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Learning in the Aftermath of a Crisis:

A Critique of Ireland's Response to the 2008 Financial Crisis

Thesis presented by

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The thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my brother, James Milner.

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Declaration

This is to clarify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism

Richard Milner   -   20/05/2019

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Introduction

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis represents a conjunctural moment, highlighting the emergent conditions of social and political conflict at the outset of the twenty-first century. It is through the dynamics of public discourse that the crisis is thematized and given meaning in order to justify a response to it, and to propose a way forward through its aftermath. In this context, focusing on the development of the crisis at a national level, Ireland presents a valuable case study. From the economic miracle of the Celtic Tiger to one of the first 'victims' of the Great Recession, to eventually becoming the success story of the European economic recovery, its path through the crisis and its aftermath is unique. Ten years on from the crisis, however, despite the fact that economic growth has returned, Ireland is now suffering the political and social consequences of adopting short-term solutions to long-term structural problems, and it is becoming increasingly clear that whatever lessons may have been learned in the throes of the crisis itself have quickly been forgotten in the wake of its aftermath.

The idea of lessons learned, which, in this context, would pertain to the Irish experience of dealing with the social and political devastation entailed in the economic cycles of boom-to-bust capitalism, is only a single dimension of a wider picture. Learning, in this sense, suggests that once mistakes are recognised and addressed, a return to the same socio-economic model may be the only legitimate way forward. The concept of learning, however, also contains a radical-critical transformative dimension, revealing an unlimited horizon of potentiality. When viewed from this perspective, learning in the aftermath of the crisis is not restricted to the lessons presented by the immanent context itself. Counterfactual considerations may be brought into play, which question the very conditions of learning and the deeper cultural logic, reflected in the crisis discourse, which maintain and reproduce these conditions. The normative foundations of the work are, therefore, rooted in the possibility of democratization, realized through forms of learning and normative innovation. The critique developed here will contend that these processes are blocked in the Irish case, thus exposing contradictions through the indeterminate and conflict-ridden communicative setting of the response to the crisis.

A basic conceptual premise here is that the crisis is understood as a situation of heightened contingency. In this sense, the aftermath of the crisis is not to be understood as a simple inevitability, but as a specific outcome of a series of events and decisions which were construed and contested in public discourse. These processes of construction and contestation represent the 'discursive mediation' of the crisis, reflecting attempts, on behalf of the public, to understand and make sense out of what was taking place. The crisis is framed as a discursive conflict over the 'thematization of the crisis', represented in relation to the unfolding of a series of path-shaping moments of political interventions and crisis-management strategies, as they became manifest in public discourse. The institutional response to the crisis, as embodied in the development of a 'public narrative' in Ireland is, therefore, the empirical focus of the proceeding analysis. The key questions, which this distinctly communicative approach seeks to address, concern the idea of learning and the related possibility of social and political change, exposed by the context of uncertainty and conflict. From this perspective, the crisis is not just mediated through discursive struggles over the meaning and significance of what is taking place, and how to get through and re-establish the normative order, it also represents an opportunity for different narratives to enter the discursive space of the public sphere, projecting the possibility of alternative futures in its aftermath. The objective of the thesis, therefore, perhaps contrary to conventional approaches, is to understand that which has not been learned from Ireland's experience of the financial crisis. This focuses attention away from reflecting upon the potential 'lessons' learned over the past ten years, to a deeper analysis of the conditions of learning in Ireland, as exposed in a moment of profound crisis.

The theoretical and methodological premises of this thesis are based in the tradition of Frankfurt School Critical Theory. Following the stated objective, which seeks to develop a critique of the response to the Irish financial crisis on the basis of something that is not explicitly present in the discourse, but yet, is normatively anticipated as an undisclosed potentiality, the Critical Theory approach presents an appropriate 'empirical-theoretical' framework. The relevance of this framework corresponds to several interrelated theoretical domains raised in the proceeding analysis. Firstly, Critical Theory engages with a theory of capitalism and, by extension, comes into its own in the analysis of crises of capitalism. Particularly from the 1970s onwards – Habermas

published 'Legitimation Crisis' in 1973 – this theoretical focus applied to the analysis of the crises of 'late capitalism', in which a new conflict between the processes of capitalism and democracy began to emerge. A second domain, which requires a perspective on the tradition of Critical Theory, is communication. The crisis is understood from the perspective of the way in which it is constructed and mediated through processes of public communication. Habermas' work, therefore, on the development of the concept of the public sphere, and the associated mechanisms of public discourse, up to the later work on 'The Theory of Communicative Action', are the building blocks of the social scientific approach adopted. A third domain relates to Critical Theory's fundamental concern with the theory of democracy. This constitutes the 'normative bedrock' for a communicative understanding of society and reflects the foundation for the diagnostic, reconstructive and explanatory forms of critique pursued here. Democracy, from this perspective, is contingent upon the interpretation and description of 'transcendent' normative principles or 'ideas of reason' which allow for the regulation of discursive mechanisms that ultimately establish and reproduce the possibility for a democratic form of public communication. A fourth domain, which contributes to bridging the gap between Critical Theory and its sociological application in an empirical context, relates to the theory of learning. Learning presupposes the possibility of change through the realization of the potentials harboured by normative democratic principles. In the context of the proceeding analysis, the sociological approach to the theory of learning takes up the critical task of trying to identify and expose those discursive mechanisms that interfere with and thereby block or distort the learning process.

There is one more important theoretical premise guiding the thesis, which seeks to bridge these critical theoretical domains with a sociological perspective appropriated for empirical inquiry. This leads to the presentation of a cognitive sociology with a critical capacity. A latent dimension, already very much present in Critical Theory, extrapolated in the work of Piet Strydom, Klaus Eder, Max Miller and Patrick O'Mahony, this 'critical-cognitive' sociological approach is still very much in its infancy in the domain of social scientific application. The current thesis, therefore, devotes significant time to theory-building and reflects, perhaps, more of an illustration of how an empirical-theoretical framework may be applied to a specific context. One of the main difficulties in approaching the analysis of Ireland from an advanced social theoretical perspective

relates to the general lack of contemporary and sustained critical analyses from such a perspective on the subject. A conventional thesis structure, therefore, following distinctions concerning a clear separation between a theoretical literature review, methodological application and analysis of findings, is not deemed suitable for the task at hand. The thesis will therefore proceed in an empirical-theoretical register, drawing insights from theoretical approaches, increasing in complexity as they are advanced, which are then brought to bear on the empirical problem.

The methodological approach of thesis follows the reconstructive orientation of Critical Theory, guided by the concept of 'immanent-transcendence'. This will take the form of a 'methodology of inquiry', utilizing a combination of different methods that reflect the empirical-theoretical emphasis of the overall project, rather than a traditional systematic methodology, which typically involves a specific set of social-scientific research tools. Immanent transcendence, which refers to Critical Theory's fundamental interest in rooting out the relevant normative principles or socio-practical ideas of reason in a given situation, directs the approach through a focus on the dialectical tension between the accumulated historical potential of socio-practical ideas of reason, contained within 'cultural models', and the ongoing process of constitution, reproduction and transformation of society (Strydom, 2011: 135). Critical Theory, therefore, proceeds with a reconstructive-explanatory form of critique that is backed up with social theory. Although Habermas is an important proponent in the development of a 'reconstructive social science', the specific procedure of reconstruction pursued here follows the work of Axel Honneth. The reason for this is that Honneth focuses on the diagnosis and critique of 'social pathologies', those disruptive elements in the conditions of learning that block access to transcendent ideas of reason. Given the empirical focus of the thesis, therefore, which effectively represents the Irish case as a situation of 'non-learning', this approach offers a perspective on those normative principles which are appealed to but remain unrealized in the situation itself.

The first two chapters lay out the empirical dimensions of the analysis. Chapter 1 introduces the 2008 Global Financial Crisis as it became manifest in the Irish context. The objective here, adopting a critical sociological perspective on the crisis, is to identify the discursive trajectory of the crisis in Ireland, and by doing this represent the thematization of the crisis in the form of a

public narrative. The purpose of framing the crisis in these terms is to highlight the justifications given for the response to the crisis in public discourse. Therefore, the concept is employed from a critical standpoint in order to highlight the emergence of dominant public justification for what is taking place. In this sense, whatever institutional response is put forward to deal with the crisis, it must resonate with this narrative, thus, containing and restricting any dissenting social positions, which may challenge that response on the basis of alternative, democratic ideas of justice, equality, responsibility and legitimacy. The chapter follows the composition of the Irish crisis narrative through an observation of public discourse, which charts the key political interventions, from the Bank Guarantee in 2008, to the establishment of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), to the imposition of 'Bailout' terms with the European Union and the International Monetary Union in 2010, up until the beginning of a 'recovery narrative', which distinguishes Ireland as a unique case. The final section of Chapter 1 highlights the forms of public resistance which emerged in opposition to the Irish government's response to the crisis. This is intended to show that there was learning taking place, but this failed to resonate to any significant extent with the wider public, to generate an alternative narrative and perhaps to propose a different response.

Chapter 2 presents a clarification of the context, placing Ireland in the wider European setting through a discussion of the major political and economic transformations that led up to the crisis in 2008. There is an important distinction highlighted here, between the chaotic and uncertain conditions of a crisis and its 'aftermath'. It is in the context of the latter that discursive struggles over the nature and significance of events actually take place, social positions are adopted and the possible projections for the future are elaborated and promoted in competing narratives. The chapter broadens the approach, contextualizing the crisis as a culmination point in the long-run strategy of European integration, driven by a commitment to the processes of financialization. By placing the 2008 crisis into this historical structural context, the institutional response, therefore, in the Irish case becomes clear. The second section of this chapter deals with the way in which developments in Ireland paralleled the processes of financialization at the European level, and it is then placed in a comparative context in which the responses of two other small, peripheral European states, Greece and Iceland, to the crisis are examined. The intention here is

to identify the way in which both Greece and Iceland illustrated responses that present a contrast to the Irish experience of the financial crisis. Chapter 2 concludes with a hypothesis, an abductive insight, that guides the proceeding analysis. This relates to the fundamental question, what has been learned in the aftermath of the Irish response to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis? And, furthermore, on the broader critical plane, what mode of learning is reflected in this response?

There is a crucial distinction that is emphasized throughout the work, between the immanent, conservative reality of Irish normative culture and the reconstructive horizon of democratization. Chapter 3 argues that Ireland reflects an embedded conservative culture which reflexively blocks the ability of the Irish public sphere to grasp reconstructive possibilities, which are potential learning opportunities in the crisis aftermath. In the case of the 2008 financial crisis, this is realized by means of a learning pathology, reflected in the non-thematization of possible alternatives. This chapter returns to the empirical analysis and attempts to elaborate the conditions of Irish public discourse, which are encapsulated in the development of a mode of learning that reflects a distinctive normative culture. Central to this analysis, and to the framework in general, is the concept of the 'cultural model', following the work of Alain Touraine, which operates in this sense as a mediating selectivity structure. The crisis is, therefore, represented as a learning opportunity, to expose the problems with a system that had led to this point and to generate possible alternatives. Learning in the Irish context is blocked in two distinctive ways, which are explicated in this chapter. Firstly, through the reproduction of the Irish cultural model along lines which are formed around the elements of nationalism and class, and, in a second sense, staying at the level of the cultural model, learning is essentially blocked at a crucial moment.

Chapter 4 introduces the principles of legitimation and responsibility as the key normative components that have emerged from an observation of the Irish crisis narrative. The critical thrust of the work is characterized in the rooting out of these normative-democratic principles, denied in the actual situation, which ultimately provide the elements for a reconstructive critique. Drawing on the theoretical work of Habermas, but also following its methodological application in the work of Theo Van Leeuwen, I conceptualize legitimacy in relation to how it is communicatively generated in the crisis situation, following four distinct modes of legitimation

emerging out of public discourse. What is observed in this case is a non-normative mode of legitimation, in which restrictive forms of thematization constrain the normative democratic possibilities discernably available to the public. The principle of responsibility, also introduced in this chapter, reflects a second key discursive feature of the narrative. Revealed in a critical-dialectical fashion through an exposition of the prevalence of blame in Irish public discourse, responsibility represents a generally important principle in the context of the crisis. By identifying key moments in which blame, or blame-avoidance, obscures the normative principle of responsibility, the cultural-political conditions of conservatism are shown to reflexively block the necessary modes of learning to adopt a democratic reading of the principle. Legitimacy and responsibility will be conceptualized in the following as 'cognitive' principles. That is, the normative culture shaping their immanent realization in the Irish context will be interpreted through the framework of a critical-cognitive sociology.

Chapters 5 and 6, drawing from recent social theoretical developments, bring forward a cognitive sociology approach with a critical capacity, thus culminating in the possibility of a reconstructive-explanatory critique of Ireland's response to the crisis. A macro-cultural cognitive theory of society is introduced, within which the principles of legitimacy and responsibility are then dealt with in relation to one another. The principles are contextualized within the broader cognitive order of society, to be conceptualised as cognitive principles, operating as part of a wider macro-cultural structure. The 'cognitive order' constitutes the key explanatory concept in the work, which allows for the development of cognitive reconstruction of the problem. This approach allows for a specification of the communicative-learning pathologies at the heart of the critique. By integrating social learning processes, which conceptualizes the potential outcomes of cultural innovation and normative change in the communicative dynamics of the cognitive order, the location of specific learning pathologies, blocking the possibility of a co-responsible form of legitimation in the Irish context, is made possible.

Chapters 7 and 8, finally, combine the theoretical and empirical observations which have been laid out in the preceding chapters within an advanced critical-cognitive sociological framework. One of the main purposes of the present work is to re-frame the analysis of the crisis and, in doing so, postulate the significance of its aftermath in a much more general sense. Based,

fundamentally, in a concern for the prospects for democracy, reflected here in the principles of legitimation and responsibility, the core features of the empirical approach have been to put forward a critique of the re-establishment of the crisis-prone conditions, characteristic of the specific phase of capitalism, and, secondly, to explicate the restrictive discursive conditions which limited the public thematization of the possibility of imagining and realizing an alternative, democratic response.

To summarize, analyzed from the perspective of the critical-cognitive framework, the response to the crisis illustrates the incongruent relationship between the cultural model of Irish conservatism and conditions of learning necessary for further democratization in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis. Democratization is a process that depends on a vibrant public discourse, guided by communicative structures that facilitate the continuous exploration of differences and, in times of crisis, constitutes a repertoire of cognitive potentials from which society can draw from in overcoming systemic failures. In contrast, the conservative cultural model characterizes a mode of public discourse, reflected in the unfolding of the Irish crisis narrative, which encapsulates a repressive communicative environment that seeks to contain and restrict the exploration of alternatives. It is a condition that is deeply embedded in Irish culture, that is beleaguered with contradiction and a society unable, and unwilling, to grasp the opportunity to change.

1.

Thematizing the Global Financial Crisis:
A Critical Observation of Public Discourse in Ireland

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis signalled a decisive end to a period of rapid and intensive economic growth in Ireland. The collapse of what had become known as the 'Celtic Tiger' along with the realisation that, contrary to the impression of a new and successful 'Ireland Inc.', a crisis of unprecedented scale was immanent, precipitating a series of institutional responses which would unfold over the course of the proceeding number of years. In the following pages, the crisis will be framed in narrative form, correlating empirically to specific path-shaping moments of crisis-management as they became manifest in public discourse. The objective is to describe the communication of a distinctive narrative to the Irish public and, by doing so, theorise specifically how the institutional response to it was legitimated.

From a sociological point of view, the global financial crisis is understood as presenting a situation that bears significant implications in domains well beyond the economic system in which it was initially generated. It is absurd, to paraphrase Alain Touraine, to claim that sociologists should confine themselves to studying the non-economic factors of an economic crisis (Touraine, 2010). As a moment of rupture in a social order, the crisis signifies the acceleration of a long-term trend towards a separation between the economic system, driven primarily by the global processes of financialization and hyper-capitalism, and the social actors who, as Touraine points out, then become the excluded, the unemployed victims of the crisis, "transformed into actors who are defined more in universal, moral or cultural terms than social ones" (2010: 2). Due to the extent of the disrupting impact of the crisis on the established socio-economic order, society has tended to fall back on its most vital integrative principles, constituting the very basis of modern society itself. Therefore, by linking the analysis of the crisis to the context of long-term historical trends, insight is gained both into how society constructs itself and how it could be potentially reconstructed.

The term 'narrative' here assumes a distinct critical reading and will be employed as a key concept operating throughout the work. As crises expose the vital integrative principles of a society, 'narratives of justification' emerge which seek to preserve the relations of power that maintain the given social order. In this sense, the crisis reveals not just the coordinating principles at stake in such a situation, but also, the societal positions revealed in attempts to justify these principles. In a complex sequence of events, as in the case of the response to the Irish financial crisis, social relations become justified so that a social order comes to be accepted as an order of justification, or a 'justification narrative' (Forst, 2013). Therefore, relations and orders of power persist so long as they are integrated into distinct narratives of justification. Furthermore, when it is said that 'narratives compete' to construe the crisis, these narratives must also make sense and be integrated into a broader justification narrative, or order of justification, to resonate with the listening public. Eder (1999), in relating the concept of narrative to the elementary societal conditions of learning, speaks of the 'narrative foundations of a social order', which refers to the way in which social actors, in the course of interaction, establish basic narratives in order to provide the common ground for reciprocal understanding and communication.

The crisis will be normatively framed according to the principles of legitimacy and responsibility. The crisis narrative will be shown to reflect the conservative orientation of Irish public discourse, through which these principles, and the correlating discursive forms of legitimation and responsibility, are restrictively thematised. As this narrative, therefore, reflects the exercise of hegemonic power through the conditions of discourse, it nevertheless provokes the emergence of counter-narratives. As Forst (2017) points out, "however self-enclosed such an order of justification may be, it always presents points of attack for critique through its claim to legitimacy" (Forst, 2017: 34). The crisis situation, by creating conditions of uncertainty and conflict, presents a context in which the social order has to publicly justify its legitimacy. In the Irish case it will be shown that ethical (principally communitarian-national and often self-serving ideological purposes) and functional justifications dominate over moral justifications of the kind that would be proposed from a normative-democratic point of view. The present chapter, ultimately, delineates the construction of a dominant narrative, but reconstructively, accounts

for the possibility of changes in the Irish model of legitimation, carried by the resistance movements that sprang up in opposition to the government's response.

The concept of crisis, which will be taken up in the proceeding section, is multi-faceted and demands consideration of numerous entry-points for analysis. It is understood here, following one pivotal distinction, as an unbalanced communicative conjuncture in which political actors compete to publicly interpret and construe what is taking place. In the undercurrents of political communication, the crisis is variably represented. It is through the analysis of public communication processes that the institutional response and the society in which such a response takes place, may be comprehensively understood. An analysis of the public discursive contestation over the meaning of crises, through which an institutional response is brought forward, results in the management of the crisis aftermath in such a way as to restore the hegemonic conditions of the already existing system. It is, according to this perspective, the most resonant interpretations or crisis-construals that will be selected as the basis for an institutional response. Whether such a response takes the form of restoration, piece-meal reform or radical innovation, the normative selectivity, or resonance conditions are always the critical factor in navigating the analysis of crises.

Ireland certainly represents one of the countries most severely affected by the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. Between 2007 and 2012, national income fell by more than 10% as a result of three interrelated elements that reflect the main causes of the crisis in Ireland; the collapse of an unprecedented property bubble, a calamitous banking crisis and, ultimately, a deep fiscal adjustment imposed as part of an Economic Adjustment Programme, which was the basis of a 'bailout' agreement with the European Union (EU) and International Monetary Union (IMF) (ESRI, 2013: 1). It is necessary to understand these events, which contributed to severe recessionary forces in the aftermath of the financial crisis, against the backdrop of the extraordinary economic growth in the preceding years. An ESRI study identifies that between 1994 and 2004, economic growth in Ireland was among the highest in the OECD, "an annual average growth rate in real GDP of over 7%" (ESRI 2013: 2). This growth in the Irish economy was accompanied by a sustained increase in the numbers in employment, rising from 1.2 million in 1994 to 2.1 million by 2007, and an unemployment trend that fell to just over 4% in 2000 and remained around this level until

2008 (ESRI, 2013:2). A key element, therefore, which reflects the significance of impact of the crisis is the sharp rise in unemployment, 4% to 14% in only four years (2008 to 2012), and this also coincided with sharp increases in taxations, reduction and restrictions on social welfare payments, and structured reduction in public sector pay (ESRI, 2013: 2).

Ireland presents an exceptional case in terms of the analysis of the Global Financial Crisis as it was one of the first countries to officially enter recession in 2008, yet it was also one of the first, according to GDP growth figures (4.8%), to successfully exit recession and enter a recovery phase in 2014. Although this is clearly a positive development, it merely presents a part of the whole picture. The financial crisis, and the austerity approach which was adopted by way of response, has left a deeply unequal society in its wake. Those that were forced to bear the most brunt of the responsibility for the huge retrenchment Ireland has experienced since 2008 constitute those within a lower and middle-income stratum. The impact of the crisis was therefore felt most severely by the most vulnerable in Irish society (i.e. those groups that are at a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion); the homeless, the long-term unemployed, elderly persons, those with special needs, etc. Social Justice Ireland have found that income inequality in Ireland increased significantly between 2008 to 2011, "with the Gini coefficient, a common measure of inequality, rising from 29.3 in 2009 to 31.3 in 2011" (Social Justice Ireland, 2013: 4). This study indicates a widening gap between low and middle-income Ireland on the one hand, and the richest 20% of the population on the other.

The following sections map the discursive construction of a public narrative which correlates with the justification of key events in the unfolding of the crisis in Ireland. This approach will draw extensively from recent empirical research on the financial crisis, along with a selection of primary source material, such as government statements and newspaper publications. By identifying and mapping the trajectory of public discourse, the proceeding sections account for the sequence of events which provide the elements that allow for the discursive composition of a dominant narrative, with which all other public discourse must ultimately resonate. From the guaranteeing of all bank deposits in Irish financial institutions in September 2008, to the establishment of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) in 2009, to the 'Bailout' agreement with EU institutions and the IMF in November 2010, up to the emergence of a

'recovery discourse' in the context of an austerity programme with EU institutions and the IMF; each crisis-response, and indeed the public reaction to it, signifies a path-shaping moment and prelude to what would become the next episode of the crisis. By capturing these nodal moments[1], and decoding the way in which they were construed, and (un)contested, in public discourse through the use of crisis-rhetoric and attempted crisis-management strategies, a sequential discursive impression of the crisis emerges. It is through an outline observation of this sequential development that the parameters of the discursive mediation of the crisis is delineated, and critically, how the response to it was legitimated and those who were to be held responsible for it determined.

1.1 Framing the Crisis Response in Ireland: The Unfolding of a Narrative

The phenomenal economic growth in Ireland from the late 1990s up to 2007, referred to as 'the Celtic Tiger', was primarily a consequence of property construction, inflated house prices and their speculative, underlying financing. The term 'neo-liberalism' captures the complex set of institutional arrangements that facilitated these developments in the context of the transformation of capitalist society over the past four decades or so. Associated with specific Anglo-American political trends, it designates extensive intellectual attention, incorporating perspectives which seek to delineate the emergence of a whole new ideological orientation. At a most basic level, it emphasizes principles to do with the extension of competitive market relations to all areas of social life, re-tasking the role of the state, and placing a certain form of individual responsibility at the forefront of the value system of society.

The ideology of neo-liberalism may be characterized as a political project aimed towards the reconstruction of society in accord with the demands of unrestrained global capitalism. The difficulty with using such a term in any exact sense relates to its sheer scope. It represents a descriptive concept which resonates with such a diverse range of state projects (public-private partnership, for example), policy objectives, and general socio-political ideas, that require sharp

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[1] Drawing on developments in frame theory, '*nodal moments*' refer here to significant instances in the thematization of the crisis in public discourse. This point will be developed further in 1. (b) with specific reference to the three path-shaping moments of the crisis response in Ireland

analytical distinctions on the theoretical level, thus making empirical application somewhat difficult. The ubiquitous nature of the term, however, and its conceptual challenges, by no means require it be avoided, on the contrary, it is essential for understanding an important frame within which the 2008 crisis is interpreted. This will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 3 in relation to the strategy of European integration and the process of financialization in the Irish context.

Understood in discursive terms, neo-liberalism, as a political, economic and social project, constitutes an encompassing meta-narrative, comprising discourses about the past and the present which are, particularly in the context of a crisis, linked to ideas and predictions of, and prescriptions for, the future. A multifaceted, yet still incomplete, project which seeks to seize upon crises as opportunities to extend market principles across society – here roughly following Naomi Klein's 'Shock Doctrine' thesis – narrative is deployed as a symbolic resource[2]. Fairclough (2000) identifies the 'narrative of progress' as an explicit instance of the neo-liberal discourse; "the globalized world offers unprecedented opportunities for 'growth' through intensified 'competition', but requiring unfettered 'free trade' and the dismantling of 'state bureaucracy' and 'unaffordable' welfare programmes, 'flexibility' of labour, 'transparency',' modernization', and so forth" (Fairclough, 2000: 148). The discursive elaboration of such a narrative contributes to the institutionalization of new forms of economic activity and social relations, and at another level, to collective identities and values. Crucially, however, discourses of neo-liberalism are not just neo-liberal discourses; there is, as Fairclough points out, a new structuring of diversity in the development of such language, not a homogenization, which contributes to it being particularly difficult to analytically pin down.

The conceptualization and analysis of crisis proposed here, lends a specific focus to the meso-level of discursive communication. The purpose of the approach is to identify those discursive mechanisms, related to the construction of a particular narrative, which determines the reproduction and/or transformation of a given social formation, made explicit in the crisis context, when 'repair work' is required to temporarily stabilize the system. There is a distinct

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[2] Following Jessop (2004), *symbolic resources* relate to the identifiable semiotic features of discourse and the associated practices in ordering, reproducing and transforming capitalist social formations

evolutionary logic associated with this approach. The emergence of such narratives poses key questions in relation to both the regularization of practices in what may be considered 'normal' conditions and the possible sources of radical transformation in periods of crisis. A crisis, however, is never a purely objective phenomenon or moment that automatically produces a particular response or outcome. It is a condition that develops when established patterns of dealing with structural contradictions, their crisis-tendencies, and dilemmas no longer operate as expected. According to Jessop, "crises are most acute when crisis-tendencies and tensions accumulate across several interrelated moments of the structure or system in question, limiting room for manoeuvre in regard to any particular problem" (Jessop, 2004: 167). A situation in which established modes of crisis-management no longer resonate may lead to a potential moment of decisive transformation, and an opportunity for decisive intervention. In this sense, a crisis is an unbalanced situation. It is, following Debray (1973), objectively overdetermined but subjectively indeterminate. An acute crisis may, therefore, constitute a potentially path-shaping moment during which the space for determined strategic interventions to significantly re-orient the course of events is opened up to the public. It may also constitute a moment of strategic innovation through the proliferation of alternative visions, invoking and re-articulating genres, discourses and styles by way of cultivating a 'poetry for the future' which resonates with the emergence of new potentialities[3].

