive forms of resistance that feature in audience studies, and one that has key implications for the positing of a 'critical body'. While the parallel rise of media culture and modern dances would seem to be linked, dance culture was *made* by dancers in a way that was more active, and incorporated a greater degree of agency through use of the body, than the act of viewing of or listening to media products alone. In other words, Fiske's (1987) 'cultural economy' may underestimate the degree of agency involved in recreational dance practice. In this light, Cohn (2011) critiques the paradigm of 'creative consumption' which can, he says, result in the reification of all cultural practice as consumption: 'this market logic has become so deeply internalised that, if, say, a woman in Trinidad puts together some outrageous get-up and goes out dancing, anthropologists will automatically assume that what she's doing can be defined as 'consumption' (as opposed to, say, showing off or having a good time)' (p.11). Equally, Malbon calls for a more critical sociology of consumption:

While the power of the imagination in contributing towards the allure of certain forms of consuming cannot be denied...the actual practices of consuming themselves are surely *also* implicated as fundamental? On a very basic level, for example, the *imaginative* construction of consuming is inextricably tied into the *practical* constitution of consuming through the use of the body [author's italics]. (1999, p.23)

A more radical view of the body would see it unfettered from the 'bottom-line' of consumption that can inflect the cultural populist position, and accorded its due autonomy, its role in constituting a 'full rich life' (Hoggart 1998[1957]) through dance and other embodied practices. Dance culture is more (though not completely) 'immediate' in this sense²⁰. Autonomist Marxist John Holloway comments on the power of 'doing', which is 'inherently social. What I do is always part of a social flow of doing, in which the precondition of my doing is the doing (or having-done) of others, in which the doing of others provides the means of my doing. Doing is inherently plural, collective, choral, communal' (2003, p.11). In this sense, recreational dancers 'do' something.

The dancing stories referred to in this section are suggestive of cultural autonomy during the period, a dynamism of modern dance culture and dancers, and an illustration of agency that is sometimes neglected in the historical record, as well as in the literature on dance. Shining through these accounts is a sense of agency, creativity and intentionality that chimes in some ways with the views of cultural populism on media reception. In particular, Fiske's (1988) 'cultural economy' that emphasises the circulation of meanings, pleasures and identities, has been salient for this investigation, and useful for questioning the gramscian view of 'foreign' media culture as debased and of questionable merit (Forgacs, 2000). Investigating the basis for a generational counter-hegemony, it seems that there was a vibrant culture around modern dances despite, and even because of, attempts at control and prohibition. In a type of 'perverse cultural economy', modern dances were seen as exotic, internationalist, and transgressive. In theoretical terms, this opens up the question of how different types of hegemonic articulations - national and international - are related. As Ferrer's (2005) investigation of Chinese discos in the 1990s shows, the cultural politics of different spheres can be related in complex ways. In considering other aspects of the appeal of modern dance, a type of dancing pluralism will be considered in the next section.

²⁰ I recall the place of media culture in clubbing. Certainly, vinyl records, pirate radio stations, magazines, television, cinema and early forms of Internet usage had their place. The phenomenon of 'the dance' however, though it drew in complex ways on these media experiences, was constituted in a very material, embodied way by the dancers. Their presence or absence on the dance floor was central to the 'being' of the event in a way that seems less salient for more direct media experiences such as watching television.

8.4 Recreational Dance and Cultural Pluralism

Working further through counter-hegemonic articulations of dance, it seems to be the case that some dancers were not making 'either/or' decisions in their dancing practices, engaged in only one type of dance. These more complex approaches to dancing will be assessed in this section.

Neat categorisation of people into 'céilí' or 'modern' dancers does not always accurately reflect the complexity of dancing 'decisions' at this time. Most of the dancers in the 1940s, although they favoured modern dances, also attended céilí dances and house dances. Many people could draw on a repertoire of dancing practices, and they provide evidence of an embodied pluralism. Fiske has described the 'cultural economy' in terms that resonate with the centripetal/centrifugal framework discussed in the literature review:

[The people's] power is expressed in the resistances to homogenisation, it works as a centrifugal rather than as a centripetal force, it recognises conflict of interest, it proposes multiplicity over singularity and it may be summed up as the exercise of the power to be different. (1987, p.511)

Such tendencies could also be observed in the late 1950s. Johnny and May were 'keen lover[s] of céilí dancing and there was such a variety of céilí bands in those days'. Even so, they also frequented modern dances: 'we would have attended both of them'. In this regard, a less predictable, more complex cultural politics may have been at work.

Such popular sensibilities have been conceptualised as a 'popular aesthetic' by Bourdieu (1998), Docker (1994) and Gibbons (1996). According to Ang (1998), 'this aesthetic is of an essentially pluralist and conditional nature because it is based on the premise that the significance of a cultural object can differ from person to person and from situation to situation' (p.181). Gibbons (1996) suggests that more plural political and cultural currents amongst small farmers in the 1920s and 1930s contrasted with the 'closed' sensibilities of nationalist hegemony, in the sense that national-popular culture tended to assume a very particular, standardised and official form that was less amenable to change. Even though céilí was closely articulated with 'Irishness', while modern dance was linked with the 'foreign' or 'international' in newspapers discourses, a number of the dancers either rejected these signifying practices or engaged in more fluid, open identity games. There may

have been a carnivalesque scepticism for the types of symbolic (and embodied) closure associated with Irish dances, and a consequent revelling in miscegenation, impurity, and hybridisation (Bakhtin, 1984). O'Connor's (2005) call to assess how newspaper discourses were negotiated by real people seems all the more pertinent in this light.

This may also be related to the moral panic that emerged around modern dance. For example, it is a type of cultural hybridisation that, for Back (1997), constituted the most 'offensive' aspect of swing music and dance for the Nazis in the 1930s and 1940s. Foxtrots and other modern dances were seen as representing a type of cultural and racial miscegenation, a truly carnivalesque threat (Bakhtin, 1984). Although as was discussed in Section 8.3, Ireland was spared the brutal, rabid nationalism that infected German society (*Judging Dev*, 2008), nevertheless even those promoting an ethos of more moderate nationalism seem to have been unsettled by processes of 'creolisation', one that opens up the possibility of a type of 'subversive hybridity'. In some ways removed from the macrocosmic considerations of Gramsci, this is a more subtle, problematic politics, a sphere that requires a further critical interrogation and extension of hegemony theory by a carnivalesque cultural politics of 'centrifugality' (Docker, 1994). In any case, such brands and degrees of pluralism challenge reductionist histories (Coogan, 1976; Brennan, 1999; Banville, 2004) that streamline the cultural preferences of groups into either/or positions. Assumptions of this sort seem to have little to say on the more nuanced realities of the past, so that complex practices are subject to various types of reductionism to further contemporary agendas (Fallon, 1998). Such cultural openness and pluralism is rarely acknowledged in accounts of small farmer culture (Coogan, 1976; Banville, 2004).

Even though their preferences lay with modern dance, it becomes possible on the basis of these findings to view many young small farmers as culturally 'open'. Another possibility is that for these pluralist dancers, moves may have had less to do with broader political formations and more to do with dancing as an end-in-itself, as a source of *embodied* fun, play and pleasure. If so, then these experiences might trump the identity politics opened up by hegemonic cultural politics. In other words, dances may have been enjoyable more as 'autotelic' practices (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), rather than as pawns in a representational, overtly politicised 'cultural battle'. Chapter 10 will work

through these post-hegemonic possibilities. Decoupling the elements of the move/meaning construct that has been used until now opens up other interesting possibilities so that, on the tricky question of what embodied practices *mean*, no hard-and-fast conclusions can be drawn. Ward (1997) criticises the epistemological error that assumes that dance must *signify* something at all. For him, such thinking constitutes another type of essentialism. At the complex threshold between meaning and movement, research findings must be handled carefully, and conclusions need to be framed in contingent terms. Finally, it seems that cultural pluralism was more evident among the small farmer class than more upwardly mobile sections of the population, at least in the earlier years of the research period, a point that will be explored in Chapters 9 and 10. The next section will return to a broader generational consideration of dance, and assess its articulation with broader currents in Irish society between 1940 and 1960.

8.5 Small Farmers as Agents of Modernity

This section will draw together a number of themes of the chapter, and consider the place of modern dance in a broader move towards modernity in Ireland during the research period. In this section, it will be argued that emigration and the rise of modern dance are symptomatic of a degree of popular agency in this respect. 'Modernity' will be used in the sense that was introduced in Chapter 1, as relating primarily to the rise of mass media culture and an associated ethos of consumption.

In ideological terms, Brown (2004) has used Geertz's concepts of 'essentialism' and 'epochalism' to describe cultural strategies deployed by newly independent states to negotiate the processes of nation-building. These processes are both ideological and material, incorporating an interplay - in Marxist terms - of base and superstructure. Both tendencies are present in a creative tension but one or other can dominate at any particular time. He associated 'essentialism' with a backward-looking, more mythological approach that dominated official life in the first twenty years of the Irish Free State. Before 1940, the Depression and Economic War with Britain had made this a decade of isolationism and striving towards self-sufficiency. Beginning in the 1940s, he suggests that 'epochalism', defined as a more outward-looking, forward-directed internationalist sensibility, came slowly to dominate: 'there are reasons for regarding the period 1939-1945 as the beginning of a

watershed in Irish life' (p.168). This 'watershed' was linked by Brown to the 'social fabric' of everyday life, although it is the official sphere that receives most attention in his study.

If modern dances, and the media forms that promoted them, did facilitate a disillusionment with culture of the national-popular, and more broadly with the rural ideology, as was discussed in Section 8.1, then there may be homologies between the imaginative journeys evident in Tom's dancing stories and the material ones being made by hundreds of thousands of emigrants in the late 1940s and early 1950s (a possibility that becomes more salient given that he emigrated himself for a number of years before returning). Given the closely related rise of modern dance, an ethos of consumerism, and a discourse of romance from the 1920s on (O'Connor, 2003), a type of popular 'watershed', involving novel articulations of embodied cultural knowledge can be identified at this time. It may be the case that Irish youth – predominantly the sons and daughters of small farmers – were important agents in 'becoming modern', a possibility thrown into sharper relief by the anti-modern thrust of the rural ideology. From this angle, the contested space of the dance hall appears for many people to have acted as a type of departure lounge for journeys – material and imaginative – into modernity. To some extent, this involved an inherent (and embodied) critique of the rural ideology, related to the post-hegemonic 'exodus' referred to by anarchist theorist Jessie Cohn (2011)²¹.

Brown (2004), referring to the cultural and economic shifts of the late 1950s and early 1960s, notes the sense of surprise on the part of some commentators at 'rapid transition from a society ostensibly dedicated to economic nationalism and its social and cultural concomitants, to a society prepared to abandon much of its past in the interests of swift growth' (p.232). Various factors were put forward, including television, Thornley's (1964) 'delayed peaceful social revolution', the vision of Lemass²², shifts in the education system and the Second Vatican Council. These elements would certainly need to be considered, but this research investigation suggests that the embodied processes enacted by

21 Perhaps on this basis it might be suggested that the political radicalism of the generation that struggled for independence was transposed into a cultural radicalism for their sons and daughters, in a context where overt revolutionary politics had been proscribed and marginalised, as was discussed in Chapter 5. Emancipatory tendencies may have been displaced into the sphere of dance, amongst other areas of social life at this time. A more fluid 'struggle' of this nature would in some ways be consonant with the post-Marxist politics of Laclau and Mouffe (1986).

22 Sean Lemass led a revived Fianna Fáil from the late 1950s.

young people on the dance floor for a number of years might also be borne in mind. In their dancing decisions, young people had long rejected the simplifications and distortions of the rural ideology, and they were ready when the government of Lemass caught up with their reality. Waters (2002, p.12) proposes a similar conclusion: 'far from being evidence of sub-modernity, it is arguable that Big Tom²³ was more central to the modernisation of Irish society than the *First Programme for Economic Expansion*'.

In an age of supposed national insularity and self-sufficiency (Coogan, 1976), dancing strategies could be seen as establishing an important bridge from the local to the global. This constituted an interest in the 'modern', defined as articulated with the commercial music, dances and entertainment of anglophonic media institutions (Byrne, 1997; O'Connor, 2003,2005; Daly, 2006). It can be argued that dance and the body in some ways constituted the cutting-edge of a type of cosmopolitanism, a site where people could engage in and negotiate with moves and meanings associated with a more international sensibility. In this regard, while Storey's view of cultural hegemony theory envisions a 'closing down' of cultural opposition through incorporation, marginalisation or disappearance, Gramsci himself seems more open to significant changes in the superstructure being enacted through a 'war of position' that leads to new configurations of power. Equally, according to Cohen (2002[1972], p.1), sometimes '[moral panic] has... more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society conceives itself'. Moreover, social change linked in complex ways to recreational dance, media culture, emigration, and an official shift from 'essentialism' to 'epochalism' (Brown, 2004) would seem to be symptomatic of a deeper shift from a nationalist-inflected isolationist capitalist mode of production to a more internationalist one. Young farmers and their dance practices, can be seen in some ways as contributing to these changes.

Just as 'dominant memory' in Britain tends to ascribe to Churchill sole responsibility for victory in the Second World War (PMG, 1982), our own hagiographies venerate influential individuals at the time such as Lemass or Whitaker (see Section 9.2 for more detail on these individuals). A consideration of popular memory around dancing performs a type of democratic 'decentring' of

23 A popular showband leader and singer.

agency. The modernising 'virus' that Brown (2004) identifies had long infected dancers in the research setting. If a type of cultural emancipation was at stake, then young small farmers at this time were instrumental in carving out an 'exodus' (Virno, 1996) from the prescriptions of the rural ideology and its associated national-popular culture. Moreover, given the gendering of emigration noted in Section 8.1, it may that females in particular availed of these escape routes from the rural ideology, a possibility enhanced by the discussion of gender restrictions in Chapter 7. In the rather oppressive cultural milieu of the young Irish state, the attainment of a degree of cultural freedom by young people at this time can be regarded as a meaningful achievement. These developments can be linked to a broader 'modernisation' of Irish society in terms of a loosening of more restrictive codes around religion and nationalism.

Chapter Summary

Using gramscian hegemony theory, this chapter investigated a range of cultural strategies of recreational dancers in Elphin between 1940 and 1960 under the rubric of a counter-hegemonic resistance. A discussion of the significant impact of emigration established an important context within which dancing decisions were made at this time. This was followed by an account of how local people successfully maintained control of their dancing spaces, a consideration that led to a broader analysis of how, by embracing modern dances, dancers made decisions that ran contrary to the prescriptions of nationalist hegemony. Teasing apart the hermeneutic basis for these processes, it was established that céilí signified in quite distinct ways to quickstep and foxtrot. It was seen as 'old-fashioned', and opposed to a more cosmopolitan sensibility around modern dance. Given that the discourses of moral panic targeting novel moves were active in the 1940s and 1950s, there appears to have been what Thornton (2004) has described as a 'baptism of transgression' around the dance practices of young people. A type of dancing pluralism was also displayed by some dancers, one that has been useful for positing a more 'open' carnivalesque sensibility associated with the 'popular aesthetic' theorised by Bourdieu (1984). Finally, it was suggested that modern dances be given their due as part of an ensemble of practices associated with a shift towards a broader modernity. While the focus has been on more oppositional currents related to recreational dance, gramscian hegemony theory also envisions conservative currents in this regard. 'Modernity' can be

viewed from a more critical perspective. In a society structured nationally and internationally by the capitalist mode of production, and by the rise of the culture industry, the findings also suggest that dance culture, especially during the late 1950s, can be read in more oppressive ways. It is these questions that will be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 9

Modern Dance as Hegemonic

*Are we human or are we dancer?
My sign is vital, my hands are cold
And I'm on my knees looking for the answer
Are we human or are we dancer?*

The Killers (*Human*, 2008)

9.0 Introduction

This chapter will present a view of modern dance as implicated in the reproduction of power. A view of cultural 'resistance' became unfashionable in studies of youth and subcultures during the 1990s, and it was suggested that accounts of recreational dance were being romanticised (Thornton, 1995; Bennett, 1999; Saukko, 2003). In her study of clubbers in Britain in the 1990s, Thornton identified processes of 'distinction' that were implicated in the generation of a 'taste culture'. As such, the supposedly oppositional cultural strategies of clubbers were re-presented as exclusive and conservative. Such conservatism can also be seen to inflect more macrocosmic developments, given that the rise of modern dance was associated with that of the anglophonic culture industry.

The first section will prise apart the category of 'modern dance' as it was practised in Roscommon during the 1940s and 1950s in order to think through the social logic of distinction. By presenting findings on processes of exclusion, conclusions about social stratification in Elphin can be drawn. In the next section, a broader view of the findings will assess the place of modern dance in the context of the rise of the international culture industry. It will be suggested that dance practices to some degree reveal articulations of culture within a transnational hegemony.

9.1 Modern Dance, Class and Distinction

This section will present evidence for the deployment of different sub-types of modern dance in the service of a 'taste culture', one mobilised as a cultural proxy for social exclusion. The concepts of 'distinction' and the closely related concepts of 'cultural capital' and 'subcultural capital' have been used (Bourdieu, 1984; Thornton, 1995).

While at a national level, céilí dance could be seen to have a 'distinctive' place, one that derived its significance by opposing it to modern dances, and that was associated with powerful groups, such discourses around the dancing body were not reproduced in Elphin. Rather, locally, it was fine-grained distinctions *within* modern dances that served this purpose (this is indicative of a disconnect between national and local sensibilities, and evidence that significant transformations and mediations take place between these spheres). Research on clubbing has been instructive in reformulating the 'social logic' of dance culture (Thomas, 1995). The enormous appeal of this movement in the 1990s and its consequent interest for dance theorists have allowed for a nuancing of thought around youth culture, dance and resistance. Thornton suggested that the salient feature of such youth practices was a concern with distinction, as expressed through what she termed 'subcultural capital', a concept derived from the work of Bourdieu (1984) who has theorised 'cultural capital' as the way that social groups acquire habits, fashions, accents and other markers in the service of distinction and taste. This concept tended to be used to theorise class, while 'subcultural capital' involves the various ways subcultures – in the case of this study, one related to dance - distinguish themselves. As such, British clubbers in the 1990s used record collections, knowledge, clothing and hairstyles to construct subcultural capital, and to exclude 'outsiders' on the basis of generation, class and gender. In their discourses, they speak in disparaging tones of working class 'acid Teds', 'Sharon and Tracey' – unsophisticated dancers, female and working class, and 'handbag house' linked to older, female working class participants. These exclusive 'structured absences' inflect the more inclusive 'subcultural ideology' of the group which emphasises 'love', 'unity' and 'respect'. The construct of 'mainstream society', Thornton suggests, operates in the service of this way of thinking. It bears little relation to empirically identifiable social groups, and

serves mainly to create a convenient 'other'. Young people were less concerned with culturally 'opposing' dominant groups, and more focused on raising their status in relation to other youth groups, within their own groups, and indeed in relation to dominant groups.

Bennett (2000) has also focused on a more exclusive cultural politics of clubbing in Newcastle, where participants sought to distinguish themselves from the beer-drinking culture of other youth groups. A more ambiguous cultural politics is evident in these studies, one that jars with a radical dance culture posited in other sources. The *Moral Panic* documentary (2004) features resistance by clubbers to the 1994 Criminal Justice Bill alluded to in Chapter 8, as well as a broader fight for the 'right to party'. For Thornton, the reality of the 'social logic' of youth dance cultures involved a more mundane, Social Darwinian jockeying for position in a 'micro-politics' that was played out *with* rather than *against* the grain of Thatcherite neo-liberal ideology at this time, and a society highly-stratified in the service of capitalist hierarchies of power. Various forms of aspirationalism were at play, rather than an inherently progressive politics. This was a step away from and outside of the paradigm associated with the CCCS in the 1970s. It represented a fundamental attack on the long-held position that youth cultures were in some way intrinsically rebellious (Jefferson and Hall, 1976). Thornton suggests these theorists had been duped by the 'subcultural ideology' of groups they worked with, and that they had inscribed their own radical politics into readings of youth culture. Similarly, and also in relation to clubbing, Malbon (1999) asks 'were these rituals what the young people actually did, or were they representations of what the young people did as seen through the eyes of social scientists?' (1999, p.19). Harris (1992) proposes a broader critique of cultural hegemony theory, suggesting that it over-politicises culture and serves the agendas of activist-academics.