In moments of major social restructuring, initiated by the conditions of acute crises, the emergence of competing economic, political and socio-cultural narratives seek to give meaning to what is taking place by construing problems in relation to past failures and future possibilities. In the next section, adopting insights from Jessop's approach to the analysis of crisis, focusing in on the meso-level dimension of public discourse, this perspective will be brought to bear on the Irish case. Through a critical observation of the discursive arrangement of three key moments of political intervention, and the identification of specific key instances of public resistance, the elements of a narrative will be delineated, according to which the response to the crisis in Ireland would become justified. The former instances, following the discursive mechanisms in the

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[3] Marx and Engels (1852), "*The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but from the future*" – The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

semiotic construction of public narratives, highlight the selection and retention of specific discourses to justify the crisis-response, while in relation to the latter, the reinforcement of these discourses may be exemplified by reference to the relatively weak public resistance observed in the Irish case, and the general lack of alternative ideas promoted in public discourse. Jessop's approach, ultimately, offers an entry into a diagnostic frame in which the 2008 financial crisis may be critically understood. This diagnostic frame will guide the following empirical observations, thus allowing for the identification of a distinctive set of elements which constitute the construction of a narrative to justify the crisis-response in Ireland.

By late 2009, Europe had certainly become the main stage of the crisis narrative. The imagined recovery peculiarly claimed to have been achieved through the method of 'growth through austerity' was shattered by the collapse of Greek public finances. Fossum and Menendez (2014) explain, "the financial crisis mutated (or better, seemed to mutate) into a fiscal crisis which dragged the whole Eurozone and indeed the entire European Union down" (2014: 2). Just as EU institutions, and many scholars and pundits, were celebrating the first decade of the Euro currency, the crisis, 'imported from America', was exposing deep structural defects in the European Monetary Union (Fossum and Menenndez, 2014). These defects were further highlighted and emphasized by the increasing divide between core and periphery, between the central Eurozone countries of Germany, France, the Netherlands, etc, and the peripheral, mainly Mediterranean countries, Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain (the PIGS, or GIPSI if one includes Ireland in the disparaging acronym). Despite a whole suite of policy decisions and an array of structural reforms aimed at decisively resolving the crisis in Europe, the entire notion of a transnational political union hung (and still, in light of the Brexit phenomenon, hangs) in the balance.

The response to the global financial crisis, which became concentrated in the United States and Europe in late 2008, may be defined by the coordinated imposition of 'necessary economic reforms' or, perhaps more accurately described, austerity. Initially justified as exceptional and temporary measures to address the immediate symptoms of the crisis, this response was certainly path-shaping, precipitating sustained reductions in public expenditure and such policy approaches as 'fiscal consolidation', despite considerable public unrest. In the US, for instance,

Noam Chomsky (2011) criticizes such an approach from the perspective of the legitimacy of the financial system itself and its function within state capitalism. Recognising the extent of state intervention in the historical development of the modern economy, he argues that, contrary to the *neo-liberal* idea of the free market successfully operating independently of state regulation and interference, financial systems have always depended heavily on the existence of strong state institutions. Therefore, when the financial crash occurred in 2008, following the collapse of the US property market, it should have come as no surprise that governments would intervene to rescue, 'bailout', the entire financial industry (Chomsky, 2011: 55).

The next section concentrates on the representation of the key crisis events in Irish public discourse. The legitimacy of the response taken to the crisis, reflected in the following through the political communication of crisis-management, will be normatively contested from the perspective of an account of the public resistance that follows. In anticipation of this contestation, which takes the form of discursive struggles over the nature and significance of the crisis, and challenges the proposed solutions to it, dissenting voices are also shown to emerge and become integrated as part of the narrative that gives a coherent meaning to the seemingly chaotic events. The mobilisation of students and the politically-engaged elderly population will be introduced below in order to draw attention to elements of public resistance in Ireland. These resistance movements, which will also be considered in their transnational context, appealing to an opposing position on such principles as legitimacy and responsibility, sought to defend what they conceived to be the real democratic interests of the public.

1.2 A Timeline of Crisis and Recovery: Key Political Interventions in Ireland

Ireland's financial crisis may be understood as a very local crisis, which shared general features with the global crisis. The Irish case, O'Riain (2017) explains, was driven primarily by lending to large property developers and massively inflated property prices. Contrary, for instance, to what happened in the US, the crisis in Ireland was not triggered by mortgage defaults – although this would become a significant feature as the crisis evolved. A distinctive institutional response to the crisis, therefore, may be identified. There are three key moments, identified in public

discourse, which indicate key political interventions on behalf of the Irish government during the development of the 2008 financial crisis. Reflecting a distinctive experience of a country's response to such a crisis, these interventions represent an attempt to contain and construe events, principally through the calculated management of public discourse.

The key political interventions will be presented here according to four sequential phases of discourse, each corresponding to a specific measure constituting the unfolding of a narrative over time. Each phase contributes to the dominant Irish mode of legitimation, seizing the opportunity to frame the crisis in a way that would justify the response taken to maintain order. This initial framing process reflects the crisis-management strategy of the Irish government, from the implementation of the highly controversial 'bank guarantee scheme' in September 2008, through the debate around the setting up of the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) in 2009, to the signing of a 'bailout' agreement with the EU and IMF in November 2010. The intention here is to identify a consistent trajectory of discourse that corresponds to a narrative of justification. This sets the parameters for how the crisis was initially communicated to the Irish public, therefore also establishing the relevant frame for the public's response.

Ireland's economic boom in the early 2000s must be understood in a broader historical context. Following years of stagnation associated with a political commitment to economic nationalism and protectionism in the post-WWII era, it was the adoption of trade liberalization policies during the 1960s that facilitated accelerated processes of economic development in the line with the rest of Europe. As Powell points out, "Ireland's freer trade policies merely allowed it to cash in on the generally good growth rates the rest of Europe was experiencing" (Powell, 2003: 433). Ireland joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, thus making further advances in trade liberalization and fiscal expansion, yet, due to extenuating global financial conditions, specifically the inflation crisis resulting from the oil price shock of the early 1970s, Irish overall rate of economic growth remained comparatively dismal. It was a radical policy shift in the late 1980s, implemented by Charles Haughey's Fianna Fail government, that precipitated vital structural economic change in Ireland, most notably in relation to a significant reduction in the state's role in the management of the national economy (Powell, 2003: 435). It is from here that Ireland's exceptional rate of economic growth in the 1990s, leading to the development of an

economic model characterized by the Celtic Tiger phenomenon in the 2000s, thus constituting the roots of the 2008 financial crisis, may be contextualized and understood. In a very short period of time (1960s-1990s), Ireland had transitioned from an insular, agriculturally-based national economy into an outward-looking, finance-based, internationally integrated economy in a global system.

Ireland would, however, prove to become a world leader in financialization (O'Riain, 2012: 498). In line with the indicative features of the process outlined in the previous section, following Fine, Ireland followed suit in relation to adopting an ever-increasing role for financial motives, markets, actors and institutions in the operation of its economy. Sean O'Riain (2012) explains that financial expansion pursued by successive Irish governments was just one dimension of a triple process of financialization in this context, including also a close connection with Anglo-American financial systems and, as outlined in the preceding section, financialization as associated with the European integration strategy, and the introduction of the Euro currency in the 2000s (O'Riain, 2012: 499). During the 1990s, Ireland, following the liberal market economies of the US and UK, lowered its personal and corporate tax rates dramatically, along with tariff rates. Powell explains that "in 1989 the standard income tax rate was lowered from 35 percent to 32 percent, and the top marginal rate was lowered from 58 percent to 56 percent" (Powell, 2003: 436). Although these policy decisions undoubtedly led to a significant increase in overall prosperity and rise in general living standards, O'Riain contends "the dynamic of economic growth in Ireland shifted firmly from an export-led expansion of employment and domestic demand in the 1990s to an economy fuelled by domestic consumption and, particularly, construction in the 2000s" (O'Riain, 2012).

As construction took the form of a dominant 'growth machine' in Ireland from the late 1990s and through the 2000s, O'Riain identifies the long-established connections between land-based elites, property developers, and political elites as a key element in reinforcing the system. This growth machine, moreover, which had relied heavily upon state funding in the past (O'Riain points to the social housing expansion in the 1930s and the state office expansion in the 1970s), was now linked to the speculative financing of private residential and commercial property. In the ten years between 1997 and 2007, a period which may be defined globally by asset price-

explosion associated with the de-regulation of financial markets, bank lending in Ireland grew to 200 per cent of the national income (Kelly, 2009). According to Morgan Kelly's assessment, "Irish banks were lending forty per cent in real terms to property developers alone in 2008 than they had been to everyone in Ireland in 2000, and seventy per cent more as mortgages" (Kelly, 2009: 2). The resultant credit bubble inflated to the extent that its inevitable end would coincide with the deepest economic collapse of any developed country since the Great Depression. As Patrick Honohan (2009) explains, it was the combined activities of the construction industry and the banking system regarding property-related lending that were chiefly responsible for propelling one another to inflate the property bubble to a catastrophic extent.

The institutional response to the 2008 financial crisis in Ireland may be characterized by the state assuming responsibility for a vast amount of private debt in order to save the banking system from total collapse. Ultimately, the approach which encouraged the development of the 'growth-machine' mentioned above, associated with persistent trust in the processes of financialization that contributed to the crisis in the first place, was now forming the basis of the Irish Government's response. Understood in the broader context of the European response, however, this is not exceptional. Portugal, Spain, Cyprus and Greece followed a similar path, unable to refinance their government debt due to the socialization of private debt, and then entering into 'bailout' agreements with the EU, the European Central Bank and the IMF in order to continue to fund state activities. What is unique about the Irish case is contained in the aftermath, in the manner in which it was represented as a success in recovering from the crisis through the diligent and devoted application of a severe austerity programme. Recovery in this context refers narrowly to Ireland's trading position, determined by financial rating agencies, and its ability to continue to engage in and borrow from international markets. It is, therefore, only a recovery in the sense that it is recognised as such by the financial system.

- September 2008 – March 2009: The Bank Guarantee

On 25 September 2008, Ireland became the first EU country to officially slip into recession. Having been anticipated for some time, as reflected in the Governor of the Irish Central Bank's speech

the previous April (Hurley, 2008), which made reference to 'trouble on the horizon', the crisis was rapidly mutating from a 'slowdown' in the economy to a fully blown economic catastrophe. In reaction to the banking systems exposure to the crumbling property market, Finance Minister and deputy leader of the ruling party Fianna Fail, Brian Lenihan presented the Credit Institutions (Protection) Bill 2008 to the Irish Parliament on 30 September. The intention of the bill, which would become known as 'the bank guarantee', was to enable the government to take a stake in any financial institution that was in need of support; essentially, to provide a state guarantee on all bank deposits up to €100,000, cumulatively, about €440bn. Crucially, however, unaware of the banking system's actual level of exposure to existing property development loans, the financial institutions to whom the government offered the protection of the guarantee were Allied Irish Bank, Bank of Ireland, Anglo Irish Bank, Irish Life and Permanent, Irish Nationwide Building Society and Educational Building Society (Masters, 2009: 128).

Two days after Lenihan announced the details of the bank guarantee, the Taoiseach, Brian Cowen gave an unusually impassioned and illuminating speech at a Business Council Dinner at Trinity College in Dublin. Undoubtedly aimed at the wider public, the key message communicated in this dramatic speech act was that Ireland was confronting a serious crisis and that 'we' must all face it together (Cowen 2008). Drawing a sharp distinction between 'right choices' – government policy – and 'catastrophic consequences' – anything else, Cowen here sets out the terms for the initial framing of the crisis by the government. In this sense, the bank guarantee is to be understood as the first of a number of measures, 'tough decisions', which will be implemented in response to the global financial chaos, and the latter must be seized as a unique opportunity to reform 'dysfunctional' public services and implement important structural change in the Irish economy (Masters, 2009: 146). Evoking memories of 'the troubles' in Northern Ireland, Cowen emphasized the way in which 'good' leadership had allowed 'us' to overcome problems in the past (Cowen, 2008). In attempting to generate a national sense of collective accountability, particularly through his consistent use of the pronoun 'we', the financial crisis was characterised as an exogenous phenomenon, a contamination from systemic problems originating elsewhere. He said;

We face an unprecedented financial crisis, much of it rooted in the excesses of the United States money system but we have major problems across Europe, and Ireland was never going to be immune (Cowen, 2008)

According to Master's (2009) analysis, Cowen's attempt to frame the crisis in a way that supported his incumbent government on the one hand, representing the largest conservative and nationalist party, Fianna Fail, and justified Lenihan's implementation of the guarantee scheme, on the other, were relatively successful. It was also perhaps significant in explaining the public's relatively muted reception of the severe budget that was announced in October of the same year. By December however, despite this, the open, export and service-driven economy of Ireland continued to deteriorate, and, contrary to government rhetoric, it was becoming increasingly clear, especially given the substantial rise in unemployment figures, that the problems being faced were certainly not exclusively exogenous (Masters, 2009).

Following the announcement, on 9 January 2009, that the chief executive of the Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority, Patrick Neary, resigned following allegations that his staff were involved in the fraudulent transferring of loans for the former chairman of Anglo Irish Bank, Sean Fitzpatrick[4]. At this point, public attention had been dominated by allegations of institutional corruption over the previous two months (Masters, 2009). The crisis was now developing at a rapid pace, and a severe economic recession was looming. Nonetheless, through sophisticated techniques of blame avoidance and deflection, and crisis-exploitation in political communication, responsibility for causing the crisis itself was still very much unresolved and would be deflected on to various parties, most notably, public servants.

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[4] Anglo Irish Bank and its former Chairman, Sean Fitzpatrick, and Chief Executive, David Drumm, have come to epitomize the corruption and irresponsibly connected to both the sources of and response to the Irish financial crisis. According to Regling and Watson's (2010) Report on the sources of the Irish banking crisis, governance and risk management practices within the institution were systematically corrupt – this had initially come to light following the dramatic nationalization of Anglo in 2009. An investigation later found that Fitzpatrick, while Anglo Chairman, had borrowed more than €100 million from the bank and hidden the loans from auditors for eight years. Drumm, it would also be later revealed, in a series of articles published in the Irish Independent, had knowledge of the hidden loans which precipitated the collapse of the bank's share price and its ultimate nationalization by the Irish government.

- April 2009 – October 2009: The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA)

As the banking crisis worsened in early 2009, particularly after the nationalisation of Anglo-Irish Bank, the actual extent of the property bubble and the possible depth of the resultant financial collapse were becoming increasingly clear. The level of property-related debt that Irish banks were responsible for, especially in regard to large residential developments, was far beyond what the state, now projecting a dire economic outlook for the future, was in any way capable of guaranteeing. Following a severe emergency budget on 7 April, which included significant tax rises and massive reductions in public spending, special advisor to the Minister of Finance, Alan Ahearne, along with special advisor to the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA), Peter Bacon, were charged with the task of drafting a proposal to deal specifically with the property development loans, which were now acknowledged to be at the very root of Ireland's banking crisis. The result of their proposal would lead to the establishment of NAMA, a semi-state owned, property-management agency, which, it was intended, would manage and dispose of '*toxic-assets*', therefore facilitating the restructuring of relevant financial institutions for which the Irish state had made itself fully responsible (Ahearne, 2015).

Although the details of how NAMA would actually be implemented changed over time, primarily as a result of the sheer volume of debt being transferred, and also, increasingly volatile global economic conditions, the initial proposal was, basically along the following lines. The six guaranteed credit institutions faced a cumulative impairment on their land and development loans of about €80-90bn, NAMA would acquire the assets associated with this debt for €54bn, a discount of approximately 30 percent, and then resell them once market conditions had improved, therefore recouping the outlay of the state, on the one hand, and, on the other, allowing the banking system to continue to function in the short term (Bacon, 2009). Designed as a financial instrument, a 'special purpose vehicle of temporary duration', NAMA was based on the speculative long-run valuation of Irish property and a projected return to economic growth within the subsequent few years. Speaking in 2015, Ahearne defends the establishment of NAMA as follows:

Ireland followed international best practice by setting up NAMA, an asset management agency to run down the bad assets of the Irish banks. Releasing bad assets from banks' balance sheets is instrumental in the path to recovery (Ahearne, 2015: 2)

NAMA was a prevalent feature of public debate and discussion in 2009. Although it was widely accepted that government measures were necessary to resolve the banking crisis, the most vocal critics of NAMA – chiefly, economists Morgan Kelly and Ronan Lyons, who are widely regarded as leading Irish property experts – found that the valuations upon which the agency based its assessment were far too optimistic. At the time the proposal was being drafted, a 47 percent decline in property prices was understood to be the bottom of the market, and the banks' assets were therefore valued accordingly. However, based on Kelly's (2009) evidence, a fall of between 40 and 60 percent in Irish house prices was to be expected over the following eight to nine years, and therefore the overall fall in value from peak to trough would be more in the region of 70 percent, far more than that envisaged by those designing NAMA. Kelly's pointed conclusion was that in paying an average of two-thirds of the face value for these toxic assets, where one third is appropriate, the government was risking the imposition of severe losses on the Irish public, in the order of €30bn.

NAMA was officially established by September 2009 and would begin transferring the first tranche of loans in early 2010. Putting aside the technical issues related to the consequent recapitalisation schemes and, more generally, the restoration of the economic conditions which led to the crisis in the first place, what was of fundamental concern was the evident lack of alternative approaches considered at this vital point and, from a moral point of view, the role NAMA would be likely to play in relation to the continuation of dangerous financial practices and non-democratic political collusion.

- November 2010 – EU/IMF Bailout

Following yet another austere budget at the beginning of December 2009, the third of its kind in fourteen months, which saw further cuts to public spending, most notably to public service pay and to vital social welfare programmes, it was now proclaimed by the Finance Minister, Lenihan,

that Ireland had 'turned a corner' in overcoming the crisis (Irish Times, 2010). Elaborating upon the same narrative which began by way of justification for the bank guarantee almost two years earlier, Lenihan, in defence of this latest budget, also emphasised the need for the 'Irish people' to 'work together' and 'share the burden' of responsibility for what was happening (Irish Times, 2010). By late 2010, despite this recovery-rhetoric and the various responses to the financial crisis up to then, Ireland was unable to service its ever-increasing level of debt and, similarly to Greece the previous May, would have to request external financing, i.e. a 'bailout'.

Having witnessed the Greek government agree terms with the Troika – comprising of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)- to borrow from the newly-established European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF), and as the debt situation in Ireland continued to deteriorate throughout 2010, an Irish bailout seemed inevitable. On 18 November, amidst rising levels of public discontent, especially among the elderly and student populations, which will be highlighted below, EU and IMF officials arrived in Dublin and were photographed entering government buildings to begin negotiations, though this, peculiarly, was denied by the Taoiseach, Cowen (Cahill et al, 2010). The charade of denial that the Irish government was requesting a financial bailout continued in political discourse for three days before it was officially announced, on 21 November, that a 'rescue package' had been agreed with the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF (Doyle, 2010). A 'National Recovery Plan' was also published in this month, which outlined actions to implement a fiscal policy aimed at maintaining a government deficit at not more than 3% of GDP in line with the Stability and Growth Pact – the agreement between European member states to protect the European Economic and Monetary Union.

According to the official Irish government statement, the bailout would total €85bn, with €17½bn contributed domestically from the National Pension Reserve Fund (NPRF) and the remaining €67½bn, externally, from the EFSF, bilateral loans from the UK, Sweden and Denmark, and also the IMF. The primary objective of the bailout agreement, referring to the same statement, was 'to rebuild international market confidence in the Irish banking system, to enable the banks to revert to normal market funding in due course and reduce progressively their reliance on funding from the Eurosystem and guarantees and other financial support from the Exchequer'

(Department of Finance, 2010). Although the focus was clearly on re-financing the collapsed banking system, the consequences of entering what was officially termed the 'Economic Adjustment Programme' raised grave concerns for the wider society. Under the heading, 'Structural Reforms in the Programme', the grounds for such concerns are clearly reflected; for example, 'Labour market adjustments', which pertain to reductions in the national minimum wage and to 'reforms' in the employment benefit system in order to 'incentivise' the unemployed.

Despite the official reason given for requesting a bailout being the general 'financing of the State', the dominant theme in public discourse was initially 'the loss of sovereignty' (Mercille, 2014). Mercille (2014), in his analysis of the Irish media's role in the crisis, describes the dominant language in the press at this time as moving quickly from this issue of sovereignty, focusing on the adverse implications of the development, to 'it's what is needed', which by establishing a sense of certainty and stability, provided a justification for ongoing fiscal austerity. The consistency in the political approach taken in response to the crisis in Ireland, is reflected in the circumstances of adopting the bailout agreement, a strategy that epitomises the lack of alternatives considered at the time. The commitment to a 'Memorandum of Understanding' with the EU and IMF would ultimately determine Ireland's economic and, to a significant extent, social future for the medium-to long-term, and it reflected the nature of Irish public culture that such a fateful event could happen in a manner cloaked from public scrutiny.

The overarching objective of the bailout programme in Ireland required actions to address fiscal consolidation, financial sector reforms, and structural reforms. These reforms were specifically aimed at resource conservation and improving competition to drive economic recovery. Robbins and Lapsley (2014) provide useful data that illustrates the economic impact of the austerity programme; by 2011, Ireland had the third highest debt to GDP ratio in the EU behind Greece and Italy. In the period 2002 to 2008, the 17 countries within the Eurozone sustained an average debt to GDP per cent that was close to 70%, before rising over the preceding three years to stand at 87.2% in 2011 (Eurostat, 2011). Robbins and Lapsley anticipate that "Ireland's debt/GDP ratio will peak at 120.3% in 2013 before falling to 117.4% in 2015" (2014: 93). By the time Ireland will exit the bailout agreement, the extent of the retrenchment imposed by the Irish government,

and under the direction of the Troika, is staggering. However, it would be portrayed as a success story, one that others, particularly those southern peripheral states, ought to learn from. As Christine Lagarde stated in a speech to the IMF in 2013;

Ireland is setting standards and what has been done has been huge by any standards. More than two-thirds of the work has been done in terms of fiscal policies (Lagarde, 2013)

- Turning a Corner: Exiting the Bailout and the Beginning of a Recovery Narrative

In December 2013, Ireland would become the first Eurozone country to exit the bailout programme. Just three years after committing to the 'Memorandum of Understanding' with the Troika, which oversaw a deep retrenchment of the Irish economy, the government had succeeded in guiding the country out of what would be remembered as one of the most difficult periods in the history of the state, and a new phase of the public narrative would now begin to represent this. As reflected in Lagarde's quote above, Ireland was deemed to be 'setting standards' in its response to the crisis. Manuel Barrosa, the president of the European Commission was also quick to commend Ireland on its discipline and commitment to the bailout programme, "Ireland's success sends an important message – that with determination and support from partner countries, we can and will emerge stronger from this deep crisis" (The Guardian, 2013). At the time this statement was made, Greece, Portugal and Cyprus were still involved in bailout programmes with the Troika and the Irish experience was therefore becoming an important exemplar in relation to the appropriate measures to be pursued in the aftermath of the crisis – sacrifice and commitment to the programme will lead to redemption. In essence, Ireland's response to the 2008 financial crisis has become the most crucial piece of evidence in support of austerity policies.

Ireland sets itself apart from the other 'bailout countries' in Europe in relation to the fact that its government had embarked upon a series of deep public expenditure cutbacks prior to entering the Troika agreement. Moreover, as Robbins and Lapsley explain, "while in Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy, national governments in their strategies of retrenchment failed to connect

cutback management to ambitious administrative modernization programmes, the response of the Irish government was to prioritize cutbacks in public services and new taxes" (2014: 96). As will be outlined in the next chapter in relation to a specific mode of discursive legitimation, the crisis, and subsequent bailout response, were used as an opportunity for public sector reform, and would in fact became a priority of the Irish government, reflected in the establishment of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in July 2011. The 'prudent' management of the public finances would become an imperative for successive governments in Ireland, who would consistently declare their commitment to not repeat the mistakes of the mid-2000s, when the economy was left vulnerable to external shocks (O'Riain, 2017: 220). The emergence of a 'new politics' in the aftermath of the crisis in Ireland consists of technical disagreements about budget balances and the fiscal space within which the government can operate, however, as O'Riain (2017) points out, this is "always within 'moral' rhetoric of fiscal responsibility and conservatism" (2017: 220).

Far from constituting a break with the practices of the past, proclaimed by the notion of 'new politics', Ireland's recovery from crisis represents a continuation of a specific socio-economic approach, characterized by "high inequality linked to property and other assets, flexible labour markets, the mobilization of foreign investment and a tentatively emerging domestic business class across a range of sectors supported by public agencies" (O'Riain, 2017: 220). Although Ireland may appear to be the only peripheral European country to emerge successfully from the economic wreckage of the financial crisis, its increased GDP and employment growth obscure a more complex picture, as O'Riain points out, "data on growth, trade and productivity is exceptionally difficult to understand given distortions introduced by the accounting practices of foreign firms located in Ireland (2017: 225). What is celebrated as a 'recovery', therefore, may in contrast be viewed as merely a return to the conditions that were a root cause of the financial collapse itself, specifically in regard to the rapid re-inflation of the property sector in aftermath of the crisis in Ireland, which has led to a burgeoning crisis of housing supply, rising and unaffordable rents and growing statistics on family homelessness. Although there has certainly been an economic recovery in the Irish case, particularly when compared to the southern

periphery, the old political and economic dilemmas remain, and Irish political discourse seems unable to address it, let alone resolve it.

Austerity is framed as the centre-piece of Ireland's recovery narrative. Whelan (2010) depicts the austerity policies adopted by the Irish government as one of the most extensive in world economic history. The Finance Minister of the Fine Gael-led coalition government (formed in February 2011), Michael Noonan, compared the recovery from the crisis, which had pushed the state to financial disaster, to the Great Famine of the mid-19th century, in which millions lost their lives (McDonald, 2013). There was indeed a dramatic tone set in framing the significance of Ireland's exit from the bailout with the Troika. The recovery narrative, however, aimed to strike a balance between proclaiming triumphant success in the face of the troubling socio-economic conditions left in the wake of austerity and a cautious optimism, as Noonan also stated, "This isn't the end of the road. This is a very significant milestone" (McDonald, 2013).

A key feature of the transition to a recovery narrative was the congratulatory rhetoric directed towards the Irish public. Ireland, according to this narrative, had stoically endured sacrifice and suffering for the greater good, accepting three years of deep cuts to social welfare, state jobs and public sector wages as part of an austerity programme that imposed 270 separate reductions in state budgets. Following the announcement of the end of the bailout programme, cabinet ministers lined up to praise the Irish people for the way they had accepted their newly straitened circumstances without taking to the streets, as in Greece and Portugal, with Richard Bruton, new Employment Minister acclaiming the "patriotism in the way people approached the crisis" (McDonald, 2013). The patronising tone of this rhetoric is perhaps best summarised by quoting Noonan once more, "The real heroes and heroines are the Irish people!", he exclaimed at a press conference (McDonald, 2013). The stoic acquiescence, by which political elites characterized the Irish public's acceptance of austerity, was certainly not universal.

In summary, the present chapter has set out the empirical parameters of the analysis. In doing so, it has also introduced some of the key ideas that will guide the development of the theoretical framework, which will be brought forward in the proceeding critique. The institutional response to the Irish financial crisis is understood through the unfolding of a narrative which is identified

in the domain of public discourse. This conceptualization will be normatively developed in relation to the principles of legitimacy and responsibility, and the trajectory of discourse itself as a narrative that sought to justify a specific response, thus restricting the thematization of alternatives, allowing for the reproduction of the same social and political conditions at the very root of the crisis. The dominant narrative, which was delineated by following the public communication of the government's crisis-management strategy, reflects the resonant conditions of a distinctive mode of learning. The next chapter will contextualize the Irish case in a European setting. This places Ireland into the long-run historical and structural developments that shaped the conditions which led to the crisis in the first place, and establishes a comparative context, in relation to which one may equate the experience of crisis and the prospects for the future.

2.

Contextualizing the Aftermath of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis:

A Comparative European Perspective on Ireland

The previous chapter put forward an account of the institutional response to the 2008 financial crisis in Ireland, as represented through an observation of public discourse. The present chapter will now broaden this focus, discuss the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis at the European level and highlight some specific national responses to it which will serve as the basis for a comparative assessment with the Irish case. The objective here will be to outline the conditions left in the wake of such a profound crisis, identify the parameters of the resultant social conflict in specific contexts and account for the learning processes that are initiated in different societies which form the bases of the various responses.

The use of the term 'aftermath', which comprises a key contextual element of the thesis, requires some clarification at this point, especially given the fact that an argument could certainly be made that the crisis only began in 2008, and has in fact continued in multifaceted economic, political and social forms up to the present. Although, for example, what is enduringly referred to as the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis, which spread throughout the periphery of the EU in the years after the financial crash, may indeed be causally linked back to the implications of 'bailout' agreements signed by member-states, there is an important distinction to be highlighted here. This refers to the spatio-temporally fixed events of the financial crisis of 2008 itself, which includes the institutional responses taken to it in various contexts, and its aftermath, which in turn refers to the conditions following the initial occurrence of the crisis. In essence, the conditions which characterise the aftermath of the crisis refer to the economic and social devastation left in its wake and, from a discursive point of view, the distinctive socio-cultural elements that have given shape to the resonant narratives put forward in public to resolve it.

> *In this crisis, some people are trying to go back, and other people are trying to discover what the future could be. What doesn't work anymore is the present, for anyone. That's why we refer to the aftermath* (Castells, 2015)

Manuel Castells (2011) depicts the 2008 crisis as heralding the end of an era of economic activity which may be characterized by the development of a system of easy credit and an ever-increasing level of debt dependence. The aftermath, following that end point, marks an uncertain stage of transition and conflict that distinguishes one phase of social formation from another that is yet to fully take shape. The context of this aftermath, therefore, involves discursive struggles over the nature and significance of what is taking place. Played out through the dynamics of public discourse, this constitutes a mediation process which involves the construction of 'public narratives', as identified in Chapter 1, which seek to give meaning to the disturbing events taking place and provide the basis for a justification in relation to how it ought to be resolved. There may be a number of competing narratives which enter the discursive space of the public sphere, each projecting a potential opportunity for some form of learning. The plausibility of these narratives, in terms of defining the problematic situation, depend to a significant extent upon wider resonance in relation to economic, political and ideological conditions. It is the resonance of a given narrative regarding these 'extra-discursive', political and cultural conditions of the given society, which will determine whether that narrative is successful in either changing the system through a form of transformational learning process or, as the case may be, reinforcing the existing order through decisive political interventions, thus re-stabilizing the existing system.

The aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis has set the stage for a fundamental confrontation. The process of publicly narrating the crisis response has revealed distinctive positions being taken up in the formation of a new social conflict. These positions, often rooted in various ideological traditions, are adopted and revealed in public discourse through the development of competing narratives. This process sets the stage for the key struggles that will determine the future direction of the emerging social conflict. What is of specific interest in the present analysis is the emergence of the 'new social movements', those developments that propose innovative ideas that resist falling back on the ideologies of the past, which represent one side of the conflict. In attempting to overcome the apparent fear of the future, which has contributed to the perpetuation of hateful movements and the re-emergence of xenophobic and racist forms of politics in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, these new social movements reflect the emergence of

more hopeful changes that endeavour to seize the crisis aftermath as an opportunity for normative learning and democratic transformation.

In much of the analyses of the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath, the actual implications for society have remained a relatively neglected dimension, that is in comparison to the predominant focus on the implications in political and economic domains. John Thompson et al. (2018) offer a perspective which examines the human and social costs of the crisis response, using the concept of 'suffering' as the basis for their analysis[5]. Unemployment statistics are taken as a measure to quantify the impact of the crisis, providing an initial indication of the extent to which peoples' lives have substantively changed; "the unemployment rate across the EU soared, rising from 6.7 per cent in 2008 to 10.8 per cent in 2013 across the twenty-eight member countries, putting 9 million more people out of work, while in the Eurozone it reached 12 per cent" (Thompson et al., 2018: 148). This sharp increase in unemployment correlates with a significant increase in the percentage of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Thompson et al. provide an examination of the crisis which shows the social devastation left in its wake; "in many of the countries that have been hardest hit by the crisis, such as Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain and Portugal, unemployment rates remain high, inequality is increasing and there are growing numbers of individuals, families and children living in poverty" (2018: 149). By focusing in on the experiences of the crisis in the specific instances of Greece and Italy, Thompson et al. develop a qualitative, bottom-up approach to compliment what the quantitative research indicates. Through a series of detailed interviews with actors from varying sections of the respective societies, this approach highlights how the crisis affected people on both physical and emotional levels and also how the new material and symbolic reality – the new 'lived reality' – has become incorporated into their daily lives. This qualitative perspective reveals the way in which suffering in the aftermath of the crisis is infused with a great deal of anger and resentment towards politicians and political elites who "are seen as distant, untrustworthy, incapable of understanding the lives of ordinary people and condescending towards them" (2018: 174).

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[5] The concept of suffering is here drawn from Pierre Bourdieu (1993)

This research draws attention to conditions that are indicative of a depression, conducive to an outlook on the world that is bleak, despondent and in general filled with despair. These conditions reflect a form of suffering that mark a significant feature of the present crisis aftermath. The sense of suffering is, as Thompson et al. observe, characterized by a deep and pervasive sadness associated with the "collapse of dreams and the loss of any sense of hope about the future" (2018: 174). The loss of hope, associated with the absence of a common purpose in relation to which people may develop forms of collective action, also results in a sense of frustration among a population that feel totally detached from and ignored by the political process. It is pointed out, however, that feelings of suffering and resentment can yet find expression in collective and unpredictable ways, as groups are given the opportunity to make their voices heard, for instance in the case of a referendum. In this sense, political processes are seen to be as much about affect and emotion as they are about reason and interest, "and when strong feelings are coupled with deep distrust and growing resentment of established political elites, the results can be particularly disruptive" (2018: 176). This point will be elaborated upon later in the chapter in relation to the Greece.

> *Understanding the suffering of others is an indispensable part of thinking through the impact of the economic crisis on people's lives, but it is also essential if we want to make sense of the dramatic upheavals that are shaking the political establishment and overturning many taken-for-granted beliefs in Europe and elsewhere today* (Thompson et al., 2018: 176)

The dramatic upheavals, which have taken place in many Western liberal democracies since the Global Financial Crisis, may be understood as elements of a general response to the neglect of the category of society itself[6]. The emphasis on the efficiency of financial markets and the sovereignty of nation-states has come to overshadow all else and highlights this widespread negation in the post-crisis context (Offe, 2012). As Eder explains in relation to a critique of the

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[6] This idea of the neglect of society relates to a key feature of the ideological regime of neo-liberalism for the past forty years. It is reflected in a famous quote of Margaret Thatcher's: "They are casting their problems at society. And, you know, there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours"

neo-liberal form of governance in the EU context, "the model of the state and the market has a significant blind spot: people forming something that we call society… it lacks the third element in the dualistic conceptual world of state and market, i.e. society" (Eder, 2014: 220). The aftermath of the crisis, understood from this perspective, represents a moment in which society is attempting to reassert itself and reconnect with the political system. It constitutes the beginning of what may be a long historical transition involving the struggle to reconstruct a new form of politics, and it is at this point that new social movements come to the fore as the expression of the neglected category.

The years since the financial crisis have certainly coincided with an increase of social mobilization in all European countries (Ortiz et al., 2013). Although it is difficult to establish a direct causal link between the various protest demonstrations, occupations, and grassroots meetings, and the specific conditions of the crisis aftermath – particularly as there are a myriad of other factors that would warrant consideration in this respect, related to opportunity structures, resources and social networks – it is undeniable that the two processes are fully interlinked. Oritz et al. (2013) have made an important contribution in establishing this link, conducting a study of protest activities between 2006 and 2013, in which they found that, in the aftermath of the crisis, "there is a major increase in protests beginning 2010 with the adoption of austerity measures in all world regions" (Ortiz et al., 2013: 2). This research also indicates that the reasons for protest are linked to issues of economic justice, to the related imposition of austerity programmes and to failure of the traditional systems of political representation. The latter point, which is also associated with a general loss of confidence in traditional political institutions, is highlighted as playing a particularly significant role in triggering protest. In the European context, the upsurge in protest was most pronounced on the southern periphery. Ortiz et al. found that one third of Greek respondents to a transnational survey had participated in demonstrations against austerity, while in Spain, the figure was 23.8 per cent. These figures are reflective of the sustained period of struggle against austerity in these countries, which has over time resulted in the ability of new political parties (Syriza and Podemos) to capitalize on the discontent and propose an alternative response to the prolonged crisis.

The response to the 2008 crisis, from an EU perspective, has resulted in an increasingly tenuous relationship between states and citizens, all within the conditions of a highly complex set of transnational political arrangements. European political elites, in the context of the crisis aftermath, have committed themselves to this Faustian pact with financial institutions (confidence in the market), which involves the imposition of austerity on smaller peripheral member-states, on the one hand, and the maintenance of democratic legitimacy throughout the national contexts of the union as a whole on the other. Joerges and Glinski (2014) characterise this seemingly anomalous approach as representing a position somewhere between 'authoritarian managerialism' and 'democratic governance'. At the EU level, the general crisis-management strategy adopted in response to the financial crisis has, in turn, precipitated another more protracted crisis, that has now spread well beyond the economic domain. The following section will now discuss the aftermath of the crisis within the wider context of the project of European integration.

2.1 A Critical Perspective on European Integration: Financialization and the Conditions of a Crisis Response

To understand Europe's response to the 2008 financial crisis, and to contextualise the approach that has been adopted by the EU to the multifaceted crises thereafter, one must take account of the wider processes of European integration which have led up that point. Although the previous chapter identified the development of a narrative within a specific national setting of public discourse, Ireland's membership of the EU constitutes a vital component in fully grasping the institutional response to the crisis. What have been identified as key moments in this case are set within, and often a reflection of, processes taking place at the higher European level, particularly in relation to the responses of other peripheral EU member-states. The following paragraphs will, therefore, outline the direction of European integration as it proceeded towards an ever-increasing reliance upon financialization and market-based solutions to crises and, leading into the next section, how this corresponds to parallel developments in the Irish case

which, although often a reflection of the EU standpoint, will be shown to warrant isolated analysis in the context of the crisis aftermath.

Over the course of the past sixty years, since the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the choice of pursuing European integration along a path which has prioritized an economic route, heavily reliant upon market forces, has become evident. This route has been prioritized ahead of other, political forms of integration, as it was anticipated that this approach would initiate a process of 'cumulative integration', creating a 'positive chain reaction' which would eventually bring the entire continent closer together (Bouin, 2018: 12). Olivier Bouin (2018) points out that a focus on advanced processes of trade liberalization, which was aimed at significantly reducing national opportunistic behaviours within the European community and the better allocation of resources – land and labour – was directed towards achieving a model of sustainable economic cooperation and growth.

A narrative, therefore, developed around the integration of Europe along certain successive steps, pertaining to the positive side of this 'chain reaction strategy'. Bouin, however, raises two grounds upon which this narrative may be fundamentally challenged, "the first dealing with effectiveness, legitimacy and sustainability of such an integration strategy, the second considering the economic and political end point of the European integration process" (2018: 12-13). The former point is associated with what Bouin identifies as "the darker version of the chain reaction strategy" of European integration, which concerns the increasing number of economic problems facing EU member-states. Such problems concern the slowing down of economic growth since the 1980s and issues associated with the transition to a post-industrial economic system, added to this, the mounting evidence of social hardship, specifically on the European periphery, such as rising unemployment and increasing levels of inequality over the past thirty years (2018: 13). This darker side of the chain reaction strategy of integration can be explicated as follows; "when some economic integration created (or was not able to avoid) economic and social imbalances and disruptions across Europe, the response to these problems would be more integration" (2018: 13). In relation to the second point above, the end point of European integration, Bouin points out there is a very significant uncertainty about where this process will lead member-states, a dimension which has revealed deep division regarding the future direction

of the EU, a dispute which was highlighted most explicitly in the referendum on the UK membership of the EU in 2016.

The agenda of the European integration process, which was pursued along a distinctive economic route, initially ran contrary to the policy orientation of the national economies of member-states, which remained through the 1960s and 70s a mixture of social democratic welfare state and a significant degree of regulation along the lines of Keynesian macroeconomic intervention (Bouin, 2018: 14). However, by the end of the 1970s/early 80s, a progressive change at the national level began to orient more towards liberal, free market and private property-based economic systems, generally in line with the agenda of building the EU. This reorientation towards a more pro-market approach was signalled in 1986 by the Single European Act, which transformed what had previously been known as the 'Common Market' into the 'Single Market', initiating a new phase of economic integration promoted by the European Commission. Bouin argues that is was at this point that Europe became fully aligned with the so-called 'Washington Consensus', which is synonymous with the long-run process of economic liberalization, deregulation and privatization on a global scale (2018: 14).

> *The end point of the European economic integration changed progressively from a social market economy (whether of Beveridgian or of Bismarckian origin) into a capitalist market economy (in the 1990s) into a capitalist market society (in the 2000s)* (Bouin, 2018: 15)

Polanyi (1944) identified a link between the rise of finance in the economy and the progressive rise of a market society, in which markets come to dominate the social structures in which they ought to be embedded. Setting this route towards the financialization of the economy as the guiding strategy of European integration is particularly evident over the past thirty years. Although, the processes of financialization have always played some role in capitalist economies, this period has witnessed a deepening and broadening of finance as the foundation of economic activity. Epstein (2005), in developing an inclusive definition of the process, describes it as "the increasing role of financial motives, financial markets, financial actors and financial institutions in the operation of the domestic and international economies" (Epstein, 2005: 3). A process that is often understood to be synonymous with the rise of neoliberalism and globalization, Ben Fine

(2012) provides a more precise definition, which delineates financialization according to eight distinctive features that have developed over the course of the past three decades; i. the exponential growth in financial assets and financial activities relative to the rest of the economy; ii. the proliferation of different types of financial assets and derivative products; iii. the rise of speculative investment in place of real investment, coupled with the maximization of shareholder value as main target; iv. the increasing domination of finance over industry; v. the increasing weight of credit- and asset-inflation-led consumption; vi. the penetration of finance into all areas of economic and social life, such as pensions, education and health; vii. the spread of a 'financial market' anthropology; viii. the re-definition of the role of the state in relation to the promotion of financialization. Fine's definition indicates the complexity and extent of this process, and its manifestation in the context of European integration will be shown to reflect many of these dimensions.

Quantitatively, there are three important measures, identified by Jayadev et al (2018), which indicate the acceleration of financialization, combined with de-regulation and liberalization, trends in Europe since 1970[7]. Firstly, incomes in the financial sector have grown faster than in any of the rest of the economy, the 'total-economy' value of the sector rose from 8.5% in 1970 to 15.1% in 2007 (Jayadev et al., 2018: 9). This growth is constitutive of a broader process involving the expansion of financial systems globally, as researched extensively by the multi-disciplinary group, 'Financialization Economy Society and Sustainable Development' (FESSUD). A second measure that reflects the trend of financialization in Europe is the growth in 'domestic bank assets', which increased from 51% of GDP in 1970 to 130% in 2007 (2018: 9). The size of the banking sector, measured in terms of the ratio of bank deposits to GDP, has therefore grown exponentially, resulting in the emergence of a vast 'shadow banking system', which was at the core of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. The last measure relates to the issue of financial debt, as Jayadev et al. explain, "European households and non-financial firms hold more debt than in the past: private non-financial sector debt rose from 65 per cent of GDP in 1970 to 142 per cent in 2007" (2018: 9). FESSUD, as part of a research project on 'variegated financialization', observed

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[7] Jayadev et al., for the purposes of the article, analyse the countries that make up the European Economic Area, which is essentially all those that are involved in the Single Market

that "the rising indebtedness of households is common across all the countries examined" (Sawyer et al. 2016: 6). In all, the interrelated processes of de-regulation, liberalization and European integration stimulated the rapid expansion of the financial sector and cross-border banking well before the introduction of the Euro currency in 1999. Since then European banks may be regarded as spearheads of the financialization process. Jayadev et al. point out that by 2008 "the median assets-to-equity ratio of the 20 largest European banks had climbed to 32" and that "European investors accounted for the largest financial flows to the US prior to the crisis and held the largest chunk of private label mortgage-backed securities" (2018: 13).

It is perhaps in the realm of ideas that the trend of financialization, and the gradual transition towards the marketization of society, is perhaps most decisive. A core feature of this 'ordo-liberal' economic doctrine – the distinctive European adaptation of neo-liberalism – is that "rational financial markets can be harnessed to impose budgetary discipline on irrational sovereigns" (Jayadev et al., 2018: 11). The essence of this approach, in line with other versions of market liberalism, is reflected in the need for governments to be controlled by the financial markets, in direct contrast to the post-war, social democratic arrangement, in which strict controls on international financial market activity was seen as necessary to preserve national autonomy in the conduct of economic policy. The distinctive feature of ordo-liberalism, which sets it apart as a variety from neoliberalism, relates to the positive role assigned to the state in creating the conditions to sustain a market economy, and crucially, its part in responding to crises. Schnyder and Siems (2013) argue that the 'ordo-institutional' perspectives emanating from this ideological tradition have gained in appeal since the 2008 financial crisis because "they seem to attenuate extreme views of market libertarianism, while still accommodating broadly neo-liberal, anti-Keynesian and anti-socialist ideas" (Schnyder and Siems, 2013: 270). It therefore represents an ideological position which acknowledges the need for the market economy to be somehow ameliorated, or even embedded within a functioning society, while simultaneously maintaining the core neoliberal message, that 'there is no alternative' (TINA).

Contrary to this ideological tradition becoming weakened, or the process of financialization coming into question as the guiding strategy of European integration, these elements would in fact form the justificatory basis of the institutional response to the 2008 financial crisis in Europe,

and, therefore, continue as key structuring forces in the crisis aftermath. One might have expected the crisis as heralding the end of European integration as we knew, yet it reflected the extent of the deep commitment to this strategy which has been adopted and developed over the past thirty years or so. The breaking point of the Global Financial Crisis, which resulted in a contagion effect that spread throughout world markets, came in mid-September 2008 with the collapse of the US bank, Lehman Brothers, which had been preceded by a series of other notable bank failures, including Northern Rock in September 2007 and Bearn Sterns in March 2008. This initial, and most dramatic phase of the crisis revealed significant systemic weaknesses in the EU's financial system, which was heavily exposed to various 'toxic assets' that originated both domestically and in the US.

The crisis quickly uncovered some painful truths about the fragility of this financial system and Europe's response was initially chaotic and mostly implemented on the national level, despite the cross-border implications (Dabrowski, 2009: 43). Dabrowski explains that the factors involved in complicating policy coordination in Europe's early response to the crisis were "the various speeds and strengths of individual economies to shocks, the uneven capacity and resources to provide rescue, the sometimes hasty and nervous reactions on a national and the temptation to free ride" (2009: 43). The principle ultimately guiding the EU's response to the crisis was that of containment. The integrity of the European Monetary Union (EMU) and the Single Market were coming under threat from economic nationalism and an intensifying conflict between troubled banks and their international depositors. To address these threats and attempt to contain the further contagion effects the crisis was having, the institutions of the EU, with assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), began coordinating 'rescue packages', or bailouts, for member-states that had assumed responsible for the debts of private financial institutions, in exchange for the implementation of strict fiscal controls and supervision at that national level, which would become known as austerity programmes.

The politics of bailouts has become a central feature of the crisis aftermath in Europe. With the extraordinary sums of public funding made available to commercial banks, often dwarfing the budgets of many other policy areas, the question of bailouts certainly leaves few people indifferent. On the one hand, public intervention was justified to prevent the entire European

banking system from collapsing and to prevent the risk of further contagion throughout the Union, while on the other hand, this particular form of intervention constituted an unacceptable level of risk to be assumed on behalf of the public, gifting private, in some cases delinquent, financial institutions vast sums of money, thus sustaining unreasonable investments decisions into the future. Understood in the broader context of the strategy of European integration outlined above, the bailout approach adopted reflects the extent to which the EU had become dependent on the functioning of its financial system. However, the increasing accumulation of debt on the periphery, which may be seen as a direct consequence of the long-run processes of financialization and de-regulation, with the consistent flow of capital from the larger core economies outwards, indicated an entirely unsustainable approach. The sheer size of the credit bubbles inflated in these peripheral states, for example, the property sector in Ireland, reflected this and ultimately necessitated some drastic forms of intervention. The coordination, or perhaps more accurately, the imposition of bailout agreements in Europe, which were perceived as a means of allowing for the continuation of an inherently unsustainable and unfair system, would become a fundamental point of public contention and opposition.

The sheer scale of the bailouts mirrors the severe extent to which the crisis was affecting such countries as Iceland, Ireland, Spain and Greece. National schemes, such as the Bank Guarantee Scheme dealt with in the previous chapter, were introduced, and would be supplemented by liquidity support to banks, recapitalizing them and setting up mechanisms to relieve banks of toxic assets, in order to try and prevent individual bank failures from developing into broader financial crisis. The outcome of this was that individual states became responsible for a vast amount of private debt. Grossman and Woll (2014), in their comparative research, quantity the height of expenditures engaged by the various national schemes, which would be reflected in the scale of the resultant bailout arrangements. In the US, bailout costs had passed $1 trillion by the summer of 2009, in the UK it had reached $718 billion, and in Ireland, the expenditure on national schemes to rescue the banking sector reached $614 billion (Grossman and Woll, 2014: 279). To put this in context, Grossman and Woll explain, "for a country like Ireland, such an amount represented 230% of its GDP" (2014: 279). Smaller countries were shown to suffer tremendously

in the aftermath of the crisis, principally because the financial sector had far outgrown the actual capacity of national economies.

The next section will proceed by placing Ireland into this context as a small peripheral European state, and a comparative assessment of crisis experience will be brought forward in relation to two other specific cases. Firstly, Greece will be presented as an example of the extent of the catastrophe that was the 2008 financial crisis and the response adopted to it. The devastation in this case reaches far beyond the economic and political domains, as Stuckler and Basu's (2013) important research has shown in relation to the effects of the imposition of Greek austerity programmes on public health. Secondly, the case of Iceland will be introduced which represents an isolated example of an alternative, democratic response to the financial crisis. Both these cases constitute appropriate modes of comparison with Ireland, exemplifying the fact that although the crisis unfolded in these regions at the same time, the degree of variation in national responses and experiences of the aftermath are significant. Of key importance in the proceeding comparative assessment is the role of different publics in the context of learning how to respond to the crisis, specifically, that of coordinated dissent in resisting certain responses and the narrative this contributed to at the transnational level in the crisis aftermath.

2.2 A Comparative Perspective on Ireland's Crisis-Response

The latest phase of European integration, outlined above, which may be defined by the directed strategy of financialization, is very much mirrored by developments in Ireland. Following a similar timeline, a political focus on the transformation in the domain of financial services from the late 1980s onwards has resulted in Ireland becoming a 'tax haven', a crucial hub in a global network of offshore financial centres. As Conor McCabe argues, "Ireland has shaped its monetary policy and tax laws to serve the international monetary system and has spent decades building up the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) as the 'jewel in the crown' of its strategy of foreign direct investment (FDI)" (McCabe, 2018: 58). Similar to the processes at work on the European level, the conditions leading up to the crisis in Ireland must be understood as part of the unfolding of a distinctive global trend.

There is no set definition of 'austerity'; it is a term, predominantly used critically, to describe a set of policy commitments related to 'fiscal consolidation' and public sector reform. Mark Blythe (2013) provides a useful description; "[A] form of voluntary deflation where the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices and public spending to restore competitiveness, which is (supposedly) best achieved by cutting the state's budget, debts and deficits" (Blythe, 2013: 2). To illustrate the debt-burden on the Irish state following the 2008 crisis, between 2007, when debt to GDP ratio stood at a relatively sustainable level of 25%, and 2012, following the bank guarantee, the establishment of NAMA and the bailout agreement, Ireland had conscripted itself to becoming one of the most indebted countries in the world, reflected in a debt to GDP ratio of 120% (Roche et.al., 2017: 2). The austerity programme embarked upon by the Irish government, which would run in two successive stages from 2008 to 2015, entailed a total financial 'adjustment' of 32billion EUR, "consisting of 20.5billion euros in expenditure cuts and 11.5 billion euros in tax increases" (2017: 3). The 'sacrifice of the Irish people', as it was sometimes referred to, following Roche et al., aside from reflecting a commitment to massive reductions in debt and government spending, also included significant structural reforms, involving labour market and social welfare 'adjustments', which would ultimately take much longer to recover from.

It is difficult to properly quantify the social and political impact of austerity in Ireland, and it is not the intention here to attempt to do so. However, there are some important indicators to be considered in contextualizing the comparative statements that follow. One exceptional factor in the Irish case is certainly emigration. A trend which is evident throughout Irish history, Glynn and O'Connell (2017) identify a dramatic rise in emigration during the economic recession that followed from the financial crisis, which peaked at 89,000 in 2012-13. Significantly relieving the unemployment figures in the aftermath of the crisis, in all 610,000 Irish nationals emigrated between 2008 and 2015. Beyond the quantitative statistics, emigration also involves an emotional cost, as Glynn and Connell observe in relation to families left behind by migrants, "parents could suffer depressive symptoms and loneliness and communities were affected by falling numbers in clubs and social activities" (Glynn and Connell, 2017: 7). A second, less exceptional, impact of austerity in the Irish case relates to the rise of unemployment numbers in the aftermath of the crisis. Barrett and McGuiness (2012) observe that, "in terms of the labour

market, employment fell steeply (14 percent decline between 2007 and 2011), the rate of unemployment soared (an increase of 10 percentage points between 2007 and 2011) and net outward migration resumed" (Barrett and McGuiness, 2012: 33). These figures include a significant degree of long-term unemployment, which have been shown to become much exacerbated in conditions of fiscal austerity. It is also important to bear in mind that the measurement of unemployment figures by means of the 'live register' (a national monthly series recording the numbers of those registered for welfare allowances) often disguises other structural problems related to the number of people in forms of precarious employment (i.e. those workers who are denied permanent employee rights) and those engaged in social welfare schemes that do not appear in the official statistics.