Although the category of 'youth' has so far been used in a rather homogenous way, it will now be prised apart to present a more differentiated perspective on the meaning of modern dance for young people in Ireland between 1940 and 1960. The types of stratification of rural society described in Chapter 5 can usefully be borne in mind for this discussion. There were after all young people from different social classes, and class identities seem to have been articulated alongside the generational and gender identities described earlier. For many young people, processes of distinction served to

establish a dancing hierarchy. O'Connor (2003, p.60) has pointed to a shift in popular terminology between 1920 and 1960 that can be considered for working out these processes:

It is interesting to note that the gradual transition from the use of the term dance hall to ballroom indicated not only a distinction between the levels of comfort and style, between parish dance halls and commercially owned ones, but also crucially the use of the name implied a desire to create a fantasy world for patrons¹.

The suggestion that, by the late 1950s, dancers were speaking generally of attending 'ballrooms' rather than 'dance halls' is germane. Such discourses appear to have been instrumental in forging distinctions between more supposedly 'upmarket' venues and the more humble halls of previous years. This change could be decoded pragmatically as a comment on the better facilities at new venues such as Cloudland in Roosky or Roseland in Moate (Rita), or alternatively as reflecting an increased aspirationalism among sections of young people, and a desire on this basis to activate more exclusive meanings around certain types of modern dance. If so, this would mirror developments in post-colonial Africa (Askew, 2003). Uba (2007) also points out the class basis and hegemonic nature of such cultural exclusions that correspond closely to Bourdieu's concept of distinction. These meanings thus sometimes operate as a proxy for social exclusion so that the 'othering' that takes place, though ostensibly of cultural forms, is rather of people associated with less 'desirable' dances (both moves and events). In Ireland, shifts in this regard might have involved a move not just away from the past, but 'upwards' to values that characterised elite groups.

In some ways, this points to a means of articulating theories of distinction and hegemony. Aspirationalism of this sort, and the exclusivity that is its bedfellow, can be seen as involving incorporation, and a perpetuation of the values and interests of dominant groups. Conceptualising cultural dynamics in this way can be accommodated within the paradigm of cultural resistance and incorporation opened up by Gramscian theory. It might be said that groups that distinguish, exclude and exert cultural power are emulating dominant groups in a way that confirms and consolidates the values of more powerful elites. There is a type of homage in such processes to processes of dominance insofar as the process of exclusion of those who are seen as lower in terms of their 'cultural capital' has the effect – whether intended or not – of co-opting some strata within youth

¹ There are possible precedents in Ireland for dance operating in the service of social mobility. Brennan (1999) voices concerns by 'Irish-Irelanders' in the 19th century related to set-dancers who supposedly emulated the ballroom dances of their colonial masters.

culture into a bourgeois hegemony.

It should also be said that this process of othering can be played out at the same dance, as well as between dances, so that micro-political engagements come to the fore. Cowan's (1990) study of social dance deals with the position of Gypsies or *Yufti* who 'constitute a hereditary group of semi-professional musicians' (p.102). In this case, different ethnic groups adopt different roles in the dance-event. Despite this, few locals know the names of the musicians: at all times, the emphasis is placed on the music rather than the musician. Whereas local youths engage in extravagant movements, the comportment of the *doppi* is low-key, understated and deferential. For Cowan, this is a denial of their humanity, part of a broader denigration of this ethnic group: they are 'socially inferior' (p.127). Similar processes are highlighted in Cressey's (2004[1932]) study of taxi-dancers². Since such dancers have the option to refuse male requests for dances, both class and racial distinctions are particularly active. Cressey describes what he sees as a 'retrogressive' life-cycle that dancers pass through, from the 'white group', to 'Filipinos and other Orientals', to the 'black and tan' cabarets' and finally to prostitution (*ibid*).

In this regard, there were various categories of modern dance, taking place in a range of venues that are revealing of all sorts of fine-grained distinctions based mainly on social class³. When we visited the site of Mantua Hall, asked whether there had been queues for dances, Jimmy said there weren't any but there would be 'boys and lads' from 'the country' that wouldn't be going, they would just be hanging around, 'looking in'. The implication is that those from poorer, boggier holdings did not have the means to attend (although it could also indicate exclusion of those too young to attend). Brian remembered how 'some of the people' wanted to charge a half crown rather than a shilling to attend dances at the hall at Croghan. Although the ostensible intention was to exclude the 'rough element', this and the other cases are reminders that distinctions seem to have operated against those of low income, whether landless labourers, skilled workers or those with poorer holdings.

2 Women who worked in clubs in the major cities in the US in the 1930s, and would be paid by male customers to be their dancing partners.

3 Class also registers in subtle ways at house dances. Charlie recalled a dance held in a 'middling' house rented by a travelling knitter, when rain leaked in through the thatch. This provided a rare glimpse of a dance held by a skilled worker, a class in decline with the advance of mechanisation. Presented as a humorous anecdote, an undercurrent of class distinction is nevertheless at play.

Other dancers recalled a similar use of entrance fees in the service of class distinctions, but this time to exclude small farmers. Annie spoke frankly about this - she refers to two types of hall in the vicinity. The first was a small, rural hall known locally as Doherty's Hall in Cloone. The others were the Canon Donoghue Hall and the Hunt Hall in Mohill. To attend the former, dancers paid half a crown. They required 17 and 6 (shillings and pence) or 12 and 6 to dance at the latter venues. Such monetary indicators were symptomatic of underlying class divisions. Their exclusion was symbolic and practical, so that the better-off, although they could easily afford to go to the less expensive dances, would not do so. 'I don't believe she ever put a foot in it', Annie remarked of a local woman who thought herself above going to the smaller local halls and 'there was little halls nearly everyone would go to, but there was certain ones wouldn't go to them'. These halls 'would be covered in iron' and they had corrugated iron roofs, the 'tin sheds' described by Rita (see Fig.17 and 20), a younger dancer who frequented more modern halls in the late 1950s. O'Connor (2003, p.61) recognises that 'not all ballrooms were equally sumptuous or glamorous', and that some were 'no more than barely disguised cattle sheds'.

Local histories confirm a degree of class segregation of dances. Healy (1990) interviewed dancers who attended rural halls in county Roscommon, and others who went to Harrison Hall in Roscommon town. No respondents indicated that they went to both. O'Connor (2005, p.7), citing ads for urban dance halls such as the Gaiety in Carrick-on-Shannon, concludes that 'dance advertisements and accounts...operated as markers of social class and status' with better facilities, luxury and glamour distinguishing the town venues. The 'certain ones' referred to by Annie were the local 'elite', those drawn predominantly from the rural bourgeoisie. They included a creamery manager, publicans and a 'shopkeeper's daughter'. She contrasted them with 'local small farmers' daughters and sons'. It may be that class identities were intertwined with those around rural and urban boundaries so that many of the elite would have operated from the towns and villages, while small farmers were based in 'the country' (apart from those more affluent members who ran businesses in the towns). A spatial distinction of sorts, it reflects circumstances in Clare as documented by Arensberg and Kimball in the 1930s (2001[1936]). Such cultural processes parallel those of British clubbers interviewed by Malbon in the late 1990s. In a moment of candour, one participant summarised his 'taste culture':

I'm very elitist, I think you have to put a lot of effort into training your tastes, go to a lot of places to do it, and a lot of people for various reasons – because they don't have the time, because they don't have the resources – just don't do it. Maybe they just don't want to. They cannot understand these different styles...I'm very elitist because of my experience...it has to do with the way I perceive taste works. It works strangely. There are social connotations of musical styles and so...if people I didn't like liked the music I like, it would spoil the music. (1999, p.5)

Exclusion on the basis of admission price seems to have been quite effective. Charlie knew of 'swanky dances' but 'the dances in Carrick then we'll say, in the Gaiety, I don't know how it was. Never a much people used to go to it from this quarter but sure it was - that would be five shillings in them times was a lot of money'. Instead he attended local hall and house dances, open to the public for a modest fee of half a crown or thereabouts⁴.

Although from the countryside near the home place, Tom received a university education, worked in Canada for a time, and later taught in Trinity College Dublin (TCD). Socially mobile, his dancing days centred largely on the 'ballroom' in urban centres: 'ballroom dancing was...from abroad. It was in my opinion a more sophisticated form of expression'. It was a 'social grace' and 'very beautiful'. He described the Top Hat, a ballroom in Dublin: 'if you want to see exhibitions, to go there any night, the girl could be beautifully dressed and the fellows and there would be not a word out of them just practising their art you know'. Such accounts were not given of dancing in local halls, and it seems that this type of discursive aspirationalism was associated with those who were 'moving up in the world'. Distinct terms were used for the more well-to-do dances, 'show dances', 'dress dances' and 'balls'. As Annie said, 'you wouldn't get what you'd call a dress dance or you wouldn't get a show dance...in them little places'.

Tom went through a detailed typology of the more exclusive dances. There was 'the really [upper] crust stuff' he attended, such as the Top Hat in Dublin in Dun Laoghaire⁵, where men and women were 'gorgeously dressed'; at two other ballrooms, the Gresham and the Shelbourne in central Dublin, people were 'very nicely dressed'; moving in two directions – down the social scale, and from the centre to the periphery, 'when you came down the country here, the dress dances as such were very nice – local. I've been at a dress dance in Sligo now for instance, the hotel there, the

4 Access to transport technologies were also germane, and some of the articulations between class and mobility have been presented in Section 4.4.

5 An affluent suburb to the south of Dublin.

Great Southern'. Below the dress dances, and not featuring in our discussion since he did not attend them, were rural hall dances in Croghan or Mantua, or house dances. The emphasis Tom placed on dancers' clothing should be noted, an element that did not feature in memories of more 'downmarket' dances (although as was suggested in 2.5, gender subjectivities may also have been involved).

Distinctions within the realm of modern dance were paralleled by those between hall dances and house dances for Annie. In this case, availability of alcohol was a key consideration: 'you were lowering yourself to an awful degree when you'd mix in places...where the half barrel [of porter] was now you'd be - you'd be shot down'. She further remembers how she badly wanted to attend a 'join', a local house dance: 'I was thinking of getting dressed and [my parents] said to me 'where are you going?' and I said I was thinking of going up to the party in such a house. 'Well indeed you're [doing] no such thing. There's nothing there only a pack of old drunks'⁶. Annie's comments also highlight a certain ambiguity around dance and class distinctions, and they cannot be taken to have operated universally. While she recalled the punishment, it is also important to retrieve her act of transgression. Her memories included attending house and small hall dances, *despite* her parents' wishes, and she was critical of what she saw as the narrow-minded class obsessions of her parents: 'they thought you were lowering yourself to an awful degree when you'd mix in places'. Instead of embodying and reproducing class distinctions, she challenged them and critiqued the evident aspirationalism. Equally, on the shopkeeper's daughter who never attended her local hall, preferring dress dances, she said 'now they just had what'd be considered now a poor class business. It was a drapery shop' (although her comment, attacking elitism, itself hints of elitism). Mícheál was also critical of 'tuppence ha'penny looking down on tuppence'.

It should be noted that these processes of distinction were more urgent for some groups than others. The dances attended by small farmers were less characterised by the discursive acrobatics of some of the more affluent dancers. Some of the older small farmers, especially, were quite nonchalant in their choice of dance-events. Given a choice between a dance at a house or hall, 'ara...I'd do with

⁶ In Annie's case, generational and gender identities would need to be considered too, as have been discussed in Section 7.5. On one occasion, a neighbour who saw her attending a dance at Doherty's Hall informed her parents of the fact, and she was reprimanded. As a member of the Church of Ireland, religious distinctions could also be considered, insofar as house dances would have been held by local Catholic neighbours.

any of them', said Marty. He suggested this attitude was common at the time: 'whatever dance was on, you'd always get someone to...it'. John agreed that they 'were all the same really. I mean you went whenever it was on. No there was no differ'. In this limited sense, the signifying practices of distinction and pluralism, discussed in Chapter 8, can be counterposed. The latter sensibility, linked to Bourdieu's 'popular aesthetic' seems to have been linked to small farmers rather than more elite rural groups (members of the latter were, for example, unlikely to attend céilí events, although religious distinctions might also be relevant in this respect in the case of wealthier Protestant dancers).

If O'Connor's (2003) analysis is taken to be accurate however, the rise of the term 'ballroom' in the late 1950s may have been symptomatic of shifts even among dancers drawn from the small farmer class, a conclusion that would resonate with the findings in the next section suggesting greater co-option of dancers in Ireland into a more commercialised, individualised and aspirational dance culture. The slightly disparaging terms for rural halls used by younger small farmers who danced in the late 1950s, when ballrooms were on the rise, would seem to support this. Likewise, stories about smaller halls told in humourous terms by Johnny and May seems to indicate a degree of playful shame around them.

The concepts of distinction, cultural capital and subcultural capital seem to open up a more multi-dimensional cultural space than either moral panic theory or hegemony theory, and raise complex possibilities around the intersection of identities. At the same time, there is a danger of losing perspective, and of settling into a glib, relativist politics where real processes of oppression and resistance are occluded. To qualify matters, the question of power can usefully be considered. While in a superficial way it may be that similar dynamics come into play when marginalised groups 'resist', and powerful groups 'distinguish', these are worked out in real political situations where oppression and resistance are more than abstractions to those involved, where dominance and subordination are 'insistently real' (Saukko, 2003), and where major inequalities of wealth and power exist. For this reason, and drawing once again on the cultural studies tradition, this work has been guided by material considerations that limit the traction of these symbolic processes.

Equally, it would be remiss to present *only* the exclusive and antagonistic sides of dance culture. The views of Thornton have been criticised by Cohn (2011), who suggests that social relations and cultural politics are represented as a ruthlessly competitive field where only the 'strongest' survive. For him, terms such as 'distinction', 'cultural capital' and 'subcultural capital' reflect both the language and the ideology of capitalism, and neglect egalitarian and 'horizontal' tendencies that interest him. Matters are thus returned to the more inclusive concerns of anthropologists and anarchist theorists - carnival, free territories and *communitas* – and, more broadly, to the solidarity generated by cultural resistance (Turner, 1969, 1974; Bakhtin, 1984; Bey, 1985) – issues that will feature in Chapter 10. In a criticism that 'turns the tables' on Thornton, in view of her attack on the CCCS discussed at the beginning of this section, Cohn (2011) proposes that theorists see the sides of these contradictory processes that suit them. This might be as true of more sceptical, Social Darwinian accounts of clubbers in the 1990s, as of those 'heroic' accounts by the CCCS of mods, rockers and punks in the 1960s and 1970s (Bennett, 1999). In other words, a youth group can be seen as *both* struggling against dominant groups, and setting exclusive boundaries between itself and others. Such ambiguities can be comfortably encompassed by cultural hegemony theory. Moreover, as was discussed in Section 2.4, as a reflexive ethnohistory this investigation has sought, not to 'decontaminate' the work of bias, but rather to acknowledge and be open about researcher biography and intentions. Etic inscriptions are unavoidable, and the 'truth' of the story of dance is best presented in terms of more contingent 'truths'.

The dancing stories that were gathered speak of a highly stratified rural society. Within the sphere of modern dance, it seems that class distinctions between a rural elite (as well as individuals aspiring to 'membership' of such groups) and small farmers were mobilised on the basis of venue, cost and transport. As such, dance practices played a part in reproducing social divisions, a process that is consonant with a local class-based hegemony. At the same time, such a view of dance cannot be taken to be the whole truth, and more egalitarian tendencies might also have been germane. The next section will assess another more conservative mode of articulating modern dance.

9.2 Modern Dance and Incorporation

Another perspective on modern dance would contextualise it in relation to the emergence of a transnationalist hegemony related to the culture industry, a question that will be addressed in this section.

By the late 1950s, there was a pragmatic adaptation by Irish political and business elites to the requirements of international capital. Brown (2004) posits an 'economic revival' that is associated with two individuals in particular - T.K. Whitaker, the senior civil servant responsible for the government White Paper *Economic Development*, and Sean Lemass, the new leader of Fianna Fáil, and Taoiseach following the 1957 elections. Between them, the *First Program for Economic Expansion* was conceived and executed between 1958 and 1963, followed by a second program in the subsequent five years. White (2006) agrees that there was a 'general opening up of Irish society that began in the mid to late 1950s [and] led to significant shifts in the Irish economy freeing trade and encouraging foreign investment' (p.87). Such 'opening up' involved an integration of the Irish economy into the international capitalist order, and a focus on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to stimulate the economy. These macrocosmic currents, as will be illustrated, inflected the sphere of recreational dance.

The thrust of the 'modern' in dance, as well as 'modernity' more broadly as defined in Chapter 1, is difficult to resist, either materially or discursively. Asked how modern dances compared to house dances, Rita said simply, 'well I suppose progress really...like everything, it fades'. According to Maureen, 'house dances finished. There's no house dance now. I haven't heard of them anyway'. It may be that a more critical view of the rise of 'modern' dance is liable to be associated with those conservative and powerful groups who in the 1930s sought, Canute-like, to hold back the tide, and regarded as a form of thinking that in the early twenty-first century is likely to be seen as reactionary and retrogressive⁷.

⁷ There are subtle and tentative ways that criticisms of the brasher, more commercial forms of modern dance are demonstrated. Jackie voiced reservations in the following terms: 'I liked the old hall. I didn't like it as good in the modern hall like. It was the old halls wasn't that big like, it wouldn't be able to hold that much, a couple of hundred I suppose, but it was real homely for the country area'. 'Homeliness' in this case was ascribed to the more intimate

It would be remiss though to regard the rise of modern dance, and the broader material shift that it was embedded in, as only a force for 'liberation', as a resistant strand within the cultural politics of the time. Already cited in Chapter 3, Lears' remark is germane: 'discovering nearly inexhaustible resources for resistance to domination, many social historians have been reluctant to acknowledge the possibility that their subjects may have been muddled by assimilation to the dominant culture - perhaps even to the point of believing and behaving against their own best interests' (1985, p.573). In cultural studies, McGuigan (1998) is critical of cultural populists: 'Fiske merely produces a simple inversion of the mass culture critique at its worst. Thereby reducing television viewing to a kind of subjective idealism...never countenancing the possibility that a popular reading could be anything other than progressive' (1998, p.588). Cohn (2011) suggests that when all culture becomes 'resistant', 'cultural resistance' loses its use as a concept. There is a requirement to get behind the types of 'subcultural ideology' that Thornton (2004) speaks of, to engage in a more critical ethnohistory of dance. Although it may have cloaked itself in the language of freedom, and while dancers may have felt themselves to be 'liberated' in some ways, a more critical analysis would problematise and expose the cultural 'costs' associated with the rise of O'Connor's (2003) discourse of romance.

Viewing the findings in this way throws into relief what seems at times to be a somewhat uncritical celebration of the 'modern' in the literature (Coogan, 1976; Byrne, 1997; Banville, 2004). Brown (2004) certainly identifies the darker sides of the post-Whitaker Plan economic order – increased class division, crime, alcohol and drug consumption – but the narrative trajectory of his history is largely framed in terms of a move from oppression to freedom. A type of future-directed 'nostalgia' is evident in some of these accounts, and Fallon (1998) has remarked on the Oedipal relationship we have with the past: it must be symbolically annihilated in order to legitimise the present. Equally, a suggestion that modern dance, and modernity in general, had uniformly progressive implications for women can be challenged. The literature sometimes is suggestive that practices

events that preceded larger, increasingly commercial dance halls. There is also a hint that such events were more closely linked to a sense of local identity for those living in the 'country area'. Will, when asked if he preferred house or hall dances, said the former were 'grand', that you'd generally be asked to them and treated well as a musician. Again, familiarity and intimacy were underlined.

related to a more consumerist ethos were unproblematically implicated in female emancipation (Byrne, 1997; O'Connor, 2003, 2005). As Barrett points out, for socialist feminists, 'gains' may be heavily qualified by new forms of oppression. While it may have been articulated in more resistant terms by dancers, especially in the earlier part of the period, the rise of modern dance could also be said to have involved a degree of co-option by powerful interests at the time.

The modernity that was discussed in Chapter 8 in its more progressive aspects can usefully be contextualised in this regard. Processes of incorporation have often been implicated in dance culture. The commercial potential of 'underground' dance forms such as disco and clubbing have quickly become obvious to entrepreneurs in the US and UK in the 1970 and 1990s respectively (Collin, 1997; *The Joy of Disco*, 2013). As was mentioned in Chapter 8, Storey's interpretation of cultural hegemony leads him to posit three possible fates for the US counterculture of music, dance and politics in the late 1960s - marginalisation, disappearance or incorporation. In his view, as the profit-making concerns of the culture industry re-marketed 'rebellion', and as politics retreated to the 'personal' through the growth of the human potential movement (*Century of the Self*, 2002), the counterculture was effectively co-opted, so that a concern with social solidarity was turned inwards in a narcissistic concern with developing 'the self'. These possibilities are consonant with Gramsci's contention that cultural opposition is tolerated only within the material and discursive framework of capitalism (Storey, 1998). As such, dominant groups are viewed as securing their position by negotiating subordinate groups into 'safe ideological harbours'.