Perhaps the most significant impact of austerity as a response to the financial crisis in Ireland is the overall rise in economic and social-class inequality. As Lynch et al. argue, it is through the continuing rise in inequality in the crisis aftermath that fears about unemployment, emigration and debt have found expression (Lynch et al, 2017: 252). The harms caused by the imposition of a severe austerity programme, they claim, "have been visible on the streets through increased homelessness and begging, in the distressed calls to national radio and help lines, in letters, comments and articles in newspapers and social media, and in Dáil questions and expositions" (Lynch et al, 2017: 252). The evidence is clear that the impoverished and dispossessed members of society have suffered disproportionally from the effects of austerity. Following Central Statistics Office (CSO) figures, the percentage of the Irish population experiencing basic deprivation has doubled since the introduction of austerity policies, increasing from 13.7% in 2008 to 30.5% in 2013. There was, moreover, a marked increase in the level of consistent poverty from 4.2% to 8.2%, over the same period. Lynch et al. observe from this evidence that the most severe deprivation was experienced by lone parents; "their 63 per cent deprivation rate is nearly double that of 2008" (2017: 259). Finally, on the significance of inequality, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of homeless people in Ireland since the beginning of austerity. According to Focus Ireland, a national homeless charity, "there were 9,753 people homeless in the week of December 24th-30th 2018 across Ireland". This figure reflects a consistent and ongoing trend in the aftermath of the crisis response, as O'Sullivan (2016) observes, "the number

of adult homeless persons in designated homelessness accommodation increased by over 80% from June 2014 to October 2016 – an increase of nearly 100% in Dublin and 60% outside of Dublin" (O'Sullivan, 2016: 18).

Despite this evidence, and the other indicative factors mentioned above, which reveal the devastating impact of the financial crisis and the imposition of austerity, Ireland, as touched upon in the previous chapter, is nonetheless held as the exemplar of recovery from the 2008 crisis, or as some commentators have referred to it, the 'poster child for austerity'. Kinsella (2017), and Barry and Bergin (2017) claim that Ireland's experience of austerity was unique in the sense that the deep cuts in public expenditure were "offset by a robust demand for exports in a way that could not be replicated in other Troika programme countries, or indeed more generally" (Kinsella, 2017: 9). Furthermore, Barry and Bergin contend that the Irish business system recovered quickly from the crisis due particularly to its distinctive export orientation and high levels of foreign direct investment, coupled with its close economic ties to countries outside of the Eurozone, which suffered a prolonged sovereign debt crisis. Although these authors stress the exceptional nature of Ireland's experience of austerity, they are in agreement that the timing and extent of Ireland's relative recovery, as measured from the perspective of a return to economic growth, was in no way associated with the policies of austerity. Indeed, there is a unique character to the Irish case of austerity, but this must be understood in a comparative context, in which the experiences of other peripheral states are considered.

The Irish government's decision to adopt austerity by way of response to the crisis may be directly connected to the long-running process of financialization and its associated politics and policies. In many ways, it could be argued, Irish political and administrative elites embraced austerity as an opportunity to further projects aimed at the marketization of public services and public management, given justificatory support through the ideological platform of neo-liberalism. O'Riain (2012), Roche et al. (2017) and Kinsella (2017) all observe that Ireland opted for a form of 'auto austerity', in that the government had committed to an austerity programme before reluctantly agreeing to accept the Troika's support. This leaves open a fundamental question at the heart of the present thesis, how was support for the austerity programme sustained despite the negative affect it would almost certainly have a large portion of the population? It is in

relation to the accommodation of austerity that Ireland is set apart in the aftermath of the crisis from other 'programme countries', where resistance, political volatility and capital flight have been much more pronounced (Roche et al, 2017: 9). The confrontational forms of political and social dissent generated in Southern peripheral European states were, in comparison, muted and/or contained in the Irish context. What is perhaps most illustrative of this point is the fact that all major political parties accepted the need for austerity and sought to accommodate the bailout programme with the Troika. Moreover, as Roche et al. explain, "rather than acting as agents of protest and dissent, unions in Ireland opted for accommodation with the agents of austerity, seeing this as the lesser of evils" (Roche et al., 2017: 9).

The experience of austerity in Greece, and the continuing political reaction to it, presents a stark contrast to Ireland. Although many of the same features of the financial crisis are also evident in this case, such as rising unemployment, emigration, poverty and social exclusion, the Greek situation is exceptional in presenting the unfolding of a catastrophe, which was precipitated by an extreme reduction in GDP (25% in all), equivalent to that of a war period, and will have long-lasting consequences associated with deep uncertainty regarding social and economic prospects. From the comparative European perspective being adopted here, Greece may be cast as the 'bad child' to contrast Ireland's 'poster child'.

The Global Financial Crisis of 2007-2008 initially effected Greece in much the same way as it did other fragile peripheral economies, exposing domestic weaknesses associated with low exports and high levels of corruption, along with an unsustainable public debt to GDP, which had been showing signs of deterioration since 2004 (Mavridis, 2018). However, it wasn't until October 2009 that the true extent of the budget deficit was exposed by the newly elected government, debt in relation to GDP had reached 109.4% (Mavridis, 2018: 3). The financial markets subsequently lost all confidence in the Greek economy, and with over 70% of its debt held by foreign investors, primarily European banks, the country faced default and bankruptcy on a national scale. In May 2010, adopting the approach Ireland would later follow, Greece officially sought financial help from the Troika, resulting in a 'Bailout Loan Agreement' which would eventually total 239 billion EUR. In contrast to Ireland, however, Greece would sign three Memorandums (Economic Adjustment Programmes), which committed the government to much more intensive and long-

term implementation of austerity measures, structural reforms and privatization of government assets. Mavridis explains, "According to these Memoranda, the fiscal crisis had to be faced through a tough consolidation process, while the most important instruments to meet the competitiveness crisis were drastic wage and salary cuts, liberalization of the labour market and services market liberalization" (2018: 2). This drastic approach, despite the extent of the structural reforms, the cutting of wages, raising of taxes and overall reduction in public investments, did not succeed in recovering the Greek economy and ultimately would result in the deepest and longest recession in European history (Matsaganis, 2018: 49)

The exceptional tragedy of the Greek crisis relates to the election of an anti-austerity coalition government, led by the radical left SYRIZA party, with the nationalist right Anel ('Independent Greeks'), in January 2015. This coalition came to power on the back of a single commitment, made by the leader of SYRIZA Alexis Tsipras on the eve of the election, "to end austerity with a single Act of Parliament on Day 1 from taking power" (Matsaganis, 2018: 50). In a referendum, which took place on 5 July 2015, the Greek public voted to reject the Troika's 'unbearable' austerity conditions, by a margin of 61.31% to 38.69%. However, despite the overwhelming result, in May 2016 the Greek government was eventually forced to accept the entire list of 'prior actions' demanded by creditors and enshrined in the bailout agreement from the year before – "the third of its kind since the Greek crisis began six years earlier" (2018: 49). Following years of mass mobilization in opposition to austerity, 2010-2015, this moment was epitomised by a numbing resignation. Matsaganis describes the capitulation of the Greek government as follows, "the morning after the intoxicating experience of the anti-austerity rising felt like a hangover" (2018: 50). The situation looked unmistakably grim, with a quarter of the population unemployed, businesses struggling to survive and young educated Greeks emigrating in droves.

> *It looked as if the dream of a quick fix to the hardship and humiliation of recent years, a dream at once noble and ugly, had been shattered for good* (Matasganis, 2018: 50)

Greece has come to represent a cautionary tale to other European countries, like Ireland. The economic and social damage left in the wake of the financial crisis in this case, by almost any measure, is devastating. Klaus Offe (2018) depicts the Greek experience of austerity as part of a

'narrative of responsibility' played out in the context of Europe, as a contrast to Germany. Offe's distinction seeks to determine how responsibility in such a complex situation becomes attributed, understanding it as a clash of two essentially incompatible frames. On the one hand, he claims, it is through an agency-focused interpretation of the dismal situation and its origins (German), and, on the other, it is the fault of institutions at the structural level (Greece). Offe observes that from this basic distinction two conflicting narratives emerge, which animate the conflict, ultimately guiding it to a conclusion. In this depiction, the dominant German narrative, which attributed responsibility for the financial crisis on Greece for not following 'the rules' as they should, won out. Therefore, the Greek referendum, which sought to democratically resist the institutional response of the EU to impose an austerity programme and propose an alternative response to the crisis failed, and ultimately came to personify the 'bad child' of Europe.

This idea of punishing Greece for breaking the rules, which correlates with certain responsibility narratives, may be contrasted with the development of a 'good child' narrative in relation to Ireland in the wake of the crisis. Keeping to the rules in this context is thus considered virtuous and therefore appropriately rewarded, and their violation, as in the case of Greece, represents a clear sign of moral inferiority, which must be appropriately sanctioned. Offe makes the point that, from this view of responsibility, wherever disturbances of the normal, rule-bound course of affairs emerge, its causes are assumed to be found on the spot, "not in mechanisms of long-distance-causation extending in time and space" (2018: 285). The introduction of the principle of responsibility shifts the problem to a moral dimension. However, as it will be described in the Irish context later, in Chapter 4., responsibility appears only in a highly restricted sense through the discourse of blame. In the Greek case, Germany, the enforcer of sanctions for rule-breaking, was engaged in a process of blame-avoidance; it was constructed as an imperative that brutal sanctions must be enforced for fear of moral hazard in Europe. Offe argues that blame-avoidance was a "driving motive of the ECB" at this time, "The ECB's decision to grant Greece's banks just enough funds to see them through the end of the day is part of a broader strategy to avoid having blood on its hands" (2018: 285). The principle of responsibility, and its degradation in the context of the crisis response, reflects a central normative element of the proceeding critique.

By way of a final comparative point, if Greece is understood as a cautionary tale in the European context, the case of Iceland's response to the financial crisis presents an important paradigmatic alternative that reflects a somewhat troublesome comparison with both cases above. Although the circumstances in relation to the relatively insignificant population size (338,349 according to Eurostat) and its status as a member of the European Economic Area (EEA), but not the Eurozone or the EU more generally, it is argued here, Iceland presents an appropriate comparison. Firstly, the causes of and path towards the crisis in the national context are similar to that of other peripheral European states, i.e. an aggressive programme of financial liberalization and privatization from the early 1990s, followed by a highly leveraged and hyper-paced period of economic growth, fuelled by massive stock market and housing bubbles. Secondly, to illustrate the extent of Icelandic bank debt, which, similarly to the cases of Greece and Ireland, was owned predominantly by foreign banks, Hart-Landsberg (2013) makes the point that when the three largest Icelandic banks failed within the first two weeks of October 2008, their bankruptcies (Kaupthing; $83 billion, Landsbanki; $50 billion and Glitnir; $49 billion) would, cumulatively, have ranked third in the U.S history of bankruptcies, after Lehman ($691 billion) and Washington Mutual ($328 billion) (Hart-Landsberg, 2013: 32). To further place this in perspective, following Hart-Landsberg's observations, the currency (krona) fell by more than 80% in 2008, real wages fell by 4.2% in the same year and 8% the next, unemployment soared from 1% to 8% between 2007 and 2009, and lastly, Iceland suffered one of the world's deepest economic declines in the same period, with GDP falling by 9.3%.

The most important point of comparison with the cases of Ireland and Greece, however, is that the Icelandic government, amidst a worsening banking and currency crisis in late October 2008, turned to the International Monetary Fund for help. Of course, the IMF's assistance was conditional, Iceland had to reimburse the governments of the UK and the Netherlands for debt they had guaranteed in one of the three bankrupted institutions (Icesave, a branch of Landsbanki). This condition would require the implementation of austerity measures, sizable tax hikes and significant cuts in government spending. The Icelandic government, as with the decisions taken by the Irish and Greek, agreed to the terms, and in exchange would receive a $2.1 billion loan from the IMF, and an additional $3 billion from the Nordic Countries and Russia (2013:

43). By late October 2008, the Icelandic public began coordinated protests against the proposed bailout agreement with the IMF, anchored by weekly rallies in Reykjavik's main square and meetings in its main theatre. The objective of the movement, which was termed the 'pots and pans revolution' was to force the resignation of the Prime Minister and to elect a new government. In contrast to the outcome of protests in Greece, the Iceland movement not only succeeded in its primary objective, coinciding with the election of a coalition between the Social Democratic Alliance and the Left-Green Movement, but it was followed through in rejecting the IMF's proposals. As Hart-Landsberg points out, Iceland's is the only government to have actually resigned as a result of the global financial crisis and "it is also the only country to have shifted decisively to the left in the aftermath of September 2008" (2013: 34).

In stark contrast to the experiences of both Greece and Ireland, Iceland's new progressive government adopted a series of policy actions which, rather than attempting to resuscitate existing structures and patterns of economic activity through austerity measures, sought to actively intervene in financial, housing and currency markets, also increasing public spending on social programmes that protected the majority interests. Although this response was certainly unconventional by international standards, it has proven to be more successful in promoting economic recovery and protecting majority well-being than the more conventional approaches of other European governments. What is most significant and why the popular movement in Iceland, which rejected the austerity conditions of the IMF, deserves greater recognition is the fact that, in a time of profound crisis and uncertainty, the public succeeded in building a project that initiated a meaningful social and political transformation. It is, therefore, the symbolic significance of this moment that is of greatest importance in confronting the idea that 'there is no alternative', and that the only response to the financial crisis was the re-establishment of the same system that led to the conditions of crisis in the first place.

To conclude, the accounts of both Greece and Iceland illustrate responses that present a contrast to the Irish experience of the financial crisis. In relation to the former, a broad-based popular movement succeeded in electing a government that brought forward and passed a referendum to reject the Troika's bailout terms, however, this ended in tragedy as the government were eventually forced to accept the terms and impose the austerity measures prescribed, leading to

a catastrophic economic and social aftermath. In the case of Iceland, the public, in a similar fashion, generated a movement that forced the resignation of one government and the election of another that rejected the austerity conditions of a bailout agreement with the IMF, however, the outcome was much more positive and reflects the viable possibility of a democratic response to the crisis. Although, as noted in the latter section of the previous chapter, the Irish public did generate a significant resistance to the introduction of austerity measures in the earlier phase of the crisis and succeeded in some instances in forcing the government to roll back on proposed measures, the extent of the political and social change witnessed in the above comparisons does not seem to be evident in this case. This brings us to the key problem of the thesis, which will provide the focus of the proceeding chapters; what is unique to the Irish experience and how is this reflected in the response to the 2008 financial crisis?

3.

The Development of a Conservative Cultural Model:
Irish Political Culture and the Conditions of Public Discourse

Public discourse is the manifest expression of underlying cultural conditions. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis in Ireland is analysed here as the discursive crystallization of a public narrative that emerged to justify the institutional response. The key discursive moments, therefore, which were identified as forming elements of this narrative, reflect mechanisms that draw their justificatory power from a deeper source. The focus of the present chapter will be to explicate this source, employing the concept of the cultural model, following the work of Alain Touraine, to theorize the way in which culturally embedded learning patterns become established in line with the development of a conservative ideology in the Irish case. This presents a critical approach to understanding the way in which certain discourses and justifications become selected over others in a historically specific context.

As a mediating selectivity structure, the cultural model may be understood here as somewhat of a filtration system, operating at a meso level, in between micro and macro, retaining those discourses deemed relevant in a situation and eliminating or 'filtering out' those that are irrelevant. Crucially, the concept allows for a recognition of the dominant self-perception of society at work in a specific historical context, as Touraine explains, which is organised around certain representations of social life according to notions of "social movement, structural conflict and cultural stakes" (Touraine, 1985: 765). These 'stakes' refer to the "social control of the main cultural patterns, that is, of patterns through which our relationship with the environment are normatively organised" (1985: 755). Ultimately, the cultural model represents the dominant image of a society, and therefore, determines the mediating environment within which social movements and conflicts, which present alternative projections of the what the society could potentially be, may challenge the reproduction of a given social formation.

The financial crisis of 2008 is represented here as an exceptional moment in which the Irish cultural model, set within the broader European context, is exposed and challenged. Important

'repair work', revealed in the course of public discursive struggles over the significance of events and specific crisis management strategies on the part of the Irish government, was carried out to shore up the cultural model – to re-establish and maintain the dominant image of Irish society in a post-Celtic Tiger era, and restrain alternative discourse from substantially threatening this. The institutional response to the crisis, therefore, which is encapsulated in the public narrative outlined above, discloses an impression of the Irish cultural model in the process of repairing its essential integrative principles. In Chapter 4, two of these integrative principles, legitimacy and responsibility, will be rooted out of the narrative through the process of a critique of the public discourse, and accordingly reconstructed in order to disclose the normative democratic potentials they contain. It is through the processes of collective learning that these potentialities may become realized. The cognitive theory of social learning, at the centre of which lies a conceptualization of the cultural model, details the discursive mechanisms involved in these processes and, as in the case of Ireland, allows for the identification of learning blockages that stand in the way of discursive and normative innovation.

The crisis is essentially framed as an opportunity for learning. This initiated a process of reflection on the legitimacy of the response to it, revealed in the discursive repair work captured in the public narrative, and, in a second sense, the way in which the principle of responsibility is then construed in the situation through the negative dialectic of blame. In the case of Ireland, therefore, a learning opportunity presents itself in the context of the crisis, however, it is not seized upon as a moment of transformation, as in the cases of Greece and Iceland – of course, as outlined in Chapter 2, both with varying degrees of success. This leads to a critical juncture in the present thesis, which demands the identification and explication of the specific processes of blocked learning in the Irish context. The chapter will, therefore, proceed by arguing for the development of an impression of the Irish cultural model that is dominated by the ideology of conservatism or, following Mannheim, a dominant mode of thought pertaining to the domain of political economy. A cultural model will be constructed which is essentially resistant to social and political change, reflected in the realization of such principles as legitimacy and responsibility. Importantly, however, the Irish cultural model may not be simply categorized as representing a

conservative hegemony, it therefore requires further clarification at this point to delineate what is an ambiguous context and to elucidate the perspective adopted in the proceeding critique.

Ireland has undoubtedly experienced a significant wave of progressive-liberal transformations over the last twenty years. The achievement of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, which was an innovative political solution to sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, may be taken as a beginning point in this sense. A peace deal, which has had a lasting impact on approaches to conflict resolution on an international scale – serving as a template to resolutions in such regions as Sudan, Bosnia and South Africa – it heralded a new era in Irish politics, decisively moving beyond the old civil war politics of the early twentieth century. The establishment of peace in Northern Ireland provided the political facility for the acceleration of economic growth and prosperity, manifested in the form of the 'Celtic Tiger'. Perhaps two of the most symbolically powerful events in this stream of liberalization in Ireland actually occurred in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis itself, namely, two referendums that were passed on the issues of same-sex marriage in 2015 and the regulation of abortion in 2018. The results of these recent referendums, which were convincingly passed by 62% in the case of the former and 66% the latter, are certainly indicative a major shift in Irish society, away from the dogmatic teachings of the Catholic Church as the primary source of moral guidance on social and cultural matters. A final example of the way in which Ireland has progressed in a decisively liberal direction relates to the domain of parliamentary politics and the emergence of a 'new politics' in the aftermath of the crisis. Beginning in May 2016, the Irish government has been held together by virtue of an unlikely alliance between the two major centre-right parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. This new arrangement for governing parliamentary politics, which seemed to transcend the old nationalist, civil war divisions, reflects further the establishment of a liberal consensus that has become embedded in Irish political culture over the course of the past two decades or so.

These developments, which some have claimed, echoing Fukuyama, signaled the end of Irish history (Coulter and Coleman, 2003), however, do not reflect the full picture of Irish political culture, as it is understood here from the perspective of the cultural model. Indeed, liberal progress has been made in significant areas of Irish society, specifically in the domains of civil and political rights, but when the issues of socio-economic rights and class inequality are taken into

account, a more complicated impression begins to emerge. Although the Celtic Tiger boom in Ireland, which, as discussed in Chapter 2, coincided with an embrace of the processes of financialization, produced a vast overall increase in wealth, it also generated a significant increase in wage inequality, reflecting the degree to which this newly discovered wealth was not fairly distributed across the society during the period of rapid economic growth. Voitchovsky, Maitre and Nolan (2012), through a quantitative analysis of wage inequality in Ireland between 1994 and 2007, make the argument that the Irish case presents a valuable example of the way in which inequality can actually evolve during a period of exceptional economic growth. Their conclusion suggests that the benefits of a such a rapid and vast increase in overall economic prosperity is not reflected in the earnings of those at the lower level of the socio-economic spectrum, particularly in the period 2000 to 2007. The progressive liberal developments, therefore, which may rightly be heralded as clear indications of the 'opening up' of a conservative society that was once dominated and repressed by the Catholic Church, in fact disguises a more complex pattern of sustaining and reproducing contradictions in the underlying cultural model.

These unavoidable contradictions are exposed in the context of the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath. The Celtic Tiger marked a transformative phase in Irish society at the beginning of the twenty-first century, buoyed by a liberal political agenda, the integrated processes of financialization and the emergence of a young and well-educated population. This period of economic boom presented Ireland as a satisfactory combination of old traditions and new liberal values, however, the conservative pillars of the society, most notably the Catholic Church and Fianna Fail, were in no way swept aside and remained a strong presence. Therefore, when the Irish construction industry collapsed and the economy became fully exposed to the global financial crisis, the tension in what was represented in this combination became clear. It was latently maintained during the period of economic prosperity as it served to sustain the existing power structure, however, as the crisis presented a threat to this underlying structure, the conservative forces emerged to re-establish order. The imposition of austerity, as explained in Chapter 2, exemplifies the way in which the responsibility for the crisis was to be shared, in this sense, political elites emphasizing the nationalist 'we' in accepting the government's approach. The aftermath of the crisis also represents the attempt to re-establish the same unsustainable

economic conditions of the Celtic Tiger (an average of 6% GDP growth between 2000 and 2008), specifically focusing on such policies that prioritize the re-inflation of property prices, taken as a primary indication of economic recovery, which has already shown to have disastrous socio-economic effects, reflected in the record levels of homelessness.

The conditions of learning which are, therefore, shaped in this cultural complex of a national setting become discernible when faced with having to thematize and respond to a crisis. Following the cognitive sociological theory of learning, developed in Chapter 5., which develops the idea of varying 'modes' of learning that may constitute a spectrum of relevance in a specific context and also a mechanism to 'filter out' irrelevant discourses, the objective here is to postulate those elements within the Irish cultural model, preventing, for instance, the generation of alternative narratives in responding to the crisis. Given that this reflects a distinctly conservative model, which is therefore capable of sustaining deeply problematic contradictions, the lack of public recognition and understanding of the problems faced in the context of the financial crisis reflects this engrained structure standing in the way of normative learning. The development of a public sphere in the context of the Irish national setting coincides with the emergence of a form of hegemonic nationalism, reflected in the distinctive form of power that bears on the conditions of public discourse and the related prospects for further participation in the democratic process. Moreover, the normative culture, highlighting in particular the issue of social class and the unequal distribution of political power, identifies the generative features of the Irish social structure which is rarely given explicit analytical treatment. In what follows, I will explicate the distortions and contradictions produced in the conservative Irish cultural model, firstly through the development of a political culture that reflects an order of normative repression and, in a subsequent section, through an account of the socio-cultural implications of conservatism as a dominant political ideology.

3.1 Delineating a Cultural Model: Irish Political Culture, Nationalism and Class

The cultural model concept, which is key to the critical sociological approach adopted here, comprises political culture as an element within a wider structural arrangement. The analysis of

political culture in Ireland presents a research tradition that will, therefore, be drawn upon in delineating a crucial dimension of the cultural model at stake here, specifically in relation to understanding the way in which a certain 'order of discourse' can emerge out of distinctive conditions. These conditions will be shown to reflect the existence of a 'form of consciousness' or mode of thought in the Irish case, a context in which a dominant ideology functions to support, stabilize and legitimize certain kinds of social institutions and practices. To guide the proceeding analysis, the Critical Theory approach is reintroduced with reference to the problem of ideology in the proceeding section. This will be brought forward through the idea of 'normative repression' or 'Herrschaft' (loosely translated as 'authority'), often employed by Habermas to delineate an ideology as a 'world-picture' that serves to stabilize and/or legitimize domination or hegemony.

The narrative identified in the opening empirical chapter, resulting from an observation of public discourse, reflects a complex of underlying normative political conditions. Eve Chiapello and Norman Fairclough (2002), through a transdisciplinary combination of the 'new sociology of capitalism' and critical discourse analysis, explicate the dialectical relationship between the mechanism of discourse, which constitutes the basic elements of any public narrative, and the development of an 'order of discourse' or, more generally, a normative order. From this perspective, therefore, what is referred to as an 'order of discourse' constitutes a process of social structuring, as Chiapello and Fairclough put it, "a social structuring of semiotic difference – a particular social ordering of relationships amongst different ways of making meaning, i.e. different discourses, genres and styles" (Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002: 194). One important aspect of this ordering process is dominance, which reflects a situation in which a certain way of 'making-meaning' is dominated by a particular order of discourse, a mainstream, thus rendering other discourses as 'marginal', oppositional or, as in the context of the present case, 'alternative'. Fairclough (1992) claims that, in this context, the political concept of 'hegemony' may be useful in the analysis of such an order of discourse, as the structuring process has become part of legitimating what may be understood as 'common sense', thus sustaining relations of domination.

The distinctiveness of Irish political culture may be attributed to a range of historical processes, most of which, in some way or another, relate to the role of the British state. Three of the main

characteristics, often highlighted as central to this distinctiveness, are the interrelated, historically rooted factors of Irish nationalism, the role of the Catholic Church and a rural-based, agricultural economy. The political culture that emerged from this basic arrangement, which would provide for a projection of an ideal image of Irish society, is probably best summarised in Eamon de Valera's 1934 speech: "The Ireland which we have dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basic of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to 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 rompings of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens; whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. It would, in a word, be the home of a people living the life that God desires that men should live" (Girvin, 1993: 383). Given the liberal secular developments in Ireland over the past twenty years, mentioned in the last section, however, the proceeding analysis will not emphasize the role of the Church, and will instead focus on the issues of nationalism, specifically the emergence of distinctive national identity, and on the issue of class, a socio-economic category which tends to be a more stabilized component of a cultural model and thus, less susceptible to change over a relatively short period of time.

Tom Garvin (1996) maps the development of an Irish political culture from a critical democratic perspective. Focusing on the early 1920s and the struggle for the formation of a new Irish state, Garvin seeks to explain a complex process, "far from being a squalid squabble between conspirators who envied and distrusted each other, as it appeared certainly to many English and Irish eyes, the conflict echoed a deep division in the Irish political mind" (Garvin, 1996: 139). The distinction between the opposing sides, pro- and anti-Treaty, in the civil war (1922-23) becomes particularly significant, as Garvin argues, the differences were based, not on some ethnic, settler-versus-native dimension, but rather on class and "elite differences of a non-sociological nature; mutual distrust, envy and contempt amounted to a paranoia that had long underlain formal friendship and ties of loyalty and affection – an emotional set of collective relationships now unreconstructable" (Ibid, 1996: 142-3). This distinction would have profound cultural implications for the development of the Irish state;

...it tended to follow a divide that separated those who saw the Republic as a moral and transcendental entity analogous to the Church of Christ, and entity whose citizens were duty-bound to defend it with their purses and their lives, from those who saw the Republic as a bargaining device in achieving rational-legal self-government for as much of Ireland as possible, regardless of formal political labels (Garvin, 1996: 143)

From this distinction, building upon an earlier study of Jeffery Praeger's, Garvin develops two categories to differentiate the dominant 'subcultures' or 'collective political styles' which constitute the parameters of Irish political culture at this formative period; 'republican moralism' and 'nationalist pragmatism' (1996: 145). In relation to the former, moralism of political style, similar to O'Malley's observation of the 'authoritarian attitude', refers to an inability "to handle the political ideas of those who thought differently, and a related tendency to see disagreement as necessarily motivated by unworthy considerations" (1996: 145). The idea of 'nationalist pragmatism', on the other hand, relates to an indifference to political convictions and promotes a certain political minimalism; he explains, politics is seen from this perspective as "a process by which large numbers of people settled their differences non-violently, rather than a process by which human beings become better people" (1996: 145). Moralism, Garvin explains, is associated with a form of 'communalism', a political community rooted in the local, it is "supervised as a shepherd might supervise his flock, is caring, values personal contact, and is profoundly distrustful of change or of individual thought" (1996: 145). In contrast, he describes the pragmatist's political system as resembling "an impersonal, unloved, and unloving machine that processes demands from citizens impersonally and in a rule-bound way" (1996: 146). It is the political culture of a certain idealised citizen, the bourgeois, the well-off, and the literate. The conditions within which this oppositional structure of political mentalities would evolve are summarised by Garvin in the following;

Irish society at the time of the founding of the modern Irish democracy was essentially peasant, although it was evolving rapidly into a classic western free-farmer society. It was also a society that had an inherited terror of poverty and had rather good levels of elementary education but very few highly educated people. The destruction of so much of the Anglo-Irish culture that occurred during the revolution exacerbated the problem any

democratic government would have had: that of running the country. In some ways,
independent Ireland had a serious problem of mentality (Garvin, 1996: 152)

Patrick O'Mahony and Gerard Delanty (2001) make the case that to critically examine the consequences of previous decisions and actions in terms of understanding the establishment of discernible goals for a society, one must deal with the genesis and institutionalization of its identity, or more precisely, its national identity. Critically reflecting upon the development of such a process, and considering the mode of reasoning it engenders, they find Irish national identity to appear as fragile, defensive and ultimately dismissive in the face of any criticism; "the society has felt afraid of finding problems with itself and of exposing contradictions" (O'Mahony and Delanty, 2001: 1). O'Mahony and Delanty offer a distinctive sociological approach, pursuing reasons beyond the limits of historical research to present a synthetic approach that facilitates reflection on how an emphasis on nationalism, reproduced and carried by this distinctive class structure, has had a significant effect on the process of democratization in the society.

Ireland's path through the twentieth century may be characterized as something of a moral maze. Often, British responsibility for 'colonial exploitation' is the argument put forward against taking a critical perspective on Ireland. However, following O'Mahony and Delanty, it is understood here "that Irish nationalism was sufficiently successful in its goal of achieving national self-determination as to deserve responsibility, positively or negatively, for shaping this century in the southern part of Ireland, allowing of course for the nature of the resources it historically inherited and the continuing effect of events beyond its borders" (2001: 2). In other words, responsibility should not be deflected away from the choices made in one way or another by social groups in society. The sociological perspective advanced below allows for crucial links to be made between (middle) class interests and values, and national identity, the institutionalization of a conservative political culture and Irish nationalism, and ultimately, between the unfolding of and response to the 2008 financial crisis and the weakened role of democracy in an extremely dependent and repressive state.

It is through understanding Irish national identity that the context of the political choices made over time can be revealed, which are often shown to be beyond those that were perceived as

'forced' by the existing situation and the logic of events. O'Mahony and Delanty argue, "Irish nationalism on the whole did choose the kind of society it wanted, albeit in a conflictual, constrained and uncertain way, and its choices are revealed in the fluctuating fortunes and evolution of its code of national identity" (2001: 2). National identity is here understood as the "cultural outcome of a discourse of the nation", serving the purposes of providing a sense of collective belonging, the basis for a form of citizenship in the nation-state context, determining the character and goals of that nation-state, and producing a corresponding form of political identity, which transfers the substance of cultural identity into values that underpin political activity (2001: 3). Existing alongside a multitude of other identities in modern democracies but holding a special position among them due to its close connection to the notion of state citizenship, national identity is reproduced in an unstable field between, O'Mahony and Delanty explain, "cultural discourses of common bonds and practices and political discourses of interests and rights" (2001: 3). Generating also a form of *symbolic mobilization*, are two main components that make up this mode of identity; a national *cultural* identity is constructed around values and rules of collective belonging, which become embedded in the nation's social institutions, such as the family, education, healthcare; and, a national *political* identity, which is built upon the values and rules that guide political practice and institutions. It is, they contend, the tension between the cultural discourses of the nation and the broader civic values constituting that political culture that can allow for contradictions in the given social order to come to the surface;

> *If political identity is shaped by cultural discourses of the nation and not by other sources of political values, the introduction or preservation of norms that guarantee the fairness and impartiality of democratic institutions may be threatened. This may arise if shifts in national cultural identity that follow the wishes of a majority are too rapidly institutionalized. In this scenario, the rights of minorities, for example, may be rapidly diminished if a racist or xenophobic cultural attitude becomes widely diffused and political significant* (O'Mahony and Delanty, 2001: 4)

Nationalism, in some form, is central to the identity of all nation-states. With its emphasis on defining oneself according to what one is *not,* as opposed to what constitutes group solidarity, nationalism often manifests itself in a chauvinistic sense, leading to racism and a general distrust

of 'foreigners'; "Irish nationalism might reasonably have been defined as anti-Britishness rather than 'Irishness'… (O'Malley, 2011: 112). Conservatism, a second feature O'Malley highlights, refers broadly to the relationship between the state and society, and the extent to which the former tends to 'interfere' in the latter. While this idea will be developed later in relation to the cultural evolution of conservatism, for present purposes conservatism may be understood as placing emphasis on individual, personal responsibility and general distrust of the state.

Conservatism, and the values associated with it, provides support for 'traditional' view of society. In the Irish context, these have manifested themselves in support for the historical role of the Catholic church in social life, which, O'Malley points out, represents a key factor that he terms an 'authoritarian attitude'; "Though this type of authoritarian attitude is declining, it does demonstrate the tendency of Irish people to feel that people should be able to impose their views on others" (Ibid, 2011: 113). Lastly, the persistence of a peasant culture, encapsulated in the landlord/tenant relationship, represents an important element in the development of Irish political culture. Although, similarly to the idea of 'Catholic authoritarianism', it may no longer saliently exist in the society, it is persevered in the present through an emphasis on such principles as loyalty (2011: 113). O'Malley discusses the importance of loyalty to one's own group in relation to the Irish political phenomenon of Fianna Fail, which characterizes a culture of loyalty in which dissent would never be shown to party outsiders (2011: 113); this is, more generally, related to the problem of clientelism and political brokerage in Irish politics.

The development of Irish national identity, which may also be viewed as consistent with the general European experience regarding the formation of nation-states, signifies the development of a political culture characterised by a cultural anti-modernism and a distinctive form of political authoritarianism, embodied, as noted above, in the positioning of the two dominant conservative political parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. Although these factors, which appear antithetical to the development of a modern democratic social order, have faded over time with the general, albeit reluctant, acceptance of a growing secularisation, sexual liberation, a more pronounced individualism and of course social welfare commitments, there remains a deep-seated cultural contradiction. O'Mahony and Delanty observe a return to the explicit themes of the nation in Ireland, particularly around the turn of the twenty-first century, coinciding with the development

of the 'Celtic Tiger', which, they argue, was both backward-looking in the sense of nostalgia for the certainties of traditional, Catholic Ireland, yet also forward-looking, attempting to accommodate "itself somewhat uneasily to social change while seeking to create a new cultural nation-code extending beyond existing institutional frameworks" (2001: 6). The power of conservative Catholic nationalism in shaping the institutional political order of Ireland, through the imposition of prescriptive ethical codes governing such spheres as the family, the public sphere, the economy, education and art, is indeed significant, particularly when viewed from the critical perspective of a democratic social order. The deep contradictions which were exposed by the response to the financial crisis, from this perspective, reveal a society at odds with itself, unable to reflect upon or thematise democratic principles at a crucial point in time.

Drawing on Delanty and O'Mahony's (2002) interpretation of Norbert Elias' empirical-theoretical work on the construction of national cultures, the preceding observations on Irish society may be set in another context. By delineating national cultural norms associated with the institutionalization of certain principles over time, Elias developed typology of the national *habitus* within a European civilizational framework. There were three major traditions delineated in this framework; in the case of England, he identified a dynamic between the ideas of freedom and authority, tolerance and inequality, self-discipline and pragmatism; in France, ideological intolerance and instrumentalism, authoritarianism and formalism; and Germany, authoritarianism, bureaucratism, discipline and conformism (Delanty and O'Mahony, 2002: 67). National political cultures thus formed along the lines of the different experiences of state-formation, an outcome which Elias understood as the culmination of centuries-long struggles within and between territories, constituting conflicts and alliance-building processes between monarchical, aristocratic and bourgeois elements. It is ultimately, as Delanty and O'Mahony point out, through his understanding of the formation of *conscience* – 'conscientization' – in the civilization of western modernity that distinctive national paths, and the associated collective identities, may be charted.

The construction of national cultures situates the functional importance of nationalism as an integrative ideology within states, also constituting boundary conditions regarding other nation-states. The former relates to the development of a particular national ethos and sensibility, which

is constructed out of the dynamics of social forces within the nation itself (2002: 69). Elias defined this process as the formation of a 'canon', which Delanty and O'Mahony conceptualize as being deeply related to the learning processes that are generated within a distinctive culture and therein diffused out of the defined milieux of social classes (2002: 69). From this distinction, a general normative orientation of a national culture may be identified, and ultimately subjected to critique. Considering the Irish case from the viewpoint of learning processes which are determined by the historical development of a distinctive ethos and sensibility of the nation, which in turn is shaped by the institutionalization of certain principles in the political public sphere, a discernible pattern begins to emerge. Irish national culture reproduces the conditions of a deeply conservative society, the outcome of a learning process which is fundamentally at odds with the democratic alignment of the enlightenment principles of modernity. As it will be argued, through the prioritization of certain principles over any consideration of the democratic will of the Irish public, the 2008 crisis presents an intellectual opportunity to make explicit this problematic learning process, and in doing so disclose a denied potentiality for a democratic mode of public discourse, in relation to which the legacy of the crisis is most profound.

The second distinction, which will be used in delineating the specific form of cultural model relevant to the Irish national context and its distinctive mode of public discourse, is the socio-economic category of class. In many ways closely related to the idea of nationalism in this context, the classical understanding of this broad concept refers to relational categories within an overall structure of the cultural model of the time. Explicating the relationship between the dynamics of labour and capital, between the capitalist class and the working class, it may be understood through what Marx termed the means of production, which in a capitalist social formation, is ultimately characterised by exploitation. Levine (1998) provides an appropriate outline of the concept as follows;

> *It is this 'hidden' contradiction that results in the antagonistic relationship between labour and capital and forms the basis for conflict in capitalist society. Hence, the opposing interests of the two different classes (the interest of the capitalists being the increase in profits and the interest of the working class being the increase in wages) lead the two classes to objective conflict* (Levine, 1998: 4)

In the Irish context, the lop-sided development reflected in the emphasis on the middle class, as a distinctive political group, through the twentieth century characterizes a process of social change that "worked insidiously and unbeknown to those it was affecting" (Farmer, 2010: vii). In fleshing out the cultural codes and aspirations of this burgeoning middle class, Farmer (2010) examines two books of etiquette published in the in the 1960s aimed at the future (male) breadwinner, which help to illuminate some interesting dynamics representative of this distinctive group; Martin Molloy's 'Book of Irish Courtesy' and 'Christian Politeness', written by the Christian Brothers themselves (2010: 224). Although the latter, rather obviously, presents a dull set of guidelines for 'fulfilling of the Divine precept', the former offers a crucial insight into the extent of class-consciousness in Ireland at the time. Referring to the "aristocratic temper of the Irish mind", Farmer explains in relation to Molloy, there was an unease about the genre of class, that Ireland perceived itself as a distinctly *classless* society (2010: 224), specifically in contrast to Britain; "Despite their long years of hardship, the Irish never became bourgeois: their minds were too fine, too sensitive", according to Molloy (2010: 224). Also, Farmer explains, it was claimed that there was an inordinate "respect for good breeding" in Ireland, not, he clarifies, in any class-conscious sense but in their respect for the integrity and personal qualities associated with member of the "Old Stock" (2010: 225). "This aristocratic stamp", Molloy explains, "is very clearly explained in the average Irish countryman, than whom there is no finer gentlemen to be found anywhere; and no shrewder judge of what constitutes a true gentlemen" (2010: 225).

Diarmaid Ferriter (2010), in addressing how the cultural capital of the Irish middle class has been translated into extensive political power, analyses how the interests and values of a definite group have become entrenched in Irish politics, leading to the formation of political conditions which define the beginning of the twenty-first century in Ireland. Using internal government documents, which began to be released in the 1990s under the National Archives' 30-year rule, Ferriter focuses on the decisive role of Fianna Fail – the most historically significant political party in Ireland – in this process, highlighting, in particular, its transition from being 'the real Irish Labour Party' to an embrace of unbridled capitalism as the basis of its governing strategy (Ferriter, 2010: 272). He makes the point, however, that this transition was a salient problem in

the 1960s, with some members of the party expressing concern in relation to the increasing emphasis on the interests of the middle and upper-middle classes;

In January 1965, for example, [Kevin] Boland wrote to the Minister for Finance that there was a 'general feeling that we have not paid sufficient attention to the weaker sections of the community and that there has not been an equitable distribution of the increased prosperity to which we point as an achievement' (Ferriter, 2010: 273)

Ferriter posits that in the post-war period, when the welfare state was very much at the forefront of European politics, hopes of a commitment to social-democratic forms of government in Ireland were severely impeded; in this period "the response of the middle-class establishment to Ireland's social and economic malaise was entirely ineffectual" (Ibid, 2010: 374-5). Partly, he explains, a product of scare-mongering about socialism, the 'Red Scare', sponsored by the Catholic church, the consensus among the large political parties and the middle class in general was that Ireland was actually not a very poor country, and those insistent on 'class-politics' were portrayed as "foreign-influenced and dangerous radical" (2010: 275). However, it may be argued, the constant denial of social deprivation and suffering, particularly in the face of statistical evidence regarding the degree of inequality and acute economic vulnerability at the time, reflects a political culture with a tendency to entirely circumvent responsibility. Ferriter draws attention to the obvious alternative to engaging with the middle class politically, emigration; a trend which would continue, and constitute an essential feature in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis. "Between 1951 and 1961, 500,000 emigrated. In 1957 alone, the figure was 60,000" (2010: 277).

Through the 1960s and 70s, Ferriter observes, middle class interests and values continued to dominate, advanced by the persistent control Fianna Fail maintained over political discourse and action in Ireland. Considered the period during which it properly entered the global economic system, becoming a member of the European Economic Community (EEC), ultimately beginning to take what would become its recognizably modern form, Irish society saw a substantial increase in general wealth, but the class-dynamics remained in place, strictly controlling the distribution of resources and power. Ferriter discerns consistent themes in public discourse during this time, related to the preoccupation with the security of the state over social equality, and, most

significantly, the controversy regarding progressive strides made in relation to social welfare (2010: 280). An important factor in understanding this development is the lack of distinction between the two major political parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. The lack of any relevant ideological distinction is strikingly clear in relation to the approach to social welfare;

> *In 1974, the Minister for Finance, Richie Ryan, returned to the issue [of wealth tax] in the context of the publication of a White Paper on capital taxation. There was considerable unease on the part of Fine Gael supporters about this question – in February 1974, Dr. Edward More, Bishop of Kilmore, Elphin and Ardagh, wrote to Cosgrave and warned him to tread carefully and not adopt the 'doctrinaire' approach of the Labor Party on such issues* (Ferriter, 2010: 281)

Although the 1980s began with a decisive victory for Fianna Fail in the 1977 general election, Ferriter notes, the era would be dominated by a resurgent opposition Fine Gael party, which now also "appealed to the liberal middle class" (2010: 283). Despite being overshadowed by reports of deep corruption associated with the Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, government policy at the time emphasized fiscal austerity, and the reduction of the national debt in the late 80s and early 90s laid the groundwork for the economic boom of 2000s. However, it is emphasized once more, "the creation of a more solvent and ultimately wealthy society was not matched by any determination to redistribute these riches or tackle the fundamental inequalities of Irish society" (2010: 283). Ferriter argues, by way of summation, there is very little to distinguish between the main political parties in Ireland in terms of economic and social policy from the 1980s onwards, and, most importantly for the purposes at hand, as the twenty-first century dawned and economic growth accelerated exponentially, the extent to which successive governments focused on addressing poverty and class inequality continued to be dismally reflected in the ever-widening gap between rich and poor, as Ireland's health system, housing, education, and transport problems remained completely unresolved (2010: 287).

The reproduction of a public culture which coincides with a deeply restrictive and somewhat insular form of 'national identity', on the one hand, and a structure of class relations which negates the recognition of general principles and problems of the political order, on the other,

results in a mode of public discourse, reflected in the response to the crisis. A principle task of the Critical Theory approach, taking into account these particular circumstances, is the reconstructive exposition of social relations which constitute relations of domination, through uncovering instances of ideological distortion. There is an important distinction to be drawn here in relation to the role of ideology, between the function of supporting, fostering or stabilizing hegemony and the function of justifying and legitimizing hegemony. It is the latter that applies to the case of Ireland, as Raymond Geuss (1981) clarifies "any set ideas which legitimizes or justifies a social practice will thereby tend to support it, but the converse is not the case" (Geuss, 1982: 15). Habermas employs the term 'Herrschaft' to describe this condition, which refers to "the power to repress, i.e. enforce the frustration of some given human preferences" (1981: 15). The following section, which focuses on an analysis of the implications of a conservative ideology for conditions of learning, takes the idea of 'normative repression' as the key point of critique.

The objective here is not simply to identify an example of ideological distortion, which is to reproduce conditions of normative repression, with the intention of showing how it ought to be eliminated, but to recognize a context in which the frustration of some preferences is deemed legitimate and unexceptional. In this sense, Herrschaft refers to the exercise of power in a political order, and how this is linked to its basic claim to legitimacy. This leads to an important distinction which informs the proceeding analysis, whereas 'normative repression' refers to the frustration of agents' preferences "which makes a claim to legitimacy that is accepted by those agents because of certain normative beliefs they hold", 'Herrschaft' refers to the power to exercise this repression (Geuss, 1981: 16). As this form of power is normally unequally distributed in society, it results in the domination of one group over another, as in the Irish case, along the lines of socio-economic class.

Terence Brown (1985) charts the development of Irish society at the beginning of the twentieth century by means of an assessment of the emergence of a conservative society. It is in this period, Brown explains, which led up to the formation of the Irish Free State in the early 1920s, that a cultural model which was to establish a hegemonic form of domination for the proceeding century took shape. What preoccupies Brown's treatment of the society and culture begins with an explanation of how a revolution, fought on behalf of ambitious republican ideals, "ideals which

had been crystallized in the heroic crucible of the Easter Rising", could have led to the establishment of an Irish state "notable for a stultifying lack of social, cultural and economic ambition…" (Brown, 1985: 14). Brown argues that for the twenty-six counties that made up the Free State from 1922, a "prudent acquiescence" was displayed in relation to the "inherited realities of the Irish social order and a conservative determination to shore up aspects of that order by repressive legislation where is seemed necessary" (1985: 14). The conditions of economic stagnation, which were an unavoidable feature of Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century, are presented as an initial explanation;

> *The beautification of the cities and the education of the workers could not proceed without an economic miracle that faith might generate but works in the form of major investment and bold enterprise would have to sustain. Neither faith nor works could easily flourish in the insecure economic environment of the Irish Free State in the 1920s, in the aftermath of a civil war* (Brown, 1985: 14)

Brown, however, emphasizes that the lack of cultural and social innovation which was evident in the first decades of Irish independence must not be attributed to the depressed economic conditions alone. Indeed, the pre-revolutionary experience had shown that artistic and cultural vitality did not necessarily require vast economic resources; "…it was to those years of cultural and social activity and to the political and military exploits that accompanied them that the new state owed its existence" (1985: 17). It is, Brown reasons, in the social composition of Irish society itself that an explanation of the deep-rooted social and cultural conservatism of the new state is to be found. Using the 1926 Census as his empirical reference point, the homogeneity of this composition is highlighted. The partition of the island into two separate states in 1920 precipitated a sectarian division where the northern six counties, which contained the only large industrial centre, constituted a Presbyterian majority that expressed its own distinctive sense of Irish identity. The southern twenty-six counties, on the other hand, as Brown explains, lay open for a "Catholic nationalist majority to express its social and cultural will unimpeded by significant opposition from powerful minorities" (1985: 18). The years preceding Irish independence, according to Brown, saw a 'cultural flowering' as a product of the 'invigorating clash' between the representatives of Anglo-Ireland and the emergent nationalists, leading to sensitive and

imaginative projections, 'adventurous social and cultural experiments', of the ways in which that diversity could possibly be accommodated in the future (1985: 18). However, as Brown observes, following revolution, civil war and, ultimately, a brokered independence, "the social homogeneity of the twenty-six counties no longer demanded such imaginatively comprehensive visions" (1985: 18).

There are two more important elements, which Brown highlights in his analysis of the 1926 Census, that further illuminate the social order of Ireland in the early part of the twentieth century; firstly, this was a rural state, with 61% of the population living outside towns or villages; and, secondly, it was prodigiously Catholic, 92.6% of the population according to the same record (1985: 19 & 30). Associated factors, such as, in relation to the former, the extreme levels of emigration, which had since the Famine remained the highest of any European country, and, in relation to the latter, the prevalence of pre-marital chastity and the disproportionate levels of unmarried men and women, the highest of any country in which records are kept, reveal these features of social composition as contributing to the overwhelming cultural and social conservatism (1985: 19). Brown describes Irish rural life at the turn of the twentieth century as being "like a raft afloat in the calm of a great storm" (1985: 19). But, however damaging the peculiar social organisation of rural life in Ireland to the possibility of future cultural and political innovations in the subsequent decades, the role of the Catholic church in the formation of the state and throughout the twentieth century is pivotal to understanding the country's disturbed relation to modernity;

> The role of the Catholic Church in directing Irish life into the narrow channels of Jansenistic puritanism has…been proffered by commentators as one explanation for the fact that so many people for so long in Ireland were able to behave as if those troublesome but exhilarating manifestations of human nature, passion, sexual aspiration, and the erotic principle itself had been quite excised from the Irish experience (Brown, 1985: 26)

The domination of the Catholic Church over Irish social life is due in large part to its institutional and popular achievements in the period following the Famine, and, throughout the past century, the role played by Catholicism in confirming Irish national identity is pivotal. Setting apart what

it meant to be Irish from the identities of the other inhabitants of the British Isles, Brown argues, was vital for Irish nationalism, particularly at a time when the Irish language and the Gaelic culture of the past was in decline (1985: 28). The devotion to the Catholic faith, he claims, was peculiarly well suited to the narrative of nationalist awakening; it was also "richly endowed with attributes appropriate to its modern role in the nation's life" (1985: 29). Brown, furthermore, illustrates that Irish Catholicism increasingly became a core symbolic feature of Irish national identity at a time when the Church promulgated doctrines that enshrined the rights of private property; this took advantage of a central nationalist aspiration, often rooted in the farmer's attachment to the land, he explains, as exemplified in the Land War, and ensured the Church's continued role at the heart of Irish social life (1985: 29).

This attempt to situate Irish society, with its distinctive conditions, into the general context of modernity drew from historical works, which offer perspectives on the way in which the society was constituted at the beginning of the last century. The development of Irish society in the wake of independence, consolidating throughout the twentieth century, represented a mode of social organisation deeply committed to conservatism, as observed above, and this would become explicitly reflected in its politics and political culture. It would cultivate what Ferree *et al.* (2002) would refer to as a representative elitist form of democracy. In this sense, comparable to Peters (2008), normative culture becomes actualized in a given political system and public sphere, thus providing characteristic orientations in relation to what, who, where, and how public discourse shapes the conditions, mechanisms and outcomes of politics. The idea of representative elitism, used here to describe the form of democracy which has become established in the Irish context, refers, in Ferree et al.'s work, to one of four normative models which are used to account for the development of contrasting forms of democracy in different national public spheres. In this case, the model of democracy reflects a form of publicity which runs from top to bottom. It is therefore understood as an elitist scheme in which citizens are viewed as merely observers of political communication, rather than participants in it.

3.2 A Conservative Cultural Model: Implications for Learning and Normative Innovation

The literary writer, Sean O'Faolain's work The Irish (1969) helps to locate Irish political culture in the context of modernity. Through what he referred to as 'a creative history of the growth of a racial mind', or a 'psychological history', O'Faolain sought, as a challenge to the conventional nationalist account of historically significant political events, to describe the unfolding narrative of Irish history as "the story of the development of a national civilization" (O'Faolain, 1969: 9). He argued that what had happened to the Irish mind in this development was not an 'undisturbed local expansion', but part of a complex process of assimilation, "at the end of which Ireland enters, with her own distinctive qualifications, into the great stream of European culture" (1969: 9). O'Faolain was critical of the dominant nationalist conception of Irish history, a perspective from which Ireland was consistently represented as on the defensive, protecting herself against foreign enemies. To take the perspective of 'nationality solely from the viewpoint of civilization', Ireland is understood, he argues, not in the sense of defending itself on the political or military battlegrounds, but, on the battleground of this racial mind, "forced on each occasion to struggle afresh with itself" (1969: 9). He observed, however, that any of the historical explanations of the achievements and failures which had come to create this 'Irish mind', as he described it at the time of writing this book, must remain circumspect. Indeed, how can one speak of an historical event or sequence of events and boldly claim they point directly to the modern destination one is viewing them from?

Ireland presents somewhat of a conundrum from the perspective of modernization. Having a long colonial attachment to a British state, that, following Cleary, is thought to be the exemplary incarnation of the fundamental principles of modernity, has resulted in continuous disputation regarding the historically subordinated country's relationship to 'the modern'. As O'Faolain's critique also reveals, academics and cultural commentators have laboured persistently on the question of whether Ireland was ever, in itself, a modern society, whether, as Cleary puts it, "the modern was to be equated with progress or its obverse, whether the agencies that had apparently generated or stymied the modern were largely external or internal to Irish society, and so forth" (2005: 2). In the following quote, the complex relationship at issue is delineated most appropriately;

…the issue as to how to articulate the relationship between Ireland and the modern has constituted an abiding stimulus or tonic to Irish cultural activity in literature, in cinema, in music and in the visual and other arts. In short, a complex, contested history of claim and counter-claim means that in an Irish context the term 'modernity' is stripped of its semblance of obviousness: its meanings have been consistently interrogated (Cleary, 2005: 3)

Employing the concept of modernity presupposes an epochal rupture with the 'pre-modern' or, more generally, a set of conditions which can define the separation of the past from the present, thus providing a definite context for analysis. Cleary, therefore, considers the question, when does modern Ireland actually begin and end? Two representations of modernity are outlined in the Irish case, constituting a transition from an 'early' to a 'mature' or 'advanced' phase of modernity. In regards to the former, Cleary highlights epochal events which correspond to the standard metanarratives of Western or European modernity; "the Protestant Reformation and the development of novel modes of consciousness, discipline and enterprise; the emergence of capitalism and the gradual dissolution of the feudal mode of production with its characteristic forms of authority, land tenure and labour; the conquest of the Americas and the expansion of the European terrestrial and maritime empires across the globe; the conception of a sovereign and self-reflexive human subjectivity as one of the cardinal features of modernity" (2005: 3). From the standpoint of these epochal events, the emergence of the initial manifestation of a 'modern Ireland', Cleary claims, is conventionally ascribed to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The inception of this modernity, he states, is attributed to the Tudor and Stuart colonisations of the island, events which are viewed either as part of the larger struggle between European Reformation and Counter-Reformation, or as an element of the westward drive of imperial expansion*;* "its corollary was the inception of a centuries-long attempt to render Ireland amenable to the imperatives of English and later transnational capital" (2005: 3).