In an Irish context, a number of commentators have spoken about the rise of a more pronounced consumerist ethos in the middle years of the twentieth century. Brown (2004) locates the new sensibility in the 1960s, when urbanisation was well advanced, and connects this to the Whitaker Plan and 'the development of a constituency of young people in which consumerism was encouraged in magazines, television advertisements, and the faddishness of the popular music industry' (p.248). According to Mary Daly (2006, p.57) 'social life was being commercialised [and] monetised' by the 1950s. O'Connor (2005, p.6) suggests that as early as the 1930s:

While it is true to say that actual consumption was limited for the vast majority of people, because of the

national economic and political situation, it is also the case that a consumption ethos was gaining widespread popularity both explicitly in the form of advertising products and implicitly in terms of promoting certain lifestyles through media such as newspapers, women's magazines, and cinema.

Even if media culture in the 1930s and 1940s, when moral panic raged, did constitute a type of oppositional resource for young people, the growing profits that were being generated by various cultural stakeholders at the time need to be considered. The anglophonic entertainment networks – radio, cinema and gramophones – would have benefited substantially from cultural 'resistance', either through direct sales, or through the 'sale' of audiences to advertisers (Fiske, 1987). Cultural developments could thus be seen as opening up a 'beach-head' for the consumerist imperatives of the international culture industry. In this light, it would be worth comparing the house dances that preceded the rise of the culture industry in Ireland, and the predominantly modern dances that replaced them. Young (2004[1971]) speaks of a transformation of 'play' into 'leisure' where the former is a spontaneous, autotelic activity, while the latter involves a commercially sanctioned release of tension or a 'letting off of steam' that serves to reproduce capitalism.

Primary research serves to throw these issues into relief. The dance hall registered strongly in newspapers between 1940 and 1960 mainly through advertisements for modern dances. Such visibility in newspapers is related to the commercial basis on which these halls were run. In the first week of January 1960, overlapping with the Christmas period, no less than 37 separate events were advertised in the *Roscommon Herald*, including 30 modern and 7 céilí dances. Dancers regularly mention the cost of entry. Maureen highlighted how strict door policy could be, speaking of a local taxi-driver's travails: 'he had a big car but the men on the door then didn't want to let him in. He should get in like free but he did eventually, like after bringing seven loads to it'. Mícheál, working on the committee of a hall in the late 1950s, told of how dancers from the parish of Creeve would try to get in for half price, and minor trouble could result. These stories are revealing of dance as integrated into the local economy and the national economy by way of the entrance fee and license fees that followed the PDHA (1935) respectively, and show that O'Connor's analysis was relevant for later years too: 'the 1930s...witnessed the commercialisation of social dancing and the establishment of commercial public dance halls' (2005, p.91).

A key transitional dance type in the rise of larger ballrooms in the 1950s were carnivals. Their success signalled to incipient ballroom owners that a new dance audience was emerging.

Newspaper data confirms that carnivals rose steadily over the research period, accounting for 4.8% of ads in 1940, 6.4% in 1950 and 14.3% in 1960 (see Table 4 in Section 6.1). The rise of carnivals can be seen as a significant development in dance culture, involving the use of marquees to increase capacity (see Fig.23). They heralded the emergence of a larger clientele for dances, and opened the way for the development of a highly-commercialised 'ballroom' circuit in the 1950s. The Reynolds brothers had been on the committee for a local carnival in Longford before establishing their national chain of large, well-equipped halls in the late 1950s. With each hall holding thousands of dancers, these ran from Limerick to Ballymote (Ryan, 1994) and were recognisable by their 'land' suffix – *Cloudland* in Rooskey, *Roseland* in Moate, *Jetland* in Limerick, and so on (Rita). While earlier halls had been run along commercial lines by local committees or families, the ballroom signalled an important departure, and led to a considerable amplification of the commercial imperative in dance culture. Local committees played no role in these later events and fund-raising for local groups was very much subordinated to the making of money, so that this was a strictly capitalist enterprise. Compared to house dances and fund-raising events in smaller halls, it could be argued that people were interpellated more as paying customers than as members of a self-supporting community. Johnny and Mícheál described how the Reynolds monopolised bookings of bands by offering season-long rotations through the various halls in the chain. The smaller halls consequently found it harder to attract such acts. The Reynolds brothers were symptomatic in some ways of the new respectability of dance culture, and its homology with contemporary currents within capitalism⁸. Also notable as a symptom (and agent) of change were the emergence of 'bands' referred to in Section 6.3 (Will; *Down with Jazz*, 1987). Unlike the informal, local collections of traditional musicians who played at house dances, these were tighter, professional units who would have been paid in cash, travelled by car between halls and invested in new technologies such as PA systems. As commercial dance culture developed, bands became more spectacular and glamorous. While earlier acts were 'very static' (Tom), playing behind musical stands in evening dress, later 'showband' units influenced by rock 'n' roll moved around the stage, dressed in bright colours, and projected a 'fun' demeanour (RTE, 2008).

Carnivals were symptomatic of another shift, insofar as even clerical interests began to embrace

⁸ One brother, Albert, was later to become leader of *Fíanna Fáil* and, when this party assumed power in coalition with the Labour Party in the early 1990s, he assumed the position of Taoiseach (Prime Minister).

modern dance given the substantial funds that could be generated from holding events. According to John, the new Croghan church was built on this basis⁹. He said the local priest 'used to bring the money out of the carnival in Croghan....up to the house....a big case of money up to the house and leave it inside the door...and they used be all saying that it would be raided some night'. This signalled a new departure, one where commercial interests had encouraged prominent elements of nationalist civil society to overcome moral or cultural reservations. By the 1950s, a sense of overlapping interests through identification with the imperatives of capital becomes apparent. It seems that after the urgent symbolic requirements of the young Irish state had receded, powerful groups operating within both national and transnational hegemonic frameworks, came to share the spoils of modern dance culture. Developments in the field of dance are indicative on this basis of incorporation of various groups into the profit-making concerns of the culture industry, and the imperatives of international capital. As with participants in disco in the 1970s, (*The Joy of Disco*, 2013), young people in Ireland in the 1940s and 1950s were being partly constituted as a market and an audience through music and dance, and the commercial model was becoming well established in this cultural sphere. While, as discussed in Chapter 8, certain 'freedoms' and 'progress' could be said to be associated with these broader shifts towards modernity and an emergent media culture, these emerged in the context of a new type of cultural hegemony, that of transnational capitalism¹⁰. Michael D. Higgins¹¹ (2007) suggests that Irish society exchanged one form of oppression – that of the Catholic church and nationalist civil society - for another more insidious one centred on the appeals of the transnational culture industry. O'Connor (2003, p.58) has envisioned a type of 'changing of the guard' in cultural power in the early years of the twentieth century:

Rules and regulations surrounding recreational dance, which had up to now been disseminated by the clergy, were transferred to another powerful institutional winner of hearts and minds - the popular media...the balance of power that had existed between the forces of church and State on the one hand, and commercial interests on the other, gradually shifted. (2003, p.58)

9 Another way that church interests were won around to an accommodation of modern dance culture was a concession to the clergy whereby hall dances were held on Sunday rather than Saturday night, so that attendance figures for mass would be maintained (Daly, 2006).

10 At the time of writing in 2013, this formation might be said to be demonstrating its more oppressive side through the politics of 'austerity'

11 At the time of writing in 2013, the President of Ireland, following elections in 2011.

Those institutions associated with cinema, radio and gramophones could be seen as constituting a new type of global 'civil society' associated with the commodification of culture. Aldous Huxley, author of *Brave New World* (1932), presented some salient ideas in this regard. Corresponding with George Orwell, author of *1984* (1949), in the wake of the trauma of the Second World War, the issue of the 'ultimate revolution' arose (*Letters of Note*, 2012). Disagreeing with Orwell's dystopian vision, he suggested that 'whether in actual fact the policy of the boot-on-the-face can go on indefinitely seems doubtful...my own belief is that the ruling oligarchy will find less arduous and wasteful ways of governing and of satisfying its lust for power'. In a passage that chimes closely with gramscian hegemony theory in its incorporative moment, he ends in the following terms: 'the lust for power can be just as completely satisfied by suggesting people into loving their servitude as by flogging and kicking them into obedience'.

Drawing on the 'dual hegemony' that has been found useful for this investigation, it might be suggested that the critical edge of a culture that could be seen as counter-hegemonic in relation to the national-popular, was blunted by its incorporation into a more global sphere, a process that paralleled the integration of the Irish economy into international capitalism. It is clear that towards the end of the research period, even 'private' organisations such as the Catholic Church, associated with nationalist cultural hegemony, were coming to embrace elements of modern dance culture. It seems that material considerations related to shifts in the mode of production from a type of 'nationalist capitalism' to one that was far more open and resonant with the imperatives of transnational capital, laid bare the fundamental overlapping of concerns of national and international economic and political elites. On this basis, contradictions between different hegemonic forces appear to have been resolved in favour of the cultural politics of international capitalism¹².

Perhaps taking this perspective brings matters back to that strain of mass culture theory associated

12 For Holloway (2003), the international network of capitalist social relations underpins more local, national inflections. He refers to various national liberation projects that, because they staked their political and cultural hopes on the nationalist state, failed to recognise the transnational capitalist net which 'held', limited, and ultimately co-opted these projects. It is on this basis that, for him, true autonomy derives from an anti-statist or extra-statist revolutionary teleology.

with the Frankfurt School, a critical position often seen as anachronistic in our contemporary climate of postmodernism, identity politics and cultural populism's 'symbolic resistance'. For example, Adorno (1998[1941], p.205) proposed that modern dance is uncritically accepted by the masses, so that 'having fun' is by no means innocent. Rather, it ties dancers into the oppressive framework of capitalism: 'rhythmically obedient' (*ibid*, p.207) dancers are slaves to the 'unabating jazz beats' (p.208). Dance is thus viewed as a repressive force, as a means for incorporating social groups into the dominant order. On the other side of the political spectrum, conservative mass society theorists such as Q.D. Leavis bemoaned the loss of 'folk dance' - the social dance of an exotic past – to the 'cheap and easy pleasures of the 1930s modern dance hall' (Leavis, 1932, p.224). Modern dancing on this basis would involve a turning away from the process of authentic living, and be related to the emergence of 'barbarians in wonderland' (Hoggart, 1998[1957]). The elitist tendencies in such theorising, its limited acknowledgement of agency, in some cases its romanticism (of past or future) have been well documented (Storey, 2006). It seems anti-democratic to suggest that my theorising from within the academy carries more political weight than the politics of everyday life enacted by dance participants. Moreover, as a 'halfie' ethnohistorian, positions that uncritically position dancers as victims of capitalist ideology are politically suspect. Saukko (2003, p.44) calls for a degree of self-reflexivity around the politics of research in this regard:

The trouble with this position is that it presumes that, whereas the 'people' are under the spell of cultural hegemony or ideology (such as sexism), the scholar is able to 'see' this reality clearly and correctly. This attitude doesn't cultivate critical self-reflexivity in the scholar, that is, it makes research blind to the ways in which the scholar's notion of 'real' structures of oppression are often heavily ideologically mediated, having their roots in the theoretical and political commitments driving the research.

For my part, the institutional context involves the School of Communications at DCU, part of an international network of sites for pursuing social science. A number of points might be made in this regard. On the one hand, ongoing and aggressive intrusions of neo-liberal policies of austerity in the academy, with university presidents operating in a manner akin to industry CEOs, make it more challenging to parse matters in a truly critical manner. There is a danger in other words that the academy itself is being co-opted by international capitalism (Garvan, 2010), a mode that is particularly effective at the time of writing when a moratorium on recruitment in Ireland ensures that young academics are required to compete aggressively for short-term contracts. Even where

radical currents still operate in, for example, sociology and politics departments, typically expressed as one or other tradition of Marxism, a type of 'poeticisation' of discourses may take place, so that theory retreats further into abstraction and ineffectuality, and emergence of a true 'philosophy of praxis' becomes more distant. These are grounds for the views of anarchist theorists such as Graeber (2004) and Cohn (2011), who speak of radicalism in the academy as 'revolution blocked'. In this regard, academia comes to seem like the Order of Glass Bead Game players in Hesse's novel of the same name, a self-perpetuating elite competing to play increasingly obscure games in pursuit of status and career advancement: 'all efforts at socialisation have as their ideal some kind of aristocracy, of rule of the best, even though this goal may not be admitted...this has been so no matter what the nature of the nobility: political, by birth, by selection and education' (1947, p.328). Those outside these rarefied environs are seen operating in another, more debased sphere. 'Disconnects' of this type between practice and theory, between academics and activism, constitute an insidious danger, one that a small number of academics in Marxist and anarchist traditions seek to bridge. In the next chapter, some of the theoretical consequences of such tendencies will be presented.

To return to the research setting, besides dancers, a group that were central for the coming into being of the dance event were the groups that emerged as the commercial potential of modern dance became evident. These ranged from private owners, to committees, to 'ballroom' owners such as the Reynolds brothers. Although from a Marxist viewpoint, these might all be seen to have operated according to the imperatives of capital, there are clearly differences in their operations. A 'small-scale capitalism', involving independent clubs, record labels and radio stations has often been central to the emergence of novel, vibrant and innovative cultural movements, as in the case of early New York disco (*The Joy of Disco*, 2013) and clubbing (Collin, 1997). The same might be said for dance culture in Elphin. Subsequent incorporation of these types of dance culture into a more global capitalism need not negate the creative and cultural value of the original forms. This is not to lapse into a libertarian capitalist position, it is merely to suggest that the *scale* of capitalism needs to be taken into account. A subsequent 'massification' induced by expansion of the financial economy in the field of dance need not preclude more meaningful, 'authentic' (acknowledging the contingency of this term) concerns in the early years of the period. The notion of gramscian hegemony allows

for these more 'underground' currents, and offers a more complex, multifaceted view of capitalism.

Nevertheless, bearing in mind these last two points, the ever-present dangers of 'going native' present themselves, particularly in a reflexive investigation such as this. Insofar as it is possible, elements of mass culture theory, carefully deployed, can be combined with other perspectives for a more rounded view of the research findings. This can facilitate a standing back from capitalist 'reality', an acknowledgement that cultural transformations involve democratic losses as well as gains, and an introduction of normativity into the research. A judicious combination of standpoints can, on the one hand, acknowledge the agency of dancers who make choices, engage in pluralist practices, use products to construct generational identities, and on the other, be sensitive to the existence of structural elements at a national and international level. Awareness of this structure/agency dialectic recognises that, while macrocosmic political and cultural politics cannot be simplistically mapped onto local cultural experiences, they are 'present' to some extent in microcosmic situations. Equally, dancers might articulate resistance or incorporation in different spheres or fields. As Ang (1998) pointed out in relation to viewers of *Dallas*, women could simultaneously enjoy this television show, while displaying feminist politics in other areas of their lives.

It might be opportune to return to a central insight of gramscian theory, that culture does not inherently embody dominant or subordinate values. Acid rock music and dance was inscribed in different ways by student radicals and music industry professionals (Storey, 1998). As such, a type of contest can take place between groups for 'ownership' of dances – that is for control of the meanings and moves around dance. In this post-structuralist severing of meaning from dance, of signifier from signified, there is no room for essentialism. The question becomes not *what* dances mean, but *how* they can be made to mean. In this regard, gramscian cultural hegemony recognises a dual, dialectical dynamic, a compromise equilibrium, where both incorporation and opposition have their place. This seems conceptually and ethically more valuable than the twin extremes of mass culture theory or cultural populism. With this theory, there is a sense, not of outright domination or its corollary, outright resistance (Bennett, 1998). Rather, a type of 'agreement' is reached, one where opposing cultural forces define each other. It is the juncture of this encounter that is of interest.

Chapter Summary

Two aspects of modern dance culture have been drawn together in this chapter. On class, it was established that some dancers mobilised different types of cultural and subcultural capital to distinguish their practices. Such cultural exclusion acted as a proxy for social exclusivity, although processes of 'distinction' on this basis were more urgent for some groups than others. Viewing the findings from another perspective, there was a discussion of how modern dance culture could be seen to incorporate young people into the concerns of the international culture industry. By the late 1950s, this was symptomatic of an undermining of the national-popular project to the extent that significant elements of nationalist civil society were actively involved in promoting modern dance. Working through the significance of these developments, there was a 'weighing up' of mass culture theory. Although elitist in many respects, if balanced by a recognition of the agency of dancers, a more rounded critical perspective can be posited, one that balances structuralist and culturalist tendencies. Gramscian cultural hegemony is sufficiently flexible to accommodate these possibilities through the construct of the 'compromise equilibrium'. Thinking about recreational dance in these ways has focused very much on a 'politicised' dancing body. There seem to be other dimensions of dancing that are not so neatly encompassed, aspects that involve shared experiences related to emotion, kinaesthesia and the body. Such aspects will be addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter 10

Dance and Communitas

*When the taking and the giving starts to get too much
Let the music hit you with its healing touch
Life's not just a way of marking time
Everybody must express the feeling some time*

Bedrock, (*For What you Dream of*, 1993)

10.0 Introduction

Dancing was for most people an enjoyable and exciting activity. A stark statement of this nature points towards a contrast with the more politicised approaches used in earlier chapters, and to the importance of retrieving aspects of dancing centred on the real and pronounced pleasures of being on a dance floor. It is in this space that a temporary community of moving, communicating, embodied subjectivities is constituted. Drawing on a more phenomenological epistemology, this chapter will open up a conceptual space for these experiences. 'Politics' as it has been used heretofore in the dissertation will not be abandoned, but a more ineffable type of 'post-hegemonic politics' will be presented.

In the first section, there will be an outline of those findings that seem to point to local experiences of Turner's 'communitas' among both men and women. In the next section, these findings will be considered in the light of views of dance in the literature as involving an essentialist feminine hexis. It will be argued that an assessment of both male and female dancing experiences allows for a more holistic analysis of dance floor dynamics. In the following section, shifts in dance attendance related to religious identities will be examined through the conceptual lens of communitas. This will lead in the subsequent section to a discussion of two variants of communitas – existential and normative – and an assessment of which of these might be most relevant to the research. Finally, Malbon's more complex notion of 'playful vitality' will be introduced to the theoretical frame to finesse the findings.

10.1 Modern Dance and Communitas

Acknowledging the pronounced motion and emotionality of dancing, Turner's (1969, 1974) concept of *communitas* has been used in a range of studies of dance culture. The concept keeps the academic gaze firmly on the dance floor, and allows for a more subtle, emic politics of pleasure to be posed. In this section, the resonances of such pleasures with *communitas* will be assessed.

Within the research setting, findings on the enormous popularity of modern dance have already been presented in Chapter 6. It may be the case that processes of resistance, incorporation and distinction accounted for the totality of the meanings of this phenomenon, and that these types of cultural politics dominated dancing decisions made by young people. However, my experiences as a clubber have allowed me to see that a type of 'excess' needs to be acknowledged to accommodate the more ineffable elements of dancing related to moving, music and collective emotional states (see Figs. 7 and 8 for evidence of the sheer pleasures associated with going to dances). These views of dancing stand in stark contrast to those of the Frankfurt School's brand of Marxism. According to Ang (1998):

Pleasure...is the category that is ignored in the ideology of mass culture. In its discourses pleasure seems to be non-existent. Instead it makes things like responsibility, critical distance or aesthetic purity central – moral categories that make pleasure an irrelevant and illegitimate criterion. In this way the ideology of mass culture places itself totally outside the framework of the popular aesthetic, of the way in which popular cultural practices take shape in the routines of daily life. Thus it remains literally and figuratively in the ivory towers of 'theory' (p.181).

Vaneigem (1967, p.9) adds that, 'People who talk about revolution and class struggle without referring explicitly to everyday life, without understanding what is subversive about love and what is positive in the refusal of constraints, such people have a corpse in their mouth'.

Returning to the theoretical frame introduced in Section 4.4, in the field of recreational dance, Thomas and Miller (1997) identify the state of *communitas* among over-60s ballroom dancers in London in a study focusing on dance practices such as the foxtrot. O'Connor (1997) has studied the emergence of *communitas* through the set-dancing scene in Dublin in the 1990s. While the social context for these studies is urban and contemporary, the dances with which they are concerned, or versions of them, would have been practised in the research setting between 1940 and 1960. O'Connor's investigation has the added relevance of operating within an Irish context. These studies show that emergence of the state of *communitas* requires activity, intentionality and agency. In other

words, it needs to be *constructed*. O'Connor (1997) specifically speaks of 'work' in this context, a group collaboration, a shared kinaesthetic effort to 'produce' a dance.