In relation to the 'advanced' phase of modernity, Cleary points out identifying inaugurating historical moments that characterize it, typically beginning with the French Revolution and the European Enlightenment that prepared the way for and accompanied it (2005: 4). He also points to the development of industrial capitalism, and corresponding technological revolutions, as

constituting another important sequence of events; the emergence of the bureaucratic state, another; the elaboration of anti-colonial and official state nationalisms; "the dissemination of Darwinian evolutionism and the secular natural and social sciences and the consequent crisis of religious conceptions of human history"; and finally, he points to the formation of modern bourgeois subjectivity and sexuality (2005: 4). The significance of each of these events indicates the complexity of the context in which one may claim 'modern' Ireland emerged, specifically with regard to the latter phase of modernity of principal concern here;

> *The Irish transition from an 'early' to a more 'mature' or 'advanced' modernity is again conventionally situated in terms of a wider Euro-American context: contributing forces include the influence of the American and French Revolutions on the development of Irish republicanism; the impact of the British industrial revolution on Irish economic subordination and underdevelopment; the emergence of the 'second', eastward-looking British Empire, and the technological dominance of the Anglo-American industrial world with its gravitational effects on Irish migration and diaspora from the nineteenth century onwards; the ideological 'wars' between clerical and secular forces that raged across the European continent throughout the nineteenth century even as in Ireland the Catholic church, after two centuries of suppression, established a moral monopoly over Irish society designed to shelter the island from the icy blasts of continental secularism* (Cleary, 2005: 4)

This sketch of Cleary's perspective helps to contextualize the conservative setting in which a modern Ireland has emerged, also establishing the basis for understanding how a corresponding social order was to develop thereafter. Moving to the end of the twentieth century, however, focus turns to what were to become the dominant ideas, symbols and cultural projects which would provide the Irish with their sense of national identity. The process of modernization in the Irish case, following Cleary's distinction in relation to the 'advanced' or 'mature' phase, brought with it the foundations of a conservative social and cultural order; how would conceptions and aspirations of a new setting address these pressures and what form would the process of democratization take in such a context? This must be a fundamental consideration when putting

into perspective the aftermath of the 2008 crisis and, more generally, the problems Ireland faces in the twenty first century.

Before adopting a sociological perspective in relation to the problem of conservatism, it will firstly be contextualized and understood in relation to a conceptualization of political ideology. Michael Freeden (1996) understands ideologies as "forms of political thought that provide important access to comprehending the formation and nature of political theory, its richness, varieties, and subtlety" (Freeden, 1996: 1). He argues that the predominant academic mode of construing the social world through an emphasis on the study of political philosophies, at the expense of the consideration of concrete ideologies results in severe constraints on the methodological tools at the disposal of theorists for understanding political thought in an actual situation. Furthermore, by neglecting a serious reflection on the problem of ideology, the political theorist is "channelled towards some features of political thought at the expense of others" (1996:2). Therefore, initially by way of redress, the exploration of political thought, in this case, coming to terms with and explaining the domination of a specified mode of ideological thinking within a defined spatio-temporal context, will be advanced, following Freeden, from the perspective of the 'conceptual morphology' they display (1996: 2).

According to Freeden's approach, which lends itself suitably to a sociological position, ideologies may be subject to three distinct perspectives. The first concerns a genetic perspective, and introduces history and evolution to address the question, "how did a particular set of political views come about?" (1996: 3). The second perspective relates to functional concerns and seeks to answer the question, "what is the purpose, or the role (if unintended), of a particular set of political views?" (1996: 3). The third, which informs Freeden's own approach to the analysis of ideology, is semantic and is developed in response to the following questions; "what are the implications and the insights of a particular set of political views, in terms of the conceptual connections it forms? Which universe of meaning – deliberate as well as unintentional – is constructed by its conceptual configurations?" (1996: 3). The latter perspective is advanced as it is not a causal or functional explanation of ideology that is sought, but an interpretative framework through which one may comprehend their concrete manifestations. This approach to the analysis of political concepts, therefore, does not seek to project "logical permutations and

ethical possibilities in the abstract", often, he argues, attached to some universalizable models, but locates them within patterns which actually appear. It is these 'patterns', therefore, that constitute an ideology;

Such patterns are most conveniently known as ideologies, those systems of political thinking, loose or rigid, deliberate or unintended, through which individuals and groups construct an understanding of the political world they, or those who preoccupy their thoughts, inhabit, and then act on that understanding (Freeden, 1996: 3)

There are three core elements which allow for the identification of conservatism as an ideology. The first element, which is based on an interpretation of the writings of Michael Oakeshott, relates to the 'self-definition' of conservatism, and refers to the methodological disagreement within the perspective itself regarding its essential definition and substance (1996: 320). It's anti-ideological, pre-conceptual stance and the general lack of evaluation and comparison with other political ideologies make it difficult to delineate its central principles and viewpoints. Freeden points to two self-imposed obstacles within conservatism that maintain this analytical obscurity; the very denial of the validity of theorizing about human beings and societies, which he explains, relates to "an attitude found among some of the less perceptive exponents of conservative thought, who insist that no schemes or categories can be applied to the spontaneity, diffusiveness, and pragmatism of human conduct"; and, secondly, here following Oakeshott, "a denial of the relevance of abstract techniques in directing human conduct, thus rejecting the rationality of any ideological manifestations of political thought as well as the recommendatory or deontological aspirations of political philosophy" (1996: 320). Although they constitute obstacles, they uncover some characteristics which offer an insight into the self-understanding of the ideology of conservatism. Freeden explicates the inferences to be drawn here; conservatism, he states, is about doing, "and about understanding what one is doing, not about thinking in the sense of planning what to do" (1996: 321). Also, it is revealed to be unreflective to the extent that it does not engage in systems of ideas about human beings and society, but, he argues, "is a method of recognizing reality through experiencing it, intellectually unintelligible for non-participants" (1996: 321). Ultimately, from the conservative viewpoint, it is futile to

conceptualize about human conduct, political or otherwise, and, therefore, Freeden holds that its horizons look only upon the past and cannot be projected on an expected future (1996: 321).

The second core element of conservatism, Freeden delineates, challenges the notion that its aim is to maintain the current political order, and puts forward a chameleon analogy to better capture its seemingly unclear modus operandi. It is, he explains, commonly understood by conservatives and their critics, that the central defining feature of conservatism is a concern with upholding the status quo. However, given the lack of a specific core and adjacent beliefs and values concerning fundamental political principles, its capacity to adapt to different conditional settings is highlighted as a core element (1996: 329). Following Huntington, therefore, it may be described as a positional ideology, "lacking both an intellectual tradition and substantive ideals" (1996: 329). Moreover, Freeden argues, conservatism may be understood as a response to an attack mounted against established institutions, a system of ideas employed to justify any established order, "no matter where or when it exists" (1996: 329). It is an ideology that is "not transmitted over time, not does it have an evolving and growing body of works attached to it…its life pattern is more like a series of sudden births and sudden deaths, activated when provoked, dormant or absent when not" (1996: 329).

The third core element, Freeden identifies, concerns resolving the "morphological puzzle" presented by the preceding two elements, therefore, submitting conservatism to distinct evaluation as an ideological project, constituting a coherent mode of thinking. Considering the conservative perspective on change, Freeden notes that, as it is not an ideology of the status quo, seeking to "forestall change and arrest the historical process", it must however be understood as an ideology predominantly concerned with the problem of change, "not necessarily proposing to eliminate it, but to render it safe" (1996: 332). It, therefore, advocates a notion of change which corresponds to a conception that is "sure-footed and respectful of the past" (1996: 333). Analysing conservatism from the perspective of the principles and ideas located within rival ideologies, such as liberty, reason, sociability, or welfare, Freeden argues, is to look in the wrong place, as those concepts are merely adjacent to the core problem of controlling change (1996: 333). This leads to accepting a conception of "organic change"; "the decontestation of history as organic growth renders change acceptable because it is conducted within proven

frameworks…because it is not destructive of the past or of existing institutions and practices, and because it does not appear to be instituted by human design" (1996: 333). Ultimately, Freeden explains, the conservative understanding of organic change as a core concept "postulates a specific diachronic reading – a construction of tradition – as part of its ideological synchrony" (1996: 333). By this, it is meant that any conservative position adopts a view of change which appears to shore up the current synchronic arrangements. Moreover, through the diachronic interpretation of the present, a specific version of historical continuity secures the preservation of the prevailing social order (1996: 333).

From Freeden's perspective, to understand and evaluate conservatism as an ideology, one must analyse the conditions from which that ideology had emerged. Although it opens a path to examining, in further detail, aspects of specific ideological projects, the problem of cross-cultural variance among conservatisms and, indeed, variance within a given cultural sphere, remain problematic. However, by following the core elements introduced above, problems related to the dominant contemporary manifestation, which somehow reconciles the seemingly irreconcilable principles of conservatism and classical liberalism, specifically pertaining to the free market, may become clear;

> *How can one term encompass within its domain both a belief in history and a rejection of history, both reverence for the state and contempt for it, both a conception of community and an atomistic libertarianism, both a faith in high politics and a diminution of the political sphere, both a notion of citizenship based on responsibility and duty and one based on contractual markets and an economic clientele?* (Freeden, 1996: 346)

From this reading of Freeden, a somewhat difficult relationship between the ideology of conservatism and democracy emerges. The restriction of thematization, which comprises the blocking of self-reflection and the denial of deeper theoretical analysis and critique relate to conditions which may be characterised as antithetical to the discursively open ideal of a democratic social order. Where is the space for cultural innovation, upon which the process of democratization itself fundamentally depends? The correlation between this deep-rooted conservatism and a rigid class structure, which reflects the hegemonic position of a native

bourgeoisie, who have come to embody and reproduce the values conducive to the reproduction of the cultural model. This, furthermore, in relation to the concept of the public sphere, concerns the problem of access to public discourse. The fundamental conservative perspective on democracy seeks to preserve the existing state of affairs, therefore, structurally precluding the entry of vital peripheral voices into the discourse.

Freeden's formulation of conservatism as an ideology remains strictly in the theoretical domain, however, to make it relevant for illuminating a dimension of the Irish cultural model, it requires empirical illustration. Garvin, in 'Preventing the Future' (2004), makes the argument that Ireland's economic development was severely stunted as a result of a series of 'non-decisions' when faced with the difficult conditions of the post-WWII period. He argues that Ireland suffered from a form of stasis throughout much of the twentieth century, much of it down to the entrenchment of powerful groups in areas of political, economic, cultural and religious life, reinforcing a 'cultural mindset' that "thought in static and rural ways and in ethical rather than scientific terms" (Garvin, 2004: 3). The development of conservatism in the Irish case, which Garvin is drawing attention to, is represented in the arrangement of socio-economic organisations, such as trade unions, the business sector, parts of state bureaucracy, that have "defended their turf in ways that effectively persevered a status quo" (2004: 3). This has ultimately led to a dysfunctional propensity of power-holders to fear other power-holders, thereby creating an environment which exhibits a general lack of self-assuredness and moral courage. Garvin observes that an "intimidating ecclesiastical apparatus intensified this climate", which would serve as a basis for similar forms of behaviour on the part of secular elites in the future.

Although Garvin's observations help to demonstrate the way in which conservatism is historically rooted in the Irish context, it is important to explicate features of this ideology as it manifests in the domain of policy. The correspondence between a public's preferences and government policy plays a crucial role in the normative justifications for democracy. The typical political cleavage, reflected in specific attitudes that may be measured through extensive surveys and/or interviews, over the distribution of economic resources has always played a significant role in structuring ideological conflict and the process of party formation. To understand Ireland's

positioning in relation to these factors, which reflect the expression of the underlying policy ideology, it is once again considered in a comparative context. To do this, I will draw from a longitudinal analysis of policy ideology in European publics between 1981 and 2016, recently published in the journal, 'American Political Science Review', by Caughey, O'Grady and Warshaw (2019). The study is truly extensive in its scope, comprising a dataset covering 27 countries over 36 years, which contains nearly 2.7 million survey response to 109 issues questions, it is also invaluable in identifying concrete correlations between public opinion, political ideology and government policy in a European context. The objective, which makes it particularly relevant for present purposes, is to "obtain biennial estimates of the absolute economic conservatism, relative economic conservatism, social conservatism, and immigration conservatism of men and women in three age categories in each country", thereby "aggregating the group-level estimates yields of the average conservatism in national publics in each biennium between 1981–82 and 2015–16" (Caughey, O'Grady and Warshaw, 2019: 1).

The four dimensions of conservatism are measured and represented in each European country, encompassing the degree of conservatism reflected in government policy and also the public mood within each country over time. A particularly interesting trend, identified in the study, relates to a distinction between economic conservatism (absolute and relative) and social conservatism. The former, which had seen a substantial increase in the 1980s, plateaued and changed little between the 1990s and the early twenty first century. The study found that during and immediately after the Global Financial Crisis, all groups shifted leftward on economics, however, this only proved temporary and the trend reverted to pre-crisis levels by 2016. Although, what they define as 'economic mood' has trended in a liberal direction since the mid-1990s, there has emerged a divergent trend evident with the increase of absolute conservatism, which they attribute to the retrenchment of the welfare state in Europe. In contrast, social conservatism in general has been found in the research to have declined steadily over the whole thirty-six years of data gathered, with the most rapid changes occurring between the 1980s and 90s. This seems to support an impression of conservativism, outlined at the beginning of the current chapter in relation to Ireland, which reflects a contradictory tendency between certain

forms of cultural liberalization, on the one hand, coinciding with a sustained economic conservatism on the other.

When Caughey, O'Grady and Warshaw's research is broken down, country by country, Ireland may be contextualized in a comparative ideological context. All four measures of conservatism show a clear north-south distinction, "Southern European countries, most notably Greece, tend toward the left-wing end of the economic scales, but are closer to the conservative end of the social and immigration scales. In contrast, Northern countries, such as Denmark and the Netherlands, are the least conservative on social issues and immigration but are more conservative on economics, particularly mood" (2019: 10). Ireland, from this perspective, reflects trends similar to other Northern countries on social issues, including attitudes towards to immigration, conservativism has shown to have significantly declined, whereas, economic conservatism, in both absolute and relative terms has shown an increase. Although such a study is far from conclusive, merely reflecting trends over a specified period of time, it does correlate with the order of discourse identified in the Irish crisis narrative.

Conservatism represents the ideological base that underlies the dimensions of nationalism and class, as introduced in the previous section, in the Irish cultural model, which then determines the way in which such principles as legitimacy and responsibility are brought down from the level of the cognitive order and discursively realized in society. The next chapter will re-introduce the critical-cognitive theoretical framework, developed in Chapter 5, to explicate this process. The purpose of this approach is to show the way in which the thematization of the crisis reflects a mode of learning that restrains the exploration of democratic alternatives, specifically related to the principles of legitimacy and responsibility, which, in turn, exposes a pathology in the formation of the Irish cultural model. However, what is of vital importance to the cognitive approach adopted here is also the disclosure of potentiality. This perspective always holds open the possibility of an unrealized potential at work in the contexts of social interaction. Although it may currently seem implausible that an emancipatory alternative to the conservative model, which sustains this deeply unequal socio-economic system, will emerge, it is impossible to accurately predict future forms of learning, which could potentially emerge in response to another crisis that will lead to significant transformation.

3.3. Learning in the Aftermath of a Crisis: An Inquiry into the Case of Ireland

Crises generate social conditions of deep uncertainly and intense conflict, in which the nature of what is taking place and proposed solutions to it are contested in discursive struggles, ideally played out in a public sphere. A narrative ultimately emerges which seeks to give meaning to the crisis situation, identify how it came about, who is to be held responsible for it and then justify the proposed solutions to it. This, to repeat the key point made in the first chapter, is the communicative/discursive understanding of crisis being adopted here. From a comparative perspective, narratives that put forward alternative, democratic responses to the financial crisis were relatively absent in the Irish case. Certainly, social movements emerged to oppose and resist specific austerity measures in this context, but a political movement offering a progressive alternative that could resonate with the Irish public, as with the cases of Greece and Iceland in which there were serious transformations in the mainstream political landscape, was not evident. In essence, it is argued here that the crisis narrative succeeded in guiding Irish public discourse in a certain direction, establishing a spectrum of relevance within which are set out the parameters for how the crisis was to be understood and, following the key moments in the previous chapter, the justification for an appropriate response to it.

The key question, which this thesis will seek to address, is, what has been learned from the Irish experience of 2008 Global Financial Crisis? Furthermore, given the nature of the crisis response, in particular the key events outlined in the last chapter and the imposition of austerity measures within the European context, how has Ireland changed in the aftermath of the crisis? An understanding of the processes of social and cultural change, whether realized in the context of actually existing social movements or remaining merely as public narratives that point towards some unrealized potentiality, are at the heart of how these questions will be addressed. A fundamental distinction, therefore, guiding the analysis to come is that between learning and the processes of change. It may initially be presupposed that the former is a precondition of the latter, in that for a state of affairs to change in any way, it requires some form of learning to take place on behalf of those involved. The sociological approach to learning adopted here, however, which will become clear in the proceeding chapters, not only incorporates the idea of learning as an aspect or even precondition of change, but conversely as a key mechanism in the prevention

of change. From this critical perspective on social or collective learning, there is a pre-existing socio-cultural condition, which shapes the way in which a society learns, which then becomes realized in relation to a particular event or situation thus either allowing for or preventing the relevant processes of change to initiate.

The crisis, and its aftermath as outlined in the European context here, presents an ideal case in which to examine this dynamic between learning and change in the case of Ireland. Essentially constituted by a series of mediated discursive events, the crisis reflects the emergence of an 'opportunity structure', which opens up the possibility of reflexively examining the state of society, specifically, as will be seen in the analysis of this case, in relation to the role of democracy and the strength of a democratic culture in that society. This represents the fundamental normative underpinning of the work. The proceeding analysis, therefore, employing Touraine's 'cultural model' as a key analytical concept and the basis for a critique of Ireland's response to the 2008 financial crisis, seeks to access the generative dimension of the Irish normative order. This moves towards offering a critical explanation for the distinctive 'pathological' form of learning that is reflected in the crisis-response itself, central to which is the dominance of a particular form of conservatism in public discourse. A critical aspect of this reflection will, therefore, be viewed from the normative perspective of democracy, and the evidently diminished role played by democratic communication in this context.

The next chapter will set out an approach suitable for accessing the normative dimension at work in the Irish crisis narrative. This will encompass two different methodological perspectives on the analysis of public discourse, with the intention of distilling the appropriate normative content that is recognised to be at stake in this particular context. The principles of legitimacy, specifically the discursive process of legitimation, and responsibility will be brought to the fore as the relevant normative elements in the case of the Irish crisis response. The key purpose of the proceeding chapter is to establish those elements required for the later reconstructive critique. It is in relation to this distinctive form of communication that processes of critical and societal reconstruction, which develop reflexively upon the established potentiality of democratization, may lead to new modes of learning, beyond the current conservative reality. This may be represented as discursively transforming, what will later be conceptualized as, a 'dissensus

learning pathology' into a limited or finite conflict by communicating to the Irish public in such a way that actually includes them in the democratic political process, in turn generating an alternative response to the crisis which may present the possibility of deliberatively exploring a different future.

4.

Modes of Legitimation and the Principle of Responsibility:
The Discursive Construction of the Irish Crisis Narrative

The narrative processes of 'meaning-making' are an intrinsic part of all social relations. In crisis situations, as reflected in the Irish case, when previously held structural assumptions are destabilised and social forces compete to interpret and represent complex unfolding events, the discursive processes involved in narrative construction are fundamental. The critical-normative importance of the concept of narrative is associated with the inherent role of justification. In this sense, as mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1., narratives of justification reflect the relations of power in society and may therefore be understood as a reflection of orders of power. Such orders of power shape and reproduce, what Rainer Forst calls, the 'space of reasons' in which the narratives themselves resonate. Therefore, a narrative represents a social order that, in turn, comes to be accepted as an order of justification (Forst, 2013: 9). Forst's perspective on justification narratives helps illuminate the normative grounding for a counterfactual approach to the Irish crisis narrative. Levels of justification progress and are made accessible, or are achieved, by means of societal struggles that challenge the justificatory authorities in the first place. According to Forst, this progress encompasses more than just the existence of better justified social relations, it also involves improved conditions of justification in the society and, as such, suggests that a basic structure of justification either exists or is being aimed at (2017: 8).

As a narrative reflects an order of justification, therefore, a normative dimension is introduced to the equation. The discursive thematization of the response to the financial crisis constitutes the development of a narrative that, in turn, represents the conditions of the underlying cultural model. In the Irish case, as argued in the previous chapter, the ideology of conservatism plays the decisive role in shaping the cultural model, which manifests itself, on the one hand, in the domain of Irish political culture and, on the other, in shaping the conditions of learning and the possibility of normative innovation. The process of thematization reproduces a distinctive mode or 'way' of learning in the Irish context, thus allowing for the reproduction of the same conditions.

In this sense, the conservative cultural model presents a difficult predicament. As Freeden explained, a hallmark of the ideology relates to this unreflective and non-conceptual quality, compounded by the overriding objective of maintaining the existing political/social order, therefore, the process of thematization is in many ways a form of 'non-thematization'. To overcome this, the analysis will reach beyond the procedural focus on the discursive processes involved in thematization and explore the substantive, normative content feeding into Irish public discourse at the deeper, cognitive level of society.

For the purposes of critique, gaining access to this substantive dimension, which will be shown to encompass the communicative structuring lying behind the mechanism of public discourse, requires the specification of the normative elements involved in this specific case. In critically analysing the Irish government's response to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, it would lead to inaccurate judgement to criticise this response from the perspective of it being either right or wrong, particularly when looking at it from a moral-political point of view, as opposed to, for example, a classical economic perspective. It is, therefore, necessary to first identify what is normatively at stake in the situation before coming to a more general critical or prescriptive judgement. There are a number of normative democratic principles at stake in this context, from justice and equality to solidarity and the fundamental notion of morality itself, all of which here presuppose an incursive shaping within the Irish cultural model. However, it is the principles of legitimacy and responsibility that are identified as the normative elements at stake. The former relates to the process of legitimation, which is fundamental to the thematization of the crisis and the justification narrative that developed around the response to it. It is not just the legitimation of the narrative itself, however, in this sense, but the legitimation of the socio-economic order that it is trying to justify and maintain itself in the aftermath of the crisis. Responsibility, as a second normative principle, emerges as being specific to the context of the crisis itself. Closely related to the principle of justice, the question of who is to be held responsible for the financial crisis and how this is to be discursively understood, which would then inform the institutional response to it, is fundamental. As it will become clear in the theoretical framework, these principles are related to one another in the transcendent dimension of society, unrealised in regard to the potentials contained in both, yet still having a critical bearing on the situation.

This chapter should be read as part of a broader methodological approach. What follows here will provide the tools to identify and root out the normative principles, mentioned above, from the narrative. This will then generate the elements for a reconstructive critique, which constitutes the other major part of the methodological approach. The principles of legitimation and responsibility will be accessed by means of their negative manifestation in the process of thematizing the financial crisis in Ireland, reflected in the mechanisms of public discourse. To expose the negative realisation of the principles is to suggest that there is an unfulfilled potentiality, this is where the reconstruction will come into play. By overcoming learning pathologies, which are the product of an ideologically distorted system of communication within a repressive cultural model, an alternative, perhaps more reflexive form of public discourse may be realised.

The methodological approach to discursive modes of legitimation will be developed, following the work of Theo Van Leeuwen. These modes of legitimation critically reflect the form of public discourse outlined in the preceding chapters. Legitimacy is therefore understood as a mechanism that forms the components which leads to the construction of the narrative. In this sense, legitimation is deployed as a communicative mechanism that reinforces the underlying normative order, reproduced by the Irish cultural model. It is, as I have mentioned, conceptualized negatively in relation to its empirical manifestation in public discourse, yet, reconstructively, it also harbours a normative-democratic potential. This anticipates a normatively advanced understanding of legitimacy, which develops counterfactually in conjunction with a critique of the principle of responsibility in the context of the crisis response.

The principle of responsibility represents a key dimension in the analysis of the 2008 financial crisis. This principle allows for a distinction to be drawn between the discursive mechanisms of blame, characteristic of Irish public discourse, and the counterfactual demands of a normative-democratic view of responsibility, a standard from which Ireland is seen to fall far short. In that critical sense, although an interestingly ambiguous and multi-layered term, responsibility emerges in this context by virtue of a negative critique of blame, which, it will be argued, obviates an appropriate application of the principle. What brings into play the notion of responsibility in the first place is that a decision has been taken that has discernible consequences. The

institutional response to the crisis in Ireland, therefore, presupposes the presence of some form of responsibility, however imperfectly realised in the context of the discourse of blame and, in particular, blame avoidance. Moreover, as this is a response that refers specifically to a financial crisis, which as Beck argues, pertains to a system based on 'organised irresponsibility', reconstructive access to the normative principle of responsibility is made much more difficult, on both the societal level and that of the analyst.

The following section will examine specific dimensions of public discourse in the context of the Irish crisis in relation to the concept of legitimation. This will constitute a background normative reconstructive animus for the work as a whole and will be taken up again in a later chapter along with the methodological application of Critical Theory. The broader intention of the present chapter is to elucidate these contested principles of legitimacy and responsibility at stake beyond the conservative formulation, which thus reveal the possibility of a democratic potential. The forms/modes of legitimation, which will be empirically detailed in what follows, present aspects of the narrative that reflect a conservative public culture, which will be analysed in more detail in as a crucial causal element in Chapter 6. From the emphasis on authority, to the moral norms and rationality at work in the discourse of the crisis response, this approach seeks to expose specific discursive features of the conservative actuality and by doing so, anticipate the disclosure of an untapped reconstructive potential, unrealized in the given situation.

4.1 Discursive Modes of Legitimation in the Irish Crisis-Narrative

Taking cue from the theoretical developments on the concept of legitimation, following the work of Habermas, the approach adopted in the proceeding section will be guided by the wider reconstructive intentions of critical social analysis to follow. In 'putting to use' of a critical theory of society, which may be defined by attempting to overcome the conventional empirical/normative split, this perspective highlights the structure of the communication itself as the focus of critique (Habermas, 1976: x-xii). Proceeding in an empirical-theoretical space, therefore, this approach offers explanatory scope to represent public discourse in relation to the development of a distinctive narrative, guided by the critical concept of legitimation.

Habermas' theorization of 'legitimation crisis' was by means of an emphasis on 'tendencies' towards such a condition. By characterizing the economic, the administrative and legitimation systems at the most general level, he delineates the 'crisis-tendencies' in each case in the context of advanced-capitalist societies. While the economic system refers to the coordination of productive activity in relation to a distinction between the private and public sectors, the administrative system, correspondingly, refers to the mechanisms of the state apparatus which carry out numerous imperatives of the economic system (Habermas, 1976: 34). It is, however, the legitimation system, presupposing a re-coupling of the economic to the political – the repoliticization of the relations of production – that holds together capitalism through the "universalistic value-systems of bourgeois ideology, civil rights – including the right to participate in political elections" (1976: 36). The legitimation system is resolved, Habermas explains, through the development of a system of formal democracy, however, careful to avoid forms of substantive democracy, which would incorporate the full participation of citizens in the process of political will-formation. In capitalism, therefore, it is an imperative to keep this fundamental contradiction from being fully thematised; the administrative system must be sufficiently independent of legitimating will-formation. It is, ultimately, the distinctive class structure, Habermas posits, of advanced capitalism which prevents the easy identification of ruling groups and manifested forms of domination (1976: 37).

So, taking into account Habermas' distinction regarding crisis-tendencies, one can see in the Irish case, a response to the 2008 crisis, attempts to resolve such tendencies towards economic collapse by administrative means. However, it must be recognised that these have not in practice resulted in major de-legitimizing effects. The management of the crisis-response, by means of political communication, as reflected in the above, had been staged for the public in a very effective manner, targeted in such a way as to resonate in the Irish public sphere. There has, indeed, been an incipient estrangement from the political system at a general level, and the gradual emergence of new, more radical, political parties, but one certainly cannot speak of a real legitimation crisis. People continue to vote and, as has been shown in the Irish General Elections of 2011 and 2016, in their clear majority for the traditional parties. As Habermas himself explains, "a real legitimation crisis would signify a collapse of the traditional party system and the

formation of a new party whose aims would at least transcend the existent economic system" (1979: 80). The critical focus must ultimately be, from a reconstructive perspective, on a greater democratization of our society, and the normative structures required to achieve this.

There is an essential link to be highlighted here, between discourse, the normative demands of legitimation and the processes of learning. Habermas' understanding of legitimation follows an evolutionary logic, which takes place in the form of "directional learning processes" that, in turn, work through "discursively redeemable validity claims" (1976: 14). It follows that the rationally reconstructible elements that learning processes generate can explain only the "logically necessary sequence of possible developments" (1976: 14). In the case of 'actual' developments, such as innovations or stagnations, the productive or unproductive working out of crises, these can only be explained with the aid of empirical mechanisms. Foundational to Habermas' perspective on collective learning, 'not-learning' reflects a situation in which validity claims are accepted or rejected without discursive consideration, thus requiring an explanation at the socio-cultural stage of development. 'Reflexive' learning, on the other hand, which allows for normative innovation and the productive working out of crisis situations, takes place through discourses in which actors "thematize practical validity claims that have become problematic or have been rendered problematic through institutionalized doubt, and redeem or dismiss them on the basis of arguments". Whichever form of learning is identified as the outcome, it firstly requires empirical mechanisms to gain access to the actual developments leading up to that point. Theo Van Leeuwen (2007) provides a methodological framework for identifying these empirical mechanisms involved in the discursive construction of legitimation.

There are four main forms (or modes) of legitimation developed in Van Leeuwen's framework that may operate separately or simultaneously, in combination with one another in the course of communication processes (Van Leeuwen, 2007: 92). Firstly, 'authorization' refers to a mode of legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom and law; 'moral evaluation', secondly, refers to legitimation by reference to value systems; 'rationalization', to legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalised social action; and, finally, 'mythopoesis' refers to a form of legitimation related to specific narratives, where outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish non-legitimate actions (2007, 92) These categories of legitimation refer to

explanations and justifications, that is specific instances of talk and text, which inform descriptive or prescriptive accounts of social practices and institutions (2007, 92). A critical aspect in analysing the construction of legitimation in discourse is understanding that legitimation is always in reference to, and thus contextualised within, specific institutional orders. The focus here is, therefore, on identifying a narrative specific to the Irish institutional setting.

- Authorization

Emphasis on the principle of authority is an important characteristic of conservative cultures. Following Van Leeuwen's formulation, authorization, in the sense of a discursive form of legitimation, may be understood as an answer to a specified 'why' question – 'Why should we do this?' (Van Leeuwen, 2007: 94). There are six different contents or forms of legitimation which are identified as possible answers here. Firstly, personal authority concerns the legitimate authority vested in a person, specifically because of their status or role in a given institution. Van Leeuwen explains that this form of authority does not require justification and it may be exemplified in the context of the 'positional family' in which "judgements are a function of the status of the member and disputes are settled by the relative power inherited in the respective statuses" (2007: 94). Secondly, role model authority refers to the legitimacy through the imitation of role models or 'opinion leaders' and plays a particularly important role in advertising and lifestyle media. Impersonal authority represents a third form of authority legitimation. In this case, which refers to laws, rules and regulations, the answer to the 'why' question does not refer to any particular actor, but to the fact that the law (rules, policies, guidelines) say so (2007: 96). The fourth form of authority legitimation Van Leeuwen identifies relates to the authority of conformity. In this case, the answer to the '*why'* question is 'because it is what everybody else is doing', implying that it is also what you ought to do. Expert authority represents a fifth form and refers to a form of legitimacy in which expertise is held above status. Van Leeuwen explains that expert legitimation often takes the form of 'verbal process clauses' or 'mental process clauses' with the given expert as subject; e.g. 'Professor Y believes...' (2005: 95). Lastly, the authority of tradition relates to a situation in which legitimacy is determined through the ideas of tradition, practice, custom or habit. In this case, Van Leeuwen elucidates, "the implicit or explicit answer

to the 'why' question is, not 'because it is compulsory', but 'because this is what we always do' or 'because this is what we have always done'" (2007: 96)

- Moral Evaluation

Before outlining Van Leeuwen's approach to the moral evaluation mode of legitimation, it is necessary to delineate an important distinction here with Habermas, specifically in relation to the conceptualization of moral norms. Moral norms may be understood to emerge from the processes of argumentation on moral ideas, over time acquiring a form of institutional force. From Habermas' perspective, the most fundamental moral norm is that of universal inclusion in fair procedures of deliberation (2013: 301). This norm is realized institutionally through the development of comprehensive and legitimate structures of public autonomy along with an equally fundamental framework of individual rights. In the conditions of modern pluralist society, consisting of multiple contexts of experience, moral norms are increasingly dependent upon procedural justification (2013: 301).

Habermas' approach to the theory of society grounds moral principles in the normative content of argumentation, thus establishing universally accepted norms through the deliberation and procedural commitments of co-present actors. Moral principles are ultimately derived from the content of the presuppositions of argumentation, but, critically, the concern here is with the viewpoint from which moral ideas and questions can be evaluated, and thereby, legitimized. The critical insight to be explored on that basis is whether the argumentation carried out in idealized discourse presupposes that all concerned in principle participate, freely and equally, in the cooperative search for truth, with the outcome determined only by the force of the better argument (Habermas, 1988).

In Van Leeuwen's use of the concept of legitimation, and its application to analysing specific instances of discursive communication, there are two important qualifications regarding the application of moral evaluation as a mode of legitimation. Firstly, relating to the limits of what discourse analysts can infer from their own distinctive approach, Van Leeuwen holds that "it is not possible to find an explicit, linguistically motivated method for identifying moral evaluations

of this kind" (2007: 98). By this, discourse analysis can only recognise moral evaluations from the perspective of common-sense cultural knowledge, and therefore, the usefulness of linguistic discourse analysis, with regard to identifying processes of legitimation, stops at that point. Secondly, developing on this argument, he claims, a *historical discourse research* must take over; "only the social and cultural historian can explain the moral status of these expressions, by tracing them back to the moral discourses that underlie them, and by undoing the 'genesis amnesia' (Bourdieu) that allows us to treat such moral evaluations as common-sense values" (2007: 98).

The conceptualization of legitimation at issue here, following Van Leeuwen's adaptation of Habermas, explicates a descriptive model "in order to derive from them the possible classes of crisis tendencies that can arise in such a social formation" (Habermas, 1976: 33).

> *The arrangement of formal democratic institutions and procedures permits administrative decisions to be made largely independently of specifics motives of the citizens. This takes place through a legitimation process that elicits generalized motives – that is, diffuse mass loyalty – but avoids participation. This structural alteration of the bourgeois public realm [Offentlichkeit] provides for application of institutions and procedures that are democratic in form, while the citizenry, in the midst of an objectively [an sich] political society, enjoy the status of passive citizens with only the right to withhold acclamation* (Habermas, 1976: 37)

To distinguish it from the previous mode of authorization, Van Leeuwen asserts that moral evaluation legitimation is based on the discursive expression of underlying moral values, rather than imposed by some kind of authority without further justification (2007: 97). Discourses pertaining to this mode of legitimation are rarely made explicit or debateable, and therefore, remain latent, predominantly referred to through revealing adjectives such as 'healthy', 'normal', 'natural', 'useful', etc. (2007: 97). Making use of an illustrative analogy, he explains that these adjectives may in turn be understood as "the tip of a submerged iceberg of moral values" (2007: 98). In the course of communication, when such references are made to a latent, 'legitimated' order, which indeed constitutes a significant portion of all social interaction, a moral concept is triggered. Crucially, whatever component of a given speech act triggers, or calls forth, such a

concept, it becomes detached from the system of interpretation from which it is derived, at least on a conscious level; "they transmute", he argues, "moral discourses into the kind of 'generalised motives' which, as Habermas has said, are now 'widely used to ensure mass loyalty'" (2007: 97).

- Rationalization

An important aspect of discursively constructed legitimation may be understood from the perspective of a distinction regarding the concept of rationalization, between instrumental and theoretical forms of rationality (Van Leeuwen, 2007: 101). In relation to the former, Van Leeuwen explains, purposes are constructed in discourse in order to explain a social practice or, as the case may be, a particular course of action, and moreover, may serve as legitimations where they contain an element of moralization. Closely following Habermas here, it is in relation to this process that purposes or 'purposiveness' turns into what has been termed a 'strategic-utilitarian morality'; "...Habermas characterizes the institutions that regulate different kinds of social action in terms of the validity claims, or 'kinds of truth' which underlie or legitimate them" (2007: 101).

Van Leeuwen's adoption of Habermas' concept of rationalisation in relation to the form of legitimation generated in the course of communication is theoretical rationalisation. In this case, legitimation is grounded, "not in whether the action is morally justified or not, nor in whether it is purposeful or effective, but in whether it is founded on some kind of truth, on 'the way things are'" (2007: 103). Based, therefore, on this notion of 'the way things are', an appropriate perspective specifically in relation to understanding a restrictive style of political communication as in the Irish case, representations of practices and/or actions are rationalised by means of 'naturalised' legitimations. Van Leeuwen develops three main typological forms of theoretical legitimation. Firstly, definition refers to the representation of an activity in terms of another, moralised activity; that is, he explains, "for a definition to be a definition, both activities must be objectivated and generalised, and the link between them must either be attributive ('is', 'constitutes', etc.) or significative ('means', signals, symbolises, etc.)" (2007: 104).

Legitimations related to this mode function as types of axioms, referring to a possible future activity or backwards to activity in relation to which they may are generalised. A second form of

theoretical legitimation within the mode of rationalisation is that of explanation. In this instance, Van Leeuwen explains, it is not the activity or practice in question, but the actors involved in a given action, an answer, he claims, to the 'why' question; 'because doing things this way is appropriate to the nature of these actors' (2007: 104). Thirdly, theoretical rationalisation as a mode of legitimation may take the form of predictions. Although this may already have been referred to in relation to the role of expert authority, Van Leeuwen makes a distinction here between expertise *and* authority, highlighting that predictions ought to be based more on the former, and may be denied on the basis of contrary past experiences.

It is necessary at this point to clarify an important distinction in relation to Habermas' general perspective on rationalization and Van Leeuwen's appropriation of it here. Although the latter is understandably simplified for purposes of empirical-methodological application, Habermas' theorization of the concept is critical in the broader context of the present work. To counter the almost pejorative use of the term, which seems to have become a common feature in certain areas of contemporary sociology, and which Van Leeuwen also seems guilty of here, rationalization must be understood from the perspective of communicative action. In this sense, contrary to the notion of simply generating strategic rationality for a given action (instrumental) or justifying the existing status quo (theoretical), communicative rationality allows for the possible coordination of action and the collective pursuit of goals on the basis of a shared understanding that the goals are inherently reasonable. Whereas Van Leeuwen's focus on criticizing strategic action in the context of public discourse is understandable in relation to identifying unjust or bad reasoning, the perspective of communicative action, which mobilizes the 'potential for rationality', encompasses a much more complex form of interaction, disclosing, for instance, the reconstructive standpoint at the core of the present critique.

- Mythopoesis

The last form of legitimation articulated by Van Leeuwen is related to the formation of the narrative itself. As distinct from the preceding forms, mythopoesis concerns a mode of legitimation which is achieved through forms of story-telling, more specifically, through what he

refers to in the first instance as '*moral tales*'; "In moral tales, protagonists are rewarded for engaging in legitimate social practices, or restoring the legitimate order" (2007: 105). The least developed within the typology, there are, however, a number of distinctions to be explained and made relevant to the case at hand. The first distinction to be drawn in relation to this form of legitimation is between moral tales, which are, as outlined above, represented by narratives that characterise legitimate action as being worthy of reward, and 'cautionary tales', which are represented by narratives in which social practices that deviate from conventional social norms are reproached; as Van Leeuwen explains, they constitute warnings in which "protagonists engage in deviant activities that lead to unhappy endings" (2007: 106). In essence, legitimation is conveyed here by developing a symbolic structure which reflects the moral order, thus reinforcing the dominant societal positions on right and wrong.

A second vital distinction drawn here in relation to this form of legitimation, also contributing to a further understanding of the first, is between inversion and symbolization. The former, which delineates things in relation to good/bad and right/wrong, constitutes narratives in which actors and/or actions are inverted in terms of their semantic features, thus rendering such distinctions more ambiguous and complex (2007: 106). This conception of inversion will be explored in much more detail in the next chapter through a clarification of the principle of responsibility, which has been, to an extent, anticipated here in relation to the comparison developed between political interventions and public resistance in the Irish response to the crisis.

The concept of 'symbolization', as a dimension of this mode of legitimation, constitutes the use of symbolic actions in stories; specific actions, Van Leeuwen argues, that can represent more than one domain of institutionalised social practice, and so provide, what he refers to as 'a mythical type of social action' (2007: 106). He further illustrates this point, referring to an example developed from a children's story, the 'Unknown Soldier'; "Just as fairy tales distance their readers from the actuality of their subject matter in faraway places and long ago times, so this story distances its readers from the naturalistic specifics of institutions such as the army, the factory, the office and the school, to allow the de-legitimation of all these domains and of the principles of social organisation that underlie them" (2007: 106-107). This is a crucial point, every

society has a repository of organisational principles, an underlying generative structure, which holds within it a system of symbolic power that is called upon in the context of a crisis.

To conclude, the discursive modes of legitimation will be deployed as part of reconstructive critique in order to identify the development of a narrative that reinforce the underlying cultural model. That is, a culture in which the thematization of alternatives is suppressed within a mode of public discourse that reproduces distinctive conditions of learning. The combination, therefore, of learning-resistant discourses, in this case identified through the normative concept of legitimation, and the more general feature of deficient thematization constitute a societal barrier to the exploration of a reconstructive potential. However, normative legitimation processes are not confined to the empirical, immanent domain of social life. Developing a reconstructive form of critique, the unlimited, counterfactual dimension is accessed, which allows for the development of a democratically more advanced form of legitimation.

In pursuit of this more advanced form of legitimation, however, further methodological observations of the crisis discourse will be brought forward in order to identify and expose another key principle, i.e. responsibility. Reflecting a core feature of the narrative of the crisis response, in a number of different respects, responsibility will be critically developed through a theoretically guided exposition of the discourse of blame, which, as in the case of legitimation, leads towards a normative appeal to the reconstructive-transcendent horizon. Legitimation and responsibility are intrinsically linked in the crisis-narrative, constituting core aspects of the justificatory basis of the institutional response. However, their empirical significance in relation to reinforcing the narrative, and by extension the conditions of domination in Irish society, allows for the critical-reconstructive approach to combine both principles in order to put forward the idea of a co-responsible form of legitimation, a normative-reconstructive standard against which the actual situation may be critically re-assessed.

4.2 A Distinction Between the Discourse of Blame and the Normative Principle of Responsibility

The modes of legitimation, outlined in the last section, relate to specific discursive mechanisms that constitute the development of a narrative that sought to justify Ireland's response to the 2008 financial crisis. Responsibility will be disclosed as a normative principle through an analysis of the prevailing discourse of 'blame'. Revealed, therefore, through a negative critique of the immanent situation, this principle further elaborates the distinction between the conservative actuality of Irish political and public culture and the unrealized, reconstructive potential that is being denied. Blame, therefore, is also a blocking mechanism, understood to reflect the conditions of learning which constitute the ad-hominem hegemonic culture of conservatism. It will be empirically analysed in the following through empirical observations of selected aspects of the public discourse. Finally, this will lead to the reconstructive theorization of a co-responsible mode of legitimation, holding open the possibility of an alternative future, guided by a form of democratic social change.

I will begin here with a question: who was seen to be held responsible for the 2008 crisis? From the analysis of the institutional response to the crisis thus far, developed specifically in relation to the narrative constructed in Irish public discourse, things were construed in such a way as to attempt to make everyone responsible for the crisis[8]. The implication here being that the Irish public had benefited from and enjoyed the fruits of the economic boom, and they must now pay the price and suffer the consequences for their excesses[9]. Although a government commissioned, expert report by Peter Nyberg (2011) determined that the causes of the Irish crisis were a combination of "very specific and serious breaches of basic governance principles" and a problem of 'groupthink', associated with an inter-elite network of relationships between politicians and actors in the financial system, responsibility for the crisis would ultimately rest with the Irish public. In what follows, this perspective will be fundamentally challenged, and the very nature of

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[8] At the World Economic Forum in Davos in February 2011, the new Taoiseach, Enda Kenny claimed "*What happened in our country was that people simply went mad borrowing*"
[9] In an interview with RTE in 2010, Finance Minister Brian Lenihan stated in relation to the housing bubble and the resultant banking crisis; "*Let's be fair about it, we all partied*".

the way in which the principle of responsibility itself is conceptualized and generally operates in the Irish context critiqued.

Drawing once more from the empirical observations of the opening chapters, I will develop a distinction in relation to another specific normative feature of the actual discourse itself and, in a second move, propose to open that problem to a more advanced, reconstructive form of critique. Having established some general features of public discourse in Ireland in the context of the development of a justification narrative which sought to legitimize the response to the 2008 financial crisis, the previous chapter presented a normative perspective, drawing on elements related to the forms of legitimation employed in the course of a specific mode of public discourse. The purpose of the opening chapter was to delineate the actual discursive environment in which the crisis unfolded, presenting, by pointing towards distinct interventions in the disorienting and disruptive context, the emergence of political explanations reflecting divergent social forces aimed at construing events and, thereby, publicly opposing or promoting certain responses to what was taking place. A dominant narrative was then identified and, through four modes of legitimation, drawing from Van Leeuwen's appropriation of Habermas, inferentially linked back to understand the justifications for the measures taken by the Irish government in response to the Global Financial Crisis.

Responsibility and legitimacy are empirically and theoretically related to one another here in the sense that both are conceived in relation to normative principles, appealed to in the mediation processes of public discourse and elaborated upon, in a distinctive justificatory manner, in the context of the crisis-narrative in Ireland. Following the empirical-theoretical logic of the previous chapter, the principle of responsibility will also be disclosed and developed in relation to distinctions observed in the analysis of the discourse itself. The concept of responsibility will later be reconstructed, along with that of legitimacy, in relation to what is being denied in terms of the realization of the principle, in this sense, following Apel (1993), a democratic conceptualization of co-responsibility is put forward. Key to this perspective, and to the reconstructive critique that follows, is the concept of learning. I will argue that the principle of responsibility has been culturally learned in a specific direction in the Irish context, which reflexively blocks exploration into the democratic frame of co-responsibility.

The first section to follow will introduce a concept of blame, discuss it in relation to certain discursive strategies in the Irish case and then move to develop a methodological distinction regarding the concept of responsibility. Although blaming is indeed a ubiquitous feature of contemporary politics, particularly in the conditions of the 'neo-liberal age', in which democratic politics is seen to play a diminished role, it is a dimension of public communication which has received little focused attention from discourse analysts (Hansson, 2015). Taking lead from some recent developments in amending this gap in the literature, communicative aspects of blaming strategies regarding certain forms of argumentation, framing techniques, action representations and legitimation will be presented. In drawing attention to a specific conceptualisation of blaming in public discourse and highlighting how it was employed in the course of the Irish crisis narrative, the intention is to move toward a distinction with regard to the principle of responsibility.

Blame, it seems, is often conflated with responsibility. By blaming someone or something, it follows, social actors are engaging in the attribution of responsibility. Take, for example, the recent empirical work of Hobolt and Tilley (2014), 'Blaming Europe?', which pertinently focuses on the aftermath of the global financial crisis in the context of political structures of accountability within the EU. Through their analysis of multiple quantitative data sources, including an immense survey of voter perception across European populations, the authors seek to explain how the media and politicians' attempts to transfer blame allows for citizens to assign responsibility, and from this, consider what the implications may be in relation to electoral democracy in a transnational institutional context (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014). Although it is certainly a valuable study, particularly from the perspective of understanding how actors and groups form judgements in complex multi-level systems, problems arise in relation to the absence of a clear conceptual distinction between processes of blaming and the consequences for the *principle* of responsibility. Granted, the main concern in their work is the idea of responsibility without accountability, the objection is, however, sustained as there are normative presuppositions built into the theoretical framework on responsibility evaluations, which are not clarified. For instance, empirical cases are highlighted in the work, when European citizens 'get it right' or 'get it wrong' in relation to where their blame is assigned, but the societal mechanisms involved in maintaining that indistinct, yet crucial, conception of responsibility are obviated, and

this will be a key point to be addressed in the proceeding argument, which will contend that discourses of blame actually obscure, and sometimes eclipse, the related principle of responsibility, especially in a situation where complex systematic problems ought to be the critical focus of attention.

A more specific conceptualization of blame is therefore required. One, however, that does not dwell on *a priori* definitions, but that is sociologically appropriate by way of application. Although, indeed, the concept of blame invariably contains a strong moral component – by virtue of constituting a dimension of the concept of responsibility itself – which warrants deeper philosophical inquiry, the intention here is not to pursue this aspect, but to focus on the mechanisms involved in specific processes of blaming and, ultimately, to disclose underlying generative conditions at work in a given institutional context, actually causing responsibility problems. Shaver's (1985) social psychological insight offers a usefully basic distinction at this point;

> *An assignment of blame is a social explanation. It is the outcome of a process that begins with an event having negative consequences, involves judgements about causality, responsibility, and possible mitigation* (1985: vii)

Considering that the focus here, from the outset, is within the realm of public discourse, Sten Hansson's (2015) research on 'discursive strategies of blame avoidance in government' offers an ideal point of departure for re-conceptualizing blame in the appropriate register. Situated within the critical realist philosophy of social science and also based upon the notion that discourse analysts are without a sophisticated understanding of blaming, Hansson, guided by a 'discourse-historical' methodological approach, seeks to refine the concept from a communicative perspective, focusing specifically on the theme of executive government communication which, he argues, contributes to the dissection and de-mystification of power relations in political life (Hansson, 2015: 2).

Hansson's approach to analyzing blame avoidance in political communication proceeds according to three distinct steps; first, linguistic tools are developed by way of describing aspects of an instance of blaming in a given institutional setting, specifically, a way of arguing, framing,

denying, representing social actors and actions, and legitimizing and/or manipulating (social) cognition; second, in order to account for possible moves within government-related 'blame games', a public administration approach is adopted following a framework developed by Hood (2011); and finally, the previous steps are integrated into a comprehensive heuristic model, appropriate for discourse analysis, as he states in this regard, "*[*a model] that discourse analysts will be able to use to detect and interpret typical macro-conversational practices adopted by officeholders in the circumstances of blame risk to achieve the goal of positive self-presentation" (Hansson, 2015: 2). A key point in proceeding through the above steps, according to Hansson, is that in the context of political debates and persuasive public discourses, moments of blaming and denying are strategically planned and carefully orchestrated, and therefore, following argumentative moves in 'conflict talk' is crucial (2015: 3). The main advantage of this conceptualization of blame, particularly in relation to adapting it to the case at hand, is that it is embedded in a communicative framework from the beginning.

It's important to highlight that evaluating aspects of Irish public discourse from the perspective of how blame is used in political communication is not a unique approach. Brendan Flynn's 'The Blame Game' (2007) deals precisely with this problem, focusing on discursive blockages in relation to Ireland's approach to environmental policy and sustainable development. Through a critical analysis of several key instances of conflict, between environmentalists, economic actors, state agencies and the government, Flynn describes the emergence of a 'blame game' which has come to characterize the conditions of public debate around environmental issues in Ireland. A key dimension of Flynn's research, similar to the strategies of blame-avoidance in Hansson, although lacking a comparable theoretical framework, is a description of how the blame game logic actually presents itself in the discourse. Outright denial and manipulation, especially through the public (mis)representation of scientific evidence, are specified in this regard, which, he argues, leads to a general political complacency towards environmental problems and a reactionary view of policy-implementation (Flynn, 2007: 19). Although the focus is much more on institutional structures than the actual substance of the discourse itself, Flynn identifies a culture of blame as being at the very root of the problems regarding the environmental debate in Ireland; he states, "it is abundantly clear… that Ireland faces very serious environmental

problems. Yet a culture of blame and complacency stands in the way of dealing with these challenges" (2007: 24). Blame is undoubtedly foregrounded here as a significant obstacle to improving political engagement with environmental issues in Ireland.

Another example of research which illustrates the approach of analyzing Irish public discourse from the perspective of processes of blaming is O'Flynn et al's (2014) 'Scapegoating During a Time of Crisis: A Critique of Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland'. Again, based within a critical realist conception of social science, this study seeks to describe how blame was placed on a myriad of targets in the muddled aftermath of the Irish crisis, ranging from a generalized collective 'we', which is a different angle on what is observed in the present work, to more specific groups such as public sector workers (also pointed out in the present), the unemployed, single mothers and immigrants, with the objective of deflecting blame from the government. There are some valuable empirical insights presented here, particularly with regard to a distinction drawn between a 'conflict frame', which refers to a strategy of diverting public attention away from problems associated with the political economy towards some other aspect of social life, and a 'responsibility frame', which is used, they argue, to 'reveal' those who are really responsible for social ills (2014: 925).

The discourse of blame is represented in the above as a communicative mechanism, not just in the narrative that emerged in the aftermath of the financial crisis, but as a characteristic element, an inherent mechanism, of Irish public discourse itself. In contrast to this perspective, which sees blaming as an inevitable feature of public discourse, it will be reconstructed in the following as a manifestation of a learning process which has been cultivated over time, under specific conditions, and as a feature that must be perceived as susceptible to transformation. A distinction, in relation to presenting a counter-point to the conventional concept of responsibility that has become entangled with the discourses of blame, will therefore be required in order to illustrate how the reconstruction of an alternative, or counterfactual understanding of public discourse based on a more advanced perspective on the principle of responsibility may emerge.