Csikszentmihalyi (1975) suggests that considerable effort is involved in certain types of play activity, particularly those that produce 'flow', a type of heightened, meditative immersion in cultural practices, especially those that involve bodily moves and are repetitive in nature. The set-dancers studied by O'Connor (1997) specifically emphasised how dance is instrumental in the generation of *communitas*: 'it's like an achievement, you've done something well...you've done it as a unit' (p.157). The rewards of such 'work' might be thought to be more connected to complex group dances, but if sheer physical exertion is an essential ingredient, then some solo and couple dances might be equally productive and rewarding¹. Thomas (2003) refers to the hectic paces that jivers go through. Back's (1997) account of jitterbuggers is indicative of pronounced physical exertion. Malbon (2004, p.498) remarks on how 'the dancing crowd' of clubbing works together' in creating conditions for the 'oceanic', a state of collective euphoria.

In the research setting various types of pleasure register, though the terms may be vague. Brian said there was 'jollification' at dances, Attracta described a 'great atmosphere', and Bridie said 'you'd really have good laughs'. This is in no way to devalue the significance of these experiences, linked to laughing, pranks and joking. While there is little place for humour in academic discourses (Van Maanen, 1988), the 'anecdotal memories' that featured so strongly in many of the transcripts are especially amenable to humour. Apart from their use in framing a normative and localised conceptual universe (Bourke, 2007), such tales hint at real pleasures on and off the dance floor. Others accounts pointed more specifically towards the types of states envisioned by *communitas* theory.

As a caveat, it should be stressed that the 'dancers' referred to in this dissertation varied in their dancing ability, and pleasures thereof. There is a danger of mistaking the enthusiasm of keen dancers for a universal love of dances. Tom was reflexive on this possibility: 'I was very fond of [dancing]. But then I was an addict to it, an addict, so maybe I'm not the right person to ask that question now. I used to dance three nights a week at one stage'. Though constituting a minority, there were less enthusiastic dancers. As part of the research interest in male and female dancing

1 I have attended dance clubs where the walls dripped with condensation. Young clubbers attending raves in the Mansion House would bring changes of clothes with them, in an anticipation of perspiration (*Folklore from the Dance Floor*, 2012). Similarly, at set-dancing events I attended, a second t-shirt was useful.

pleasures discussed in Chapter 8, there will be a presentation of findings along gender lines, in the light of tendencies in the literature to posit a feminised sphere of dance.

A degree of ambiguity registers in other male accounts of dancing. Paddy said 'you might be nervous sometimes you know...there'd be no drink that time. If you had some drink in you, you might get more courage but...usually you might be nervous at the start of it but that would go away after a while'. An initial unease, possibly around courtship, did not seem to overly impede his dancing pleasure. Pleasures were sometimes selective. John enjoyed set-dancing, although he was less comfortable with other moves: 'there was some great old-time waltzes and some of us wasn't so good you know'. Neither were céilí dances his *forte*. Roddy was busy hunting in his youth and attended few dances: 'well I suppose the main reason I wouldn't go was because I wasn't a good dancer and I didn't know any dance...I'd shuffle around like. You wouldn't call it dancing'. Ned said that, since he was a musician, he stayed off the dance floor in order to concentrate on his playing. Likewise, he would 'shuffle around'. According to Vincent, although his wife enjoyed dancing, he had two left feet and couldn't dance, but 'where would you go otherwise'? This comment reveals as much about the widespread popularity of dance, as of Vincent's particular attitude. Jackie remembered 'I was never much good dancing but you know you'd struggle it anyhow so you would (laughing)'. Since modern dance was the dominant form at the time, when men speak more generally of dancing, it is this form that is salient, one that parallels the modern moves that so discomfited the bachelors in Béarns. For this group of four male dancers, there would seem to be some support for Bourdieu's (2008[1960]) positing of an essentialist female dancing 'hexis'. According to Bourdieu, 'bodily hexis is political mythology realised, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking and thereby of feeling and thinking' (1977, p.93). It might also be noted in this regard that three of these four less enthusiastic dancers are bachelors. However, some bachelors, including Marty, very much enjoyed dance, so that no hard-and-fast conclusions can be drawn. Moreover, the dancing experience of some females raises questions in this regard. Although she enjoyed the waltz, Pearl preferred to sit through other dances and listen to the music. Irene demonstrates no great enthusiasm when she says she danced a little before she got married and then stopped.

On other occasions, it is quite clear that most men enjoyed dancing, although 'malespeak' may prevent its direct expression, and sometimes it requires a female partner to voice it. Of her husband Packie, also present at the interview, Babs said, 'I used to hear them saying...he used to dance the nine nights of the week'. Once the topic was introduced, Packie himself felt free to talk of his pride

and skill as a dancer: 'I could dance a half-set as good as any of them'. Maureen said of a local dancer, 'he used to love going to the dances and he was a beautiful waltzer and so was his wife but she usen't be wanting him to be going. She used to hide his shoes but he'd go in clogs...but he'd go' (both laughing). On other occasions, and perhaps related to this reticence, the identification of male pleasures in and competence around dancing are more vicarious, and centred on observing other dancers. 'Great' or 'grand' dancers featured regularly in dancing stories. It is notable that male dancers were more commonly mentioned in this regard than females, and this seems true of both male and female 'viewers'². Charlie described Marty himself (in his absence) as 'a grand...a nice grand dancer'. Of nine instances where such terms appear, it is with respect to men for eight of these, and modern moves accounted for the majority of these instances.

When men, unprompted, do reveal their own joy in dancing, it is sometimes in reserved terms. Asked whether he enjoyed dancing, Marty said simply, 'ah God, I would'. Tom, the self-confessed dance 'addict' was more forthcoming. Speaking of ballroom dances, he remarked 'I used to go to that, and I enjoyed that immensely'. Sometimes, as when Tom spoke enthusiastically about the appeal of 'stylish', 'graceful' dances, it seems that the seductive appeals of a discourse of romance had a more cross-gender appeal than O'Connor (2003, 2005), for example, allows for. For Charlie, 'the waltz was the nicest dance of the whole lot'.

At times, these stories uncover a more particular facet of male dancing pleasures. Mícheál remembered 'that...foxtrot and quickstep and all those. If you were skilful at those you were a bit proud of yourself you know'. Pressed on this 'pride', Mícheál agreed that there may have been a competitive side to this. Such displays, perhaps akin to sport, are double-edged - the skills are revealed to both prospective female partners and male competitors. Neither of these grounds negates the evident 'intrinsic' pleasure (Thomas, 2003) that many men experienced. Teresa also seemed to refer to this more athletic dancing pleasure: 'the men'd come in there and - the band - the music - they liked their music and they would look around the hall and they would find - see the girl they would like to dance with and I'll tell you they *could* dance'. Perhaps this more athletic pride and pleasure indicates where 'greatness' lies³.

2 Some of these comments are related to house dances. Brian said: 'Pat was a great set-dancer...oh I remember him dancing with his two hands up over his head. I don't know, it was part of a set. It was his particular style'. Marty remembered my granduncle: 'ah he was a terror. And they had a plank floor in McKeon's kitchen that time and if you heard the timing of him with a pair of nail boots on him like'.

3 Another notable occasion for observing male bodies in motion at this time was at GAA matches. Roscommon, having won the all-Ireland on two occasions in the 1940s, was and is noted for its football. A number of local teams carry forward this tradition and a visitor to the area would be well-advised to follow sports coverage of matches, as a

Most female dancers also spoke of their pleasure and joy in dancing. Bridie was very forthcoming on the nature of her pleasure: 'it's the music that gets you. The rhythm or some - you've a happy feeling. It would be hard to describe it but it's really a happiness that the music elevates you, do you know what I mean? It sort of gives you a great lift'. Her account underlines the centrality of music for an understanding of dancing pleasures. Annie gave a comprehensive list of a dozen or so dances, all of which she enjoyed. Attracta stated 'oh I enjoyed dancing. Just that I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the music and I enjoyed the dancing and it was a way of getting out and it was good in every way'. Sharing the enthusiasm of a number of male dancers, Bridie said 'of course the waltz was *the* one'. As has been discussed, although waltzes were of an older provenance than quickstep or foxtrot, arriving on Irish shores in the nineteenth century (Brennan, 1999), 'it came in under the jazz [modern]' (*Down With Jazz*, 1987), while it was also danced in houses, and at céilí dances in the form of 'old-time waltzes'. Such cross-event performance is indicative of its popularity. As with dancing pleasures more broadly, the basis of such enjoyment was difficult to pin down. For many, words to the effect that 'it just was' were used.

It seems that dancing pleasures were cross-gender (and equally a minority of both sexes were less avid dancers). After all, modern dances were usually couple dances, and it 'takes two to tango'. It may be the case that men's dancing pleasures are less obvious to researchers because of gender-specific ways of talking about dance, again a type of malespeak. In this regard, actions speak louder than words. Proceeding from these dancing pleasures to an assessment of the types of group emotions that were generated on the dance floor is problematic. A type of resistance to verbalisation of feelings around dance (Thomas, 1993; Ward, 1993) was discussed in Chapter 2, one that is compounded when the subtle feelings related to *communitas* come into play. Even where dance practices are studied 'live', these subtler aspects of dancing experience are not always recognised or discussed in our 'society of the logos' (Polhemus, 1993, Ward, 1997). Given that this investigation is an ethnohistory with no possibility of participant observation, there are additional limits in accessing feelings around 'being at a dance', and to the types of phenomenological 'interactions' that Malbon (1990) speaks of in his study of clubbers. Moreover, in this investigation, verbalisation of these subtle experiences, where they occur, will be mediated by time and by memory in a way that does not characterise ethnographic approaches. Another complicating factor relates to social discourses. It may be that the mode of articulating feelings and situations among set-dancers studied by O'Connor (1997) in the 1990s was related to contemporary modes of thought and speech.

means of striking up a conversation. As with these labels for dancing performance, renowned football players are regularly noted for their 'greatness'.

Conversely, it is possible that older, rural, Irish people who danced in the 1940s and 1950s simply may not talk in these terms, and that their experiences may be articulated in terms of a 'nice' ambience, more grounded notions of fun and enjoyment, or other modes of inter-subjectivity such as dyadic interactions.

Occasionally though, dancers do open up tantalising glimpses of these states. On house dances, Maureen explained her pleasure: 'yeah because everyone was in it that you knew and the girls [...] you knew the lot of them but you met fellows in it too'. Asked what jazz meant to him, Marty said, 'it meant nothing to me only the crowd'. A number of respondents spoke of carnivals attracting enormous crowds, in the hundreds and even thousands. Since carnivals each happened once a year at relatively widely dispersed sites, their drawing power was significant, but halls could also command crowds. Quoting a friend of his on attending a dance at Mantua Hall, Charlie said, 'well it [was] horrid like the Eucharistic Congress – you wouldn't know whether you were coming up or coming down'. Local halls could hold 200 people when full, said Liz, and even house dances could draw on 100 people. Some outdoor dances were also mentioned in this regard – the bonfire céilís at Cox's Cross at the latter end of the research period could attract 500-600 people, according to Bill.

The specific focus on 'crowds' that characterises accounts of house dances, modern dances and carnivals is of interest. It speaks of a phenomenological immersion in the dance event, and in the public that is constituted by it. The cohesive 'carnival crowd' (Bakhtin's, 1984) revealed in these accounts – an immersive, organic mass where difference is subsumed – seems quite distinct from those more structured communities referred to in Chapters 7, 8 and 9. Malbon (1999) draws a useful distinction between 'communities ordained by politics, economics and histories – in short, by rationalism' and those constituted by the instant and the ephemeral, by sociality, empathy and non-rationality' (p.164). Such empathy at times extended to the 'other'. John said, 'ah, you met your pals and you maybe met new people and so on, you know...you'll always meet some other one. That's the way I look at it and I'm 80 years and I can still meet people that I've never met before'. Dan said that at a modern dance in Acton, London, he danced with a woman from the labourers' cottages in Elphin town, a person he had been warned off socialising with in his youth on the basis of her class. The next section will assess how these findings around male and female dancing pleasures problematise more essentialist conceptions around dance and gender.

10.2 Modern Dance and A Gendered Hexis

In this section, there will be an assessment of the findings of the previous section in light of literature that conflates recreational dance, femininity and emancipation (Bourdieu, 2008[1960]; Miller, 1990; Pini, 1993; Back, 1997; Bennett, 2000; O'Connor, 2005, *The Joy of Disco*, 2013).

McRobbie (1981) has criticised subculture theory for excluding the practices of females. She suggests that:

The temporary flights of the Teds, Mods or Rockers...show that it is monstrously more difficult for women to escape (even temporarily) and that these symbolic flights have often been at the expense of women (especially mothers) and girls. The lads may get by with – and get off on – each other alone on the streets but they did not eat, sleep or make love there. (1981, p.114)

Equally, Brunsdon (2007) has been critical of the 'boyzone' of the male-dominated CCCS in the 1970s, and its grounding in various types of patriarchal exclusion. The move by McRobbie to consider the private space of the 'bedroom' as a key locus for female subcultural activity misses an important public arena where women were very active. Such opportunities have, however, been taken up by dance anthropologists, so that a type of feminised counter-hegemony can be identified on this basis.

Miller (1990) studied how the 'auto-eroticism' of women who 'wine'⁴ at carnival represented a challenge to patriarchal norms. Back (1997) suggests that women challenged gender norms in British dance halls during the Second World War: 'the war had suspended some aspects of male power...women were exploring new forms of autonomy in all matters, from spending-power to sex' (p.188). The sexualisation of dance halls led to chaos on the dance-floor during a 'ladies' choice'⁵ dance, according to one dancer. Pini (1993) and Bennett (2000) discuss how raves offered a space within which women attained a degree of autonomy not permitted at more 'mainstream' events. The rise of disco in the 1970s suggested for some participants that 'female desire was just the most sumptuous, wonderful thing' (*The Joy of Disco*, 2013). Studies that reify a feminised resistance through dance stress its role in undermining more oppressive gender relations that exist outside the event. Viewed from this perspective, dance constitutes a type of gendered carnivalesque, a feminised 'second life' (Bakhtin, 1984).

4 A type of sexually-charged solo dance, performed in this case mainly by females

5 A dance where, contrary to usual conventions, females were expected to ask male partners to dance.

Sometimes though, there seems to be something of an 'over-reach', so that a celebration of dancing women is posited at the expense of dancing men. They are portrayed as poor or reluctant dancers, or it is suggested that they used dancing for more ulterior ends (O'Connor, 2005). Arguing that the fondness of male dancers for dance was a form of subterfuge, and that their real attentions lay in courtship, glosses over the complex interweaving of pleasures that exist for both men and women. Such thinking is inscribed, for example, in Bourdieu's (2008[1960]) work on dancers in Béarns. He suggests that women were more inclined than men to adopt modern, urban techniques of the body in dance practice – these constituted a type of emancipation in a deeply conservative, traditional society and offered females the opportunity to literally dance their freedom. Bourdieu adds the more essentialist suggestion that such processes are predicated on a greater sensitivity to bodily 'hexis' among women. Inscription by gendered politics of this sort featured strongly in his earlier study. Men, Bourdieu (2008[1960]) suggested, were less comfortable with more cosmopolitan, urbane moves. Though qualifying her work as centred on the discursive rather than ethnographic domain, O'Connor (2005) suggests that in the 1930s 'for men, the activity of dancing was not their primary motivation or source of most enjoyment' (p.10). Dances and dancing rather were a means to an end, in this case related to sexuality. A caveat at the beginning of another (2003) study by the same author is revealing. It stresses its 'exploration of popular recreational dance...with particular emphasis on women' (2003, p.50), even though the foxtrots and quicksteps that feature in this study would have involved male dancers too. The achievements of feminist theorists in making space for a dynamic and sensuous female experience of dance has been crucially important for the field of dance anthropology. Even so, whether because of a casting of dancing in contemporary society as feminine, or because of a concern in dance studies with performance dance - a sphere that could be seen to be feminised (Thomas, 2003) – a type of epistemological blind spot is apparent.

While more general hidden histories are often associated with the experience of women (Gopal, 2012), in the field of dance it is men's experiences that need to be retrieved (Ward, 1993). There are relatively few studies that investigate the male dancing experience⁶, either on its own terms, or when it is intertwined with that of women in couple dancing. This gender imbalance in the literature perpetuates the notion that enjoyment of dancing lies outside the realm of male experience. Sometimes, matters are skewed somewhat to lead to this conclusion. In Bourdieu's 'The Bachelor's Ball' (2008[1960]), the practices of bachelors seem to stand in for their sex more broadly, and little is said about those of men who did marry. This research investigation has examined whether this

6 An exception in this regard is Buckland's (2006b) study of morris dancing in England in the 1960s and 1970s, a form practised mainly by men.

bodily discomfiture is gendered, or is confined to certain types of men.

At the same time, following Cowan (1990), it is *both* male and female dancing subjectivities that need to be considered. In her work on dancing in northern Greece, she frames the issue succinctly in poststructuralist terms, so that a genuinely critical approach emerges when 'gender is examined as a relational reality, when 'being/becoming a woman' and 'being/becoming a man' are mutual processes' (1990, p.8). This is in no way to gloss the very real political issues at play. It is simply to suggest that these issues might be more fruitfully investigated by thinking through both sides of the gendered dancing experience. In her critique of feminist approaches that 'dismiss the existing literature as irrevocably male-biased...to shift attention towards the alternative terrain of girls' culture', McRobbie says that important opportunities are missed of 'grappling with questions which, examined from a feminist perspective, can increase our understanding of masculinity, male culture and sexuality' (1981, p.111). This is all the more germane when a framing of recreational dance as 'girls' culture' seems to contradict the historical record.

The epistemological thrust of this investigation centres, not on excluding one sex from the dance-floor, but of understanding the complex relationality of the gendered performances there. This would seem to be especially pertinent given the pronounced and intimate *presence* of both sexes at dance events, especially in the arena of courtship. Such a reciprocal view of the research findings will do more justice to the experiences of both sexes. If the dance-floor is opened up in this way, and if the conflation of dance, femininity and freedom is teased apart, then a different assessment may emerge of the meanings of dance generally, and modern dance specifically, for both women and men. In fact, an acknowledgement that both sexes simply enjoyed dance in-and-of-itself, as well as through its articulation with other aspects of the dance event, need not mean that studies of gender are less relevant. Rather, it can avoid the type of over-politicisation of dancing that has been referred to in Section 3.6, so that a conceptual space is opened up for the real and widespread joys of dancing for a range of social groups.

This investigation has established that foxtrots and quicksteps were enjoyed equally by men and women in Ireland during the research period, findings that chime with studies of recreational dance in Ireland in the 1990s⁷, so that the type of essentialist and emancipatory feminine hexis that Bourdieu (2008[1960]) and others posit, seems to have been less germane in other social contexts.

7 Clubbing in Dublin in the 1990s appealed to dancers of both sexes (Shanagher, 2012b).

These findings resonate with a number of sources in the literature. Ward (1993), for example, interrogates the myth that dance has been 'an ordeal or something faintly ridiculous for men'. This, he says, 'perishes with historical scrutiny' (p.22). According to Malbon (1999, p.142), 'the male clubbers I interviewed evoked their experience in a similar fashion [to the female clubbers]'. If both men and women enjoyed dancing, then the dance-floor space can no longer be seen as an exclusively feminine 'inside' opposed to a masculine 'inside', as O'Connor (2005) suggests. Both sexes were actively involved in negotiating and enjoying these dancing spaces.

In terms of the present investigation, interrogating a gendered hexis need not exclude Bourdieu's concept from consideration. It might retain conceptual traction in terms of a 'generational hexis', as has been discussed in earlier sections of this chapter, one that was embodied in the preferences of young people for modern dances, moves that jarred with those of their elders. On this basis, an admission of men into the realm of dancing pleasures in no way diminishes the particular and oppressive ways that women were positioned by patriarchal currents in society at this time. It merely strengthens the case for a more age-based understanding of these processes. The next section will explore how an open dancing spirit appears to have operated across religious lines.

10.3 Communitas and Religious Identity

Given that until shortly before the research period, Catholics and Protestants attended distinct dance events, an evident 'coming together' of the groups through dance would seem to constitute an example of *communitas*.

Some historical perspectives will be useful for framing these findings. Friel (2004) discusses the 'ballroom dances' of the predominantly Protestant landed ascendancy throughout the nineteenth century in Ireland's southeast, and contrasts these with the house dances of mainly Catholic small farmers. Such divisions seeped into the lore of older dancers in Elphin. Bridie heard stories about carriages pulling up to Rockville House for a dance: 'well I used to hear yarns about the entrance...where the carriages used to be going, and the hoity-toity people'. At the time, this would have been the residence of the Lloyd family, whose family cemetery is nearby. Small farmer perspectives of these ballroom dances are very much from the 'outside'. Protestants also show an awareness of exclusivity in this regard. Pearl recalled dances in her parents' time – 'you had to be someone to get in there'. Discussing religious antagonisms, Annie said that 'today [it] doesn't seem to make much difference, but in those days of course it did. Back we'll say in - well we'll say now in

1920 and that, I think it did'. While Protestants as a group would have encompassed a range of strata, a degree of division of dance culture along religious lines is evident.

In the research setting, following independence in 1922, the landlord class - the 'gentry' - for the most part vanished as was discussed in Chapter 5. What remained was a stratum of rural Protestant big farmers, at this time usually maintaining holdings of about 100-200 acres, larger than most of their Catholic neighbours (Annie, Marty), but a long way removed from the vast estates comprising thousands of acres of the ascendancy. It may be the case that this amelioration of the economic gulf between Protestant and Catholic is related in some ways to more inclusive currents in dance culture. Even so, in the 1940s, religious divisions continued to be marked in some ways through dance. One dancer who wished to remain anonymous - itself a significant reminder of lingering tensions around this issue - remarked that 'church dances', modern dances held in the Church of Ireland parish hall, were not widely publicised in the past. This was his indirect and delicate way of suggesting that they were religiously exclusive affairs.

As early as the 1930s, Thompson's (1974) vivid account of a local 'big house' dance suggests it was open to all regardless of faith and class. On a smaller scale, Rory, Pearl, Annie and Irene - all Protestants - attended station dances in the houses of small farmers. As was discussed in Section 5.1, these were domestic religious celebrations where neighbours were invited to attend an event overseen by a local priest, and can be seen as a type of 'folk Catholicism' (Spitzer, 1986). Celebrations would follow the more serious observances⁸. Irene, a Protestant woman, said she would skip the earlier part of the proceedings but arrived for the 'entertainment'. Such crossing of the religious/ethnic divide has also been noted in other dance contexts, such as the emergent New York disco scene of the early 70s, where black, latino and white people participated (*The Joy of Disco*, 2013). In an Irish context, dance venues associated with punk and hip-hop youth cultures in Belfast in the 1970s and 1980s saw a crossing of religious lines (*Folklore from the Dance Floor*, 2012).

Another early indicator of change was recalled by some older Catholic dancers, who described the ballroom at Rockville House. Originally the residence for the powerful Protestant Lloyd family, it was opened up to the wider public for modern dances after its original residents had departed in the

⁸ These 'mesalliances' (Bakhtin, 1984) of the sacred and profane had a long pedigree in Ireland. Ó Giolláin (1999) has documented the outdoor 'pattern dances' that took place at holy wells until the middle of the nineteenth century. Religious observances were followed by dancing, music and song.

1940s. Invariably, dancers mentioned that it had a mirror along one wall, indicating the more luxurious facilities of these old 'big house' ballrooms. The house was later demolished, but the temporary reinvention of its ballroom as a more inclusive site for dancing and socialising is revealing of a loosening of codes around religion and class, and an undermining of 'cultural capital' around these distinction. Those who remembered the dances in this venue were largely Catholic small farmers (Bridie, Ted, Bill), although given Bill's position as a farmer/shopkeeper/publican, it may that relatively affluent small farmers attended, those with higher acreages. Such a possibility would chime with notions of 'distinction' discussed in Chapter 9, and is suggestive of a fracturing of small farmer culture into more and less affluent groups. Given the relatively small number of people who recall these older dances, more work would be required in this regard. Speaking more generally, it could be suggested that modern dances, or at least those more 'upmarket' forms, attracted people of all faiths (Ruane and Butler, 2007). By the 1950s, the same anonymous dancer referred to earlier in this section said that even previously Protestant 'church dances' were opened up to Catholics.

An emerging shared cultural experience didn't obfuscate all difference. 'Of course the Church of Ireland people in those days wouldn't go on a Sunday night to a dance whereas the Roman Catholics did', said Annie. Pearl had direct experience of this so that her father would not permit her to go out dancing on Sundays, and 'he only worked one Sunday in his life', when the hay was being taken in. Annie suggested drinking was less associated with Protestant dances, although her account is ambivalent, and she remarks ironically some of her co-congregationalists were 'professional drinkers'. Differences were occasionally marked *between* the different Protestant congregations: 'and I know a Church of Ireland girl married a Methodist man and he'd go and he'd sit and she could dance away', according to Annie. Equally, apart from experiences at school (Annie), it is notable that céilí dances did not seem to attract Protestant dancers. It is specifically modern dances that would seem to be associated with this type of *communitas*.

There is evidence of modern dance in particular as a unifying force across religious lines, and of the emergence of a type of 'ecumenical' dancing community. Recreational dance in halls (and houses) can be seen in some ways as sites for interrogating and even transcending the types of religious tensions that were so active until the 1920s. Such a scenario would conform in many ways to the egalitarian, inclusive definition of *communitas* posited in Section 3.4 (O'Connor, 1997; Ehrenreich, 2007). If this was the case, then McNeill's (1995) 'moving together in time' may have played a small part in the emergence of relatively integrated national community in the wake of independence

(Ruane and Butler, 2007). At the same time, even if recreational dance were articulated in this more inclusive mode, such cohesion would need to be considered alongside the generational logic that was discussed in Chapter 8. These dancers after all, whether Catholic or Protestant, were *young* dancers. The next section will tease apart the notion of *communitas* in this light.

10.4 Existential and Normative Communitas

This section will work through Turner's elaboration of the concept of *communitas*, as a basis for thinking about more fragmented experiences of recreational dance.

Turner (1969) notes that 'where existential *communitas* prevails, society is seen as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured *comitatus*, community or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders' (1969, p.96). Arensberg and Kimball (2001[1936]) have suggested that, although dance was an 'institution of the young', the power and authority of elders in rural Clare of the 1930s was considerable. Given, moreover, that older people frequented such dances, there may be some grounds for concluding that the collective experience at house dances *tended* towards existential *communitas*. House dances were dominant at a time when mobility was limited, and when those who attended would, as a result, have been drawn from a relatively small catchment area, and on the Catholic small farmers who dominated the countryside⁹.

As has been discussed in Chapter 7, the period 1940-1960 saw shifts in dance culture away from the domestic sphere and towards events held in more widely dispersed, larger, private halls, requiring a greater degree of mobility. Innovations in transport technologies – first bicycles, then cars – were intimately related to these changes (see section 4.4). For those young people who acquired bicycles, a new conception of, and use of, space was available. In the terms that were discussed in Chapter 5, there was an opening outwards of spatial orientation, consciousness, and identity from the townland to the parish and beyond. As early as the 1930s such developments were opening life up in a very tangible way, and allowing for a type of trans-local imaginary to emerge:

Apart from the novelty of the modern music and the new dance rhythms, the dance halls had the added attraction: namely, that large numbers of young people came together for the first time, extending the boundaries of parishes and counties. (*Down With Jazz*, 1987)

⁹ This would be a tendency rather than a hard-and-fast categorisation. As was related in Chapter 5, there was stratification within the small farmer grouping.

This brings matters back to the generational culture discussed in Chapters 6 and 8. For perhaps the first time in rural society in Ireland, the inter-generational bonds of community were being challenged by an age-based solidarity across parish and county. Perhaps the fundamental shift in this regard was related to the opening up of a spatial choice, on where one would wish to dance, and more importantly, which *community* one wished to dance with. It appears that the path of least resistance for dancers in this respect was to dance with those of one's own age group¹⁰.

These material journeys between dance halls might be related to the broader trope of 'escape' discussed in Chapter 8, one articulated with the media experiences and 'imagined communities' of young people, and the types of 'movements' associated with emigration. In this regard, 'community', 'an area of common living', is related in complex ways to *communitas*, a 'modality' or emotional state (Turner, 1969, p.96). In particular, there are the seeds of 'normative *communitas*', a mode that emerges where groups exclude as well as include, where elements of 'structure' characteristic of official life are salient. As with the predominantly gay clientele of the early disco scene in New York (*The Joy of Disco*, 2013), and those older dancers in their 40s, 50s and 60s who experienced *communitas* at ballroom dances in cities in Britain (Thomas and Miller, 1997) *young* dancers in Roscommon, at one and the same time, performed social inclusion and exclusion.

Further fragmentation of *communitas*, from 'existential' to 'normative', may have taken place along class lines on the basis of attending the different 'grades' of modern dance that were summarised in Chapter 9. On this basis, processes of distinction facilitated the emergence of class-based communities *within* the broader generational thrust of dance culture. It is in this light that the findings outlined in Section 10.3 can usefully be considered. While in some ways, cohesion may have taken place across religious lines, the same process can be theorised as involving normative *communitas* emerging among more affluent sections of rural society, whether Catholic or Protestant, those who attended the 'balls'. Normative *communitas*, and by extension 'distinction', can thus be viewed as an exclusive or inclusive social phenomena, depending on the complexity of society, and on the epistemological or conceptual 'angle'¹¹ used for research purposes.

10 More flexible, fluid notions of 'community' chime with those recent studies of youth culture referred to in Chapter 8 (Bennett, 1999; Muggleton and Wienzierl, 2003).

11 Equally, according to Johnny and May, normative *communitas* operated in other ways: 'in a lot of cases each of those functions had their own following. You know you wouldn't get everybody that'd be at a céilí at a modern dance...they were all perfect, all masterful dancers, because they specialised in them but each of them would have their own following you know' (other accounts, as described in Chapter 8, testify to more pluralism in this regard, at least in the 1940s). Perhaps, given the symbolic force of the national-popular during this period, it would be more accurate to describe the social pleasures of attending céilí in terms of 'ideological *communitas*', that form most closely related to reproduction of the interests of powerful groups (Turner, 1974).

The same theoretical ambiguities that were discussed in relation to 'distinction' in Chapter 9 are germane at this point, so that care has to be taken not to downplay egalitarian, horizontal tendencies (Cohn, 2011) (indeed 'distinction' and 'normative communitas' are conceptually closely related, although operating from different ontological premises). In this regard, interview transcripts provide glimpses of generous, socially inclusive gestures around dances, even in complex, differentiated societies. 'Gamble' dances, held in houses, were often held to raise money for families in financial difficulty, according to John and Charlie. These were an occasion for the community to draw together in a supportive and compassionate mode. On the question of raising the admission fee to exclude 'rough' elements at hall dances, some people campaigned against this in a spirit of solidarity: 'old Bernie Lee anyway, according to my informant, he stuck - stood by the ordinary fellow again. The ordinary guy could pay a shilling or whatever ' (Brian). These types of cross-class solidarity undermine neat categorisations into 'existential' or 'normative' communitas. They speak rather of a more expansive, humanist sensibility, and provide further evidence of a popular critical ethos. On the 'division' between more and less comfortable small farmers, and between farmers and labourers, care needs to be taken not to overstate exclusionary tendencies¹².

It is worth recalling the republican socialist tradition among small farmers discussed in Chapter 5, running from activist Jim Gralton in the 1920s to independent republican Matt Brady in the 1940s (Feeley, 1986; White, 2006) and forward to his son, Ruaidhrí in the late 1950s. Equally, in the economic sphere, the *meitheal* or 'working in co', as it was termed locally, was widely practised during the 1940s and 1950s among the farming community. There are numerous instances in the dancing stories gathered of people engaging in cooperative labour, manifesting Kropotkin's (1972) 'mutual aid' around turf-cutting, harvesting oats and potatoes and exchanging farm machinery. Given the high degree of self-sufficiency during the Emergency of 1940s, these types of reciprocal enterprises were crucial for dealing with economic challenges, as well as for enhancing bonds of solidarity¹³. Such practices also inflected the field of dance, so that many small local halls, at least during the 1940s, were run 'by committee'. Viewed in another way, and given the complexity of social life at this time, it may be that normative communitas was more salient, forged around

12 There may also be a more 'long-durational' (PMG, 1982) example of horizontal tendencies amongst the communes that existed in considerable numbers in Ireland in the pre-famine period, including a number in County Roscommon. The Irish 'cluachán', involving the rundale system of collective agriculture, attracted the attentions of Marx, among others (Slater and Flaherty, 2009). Duffy proposes that this 'complex system of management...helps explain why the Irish became such gifted navigators of political institutions. But it was also a structure that fomented internecine feuds'. (2007, p.17)

13 They continue in some ways today. During fieldwork, I sat for tea with a group of local men that included my cousin. They were travelling from farm to farm in the area digging potatoes for neighbours

generational identities and linked to the emergence of novel transport technologies and new experiences of media culture. This more differentiated form of *communitas* in turn seems to point to Malbon's (1999) concept of 'playful vitality'.

10.5 Communitas and Playful Vitality

In untangling the complex intersections of identity and the collective emotions of the dance floor, the salience of Malbon's (1999) 'playful vitality' will be discussed in this section.

In his study of swing dance, Douane (2006) identifies what he considers to be a blind spot in studies of recreational dance in the following terms: 'the necessary conditions for adult forms of play have not received due sociological consideration...the determinants of adult forms of play...have yet to be fully articulated' (p.111). The cultural historian Johann Huizanga (1969) has defined 'play' as an end-in-itself, a 'totality...a thing on its own' (p.2); it is 'a well-defined action which is different from 'ordinary' life' (p.4); 'an interlude in our daily lives' (p.7). Malbon has incorporated these ideas into his study of clubbing in Britain in the 1990s. As with *communitas*, 'playful vitality' theorises dance as a complex, enjoyable social phenomenon, one intimately related to the body, to moving and to emotionality. It 'takes the form of a sense of individual and communal euphoria, induced through the playful practices that constitute dancing, as well as the specific contextual details that mark clubbing out as different from, say, line-dancing, ballroom dancing or even disco' (p.146). As in the types of phenomenological approach outlined earlier in this chapter, Malbon accords a central place to music in dancing, a point often missed in 'extrinsic' understandings of dance (Thomas, 2003). He speaks of playful vitality as involving 'a power [that] comes not from above – it is not ascribed – but from within – it is achieved. Rather than being a mode of power that is evaded through play, it is instead a form of micro-power that can be inhabited through play' (p.148).

At the same time, Malbon is critical of the concept of *communitas* on the basis that there is little empirical evidence underlying claims for the dissolution of difference on the dance floor (although O'Connor's (1997) study of set-dancers does offer empirically-founded evidence in this regard). He distinguishes his concept from what he sees as the more 'utopian' tendencies of Turner's construct. This is achieved primarily by questioning the notion that a nebulous group identity emerges through dance. Instead, 'while not denying the genuine nature of the sentiments that can occur in clubbing, I propose that the actual differences of those within clubbing should be carefully scrutinised' (p.151). In other words, identities remain active *within* the more communal emotional experiences of the

dance floor, and *alongside* the 'anonymised identities' that characterise such experiences (1999).

This critique would chime with Thornton's (2004) critique of clubbers' 'subcultural ideology', one which leads her to believe that notions of an immersive social 'unity' are no more than self-serving constructs that obfuscate very real distinctions that inflect the dance floor. Equally, as was discussed in Chapter 9, the ideological and biographical position of the researcher might be considered. As far as Thomas (2003) is concerned, *communitas* is to be found among the over-60s in her study of ballroom dancing. She contrasts their 'social solidarity' with a mere loose 'sociality' or 'neo-tribalism' to be found at the social dances of younger clubbers. Her sympathies appear to be with the group that she has worked most closely with¹⁴. Issues of identity politics and collective emotion are addressed in Malbon's concept, so that there is a conceptual bridge between 'extrinsic' and 'intrinsic' ontologies. In his view, other modes of intersubjectivity are available within the more generalised, monadic emotional states of the dance floor suggested by the concept of *communitas*. This positing of a complex intersection of identities challenges other views of dancing. McNeill (1995, p.65) argues that the pronounced collective emotional solidarities of group dances that manifest 'keeping in time' have declined with the advent of couple dances:

In our own time mass culture has made song and dance almost synonymous with sex throughout the world. This constitutes a specialised, historically exceptional meaning, and has helped to blind us to the other roles that dancing played in other times and places...a direct and obvious contradiction exists between emotional solidarities shared by all participants, and the pairing off the sexual excitement invites¹⁵.

However, the sort of mutually exclusive framework posited by this theorist might not do justice to the dancing experiences. Even where the dyadic pleasures of courtship dominate, it may be that 'heterosexualised' gender identities inflect the state of *communitas*, so that it need not be an 'either/or' situation. A degree of sexual flirting can exist within group dances (see O'Connor, 1997 on the subtle 'sexual grazing' that can take place during set-dancing) and conversely a sense of group solidarity can emerge with couple dances (Thomas and Miller, 1997). O'Brien (1942, p.4) has described a modern dance in the 1940s: 'the parties quickly lock themselves into a solid mass and keep shuffling and sweating for ten minutes in the space of a square foot, like a vast human

14 As a former clubber, it seems to me that such distinctions need to be interrogated.

15 Part of McNeill's analysis rests on the assumption that group dances have given way to couple dances, a suggestion that could be contested on two grounds. Freeman (1981) counters that dancing and courtship have always been tightly entwined. Also, the assertion that group dances have given way to couple dances needs to be challenged by empirical research. For Thomas (2003) various forms of individualised solo dancing have dominated since the 1960s in the UK from the twist of the 1960s to clubbers, and there is some evidence for the ongoing popularity of group dances (O'Connor, 1997). As this investigation argues, collective joys are better seen in more flexible, and less essentialist, terms.

centipede marking time'. Setting aside the unsympathetic tone, it would seem that a group consciousness sits comfortably alongside dyadic relations.

Malbon's work, though useful in many respects, needs to be interrogated in others. He suggests that playful vitality is not to be found among 'ballroom dancing' and 'disco dancing', but only among the collectivities formed around solo dancing at techno clubs. In order to advance his more essentialist formulation of playful vitality, Malbon speaks of 'contextual factors' that might include the powerful PA and lighting systems in clubs, solo dancing, and imbibing of ecstasy¹⁶ characteristic of these events. At hall dances, there would have been significantly smaller sound reproduction systems, sufficient to allow conversation between couples rotating around the dance-floor, and various controls were in place to ensure that alcohol – if it was consumed at all – was not taken to excess. At the same time, although techno and ballroom or modern dances are distinct in some respects, they are united in the salience of the dancing body. Thomas and Miller (1997) suggest that *communitas* exists among ballroom dancers, a state closely related to playful vitality. In fact, as indicated earlier in this section, their study reverses Malbon's contextual requirements, suggesting that ballroom dancers do, while clubbers do not, access these privileged emotional states. This investigation keeps an open mind on these issues, so that a type of dancing sectarianism has no place. Establishing a correlation between specific 'contextual factors' and the emergence of *communitas* or playful vitality seems to miss the point somehow, and to be over-mechanistic. A more holistic, critical consideration of dancers' experiences, as has featured with this project, would seem to be a more fruitful research approach. A further critique of Malbon is that while he expresses an interest in macrocosmic issues, there is little detailed investigation of the material conditions in Britain within which clubbing was practised, an epistemological blind spot that the present investigation has addressed in earlier chapters.

Given the research findings of this investigation, conceptualising the types of powerful emotional states and pleasures generated through dance might best be done by Malbon's concept, rather than *communitas*, whether of the existential or normative variety. Malbon's playful vitality recognises that identities and 'structure' are always there, infusing 'anti-structure' in a dialectical manner. In earlier chapters, there was a discussion of how generational, class and gender identities inflected dance. Such dancing politics shine through at all times, inflecting, enriching and synergising with more integrative tendencies associated with collective emotion, movement and spirit. Dancing on

16 Slang for MDMA, an empathetic stimulant favoured by clubbers (Collin, 1997).

this basis can be seen as a site where a range of subjectivities intersect. Malbon's 'individualised' and 'anonymised' identities' were germane, along with national, international, generational, gender, class and religious identities. At the same time, Turner's studies have their place, and are more widely represented in the literature on dance.

At this point this chapter has circled back to a consideration of cultural hegemony, but this time thickened by an acknowledgement of the more phenomenological pleasures and experiences that dancers felt. In this regard, it could be noted, as with Bakhtin's 'first' and 'second' lives, Turner (1969) does posit a mutually constitutive opposition between 'communitas' and 'structure'. There is 'the spontaneous, immediate, concrete nature of communitas, as opposed to the norm-governed, institutionalised, abstract nature of social structure' (1969, p.126). As 'mutually determinative' categories, 'maximisation of communitas provokes maximisation of structure, which in turn produces revolutionary strivings for renewed communitas' (p.129). This would seem to be an accurate description of the moral panic discussed earlier¹⁷, and more broadly of the type of dialectics between incorporation and resistance posited by cultural hegemony theory. At another point (p.109), he teases this issue out: 'from the perspectival view of those concerned with the maintenance of 'structure', all sustained manifestations of communitas must appear as dangerous and anarchical, and have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions, and conditions'.

At the same time, in their emphasis on the body, on sensuous experiences, and on play, both the concepts of communitas and playful vitality are distinguished from the ideas discussed in earlier chapters, and they have a more self-referential quality. Perhaps a key difference between these approaches is one of ontological scale. The politics of hegemony tend to best fit those cultural processes operating on a national or international scale. Those working at the phenomenological level are concerned with particular dance events in particular places. As such, it may be more a question of emphasis, and of where the academic gaze settles. The intention is not to resolve these macrocosmic and microcosmic perspectives into one another. It is rather to open up a conceptual bridge that allows for both to be given their due place and importance.

17 Such a model accurately predicts that those forms that tend most towards existential communitas and normative communitas – modern dances, and to some degree house dances – tend to be the focus of moral panic campaigns. Moreover, Turner specifically refers to youth as 'marginal' to 'structure' in this scheme of things, as most embodying anti-structural sensibilities.

Chapter Summary

A range of cultural strategies that can be regarded as post-hegemonic were deployed in Elphin between 1940 and 1960. While a minority of men and women were unenthusiastic dancers, for most people of both sexes, dances were sites for the experience of pleasure. Consequently, a wider conflation in the literature of femininity, emancipation and dance cannot be taken to have been universal. This was followed by an analysis of the loosening of religious boundaries in the broader field of modern dance. In addition, possibilities opened up by new transport technologies allowed more extra-local forms of community and *communitas* to emerge. Given the generational thrust of this dance culture however, this might be theorised as 'normative' rather than 'existential' *communitas*. Malbon's (1999) playful vitality can be used to further theorise these findings, in allowing for the inflection of *communitas* by various identities. The final chapter will take a backwards glance over the entire dissertation, and draw the various threads together into a critical conclusion.

Chapter 11

The Last Dance

Let us read, and let us dance; these two amusements will never do any harm to the world.

Voltaire, (*Dictionnaire Philosophique*, 1785-1789)

11.0 Introduction

This final chapter will bring together a number of strands of the investigation. Focusing matters by reintroducing the four research questions that have guided the research, the various empirical and theoretical layers will be interwoven. Such an overview will allow the key findings to come to the fore, and allow for a critical evaluation of whether and how it has met its research objectives.

The research questions about recreational dance in Roscommon are as follows:

1. What was the dance culture of the 1940s and 1950s?
2. What social contexts might be useful for understanding recreational dance?
3. How might Gramsci's theory of 'cultural hegemony' be used to understand dance culture?
4. How might recreational dance be regarded as post-hegemonic?

These will be addressed the first section. The following section will present a critical overview of the research project. In the final section, possible areas for future investigation will be set out.

11.1 The Research Questions Revisited

10.1.1 What was the Dance Culture of the 1940s and 1950s?

This first question was of paramount importance, establishing foundations in 'embodied cultural knowledge' (Buckland, 2006a) for the rest of the work. It also became apparent, as outlined in Chapter 1, that no systematic work had been done in this area, and that apart from a limited number

of studies (Smyth 1993; Gibbons, 1996; O'Connor, 2003; 2005), the academy had overlooked this rich seam of dance culture. O'Connor's studies in particular both influenced this investigation, and indicated where more work needed to be done. In terms of influences, the academic 'spark' for this project was largely on the basis of O'Connor's (2003, 2005) acknowledgement of the importance of modern dance, its articulation in relation to a conservative, nationalist official culture, and its associated pleasures. The twin concepts of the 'discourse of romance' and the 'discourse of ruin' (2005) were invaluable in conceptualising cultural politics during the research period. The latter of these resonated closely with moral panic theory, but with a particular focus on dance; the former chimed with the trope in the literature, and in some respondents' accounts, conflating 'freedom' and 'modern dance'. Both discursive formations would be useful for dealing with the third research question.

At the same time, limits were evident in these studies. Further work needed to be done to go beyond the focus on newspaper discourses or cinematic texts and to engage with surviving dancers (a limit specifically recognised O'Connor (2005)). While both studies acknowledged the pleasures of dancing (and a (1997) study featuring interviews with dancers was useful for thinking about set-dancing and *communitas*) there was room, in my view, for a rebalancing of the investigation *towards* acknowledging dancing pleasures, and *away* from a view of modern dance as a culture under siege (*Down With Jazz*, 1987; Smyth, 1993; Gibbons, 1996). Moreover, as a recreational dancer myself, the neglect and devaluation of male dancing experience required more investigation. Through my 'gendered subjectivities', I felt I could address this gap. The lack of a quantitative dimension in assessing the centrality of modern dance could in my opinion be usefully addressed. This was in no way to suggest that such methods were superior to qualitative methods; merely that they provided a useful and complementary source of data on dance culture. Although the research by Smyth (1993) and Gibbons (1996) was narrower in focus than O'Connor's work, focusing more on those spectacular developments related to moral panic and the anti-jazz campaign, it was nevertheless useful in providing an insight into the 'structure of feeling' around dance during the period.

Setting out to establish the nature of dance culture, interviews confirmed the suggestions in the literature on the importance of modern dances and céilí dances (moves and events), and provided new data on the vibrancy of house dances, maypole dances and crossroad dances during the 1940s (previous work by Brennan (1999) and Ó hAllmhuráin (2005) tended to date the decline of house dances to the immediate aftermath of the PDHA (1935)). A diverse and vibrant dance culture came

into focus, one sometimes indicative of a type of dancing pluralism, so that the same people were proficient in various different moves. The healthy state of this dance culture was indicative in some ways of the relatively limited leisure options that otherwise existed, and was starkly illustrated by researching the main local newspaper, the *Roscommon Herald*. Pages of advertisements provided an invaluable insight, not only into the cultural centrality of dancing, but into the relative popularity of the different forms (with the exception of house dances and other informal events that were not advertised). This involved a simple counting exercise of advertisements which revealed that modern dances accounted for between 80% and 90% of the advertisement total, a figure that, with certain caveats, could be correlated with the number of events. These large sections in the *Roscommon Herald* also spoke in a very direct way of the desire to dance, to escape, to move, a theme that was fleshed out under the third research question.

During this phase of the research, dominance of the sphere of dance by modern dances such as quicksteps and foxtrots was thrown into stark relief, and made it all the more imperative that this culture should be researched, documented and theorised. Part of the investigation involved an assessment of the various grounds for the exclusion of modern dance - related to an-other ontology of the body (Thomas, 1993) more generally, to a more specific lack of interest in dancing, to class and gender exclusions, and to both nationalist and more cosmopolitan conceptions of history. Equally, the relatively marginal place of céilí dances seemed to require an explanation. Before addressing this more complex question, I sought as an ethnohistorian to grasp the 'structure of feeling' of life in Elphin during the 1940s and 1950s. This would allow the research to move beyond the realm of 'dance studies', where moves are analysed in something of a social vacuum on an 'intrinsic' basis, and to open the project up to more 'extrinsic' elements (Thomas, 2003). In other words, knowledge of relevant social contexts was required. This 'extrinsic/intrinsic' binary came to assume a fundamental place for grounding the investigation, and helped me to remain sensitive at all times to the macrocosmic and microcosmic dimensions of social life, as well as to the synergies between these.

11.1.2 What Social Contexts Might be Useful for Understanding Recreational Dance?

The sheer complexity and richness of social life in Elphin around dance was initially quite overwhelming. As an interdisciplinary investigation, and informed by various political currents, choosing those aspects of life that were most germane presented some difficulties. As the fieldwork progressed, dancers themselves, through the subjects covered in our exchanges, guided matters in

this respect. This is not to say that interviews constituted a transparent window into life at the time, as was discussed in the Chapter 2. Various 'interview effects' intervened, from the types of question asked, to reticence on certain issues, to the vagaries of memory. Nonetheless, the subject matter of interviews came to represent a type of collaborative approach to thinking about relevant contexts. Along with this emic dimension, the emerging theoretical frame came to assume an important role in this respect (PMG, 1982). Cultural hegemony theory led me to broader contexts related to class, politics and media; 'communitas' to transport, comparisons with house dances and dancers' feelings. This dialogue between the etic and emic was a central dynamic of the research, played out as it was in an ongoing process of iteration between theory and findings.

The 'lay of the land' featured strongly in stories of dance and seemed a good place to start. In a predominantly agricultural economy and society, land occupied the consciousness of people during the 1940s and 1950s, as it does today. On this basis, the discipline of geography came to guide me. Aallen et al.'s (1997) study of the Irish landscape was especially useful. Another element of this approach involved my immersion in landscape, travelling the backroads, byways and lanes that criss-cross the countryside in these parts, as in many parts of rural Ireland, and attempting to build the type of ineffable spatial-historical knowledge that locals possess. OS maps allowed for a diachronic thickening of this process, and the pursuit of a type of 'psychogeography'¹ in this way. Seeing the world through this lens led naturally to questions of the agricultural economy, and from there to those relating to land ownership, conflict and class.

The transformation of the landscape locally from tillage to the dry stock cattle pasture that dominates today (with occasional sheep) between the mid-nineteenth century and the 1940s spoke of significant changes, notably those relating to the rise of the small farmer. Avoiding to some extent the decimation of lower strata of rural society during the famine of 1845-1852, the tenant farmer antecedents of this group came to constitute a highly politicised and numerically powerful group that secured ownership of their land from the late nineteenth century on, under the political guidance of Michael Davitt and the Land League (Maguire, 2012). They continued to play a central role in the struggle for independence from Britain, and the establishment of the Free State in 1922. The historical literature concurred with geographical sources in documenting the rise of this group (Coogan, 1976; Lee, 1979; Waters, 1977; MacLochlainn, 1983) but primary research drawing on census data from 1946 and 1956 'drove the point home'. Labourers by this time were a marginal

¹ The term refers to an inter-disciplinary and personalised study of place, time and change. See for example Tim Robinson's *Connemara Trilogy* (2005-2012)

group, much declined from their numbers in the first half of the nineteenth century. Various groups such as a rural bourgeoisie consisting of publicans and shopkeepers, 'professionals' such as doctors and guards, and 'rural intellectuals' such as priests and teachers (Goldring, 1987) were present around Elphin, as were small numbers of Protestants, but the Catholic small farmer accounted for a significant majority of the population. These findings allowed me to regard modern dances as associated primarily with small farmers, while recognising that there were other types of dances attended by a rural elite. The stratification of rural life was thus underlined, not just between small farmers and other groups, but also *within* this former group, a finding that belied the notion that 'we were all in the same boat'. Together, these allowed for theorising around Bourdieu's 'distinction' under the third research question.

These considerations of class facilitated an investigation of the politics of the area, whether in terms of official electoral politics, or currents that were more 'underground'. While a type of gramscian collective will had served the purpose of uniting various social classes in the project to secure Irish independence (MacLochlainn, 1983; Goldring, 1987), significant 'fractures' of this formation were evident in subsequent years, manifested initially around the tensions of the Civil War, and later in various strands of republicanism and socialism. Oral accounts, the built environment, and the literature (see especially White, 2006) made it clear that this was a 'republican' area, one that during the 1940s and 1950s saw a number of local people from around Elphin involved in IRA campaigns, (and sometimes interned on that basis). These counter-hegemonic currents were reflected in electoral patterns for the county, notably in the success of 'flash parties' and 'independents' in the 1940s. Together, these spoke of resistance, of negation and of struggle in the various strands of the political sphere. While no direct correlation can be posited between these political currents and developments in dance, they were nevertheless useful for building an understanding of local life. Moreover, these findings opened up the possibility that a fragmentation of the collective will in the sphere of politics was complemented by a parallel process in the sphere of recreational dance. Goldring (1987) in particular was useful in pointing to the rise of a powerful Catholic middle class nationally, one that sidelined its erstwhile allies in the historical bloc that led to independence, and became at that time particularly concerned with the meaning of 'Irishness' as a means to consolidating a nationalist hegemony.

Related to these currents was an analysis of the Irish state preceding and during the main research period. Dominated between 1932 and 1948 by *Fíanna Fáil*, these years saw steps taken to sever the remaining links with Britain following the Economic War of the 1930s, the dropping of the oath of

allegiance to the British crown, and the eventual establishment of a Republic in 1949 (even though this particular move was instigated by Clann na Poblachta during the Inter-Party government of 1948-1951). These processes were symptomatic of an ongoing project to establish national autonomy, one whose trajectory could be traced back to the end of the eighteenth century. The sphere of dance could usefully be contextualised by considering official views on céilí and modern dance. The former, articulated as an element of the national-popular that preceded and followed independence was valorised by powerful groups as embodying an essentially 'Irish' identity (O'Connor, 2003, 2005). The latter was identified with 'impure', 'corrupting' currents from abroad. These cultural tenets were located within the broader framework of a rural ideology that conflated national-popular culture, a gaze towards the past and a concern with the rural. Local experiences of dances associated with cultural nationalism registered in interviews, and a gramscian 'civil society' was quite evident. At the same time, the enormous and contrary popularity of modern dance among locals in the 1940s could be used to theorise negotiations with dominant culture under the third research question.

Other contexts came into focus as the findings came to inflect the work. An emergent media culture, though limited in scope relative to today's society, was evident in oral accounts and local histories. Cinema, gramophones and radio were all discussed, although the latter of these appears to have played an especially prominent role in promoting the new sounds of 'jazz' (*Down With Jazz*, 1987). The shocking impact of emigration during the late 1940s and 1950s, as documented by Ó Túaithaigh (1979) and others, registered strongly locally, and came to represent for me another type of 'escape' that informed the third research question. Even shifts in transport technologies could be viewed under this rubric. As more people acquired bicycles, and later cars, this allowed for new types of movement, new forms of 'freedom'. Taken together, all these contextual elements allowed for an appreciation of the way local dancers engaged with and developed a vibrant culture around modern dances, and opened the way to theorising these cultural politics using gramscian hegemony theory.

11.1.3 How Might Gramsci's Theory of Cultural Hegemony be Used to Understand Dance Culture?

Armed with an understanding of the shape of dance culture during the 1940s and 1950s, and a grasp of some key contextual elements as they inflected local life, the way was clear to begin theorising a basis for the dominance of modern dance. From an early stage, the concept of cultural hegemony as

theorised by Antonio Gramsci (SPN, 1971) assumed a central place. Its positing of a sphere of struggle between more and less powerful groups, and of different articulations of culture on this basis, seemed to present a useful way of thinking about various forms of recreational dance, articulated in quite different ways by diverse social groups at both a local and national level. Also, Gramsci's specific concern with the nature of the state was germane, given the nature of political developments surrounding independence and in subsequent years. Moreover, as Bennett (1998) suggested, gramscian theory seemed to transcend the structuralist-culturalist bind that had riven cultural studies until the 1980s. Though recognising the importance of class, power and structure, cultural hegemony theory also opened up a mode of thinking about agency, negotiation and resistance. 'Civil society' which, together with 'political society' constituted the gramscian state, could thus be colonised through a 'war of position'. Related to this conflictual view of culture was a normative interest in uses of culture for the purposes of 'emancipation' by less powerful groups. Culture, as the CCCS might put it, could be 'revolutionary'.

Later post-structuralist interpretations of hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe, 1986), labelled by Storey (2006) and others as 'post-Marxist', allowed for a finessing of gramscian theory so that other types of struggle, as well as the classical Marxist proletarian one, could be taken into account. On this basis, small farmers could be regarded as engaged in a cultural struggle with powerful groups in the young Irish state, particularly the emergent Catholic middle classes. Aligned to this, Laclau and Mouffe's (1986) analysis allowed for the struggles of strata *within* the small farmer group to be identified, whether along gender, generational or religious lines. More generally, this interpretation of hegemony theory made explicit and accentuated the more constructivist tendencies in Gramsci's work. Culture, in this view, is relational and is 'made to mean' in the linguistic and material interactions of different groups.

The theoretical 'fit' of gramscianism to the research questions was not exact. The body registers in quite tangential ways in the *Prison Notebooks*, and dance not at all. Even media culture more broadly was regarded with a degree of suspicion by Gramsci. His emphasis on the national sphere of culture seemed to me, not only to neglect contemporaneous transnational articulations of culture, but to overlook relations between these spheres. Getting to know the work of theorists associated with cultural populism, such as Fiske (1987, 1988) and Dyer (1992) who stressed oppositional articulations of media culture helped me to navigate the second limitation. On this basis, extending Fiske's notion of the 'cultural economy' with the notion of an agency-rich 'embodied productivity' opened an avenue for acknowledging the dancing body, and mitigated the first limit. On the third of

these limits, I found it helpful to think of a dual hegemony operating along two axes – 'national' and 'transnational'. Cultural struggle took place in the intersection of these hegemonic frames. Along with the national-popular theorised by Gramsci, there seemed to be a transnational dimension that needed to be taken into account. While these critical strategies allowed the work to move forward, I was aware, especially as a recreational dancer myself, that some aspects of dancing still seemed to elude the gramscian frame, particularly those relating to pleasure, the body and collective emotions. These issues were set aside for the fourth research question under the heading of 'post-hegemony'.

To focus on the strengths of gramscian theory, it allowed me to work through the findings with flexible conceptual 'lens' in a number of ways. It became evident from an early stage that hall construction and ownership was not, as the literature seemed to suggest (Brennan, 1999; O'Connor 2005), solely or even mainly in the hands of clergy. Rather, most halls in Elphin were either privately owned or in the hands of local committees. This finding opened the way to begin conceptualising a dancing counter-hegemony. Next, given that all social classes seemed to attend modern dances, it was clear that there was a generational basis for their popularity. Oral histories were consolidated by the literature on moral panic (Smyth, 1993; Gibbons, 1996; O'Connor, 2003, 2005), where it was clear that youth culture was perceived as dangerous and debased by an older generation, and that a discourse of ruin was activated around the new moves. Locally, such themes were identifiable in the *Roscommon Herald* up to the 1950s, and resonated with studies of jazz dance in other countries (Back, 1997). It was argued that such processes were indicative of the destructive moments of nationalist hegemony, while the production of céilí dance illustrated its more creative aspect, one that enhanced the political and cultural imperatives of the young Irish state.

As Hall et al. (1978) have pointed out, the operations of moral panic were consonant with gramscian thought in this area, although somewhat narrower in its concerns. Synergies between these two theories were identified at a number of points. Also of interest in this regard was a critique of moral panic theory (*Moral Panic*, 2004), and by extension of cultural hegemony theory, on the grounds that it posits an overly monolithic view of the power of the media, a suggestion borne out by the identification of more pluralist sentiments in the *Roscommon Herald*. Dancing stories showed that generational tensions marked by the discourses of moral panic were experienced by many dancers, but particularly by female participants. There was, on this basis, empirical evidence that moral panic was 'profoundly gendered', chiming with newspaper analyses by O'Connor (2005) and Thiel-Stern (2008) in this regard.

As the findings on newspaper advertisements suggested, modern dance was dominant throughout the research period. Working through a basis for this popularity using interview transcripts, there seemed to be some evidence, in tune with research by Thornton (2004) and Ó Giolláin (1999), that moral panic in fact fuelled the popularity of quickstep and foxtrot. A 'baptism of transgression' was evident on this basis, a process I termed a 'perverse cultural economy' that built on Fiske's (1987) 'cultural economy' referred to earlier in this section. People actively construct 'meanings, pleasures and social identities' through their media experiences, and the perverse moment comes when these processes are diametrically and pointedly opposed to those prescribed by dominant groups. These articulations were heightened by an early association of modern dance around Elphin with controversial figures such as Jim Gralton, as well as with a positive inflection of these moves as international, outward-looking, fresh and exciting by the culture industry. Moreover, a contrary 'geography of mobility' that celebrated the very places that were most repugnant to adherents of the rural ideology was evident (Cresswell, 2006). In an environment where young people were being encouraged through the institutions of nationalist civil society to become céilí dancers, their dancing decisions led most of them in precisely the opposite direction and into the arms of modern dance(rs). These interpretations of the rise of quickstep and foxtrot are only meaningful in relation to a consideration of the other main hall dance at the time, céilí dances. Findings showed that, in contrast to views of modern dance, céilí was seen by many dancers as old-fashioned, parochial and lacking in glamour. The impact of emigration was also examined as a basis for empirically thickening these notions of escape from a rural ideology and national-popular culture. An additional finding in this respect is that there was a degree of dancing pluralism among some dancers so that, even if their preferences lay with modern dances, many could also perform céilí and set dances. A Bakhtinian notion of 'centrifugality', related to Bourdieu's 'popular aesthetic', was posited (Docker, 1994) on this basis, one consonant with post-structuralist notions of hegemony (Arditi, 2007). In other words, the general lack of popularity of céilí dances could partly be ascribed to the attempted 'closure' by powerful groups of meanings and moves around céilí dance. Modern dances, less institutionally constrained, were conversely more open, more fluid, and more attractive.

There was also a discussion of that trope in the literature that conflates femininity, emancipation and dance. Notable in this regard is that dancing pleasures in Elphin were cross-gender, a finding that challenges those studies that regard men as reluctant dancers at best, and often simply as non-dancers (Bourdieu (2008[1960])). This need not negate the idea of pleasure as 'liberating', a trope often articulated in these latter studies in terms of women and dance. Rather, it extends such

freedom to men, and moreover, strengthens the case for a specifically generational thrust to these strivings towards emancipation on the dance-floor. More details on the pleasures of dancing were included under the fourth research question. A useful study at this juncture was Ferrer's (2005) study of disco dancing in China in the 1990s. In a critique of the mass culture position, this dissertation has argued that cultural forms which might otherwise be seen as incorporating dancers into a capitalist framework, could in specific contexts, be used for oppositional purposes, a suggestion that is relevant to an Irish context where a type of nationalist-inflected capitalism could be identified in the 1930s and 1940s. These different oppositional threads were woven together to posit an 'ensemble' of practices that tended towards modernity. The 'dual hegemony' framework used in this research investigation demonstrated its utility at this juncture. A final use of gramscian hegemony theory in its resistant moments involved the idea of cultural amnesia. It was suggested that the exclusion of modern dance, for the most part, from the historical record amounted to a hegemonic process articulated through a 'dominant memory' (PMG, 1982). This investigation could, conversely, be viewed as 'resistant' insofar as it sought to give a voice to subaltern groups and their culture. In other words, in an analogous manner to dancers in the 1940s and 1950s, the historical thrust of this investigation has been counter-hegemonic, and has drawn on a centrifugal, pluralist sensibility.

At the same time, thinking through a more incorporative mode of gramscian theory was helpful for rounding out my critical perspective. The rise of these novel moves, although framed in some sources as unproblematically emancipatory in relation to nationalist hegemony (Byrne, 1997; O'Connor, 2003, 2005) can also be viewed as oppressive in a transnationalist hegemonic framework. The rise of a discourse of romance, in other words, was not politically 'neutral'. First, it became apparent, in line with Thornton's (2004) findings on clubbers in England in the 1990s, that processes of 'distinction', 'cultural capital' and 'subcultural capital' were active *within* the field of modern dance. Elite and aspirational groups demonstrated their current social position and/or a particular aspirational trajectory on this basis, by attending some events rather than others. Entry cost, venue and access to transport technologies were all implicated in this respect. It was argued that these processes of distinction could be seen as localised consolidations of cultural hegemony. Secondly, viewing the research findings from the perspective of a critique of the rise of the culture industry, the rise to dominance of modern dance was symptomatic in some respects of the constitution of young people as consumers. The rise of the 'band', of much larger and better-equipped halls, and of a broader ethos of consumption, particularly towards the late 1950s, are illustrative in this respect. There was, it seems, the consolidation of a novel transnationalist

hegemony, one that eventually diverted the attentions of powerful groups who had previously promoted nationalist dance, such as the Catholic clergy. A cultural politics of this type, it was argued, was related to the increasing openness of the Irish economy to transnational capital following the Whitaker Plan of the late 1950s, a development that has significantly shaped culture and society in the Irish state since then. Some reservations were voiced about this interpretation of events, on the basis of pitfalls associated with mass culture theory, my liminal status as a 'halfie' ethnohistorian concerned to avoid diminishing the experiences of locals (Saukko, 2003), and a critique of the supposedly objective view from the academy.

11.1.4 How Might Recreational Dance Be Regarded As Post-hegemonic?

The final research question sought to move beyond the gramscian framework. In a critical move influenced by radical anthropologists such as Graeber (2004) and Cohn (2011), their contributions appealed to this investigation in a number of ways. First, my own dancing experiences had allowed me to see that the complexities of dancing could not be wholly explained by the 'resistance/incorporation' dichotomy posited by gramscian cultural politics. The dance-floor involved experiences that might be described as 'a politics that doesn't look like politics' (Duncombe, 2002). Theoretically and politically, while they favoured a broadly emancipatory politics, post-hegemonic epistemologies seemed to avoid the type of reductionism and orthodoxy that sometimes characterises classical and gramscian Marxist approaches. Laclau and Mouffe's 'contingency' was taken further on this basis, to allow for a view of cultural politics that need not be delimited by the nexus of the nation-state (Arditi, 2007; Williams, 2010). This more fluid framework for understanding impulses towards 'freedom' seemed to open a conceptual and political space for dancing experiences that are more nebulous, more contingent, and more local/transient in their implications. Theories related to this way of thinking constitute a second epistemological 'angle' to complement those opened up under the rubric of gramscianism.

Moreover, the very pluralism suggested by these approaches did not 'close the door' to earlier theorising. Rather, gramscian theory now became one tool among several that could be used to construct 'partial' truths. The related implication that some aspects of dancing would remain unknowable also seemed to point towards an epistemological 'modesty' that chimed with the intentions of this investigation to be sensitive to the limits of academic 'knowledge-power'. This in turn went some way towards maintaining a sensitivity to the value of local types of 'knowledge-power' as articulated by dancers. On this basis, the integrity of my status as a 'halfie' ethnographer,

and that of this work as a reflexive ethnography, could be sustained to some extent.

To open up a theoretical avenue into these other sides of dance, I found Turner's concept of 'communitas' to be useful. Not only did this constitute an important strand of the literature on recreational dance (O'Connor, 1997; Thomas and Miller, 1997), but it also opened up a space for the body, for pleasures and collective emotions, in a way that was revealing of the limits of gramscian theory. A number of related ideas in the literature allowed for consolidation of the concept, from Miller's (via Hegel)(1990) 'Absolute Freedom', to McNeill's (1995) 'keeping together in time', to Malbon's (1999) 'oceanic experiences' and 'playful vitality'.

Identifying these sides of dancing presented their own challenges. As Thomas (2003) has pointed out, recording of 'an-other voice', one associated with a more ineffable ontology of the body, was by no means straightforward. Apart from the need to bridge social-emotional gaps in order to gather these more intimate dancing stories (Malbon, 1999) which, despite my halfie status, were heightened by age, urban/rural and professional divisions, difficulties of this sort were further compounded by the nature of this research. This centred on the temporal distance of dancers from the 'live' experience of dancing, the related impracticality of participant observation and the distinct discursive modes of older dancers.

Figures from the *Roscommon Herald* indicating the enormous popularity of modern dance would seem to be accounted for, in a way that is difficult to measure, by more subtle experiences and pleasures of the moving body. It would be theoretically arrogant to assume that gramscian dancing politics account for the totality of the 'dance craze' (O'Brien, 1941). Occasionally, the findings do reveal outright pleasures in dancing, in meeting new people and in being part of a dancing crowd, that are suggestive of communitas. Building on the discussion of gender and dance under the third research question, findings on the specific pleasures of men and women were set out. Most dancers of both sexes showed an enthusiasm for dancing that included autotelic 'pleasures-in-themselves', a finding that challenged suggestions by O'Connor (2005) on the limited appeal of dance for males. Moreover, an analysis of religious identities on the basis of a comparison between the 1950s and 1920s indicated that recreational dance was associated with a certain 'coming-together' of Catholic and Protestant, a finding that resonates with Ruane and Butler's (2007) study of the Protestant community in rural West Cork. Such a scenario is illustrative of communitas as a 'leveller', where distinctions are temporarily mitigated.

Following through on these findings, Turner's later elaborations of 'existential' and 'normative' *communitas* were brought into play as a way of theorising *communitas* in complex, stratified societies. On this basis, and given a more exclusive thrust to modern dance on generational and class lines, it may be the case that 'normative *communitas*' is more germane, a possibility that harks back to the discussion on 'distinction' in Chapter 9, although Cohn's (2011) critique of the concept provides a useful critical 'brake' in this regard by suggesting that these latter concepts downplay more egalitarian tendencies. Malbon's (1999) 'playful vitality', although similar in some respects to '*communitas*', represents a nuancing of *communitas* theory by positing its inflection by identity politics, a possibility that builds a conceptual bridge with the previous research question.

To conclude this section, and in light of findings under the third research question, I agreed with Saukko (2003) that a type of 'triangulation' of epistemologies, resolving theories of resistance, incorporation and *communitas* into a single 'truth' of events seemed to jar with this research project. A strategy of this type carried resonances from positivist ontologies that are of limited interest for this investigation. Rather, in tune with the suggestions of radical anthropology and anarchist cultural studies, it seems to me that none of these strands tells the whole 'truth'; rather, they all reveal partial, situated 'truths' that can usefully complement one another. A gramscian concern with the macrocosmic, the material, and the overtly political in both its resistant and incorporative variants has, I hope, been fruitfully combined with a post-hegemonic interest in more contingent, local and embodied experiences.

11.2 Critical Evaluation

In this section, I'd like to critically reflect on the research project, and to point out to the reader what seem to me to constitute its strengths and weaknesses.

I'll begin by outlining what I believe I have contributed to the literature on dance in Ireland. This investigation has addressed a number of cultural-historical blind spots identified in Section 1.2. First, the voices of dancers who participated in the 'dance craze' of the 1940s and 1950s have been inscribed into the academic, cultural and historical record. Before I started this research, the notion of a significant outburst of 'collective joy' (Ehrenreich, 2007) around dance in the 1940s would have seemed innocuous, unbelievable and out of place. Even today, various types of nationalist and transnationalist cultural hegemony continue to colour the historical record, just as it sought to shape dance practice in the past. Such 'dominant memory' tends to frame the period as either one of

unmitigated misery, of philistinism linked to an insular culture of little value, or as a type of golden age, a rural idyll. This project cannot claim to have established the cultural 'truth' of the period, but it can take its place as one of a number of stories (Coogan, 1976; Brennan, 1999; Arensberg and Kimball, 2001[1936]; Brown, 2004) and is distinct, I believe, in its recollection of 'popular memory' (PMG, 1982) around recreational dance. Working along the faultlines of the exclusions of dominant memory – the body, dance, 'foreign' or modern dance, small farmer culture, experiences of women, of religious minorities, young people – another type of 'people's history' (Zihn, 2003) has come into focus. While incorporation was certainly part of the 'story of dance', this story was in many ways characterised by agency, creativity and autonomy. In the face of opposition from powerful quarters, a post-independence generation was active in the construction of a dancing 'assemblage' (Jordan, 1995) that fundamentally shaped popular dance in subsequent years, and through various incarnations to the present day – jive, rock, clubbing, salsa, swing and so on. This embodied contribution to modernity came, not from official circles, nor from the intelligentsia, but for the most part from young male and female small farmers. Their role in a fracturing of the collective will in the cultural sphere has, with this investigation, been acknowledged. Moreover, in the context of studies of recreational dance, the male dancing experience could be regarded as a subaltern culture, somewhat neglected and devalued by cultural historians. As a recreational dancer and a man, I hope this work has helped to inscribe into our histories the story of the male dancer. Equally, my concern was to effect this, not by a reciprocal exclusion of female dancing experience, but rather by an emphasis on the relationality of male and female experiences of dancing. Such relationality was extended more broadly to an inclusion of both céilí and modern dancers as subjects. Given that previous work has tended to focus on single dance forms, or on more marginal forms alone (with the exception of O'Connor's discourse analysis (2003, 2005)), this constituted another contribution of this project. Finally in this regard, quantification of dance popularity based on advertisements provides a quantitative basis for future studies of recreational dance.

I also hope that this cultural history has added to Irish historiography in its use of Marxist, post-Marxist and anarchist theoretical and normative frames. Gibbon (1973), Goldring (1987), McGuinness (1999) and others have applied the ideas of Marx, and those influenced by him, to an Irish context. This investigation, guided by the hand of the Italian revolutionary, Antonio Gramsci, has found a sufficiently flexible set of concepts to identify a politics of culture and of dancing. Equally, suggestions in Gramsci's work have been taken further, so that post-structuralist theorists and anarchist theorists have opened up rich layers of post-hegemonic 'contingency' that have allowed for a more modest claim to conceptual and normative 'truth', one that can envision a more

subtle politics of the body and less orthodox types of emancipation.

My status as a 'halfie ethnographer', and the associated reflexive spirit that has infused this work has constituted a novel contribution to Irish ethnography and ethnohistory. It has been influenced in this respect by a rich seam of feminist 'researcher-dancers' (Buckland, 1983, Ness, 1990; 2006; O'Connor, 1997) who, in a very embodied way, have interrogated the subject/object divide. The other elements of this reflexivity - my status as the son of a local man, and my status as a man - have also undermined notions of the 'detached outsider' that characterises more positivist ethnographies. There is certainly a place in research for those who come from 'outside' the research frame, whether on the basis of human relations or dancing experiences. There is place too though, I believe, for those with one foot inside the research frame, as well as those 'native ethnographers' with both feet inside the setting.

An epistemology of this type has opened a way for me to use my own 'dancing subjectivities' as a type of reference point for this investigation. It is on this basis, for example, that it was important to me to make empirical and conceptual space for dancing pleasures. A work that denied or occluded the dynamic and vibrant joys of the dance floor could not legitimately claim, in my experience, to be telling a meaningful story of dance. In other ways that this work is perhaps symptomatic of, I have been aware of an 'undercurrent', of making sense of my own dancing experiences, those of clubbing in particular, when a particularly effective and affective 'meaning' of dance became apparent to me. 'Familial subjectivities' have eased my passage into the community, allowed me to build a rapport with interviewees, and given me a sense of belonging, of playing a role in recording the culture of Elphin (on my most recent visit to the field, the issue of producing a booklet for the local community that tells this story of dance was raised at a number of points. This is the least that I could do to return the hospitality I experienced during my time in Elphin). As with dancing subjectivities, the process of writing this dissertation has entailed a deeper personal 'journey' of coming to terms with my past, with the complex historical currents that formed this community and my family in a way that would resonate with most Irish people, and anybody a generation or two removed from the ancestral complexities of farming. Though not explicitly worked through in the research, the investigation is also symptomatic in this way.

In a more critical sense, reviewing reflexivity in this way takes me to a consideration of questions of the methodological rigour of the dissertation. There are some epistemological risks associated with being a 'halfie', and the 'etic/emic' distinction has been salient right through the research process.

Writing as a clubber, I am aware of the possibility, especially in terms of the symptomatic nature of this work, that I have written a history of modern dance in Roscommon in the 1940s and 1950s through my experiences of clubbing in Dublin in the 1990s. In other words, as Harris (1993), Malbon (1999) and Cohn (2011) propose, an inscription of research by the researcher's biography, agenda and politics is an ever-present methodological pitfall. A glib defence in this respect might be that history is always a view from the present, but more is required of me in an investigation that claims to introduce a hitherto neglected voice into the cultural-historical record. I cannot claim to have produced a completely 'objective' work. It *is*, in ways that I have indicated, subjective. I have been heavily influenced in this regard by Thomas' (2003) assertion that an open and honest reflexivity on these issues can transform a potential weakness into a strength, so that the researcher's biography comes to be seen as a type of data. I would also stress that the voices featured are those of the dancers, and the historical sources are all verifiable. As such, I hope to have walked this subject/object line in a manner that does justice to both researcher and researched.

On the other type of reflexivity, familial subjectivities, there are risks of romanticising the experiences of small farmers, of transforming them into a necessarily 'progressive', pluralist social group, of substituting them for the heroic proletarian protagonists of classical Marxism. Such risks are compounded by a sense of nostalgia that can inflect the personal accounts of dancers, particularly when these relate to a generally enjoyable activity such as recreational dance, associated with the 'golden years' of youth (not to mention my own dancing nostalgia). Again, such tendencies may inflect the work, though I have done what I can to minimise them, by taking into account the stratification of rural life, the processes of distinction that were at work, the poverty and emigration, and the ways that the transnational culture industry can be seen to have co-opted this social group. In fact, it may be that matters have become over-politicised, a danger pointed out by Harris (1992). For example, given the sheer, healthy pleasures that dancing facilitates, the insights offered by positive psychology, as exemplified by Csikszentmihalyi's research (1975, 1997), could have been incorporated. Instead, I thought it better to proceed with the paradigm of *communitas*, one that seemed to balance recognition of the pleasures of dance with a body of literature that I was more familiar with. As regards the twin, and related, dangers of demonisation and valorisation of the group, I hope that in this respect too, I have walked that fine line.

A related issue that has registered with me has been the danger of viewing cultural strategies related to nationalist hegemony in terms that are overly negative. The role of civil society has often been presented in terms of conservatism, narrow-mindedness and oppression. In the type of conflictual

paradigm that has been deployed, where marginal groups are pitted, in a somewhat dramatic fashion, against dominant groups, it may be that at times the investigation has lapsed into the more 'heroic' sensibility that characterised the work of the CCCS (Bennett, 1999). At a number of points, I have discussed the impressive anti-imperial context that underlay the foundation of the Free State and the Irish Republic, and suggested that a nativist essentialism had an important and productive role to play in the early years of the Irish state (Said, 1993). It has, after all, given us a completely new dance form, céilí, that is still practised by many people. There may be room for a greater celebration of this, and a valorisation of the process of nation-building that led to a relatively stable modern democracy in the tumultuous years of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. I hope that the important figure of De Valera has not been demonised, and that, whatever his limits, there has been some recognition of his achievements (Ferriter, 2007) (in any case, he was a single figure with limited powers in a much larger socio-political formation). Yet, in order to do justice to dancers' experiences, and in the act of retrieving modern dance culture, it seems to me that the enormous contribution of young people at the time in constructing a vibrant 'scene' against considerable opposition requires that space be made in this regard. If I have erred, it has hopefully been on the side of caution.

A final sense in which the work may be coloured by subjectivity relates to the particular confluence of circumstances prevailing in Ireland during the period when this research was carried out between 2007 and 2013. These years overlap with the financial crash of 2008 that impacted on Ireland in a particularly pronounced way, deflating a property bubble, producing high unemployment, emigration, and middle class 'new poor', processes that involved the intervention of the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank, and the implementation of the policies of 'austerity'. These currents registered personally in a very direct way with my brother and a number of friends losing their jobs, others struggling with debt, and feeling the pinch myself through negative equity and pay cuts. Teaching students on the DCU/BCFE (Ballyfermot College of Further Education) Media Production Management course, I was also aware of the implications for them, as they embarked each year into very stormy and uncertain waters. 'Interesting times' such as these have inculcated in me a healthy scepticism towards capitalism. On the one hand, this has politicised me and many others, and nudged me in the direction of Marxist and anarchist analyses. These inflect the work in the choice of theoretical and normative frames in different ways, as for example in Section 9.2, but also in more hopeful ways mobilised around notions of agency, autonomy and popular creativity. Periods such as those pertaining at the time of writing also present emancipatory opportunities. These latter currents have been played out in my own non-academic life on the basis

of my work as an activist on issues of food sovereignty .

In a more specific critical sense, I would like to have delved more deeply into the historical record, not in a temporal sense, but simply in terms of accessing more data. Explorations of this sort provided me with moments of true *jouissance* during the investigation, and were very personally rewarding. Time constraints have prevented me from investigating, say, tax receipts for dance licenses, government and other institutional reports, and Dáil records. Moreover, while I have engaged with historical literature covering the period, I have necessarily focused on some sources to the exclusion of others. The same might be said of theoretical material on dance. It is hoped that those sources that have informed the work have given it a sufficiently broad scope, one that does justice to the complexity of the dancing experience.

A related point is the inter-relation of the macrocosmic and microcosmic. I have at all points attempted to acknowledge both poles of this binary. Nevertheless, the bulk of the primary research has dealt with the local setting of Elphin. In other words, as a case study, the findings presented in this investigation need to be seen as mainly reflecting local conditions. While the literature shows that there was a 'dance craze' nationally, the precise shape of this dance culture will have varied from place to place. This investigation makes no claims, for example, to extend these findings to the experience of urban workers or more affluent groups in the city, to other rural areas where quite different politics and cultural politics prevailed, nor to regions where céilí, set-dancing or other dance forms were viewed and danced in quite different ways.

Thinking critically about my time in the field, perhaps six months in total spread over four years, this was a very intense time, by turns exhilarating and frustrating. Meeting Annie, a descendant of the Lloyds, and realising that her 'cultural capital' was much the same as that of her Catholic neighbours, spoke to me of a democratic trajectory to Irish history, one not often acknowledged in our reflections on the nature of Irish society (see O'Toole (2010) for an example of one of the more interesting analyses of both the limits and potentialities of the Republic that have been emerged since the economic downturn). Equally, Tom's generosity, perhaps a year before he passed away, in talking to me, in sharing his love of jazz music after I wheeled him in his chair back to the ward, stayed with me. Bridie, Marty, also deceased now, come to mind. Meeting the dancers was an enormous privilege for me, and I am grateful to those, living and deceased, who have guided this research. McGuinness, drawing on Walter Benjamin, said of his study of the Dublin working class: 'to tell a story is to repeat what has previously been told. In that regard I am at all times conscious of

the men and women (the interviewees) who willingly gave me of their stories and of the larger working class community into which all of them were born' (1999, p.14), sentiments that reflect my own. On the other hand, the occasional cancelled interviews with no reason given were associated in my mind with periods of doubt and questioning. At times, there was a thin line between 'pushing' for an interview, necessary to some extent, and being involved in a situation that was uncomfortable for both researcher and researched. There was loneliness too, given that the 'halfie' operates in a liminal existential zone, neither completely inside nor outside events. Given the number of interviewees, it was impossible to cultivate friendships in the way that I would have liked, in order to deepen our rapport and our relationship, though I'm still in touch with one or two people.

On other occasions though, I felt very much 'inside' the setting, while attending games of '25' at a fund-raiser in the local youth cafe, sitting in Oliver Beirne's pub where he and I often exchanged books, going to funerals and visiting people in the 'old folks home'². Such experiences were especially heightened when close family members met in the home place. My parents came to visit many times, and we have travelled the roads by car and become immersed in its history, landscape and community. I recall my Dad approaching an old woman we met walking the roads to ask if she would be interested in taking part in the project. The death of my uncle Pat in 2011, over the course of a month in Galway hospital, shortly after he and his wife Bridget returned for their annual monthly visit from New York, was a difficult time for all of us. We held the wake in the house, and at times like these, I was so far inside the research frame that I felt the need to detach my academic sensibility in order to respect the occasion.

Finally, a critical evaluation of the work might point to areas that were not investigated, to theories that were not used, conclusions not drawn. There are aspects of dancing that have not been addressed for a combination of reasons. The literature is silent, dancers themselves are silent, or the experiences, to an even greater extent than those relating to *communitas*, simply defy verbalisation. In the spirit of contingency that informs this work, I am comfortable with these silences. They speak in an explicit way of limits, limits that are always present, though not always acknowledged. On the other hand, some of those omissions on the basis of constraints of space and time will form the basis of a discussion of further research in the next section.

2 The colloquial term for a nursing home.

11.3 Further Research

This section will build on the critical review of the previous section, and sketch out some possibilities for future research raised by this investigation.

The first category I'd like to address relates to data that was gathered, but not included in this investigation on grounds of balancing scope and depth. There were interesting findings related to the dance venue and the notion of 'safe space' that O'Connor (1997) posited in relation to female set-dancers in Dublin in the 1990s. It seems that there was also a concern for males to find a 'safe' dancing experience free from drunkenness and violence. Material of this nature might have been used to further problematise the conflation of dance, femininity and freedom. Data on the ambience of dance venues – floor, lighting and sound systems – was excluded, although it might have been used to flesh out a more phenomenological analysis of the dancing experience. The investigation yielded some possibilities around the revival of céilí in the late 1950s. It seemed that a re-articulation of meanings around 'Irish dance' took place at this time, partly as a reaction to the ongoing commodification of modern dance by the culture industry. This finding would be in tune with post-structuralist interpretations of gramscian hegemony theory that emphasises articulations and re-articulations of meanings around culture. These empirical strands aside, there was a theoretical exclusion of Bey's (1985) concept of the TAZ (temporary autonomous zone) at a late stage, even though this chimed in many ways with anarchist theory around autonomy and cultural resistance. Equally, Ditcher's (2007) concept of the 'global-popular' came into focus later in the research process, so that while it spoke in a very direct way to the concerns of this investigation, a more detailed analysis on this basis was not possible. These decisions were largely related to balancing the scope and depth of the research. A 'trade-off' is always necessary in this regard. Decisions to exclude material later in the writing process were more difficult, given the thought, writing and work that had gone into them. Nevertheless, choices on this basis were inevitable in order to conform to the DCU dissertation brief that stipulates a maximum length of 90,000 words. These excisions have been set aside and may be retrieved and theorised during a post-doctoral phase.

Other avenues for further research by myself or by others have been far more tentatively explored in this project. They are present more as tendencies or potentialities or as snippets of data, and have not yet been worked out in any systematic way. First, I hope this investigation will be followed by

others that explore modern dance culture in other parts of Ireland, as a basis for comparison, and for a greater generalising of concepts and theory. Next, a systematic analysis of the meaning of a shift in dance culture from private domestic settings to enclosed commercial halls would be of interest (a related issue centres on the shift from open air dances such as maypole and crossroad dances to indoor venues). This would involve an extension of the temporal frame backwards to include a period when house dances were dominant, and when modern dances were emergent. A study of this sort would throw into even starker relief the issues raised in this investigation around incorporation of dance culture by forces associated with transnational and nationalist hegemony. They would also allow a greater deployment of anarchist notions of mutual aid, self-organisation and autonomy, and of a 'cultural commons', given that house dances could be characterised on these bases. This might take place within a broader consideration of the historical course of cooperative traditions in Ireland extending back to the *clúachán*/rundale system, and the fate of such movements under modernity. Again, dance culture would be indicative of a larger story, as well being meaningful on its own merits. Research of this nature would need to be carried out using documentary sources rather than an oral history, given the time that has elapsed.

Such work could be articulated in some ways with a deepening of the Bakhtinian tendency in this dissertation. Under the guidance of Docker (1995), tensions between 'centripetality' and 'centrifugality' have inflected the work at a number of points. In this light, there is room for a consideration of the basis for a rejection by many people of the prescriptions of nationalist hegemony. The fate of the Irish language, for many years now a compulsory subject in national schools, comes to mind. A study of this nature might develop proposals for a promotion of culture that works with rather than against the grain of the popular aesthetic.

A more specific research possibility relates to the types of dancing subjectivities referred to earlier, those that have inflected the work in various ways. It was remarked that this work is in some ways symptomatic of my own dance experiences in a more recent incarnation of dance culture in Ireland. Working in a more direct way with this culture is a task for future research. The 1990s and early 21st century, when youth in Ireland, as in many countries, were swept up in a type of 'cultural revolution', involving a type of cultural 'high-water mark' in dance and music culture (Thornton, 1995; Collin, 1997; Malbon, 1999). As with past dance cultures, these developments have received limited attention in academic and non-academic settings, although very recently, a number of media productions and websites have started to take on the task of recording and conceptualising rave and clubbing, especially in Dublin (Braine, 2003, Tarpey, 2011, *Folklore from the Dance Floor*, 2012;

Shanagher, 2012b). Apart from my own contribution, this work has mainly been in the non-academic sphere. Much more remains to be done by those inside and outside the academy, and on clubbing outside the capital. It is hoped that more systematic inroads will be made in years to come into these areas, and that it will not be necessary for two generations to elapse before memories and dancing stories around these innovations in dance culture are recorded³.

As the end of this project approached, a more 'grounded' research possibility opened up, one that came into focus largely on the basis of my attempts to think through an articulation of elements of social life relating to politics, culture/dance, religion, economics and environment. Marxist theory has gone some way in allowing me to develop my thoughts in this respect, but a more holistic conceptual frame might be available, or might be developed. Some thoughts on this basis have recently occurred to me, related to my interest in food sovereignty and environmental issues. I should state at the outset that my feelings on this are ambiguous. Radical anthropology has instilled in me a suspicion of tendencies towards univocality, systems, centripetality. An ability to 'live and let live' in a theoretical sense might do more justice to the messy, fragmented, contingent nature of reality. I'm reminded of a quote by Hesse's (1947, p.137) protagonist Joseph Knecht in *The Glass Bead Game*:

Each of these Games moves with such gravity and sincerity towards a solution, only at the last moment to nobly forgo the attempt at solution, that it was like a perfect elegy upon the transitoriness inherent in all beautiful things and the ultimate dubiety immanent in all soaring flights of the intellect.

Bearing this caveat in mind, I will outline possible avenues for further research.

As I think Section 5.1 has indicated, and as is very clear in an agricultural setting, the natural world frames all that we do. A nature/culture binary pervades our practices and discourses in contemporary society, but these elements are part of an integrated system. Culture is not possible without nature, and on many levels, culture is 'natural'. Thinking in this way is not unrelated to the concern of this investigation with the body. I think another type of 'grounding' of academic research is required. These possibilities dawned on me as I reflected on life as it was lived in rural communities in the 1940s and 1950s, characterised by a patchwork of smallholdings largely self-sufficient in food, energy and water, rich in wildlife, and existing in a sustainable manner. The term

3 A meeting held on May 4th 2013 as part of the Phizzfest festival in Dublin brought key participants in Irish rave culture in the 1990s together to discuss its meaning and impact, in one of the first events of its type. This took place after a preview screening of a new documentary, *As an Talamh: Notes on Rave*, by Aoife Ni Canna for Dublin Community TV.

in this case refers to a society that balances its inputs and outputs in a way that can be sustained, and that respects both human and non-human life. Taking such a standpoint leaves me open to charges of romanticism, and even of subscribing to De Valera's vision of a 'frugal', 'spiritual' Ireland (see Appendix C)(and in fact work by the late Irish-based environmentalist Richard Douthwaite (1992) has revisited the sensibilities evident the 1943 speech in positing an economic argument for 'de-growth'). The modern world has certainly brought benefits such as running water, electricity and motorised transport but something has also been lost, a note that registers in many interviews. In a rural context, the dominance of a neo-liberal hegemony today might be interrogated on the basis of the rise of agribusiness, chemical fertilisers and pesticides, an ongoing flight from the land of the lower strata of small farmers, a culture of dependency on the products of international capitalism, whether of energy, food, material culture, or symbolic culture, and a consequent dilution of autonomy in this sense. These developments are in many ways related to a perceived 'conquering' of nature, and yet, as recent pushes towards opening an academic space for sustainability in DCU demonstrate, questions need to be asked, questions that return to our relationship with the natural world. To illustrate this issue by returning to recreational dance, house dances existed in a society that was, for the most part, 'sustainable'. The dances themselves can be seen in this way, requiring neither vinyl, nor electricity, nor accelerated consumption, nor planned obsolescence. In this way, modern dances were on the edge of, and were symptomatic of, a shift towards 'being modern'. There are I believe potentialities for developing this investigation on a more 'ecocentric' basis (Pepper, 1996), or recognising that social theory torn from a 'natural' foundation is lacking in key respects. Cultural studies has not provided me with any way of thinking through these issues. More fruitful avenues exist in radical anthropology and alternative economics, in the work of Sahlins (1972), Schumacher (1973), Illich (1974, 1990), Graeber (2003), Critchley (2012) and others. Marx's notion of the 'metabolic rift' (see Slater and Flaherty, 2009) also presents possibilities in this regard. There is I feel, more generally, a need to read Irish history through an eco-anarchist theoretical lens, to critically interrogate those histories constructed through nationalist, neo-liberal and Marxist frames. The suggestive work being done in this area, primarily by 'anarchist-academics' in the US, points for me to a way of interrogating, enriching and invigorating the more general sphere of 'activist academia' in these 'interesting times'.

11.4 Parting Words

This research investigation has set out to examine dance culture in Ireland during the 1940s and 1950s. It has clearly established that the dancing preferences of most young people in Co.

Roscommon at this time were for modern dances. Such events accounted for 90% of dance advertisements in the *Roscommon Herald*, while céilí dances were held much less frequently. Given the assiduous promotion of 'Irish dances' by powerful groups associated with 'civil society' in the Irish state, Gramscian theory was used to discuss how nationalist hegemony around the politics of dance encountered a generational counter-hegemony. On this basis, a fracturing of the collective will is evident, one that is starkly revealed by processes of moral panic revealed in dominant discourses over the period. Female dancers in particular were subjected to attempts to proscribe and control modern dance culture. The considerable success of quickstep and foxtrot amounts to a negation of dance practices linked to the 'national-popular', a process that was contextualised in relation to an emergent media culture, emigration, and an ongoing modernisation of Ireland. At the same time, another view of the findings is suggestive of the rise of the transnational culture industry, one that co-opted young dancers into a commercial model that came to be associated with dance practice. Equally, the more exclusive cultural politics of 'distinction' were evident in the way that boundaries were established within the sphere of modern dance between more and less 'sophisticated' dances. Acknowledging these more politicised interpretations of dance, the findings also show, however, that dancers experienced the subtle pleasures of the moving body, 'communitas' and 'playful vitality'. A broadly 'post-hegemonic' conceptual frame was used to think through these more phenomenological views of dancing. Such dancing pleasures were evident for both male and female participants, challenging the notion that men were reluctant or incompetent dancers. It was also the case that modern dances were sites where Catholic and Protestant dancers encountered each other on the dance floor in a relatively novel way at this time. Malbon's playful vitality was useful for a critical finessing of these processes of communitas around dance.

Reflecting on this chapter, on the dissertation as a whole, and on the last 68 months of work that have led to this point, I hope that I have in some way added to the knowledge of these 'fugitive forms' of dance. What seem subjectively important to us are often events in our everyday lives, articulated with intense emotional experiences and with our embodied cultural knowledge. In all these ways, dancing memories gain a hold in our processes of remembering in a manner that characterises the experiences of researcher and researched. In seeking to do justice to the complexity of dancing experiences, there has been a synergy of a number of perspectives. The epistemology was inflected throughout by an undercurrent of 'contingency' influenced by recent developments in anarchist cultural studies and radical anthropology. In other words, by bringing a number of conceptual 'angles' into a critical complementarity, this investigation has recognised that none of them tells the whole story, all offer partial views, and there are sides of the dancing

experience that will remain ontologically 'other'. At the same time, the trope of emancipation, of culture as revolutionary, runs through the work. Marxist theorists such as Antonio Gramsci have given me a theoretical and political grounding that have allowed me to identify processes of cultural and political struggle by small farmers in relation to powerful cultural arbiters during the 1940s and 1950s. Weighing up the literature has allowed me to see that hegemonic processes of this type have also operated in the construction of 'dominant memory' around dance. Equally though, I have become aware of the limits of these views of culture as 'revolutionary', of the ways that it can be co-opted in the service of various interests occupying the terrain of the global culture industry, and of how pleasure constitutes a more subtle post-hegemonic politics. On a more personal note, as with any substantial research project, I can only hope that at the end of this phase of the academic journey, that my emotional, conceptual and political 'dance' with those interviewed, with those who have written on this topic, and with those who have guided me along the way, has addressed the research questions and opened up avenues for future research.

Appendix E: Housing Stock and the 1911 Census

Using the 1911 records, an analysis of housing stock in the ten townlands adjacent to and including the 'home place' was carried out. This is the most recent census¹ to offer such detailed information, and is suggestive of the type of residences that dancers lived in during the 1940s and 1950s (even though there would have been some turnover of stock in the interim). House 'class' ranges from 1 to 4. At one end of the scale lie Class 1 houses with stone walls, tiled roof, a dozen rooms and perhaps a multiple of this number of windows. At the other are Class 4 houses with walls of mud, thatched roofs, one or two rooms, and two or three windows.

Table 6: Housing Stock in 1911

House Type	Percentage of Total Stock (%)
Class 1	3.3
Class 2	70.5
Class 3	21.3
Class 4	4.9

(Source: Shanagher, 2013)

It is clear that Class 2 houses were dominant - stone-walled, thatched, 2, 3 or 4 rooms and 3 windows. Such dwellings sit at the lower range of Class 2 houses, just a notch above Class 3 houses². This is true of many houses entered under the apparently more comfortable Class 2 category so that there is in reality a cluster of perhaps 90% of the houses around the border of Class 2 and Class 3 houses. This was the abode of the small farmer, a relatively prosperous class at this time.

1 These more fine-grained details are not currently available for 1946 and 1956. For reasons of confidentiality, under the one-hundred year rule only material that is over a century old is made available to the public in this way (CSO, 2012).

2 This is the type of house, no longer standing, that my great-grandfather Jim Shanagher lived in.

Appendix H: Poems About Dances

The Carrowmore Dances

On St. Stephens Night in 1920

I rambled to Carrowmore to a so-called *spraoui*
There were shopboys from Frenchpark and milliners from Boyle
And other small bantams¹ that would make you smile

When the party commenced sure Ned Hanly gave a squall
When in stepped the whole gang across the new wall
A fiddler² is welcome, to see him we are proud
But sure he had got no right for to bring such a crowd

They flocked in by threes and sat down by the wall
Begorrah my dear the house won't hold them all
There was wine mixed with water and strong tea galore
Which caused Jimmy Reilly to be pitched on the floor

He was asked out again and says he I don't know
For the dances have changed that we danced long ago
If you take me easy I might try it again
But me hat is all broke that I bought in Elphin

We danced through the program and that before long
They called upon someone to sing up a song
When the dance was all over the party all fled
It's high time said Bunkem we should be in bed

Tibby Hall at the room door jumped up for to go
Sure it must be daylight for I hear the cock's crow
[incomplete]

So now to conclude and to finish my song
I hope you'll excuse me if I said anything wrong
Hurrah for the mixed port, 'tis it I adore
And here's to the dances of fair Carrowmore

Composed by local poet Barney Dowd

(Source: Jack)

The Dance at Croghan

Come ye people all about great and small come listen for a while
I'll sing for you a verse or two that will cause you all to smile
It's about some ladies of this place that was looking for a chance

¹ The meaning of this term is not clear.

² This was Tom Shanagher, my grandfather.

So they put their heads together saying we'll have a leap-year dance

The windows are all broken there's no hinges on the door
But the hall is decorated with a waxed and polished floor
They're reeds and shades and fancy flowers on every (unclear)
But little they knew they would come down with Roche's auld camog stick

Some of the ladies fainted and some went in a trance
When they heard the (unclear) outside saying he'd have no Free State dance
There were shouts and yells the hall was shelled with bottles, stones and brick
And we did (unclear) no music from the roof but Roche's auld camog stick

Some ladies came from Cavetown and some came from Derrylow
From Croghan and from Newtown and all round Eastersnow
They were powdered puffed and painted and (unclear) good lick
And we broke the bangles on their hands with Roche's old camog stick

And to attend this leap-year dance
The people did clock in from Roscommon and from Strokestown from Carrick and Elphin
But when they arrived in Croghan they were halted very quick
And shook with fear for fear they'd hear from Roche's old camog stick

Composed by Barney Dowd

(Source: Jimmy)

Appendix I: President Eamonn De Valera's 'Ideal Ireland' Speech

'The ideal Ireland that we would have, the Ireland that we dreamed of, would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit – a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. The home, in short, of a people living the life that God desires that men should live. With the tidings that make such an Ireland possible, St. Patrick came to our ancestors fifteen hundred years ago promising happiness here no less than happiness hereafter. It was the pursuit of such an Ireland that later made our country worthy to be called the island of saints and scholars. It was the idea of such an Ireland - happy, vigorous, spiritual - that fired the imagination of our poets; that made successive generations of patriotic men give their lives to win religious and political liberty; and that will urge men in our own and future generations to die, if need be, so that these liberties may be preserved. One hundred years ago, the Young Irelanders, by holding up the vision of such an Ireland before the people, inspired and moved them spiritually as our people had hardly been moved since the Golden Age of Irish civilisation. Fifty years later, the founders of the Gaelic League similarly inspired and moved the people of their day. So, later, did the leaders of the Irish Volunteers. We of this time, if we have the will and active enthusiasm, have the opportunity to inspire and move our generation in like manner. We can do so by keeping this thought of a noble future for our country constantly before our eyes, ever seeking in action to bring that future into being, and ever remembering that it is for our nation as a whole that future must be sought' (RTE, 2008).

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