The prevalence of blame-avoidance in Irish public discourse reflects a learned and structurally institutionalized feature of a distinctive public culture. The principle of responsibility is therefore

animated by the particular way in which it has been socially learned, and furthermore sustained within the broader social and cultural order. This distinctive mode of learning is represented, not just in the empirical examples developed in the present chapter, where it has been exposed by a means of a critique of the discourse of blame-avoidance but may also be identified in relation to other aspects of the crisis-response. The responsibility, for instance, to repay all bank debt to international creditors, backed by a government guarantee, may be highlighted as a further illustration of the way in which the principle operates in the Irish case. By focusing on the negative critique of blame-avoidance, a disclosed potentiality for a different mode of learning is anticipated, thus, critically opening the way to a reconstructive perspective on responsibility.

As in the case of Hobolt and Tiley (2014), referred to at the beginning of this section, Hansson (2015), Flynn (2007) and also O'Flynn et al. (2014) are guilty of dissolving responsibility into their conceptualization of blame or discursive blaming strategies, and by doing so obviate the *normative* significance of what is being denied, or blocked through such a mode of discourse. In Hansson, for instance, despite the advanced theoretical framework behind understanding strategies of blame-avoidance in public administration, there is no distinction made in relation to what may be the consequences of this for a broader democratic form of communication. From the perspective of critical realism, the problem is presented as an intrinsic reality of political discourse, a 'realpolitik' that can be comprehended by delineating the mechanisms involved. Although, indeed, blame is a dimension within the broader context of responsibility itself, the overshadowing of the latter by actual mechanisms related to the former in this case requires a sharper distinction be drawn in the diagnosis, thus disclosing *reconstructive* possibilities; the conflation of responsibility and blame neglects the background normative-democratic context and the associated forms of discourse required for the evolution of a legitimate democratic culture. The critical realist tradition, to reiterate an earlier point, is essentially found to be fundamentally restricted by its ontological commitments and is consequently unable to satisfy the requirements of the critique proposed here.

The principle of responsibility, and the disclosure of a responsibility discourse through the critique of blame, raises the prospects of a responsible society. This, in turn highlights the emergence of a reflexive, counterfactual idea of responsibility, which will later be shown to

constitute an element of the modern cognitive order of society, along with the principle of legitimacy. There are competing models, or cultural interpretations of responsibility, which may be illustrated in the present context with reference to the conservative emphasis on *individual* moral responsibility and the emergence of broader conceptualization of *co-responsibility*, which seeks to encompass a more democratically advanced application of the principle. The former model, which may be understood as operating in the Irish case, constitutes an element of the general '*conservative turn*' that accompanied the thriving of the globalizing neo-liberal socio-economic order from the 1980s onwards. In essence, developments which supported the progressive privatization of state assets and the dismantling of the welfare state – all promoted on the general appeal of individual responsibility.

The category of individual responsibility, which is congruent with the development of a conservative culture, applies to pre-institutional contexts. According to Strydom (1999), the traditional interpretation of this category pertains to the duty of loyalty incurred specifically within the settings of friendship, family, kinship and the group or nation (Strydom, 1999: 68). On the formal, institutional level, this form of responsibility extends to marriage and family, and to occupational roles characterized by the existent division of labour. It presupposes social institutions, therefore, remaining within the normative confines of the social institutional framework. The post-traditional variant of individual responsibility is post-conventional in the sense that it breaks the limits of the pre-institutional and institutional conventions (1999: 68). Strydom argues that "duties of responsibility accrue to individuals on this level due to their possession of special knowledge, abilities, judgement, power or influence in particular domains of social life" (1999: 68). In this sense the boundaries are shifted by assuming individual responsibility for the redesign and reorganization of social institutions.

In the proceeding analysis the principle of responsibility will be re-framed in sociological terms. In the same way that learning is conceptualized as a collective achievement in the present work, occurring at the systemic level, following Miller, so responsibility is to be understood as a social phenomenon, framed by the conditions within which a given interpretation of responsibility may be reconstructed. Framing responsibility in such terms requires consideration of situational structures, thus constituting the elements which will provide the content for a reconstructive

procedure later. Strydom describes the relevant situational structures in this sense as context within which "a range of – objective, moral and conative – classifications of reality, variable yet nevertheless relatively small cross-section of knowledge concerning values and norms becomes accepted or rather presupposed by the participants" (1999: 72). These presuppositions are the features that therefore coordinate the situation in relation to the principle of responsibility, as such they are rules of coordination. As this coordination effect rests on the mechanisms of communication, the rules of coordination are themselves actually structure of discourse. The proceeding reconstructive approach, which moves towards a critical-cognitive perspective, makes explicit these rules of the discourse, and therefore, a normative reconstruction of the underlying coordinating conditions.

By conceptualizing the principles of legitimation and responsibility as key features of the analysis of the crisis-response, I have elaborated a distinction between the conservative reality of Irish normative culture and the potentiality of reconstructive horizons which, in being disclosed in the conditions of crisis, contain the possibility of an alternative future. The next chapter will further explicate this distinction in relation to an account of the foundational concept of Critical Theory, namely immanent-transcendence, and also develop a specific reconstructive procedure for advancing a co-responsible mode of legitimation. Responsibility, in this sense, will be re-framed within the principle of legitimation. Therefore, no longer constituting separate regulative principles, they will be combined transcendently as a novel cultural model in relation to which the mechanisms of communication and processes of collective learning may be critically reexamined through a critique of the conditions of Irish conservative culture.

The normative principles introduced in this chapter will now be contextualized within a broader critical theoretical architecture. The next chapter will outline the theory of society within which the various elements introduced up to now are placed and, importantly, held together in relation to one another in the context of a crisis aftermath. At the surface, manifest level of social reality, processes of public discourse were identified in the thematization of the crisis, leading to a narrative which sought to justify the crisis response. Beneath the surface, shaping the conditions of resonance to which the discourse above has to make sense, lies the cultural model, this is a crucial component in the proceeding analysis. A mediating structure that sets out the parameters

of the social conflict, this is restricted in the Irish case by the culture of conservatism, which constrains the thematization of alternative responses to the crisis and blocks out voices opposed to the status quo. This ultimately reflects a distinctive mode of learning, reproduced by the Irish cultural model, at work in the aftermath of the crisis. The theoretical framework that follows here takes advantage of recent social theoretical developments in cognitive sociology to put forward a critical framework in which each of these components are placed in a causal relationship to one another. Vital to this framework is the way in which the normative principles, introduced in the present chapter, are accommodated in a dialectical fashion, recognizing their diminished immanent realization in the context of the Irish cultural model, while simultaneously containing an unlimited transcendent potentiality.

5.

Developing a Critical Theoretical Framework:

From the Public Sphere to a Cognitive Theory of Social Learning

Chapters 1 and 2 sought to outline distinctive features of the response to the 2008 financial crisis in Ireland. Public discourse, constituting the key mediating mechanism in the development of the narrative of this response, is ultimately identified in this approach as the object of analysis. An important element in establishing an analytical link between the crisis and the mediating processes of discourse will be introduced using the concept of the public sphere. Focusing, therefore, on the meso-level dimension of public communication, this concept will be employed in detecting the structural selectivity of discourses in building such a narrative to justify the Irish government's response to the crisis. The critical normative perspective of the work was outlined in the previous chapter with the introduction of legitimacy and responsibility as the relevant normative principles in the case. The approach adopted here towards these principles is anchored in the democratic project of modernity, specifically, a communicative understanding of a democratic society, at the centre of which is a properly functioning public sphere.

Up to now, the relationship between the concepts of crisis and narrative have been understood predominantly in relation to discursive mechanisms, mainly following a critical realist account. However, this approach becomes inadequate in detecting the normative power implied in the specified concept of public discourse. The construction of what may be perceived as a legitimate response reflects the selective, normative operations of the public sphere. Moreover, this must also be recognized as constituting a key determining factor in identifying what is understood in relation to that perception of legitimacy – such operations include the organization and role of the mass media, the part played by intellectuals in public life, and the structural biases and strategically selective processes of various public and private modes of economic, political, and ideological domination. Discursive mechanisms, according to the realist account, down-play this critical-normative dimension, focusing instead on the selection of discourses according to a static macro-structural orientation, guided in this context by the imperatives of global capitalism, and

by a seemingly inert micro dimension, where agency and forms of socio-cultural innovation appear inconsequential.

In assuming the normative structure of public discourse, distinguished only latently in the account of the public resistance in the Irish case above, there is, contained within, a reconstructive potential beyond this realist conceptualization of discourse as a structural supposition comes into focus. Normative selectivity, therefore, is dependent on a distinctive mode of public discourse, which is in turn conditional upon a specific formation of public sphere. This exemplifies the normative power of public discourse. The crisis narrative did not just develop through some arbitrary selection of discourses that sought to legitimize the Irish government's institutional response. The discourse is culturally embedded, which moulds a narrative that resonates under specific conditions.

Although resistance movements in Ireland appeared at the time of the crisis somewhat inchoate and unable to alter the dominant narrative of the crisis response, they nonetheless demand attention as significant moments of learning, suggesting the possibility for the development of a counter-legitimation narrative; i.e. the possibility of democratization as a response to crisis. Social movements, which in this case emerged in opposition to the perceived injustice of the political management of the crisis, often signal the beginning of the gestation process of social and political change. However, in the context of the crisis aftermath in Ireland, an opportunity for this normative democratic learning, which may carry and develop the reconstructive potential given expression in the course of such movements, did not strongly resonate in public discourse in any sustained way.

In advancing an argument which seeks to explain the conditions for the domination of certain interests or of a specified form of political hegemony reflected in public discourse, one must articulate exactly what these interests are and the form this hegemony actually takes, and, from a critical perspective, what is being denied or blocked in such a situation. Following the descriptive analysis of the initial chapters, which establish the relevant features of the actual situation, the remaining steps in the present work will go beyond the concrete setting, seeking to uncover the causal structures at work in the problematic situation. In pursuit of this form of

critique, guided by the methodological structure of Critical Theory, reconstruction will take a multi-dimensional form; at the immanent level, it will focus on the problem of legitimation in relation to the crisis narrative and on the more general issue of responsibility in Irish public discourse, and, on the transcendent level, it seeks to expose those unjustifiable features of socio-practical ideas of reason or cultural models, thus positively disclosing a surplus potential, which has remained critically unrealized in the actual situation. The objective is to arrive at an explanatory critique which offers an account of the problem and specifies the relevant learning pathology which, if transformed, could allow for a more adequate and justifiable realization of democratic possibilities.

5.1 The Concept of the Public Sphere: Towards a Theory of Triple Contingency Learning

In 'The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere', Jürgen Habermas argued that, as a distinct realm set between the state and civil society, the idea of a public sphere emerged initially in Europe in the late eighteenth century with the development of rational-critical discussion of public affairs. A sphere, therefore, in which critical public discussion on matters of collective interest became institutionally guaranteed, would replace the absolutist notion of the ruler's power as being represented before the people with a sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse by the people (Habermas, 1989: xi). Above all, the public sphere refers to the "people's public use of their reason" (1989: 27).

Through the formation of political associations over time, the objective of citizens became the assertion and maintenance of the autonomy of civil society as a forum for rational-critical discourse, free from political domination, thus allowing for the elaboration of such fundamental principles as freedom, equality and publicity as the basis of a democratically transformed politics (O'Mahony, 2013: 8). The most vital aspect in the tradition of Habermas' formulation of the public sphere is not so much concerned with the historical development and eventual disintegration of this distinctly normative category, but with the recognition of the centrality of discourse in transforming the relationship between political and social spheres. Following O'Mahony (2013) on this point, modern political society does not simply depend upon the

aggregation of votes as the mechanism for the establishment of legitimate political authority, but, more fundamentally, it depends on the communicative process of the formation of reasonable public will by means of rational critical discourse; "the latter is more fundamental as it embraces the indispensable ethos of democracy, an ethos that must be constantly communicatively replenished and without which it would not endure" (2013: 9).

Nancy Fraser (1990), among others, has highlighted significant limits in Habermas' original formulation, specifically in relation to understanding actually existing democracy, that is, with a view to bridging the gap between critical social theory and actual democratic political practice. Firstly, Fraser contends, Habermas idealizes the liberal, bourgeois public sphere and thus fails to recognize other, non-liberal, non-bourgeois, competing public spheres, which are understood to have been co-emergent. Counter-publics, she argues, following a revisionist historiography of the subject, contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, developing alternative styles of political behaviour and forms of public engagement (Fraser 1990: 61). Secondly, focusing on the process of discursive interaction within formally inclusive public arenas, Fraser claims that the precondition of participatory parity and equality for engaging in Habermas' bourgeois public sphere does not go far enough by merely 'bracketing' social inequalities. Discursive interaction, therefore, within this construct "was governed by protocols of styles and decorum that were themselves corelates and markers of status inequality…these functioned informally to marginalize women and members of the plebeian classes and to prevent them participating as peers" (1990: 63). In order to correct these significant shortcomings, Fraser argues, Critical Theory most expose the ways in which societal inequality infects formally inclusive existing public spheres, which thus requires a reconstruction of the concept that would allow, on the one hand, for the recognition of multiple publics and, on the other, the inclusion of interests and issues that "bourgeois masculinist ideology labels 'private' and treats as inadmissible" (1990: 77).

Fraser's critique indicates the sociological significance of the public sphere, particularly in relation to the analysis of modern democratic social relations. Although Habermas' formulation is indeed an invaluable conceptual resource, and has initiated an extensive tradition of sociological inquiry, work remains in order to make its counterfactual claims relevant to the muddled empirical conditions of modern, political reality. Habermas (1992) himself conceded that his early

conceptualization of the public sphere risked over-idealizing a set of norms and value-orientations that proved historically ambivalent about democratic commitments, and therefore later proposed that these intersubjective commitments, which ground democratic practices, must be understood to emerge out of everyday communication and informal discourse (O'Mahony, 2013: 10). It is, ultimately, in the light of his broader, more complex, social theoretical developments, specifically the elaboration of a two-track, integration theory of society according to the system/lifeworld distinction, that Habermas' concept of the public sphere and its normative functioning through the processes of public discourse and collective learning may be properly understood. In this sense, public discourse is embedded in the general context of social integration, constituting the communicative power of the democratic public sphere itself. The objective, therefore, must be, moving towards empirical considerations, to not simply continue advancing normative arguments for comprehensive communicative power, but to understand the actual conditions that enable or block its realization.

Bernhard Peters' work brings us much closer to the possibility of empirically implementing the distinctly normative category of the public sphere. By distinguishing between the ideal of the discursive public sphere, or the procedure of public deliberation, and the idea of a 'public culture', Peters presents a more complex framework according to which the analysis of actual public communicative mechanisms may be guided. A further distinction in developing this framework, highlights the need to combine two bodies of research and theory; on the one hand, this involves the body of literature on culture, specifically political and national cultures, including belief systems, value change and the production and distribution of public knowledge; and, on the other hand, the body of literature on public communication, which pertains to two overlapping forms, namely mass media communication and political communication (Peters, 2008: 69). This distinction draws attention to the differing concepts of *legitimacy* in relation to both the normative and empirical accounts of public discourse. From the perspective of the former, a political order or decision is deemed legitimate when specific reasonable and transparent justifications are present. The empirical account, in contrast, understands legitimacy as extending beyond the general compliance with a political order to its standing as a kind of asset or loyalty (O'Mahony, 2013: 27). In the latter sense, therefore, legitimacy is composed of

phenomena such as custom or affective identity within a given tradition – for instance, in the case of nationalism – which can only be weakly normatively justified. The empirical concept of legitimacy, following O'Mahony's interpretation of Peters, is more comprehensive than the normative one as it includes the normative understanding itself as an element within the overall process of legitimating a political order (2013: 27).

Peters' understands Habermas' concept of the public sphere as corresponding to the structure of public discourse or deliberation within a given national context, or public culture. This basic assumption, which leads to regard the national setting as a public culture in itself also, therefore, leads to the assumption that public discourse is a 'national affair', taking place, as Peters' writes "in communicative structures and processes that are centred in a given country, despite many links to communication processes in other countries" (Peters, 2008: 80). The sphere of public deliberation, even within national confines, however, is far from homogenous. The relations between a public culture and structures of public deliberation are internally differentiated in many ways. As it will be reflected in the empirical account of Ireland, which follows here, the ideas and interpretations that constitute parts of the cultural repertoire function as a background and a resource in public deliberation, "as unstated assumptions and as a reservoir for the articulation of specific ideas" (2008: 110). In the course of public debate, therefore, elements of the cultural repertoire become articulated, while other parts remain as an implicit horizon of assumptions and presuppositions.

> *The focus of public debates might be narrow (oriented towards questions of immediate practical relevance and towards specific disputed aspects of such issues), or more general or fundamental. It is in these wide-ranging 'grand debates' that public interpretations and collective self-understandings are most clearly articulated and disputed* (Peters, 2008: 110)

To differentiate the various possible manifestations of public sphere within diverse national settings, thus allowing for an assessment of the varying normative democratic capacities of different societies, Ferree et al. (2002) offers a framework to guide such a distinction. They observe a close link between theories of the public sphere and democratic theory more generally,

with the latter focusing on accountability and responsiveness in the decision-making process, and the former, on the role of public communication in facilitating or hindering this process (Ferree et al., 2002: 289). Seeking to develop a categorization tool for attempting to identify normative criteria in relation to the role of the public sphere in 'actually existing democracies', they review four distinct traditions of democratic theory; Representative Liberal, Participatory Liberal, Discursive, and Constructionist. Each tradition is mined for its key normative criteria, for what they refer to as 'good democratic public discourse' and summarized in terms of *who* should be included, *what* is the ideal content of the discursive process, how participants should express themselves and the relationship between discourse and decision-making (outcomes) that is sought (Ferree et al., 2002: 290).

The four democratic traditions identified by Ferree et al. reflect a varying emphasis on each of the above key questions, therefore generating contrasting normative modes of public discourse. For the representative liberal tradition, the emphasis is placed on the problem of who should be included in the discursive process; for the participatory liberal tradition, the 'what' question, regarding the processes of engaging in public debate is core; placing the discursive and constructionist traditions together as newer theoretical approaches, they emphasize, respectively, the 'style' in which debate occurs and the relationship between public debate and decision-making as central. From this framework, the most appropriate form of public sphere for describing Irish democracy would align with the representative liberal model. In contrast to the other traditions, this model of public sphere stands alone in valuing "elite inclusion over stronger and more active versions of popular inclusion" (2002: 317). Placing a strong role on the value of expertise in public discourse, it also suggests a criterion that such discursive space should be allocated according to proportionality. In contrast, discursive theory, which holds the idea of 'deliberativeness' as its highest value, suggests that public discourse space should be divided among actors in the centre and periphery, at least for non-routine decisions. The representative liberal tradition also places the strongest value on the idea of discursive closure; Ferree et al. explain, public discourse from this perspective "is only useful in relationship to decision-making, and once decisions are made, continuing debate is at best a waste of resources and at worst a threat to legitimacy" (2002: 318).

In deriving specific normative criteria from contrasting democratic theories of the public sphere, this framework may certainly be appropriated to empirically analyse distinctions in how public spheres operate across different countries. However, in light of developing the present critique, the question I seek to focus on, specifically in relation to the Irish case, is *why*. That is, although Ferree et al. distinguish a typological framework for identifying general variations in democratic public spheres, one must examine more closely the underlying normative cultural conditions within different national settings in order to develop sharper distinctions in relation to why these variations take the shape they do. Irish public discourse, as reflected in the context of the crisis response, represents a public sphere which is plagued with distortions, which is shown to repress the reflexive component in discursive learning and ultimately constrains the possibility of cultural and democratic innovation. In what follows, I will argue that this is a direct result of the historical development of a distinctive Irish political and public culture. That is, a culture dominated and moulded by a deeply conservative national ethos, hegemonically manifested in the political domain with an emphasis on the authority of traditional institutions. This, I will furthermore argue, results in a general suspicion of the normative functioning of public discourse and may be observed in the processes of discursive mediation of the financial crisis dealt with above.

Differing traditions of public sphere may also be reflected in the normative development of varying modes of communication and conditions of collective learning in relation to specific political forces. Compare, for instance, the development of the tradition of European social democracy through the post-war decades, with the emergence of a transnational political movement and parties defending the interests of labour, and its stunted adaptation in the case of Ireland. This example marks a fundamental cultural incompatibility with the leaning conditions constitutive of rational dissensus, upon which the tradition of social democracy is generally based. These conditions are conducive to the communicative setting for a productive form of social conflict, in which there is an attempted balance struck in realizing the core principles of freedom, equality and justice. In the Irish case, however, the normative operations of public discourse fail to achieve these communicative standards, and instead result in the reproduction of learning pathologies and conditions of social injustice. This indicates, therefore, distortions in the normative functioning of the Irish public sphere itself.

Habermas' early conceptualization of the public sphere may be understood as maintaining the basic theoretical position of double contingency. Following Piet Strydom (2009) here in explicating an important conceptual blind spot with regard to the role of the public in a modern communication society, Habermas somehow accommodates a higher, more complex level of contingency than he seems to accept by maintaining double contingency. Strydom explains, "through such matters as the public sphere, the public, the structure of communication, the system of perspectives and personal pronoun, and the third point of view, [Habermas] often touches and even elaborates upon this form of contingency, yet he never acknowledges it as such, not to mention giving it a name" (Strydom, 2009: 121). An insight which has therefore remained dormant within Habermas' work, Strydom distinguishes the contingency that the public, as a bearer of the 'third point of view', brings into communicative relations, and thus into the social process itself, as 'triple contingency' (2009: 121).

The normative significance of the public in contemporary communication societies is therefore captured in the theory of 'triple contingency learning'. The formulation of double contingency, sustained in Habermas, views communication as two subjects, ego and alter, facing the problem of taking up communicative roles of speaker and hearer. Engaging at this level of contingency, the interchangeable perspectives of the speaker and the hearer become interlinked in such a way that two coordinated ego-alter circles or perspectives of participation result (Strydom, 2009: 133). Strydom's argument is that the participants' awareness is not exhausted by focusing solely on one another, that both must also in some way relate to the "world of perceptible and manipulable objects around them", otherwise "they would not have been able to participate fully in communication" (2009: 133). This implies that, in addition to the perspectives of ego and alter, another perspective comes into play, beyond the double contingency relation. This Strydom refers to as 'the observer'; "the observer belongs to the situation as a constitutive part of its sociality. Over and above the 'I' and 'thou', the third point of view represents society" (2009: 111). This third perspective, located within the society itself, constitutes the role of the public. Strydom explicates the formulation of triple contingency as follows;

> *...the concept of double contingency needs to make way for a more adequate replacement – namely triple contingency. In the first scenario, two social actors, communicatively*

acting subjects or black boxes, A and B, face or encounter one another and enter into some relation with each other as 'I and 'thou'. In the basic situation of triple contingency, by contrast, there is a third perspective, borne by C, who observes what A and B are saying and doing. By doing so, C has a constitutive impact on the situation. Indeed, this threefold configuration represents the elementary social situation rather that the former twofold one. But it also brings a higher degree of contingency with it (Strydom, 2009: 111)

In relation to the present work, which conceives of the 2008 crisis and its aftermath in communicative terms, this formulation of triple contingency learning presents a key theoretical perspective. It is, of course, not just simply a matter of communication, but one critically concerned with processes of collective learning. Following Strydom's constructivist lead further here, which is juxtaposed to Habermas' 'legitimationist' approach, a triple contingency learning perspective seeks to grasp what is collectively accepted in a particular situation, and not, as in the case of the latter, attempt to measure existing reality against a necessary and unavoidable presupposition, stylized as a normative standard (2009: 120). In this sense, the focus is on detecting starting points for new "constructive learning processes that could possibly move in the direction of an unlimited or indefinite public" (2009: 120).

Identifying this counterfactual, unlimited or indefinite public by following learning processes requires that the normative codes of all societal participants, not just the preferred one, be examined as possible presuppositions for further learning. This focus on all participants, including, Strydom argues, social movements, must be subject to social critique, which should assess the projection each animates in its strategic communication in relation to the other participants. Therefore, rather than simply holding up the picture of a transcendent normative standard against the actuality of the society, so that one can begin to appreciate how far short it falls from these ideals, this constructivist sociological approach discloses the illusory side of the ideals in order to expose the errors that need to be corrected. As Strydom points out, "sociology is not exhausted by describing existing reality – 'facticity', in comparison with a normative standard, 'validity', as Habermas proposes – since it specifically undertakes the uncovering and exposure of illusory ideals about reality and their effects on what becomes collectively accepted in the course of public communication within a particular situation" (2009: 120).

Democratization depends upon listening more attentively to publics. The financial crisis has indeed exacerbated existing tensions and activated new, perhaps more destructive ones. In this sense, the clash between nation-based social protection regimes and the European Monetary Union-induced austerity and imposed spending cuts has entered the electoral arena across Europe; of course, Brexit being the most dramatic example of this. The crisis has also led to the reactivation of latent distributive cleavages at the European level, between the 'richer' Member States and the 'poorer' receiving Member States, leading to a further straining of the tension between solidarity and economic integration. Eder (2014), similarly to the present thesis, recognizes this 'crisis of Europe' as an opportunity for the birth of a new society through the development of a post-national narrative, which could potentially herald the first truly modern society. Although I agree with Eder's sentiment here, and there is indeed much evidence of new emergent cultural models which could potentially challenge the dominant cleavage, there is still much to overcome at the cognitive order level for these to constitute new transnational cognitive cultural models. The focus must, therefore, remain on the cognitive processes of collective learning, and the identification, exposition and critique of those instances in which learning processes are pathologically blocked.

In that sense, Celikates' (2015) approach of 'learning from the streets' offers a more promising orientation, if combined with the critical-cognitive framework developed here, for detecting the sources of potential social transformation in the future. By addressing systematic theoretical shortcomings in the analysis of modern social movements and the related forms of civil disobedience, Celikates evaluates how the activist practice of confronting "low-intensity representative democratic institutions" with "participatory or high-intensity democratic forms of democracy and self-determination" actually guides this transformation (Celikates, 2015: 65). By paying closer attention to forms of cultural innovation, learning processes could potentially generate novel forms of contestatory power, combining "new forms of civility that will challenge established assumptions about civil and civic norms, the symbolic and the confrontational, alternative forms of collectivity, and a prefigurative transformation of public space in ways that trigger the dynamics of collective action" (2015; 72). This perspective also indicates the future orientation for the development of the empirical focus of the critical-cognitive framework

advanced in the present work, pointing towards new combinations between applications of a Critical Theory research and the theoretical advancement of cognitive sociology.

5.2 The Theory of Social Learning and the Pathologies of Blocked Learning

A fundamental theoretical distinction in proceeding with this approach relates to a sociological concept of learning. Following in the social evolutionary tradition, learning is understood here to proceed at the level of the society, prior to that of the individual. It is a fundamental constitutive element of social evolution. Klaus Eder (1999) argues that modern societies have created a new type of 'reflexive knowledge' in relation to the way in which they look at themselves; he writes, "society has learned that it learned" (Eder, 1999: 197). This exceptional form of reflexivity is therefore an inherent characteristic modern society, which, he argues, is a learning society. Ultimately, however, this advanced sociological understanding of the reflexive capacity of the modern learning society presents us with a paradox, which is reflected in the title of Eder's paper and illuminates a core concern of the present work; why, despite this learning capacity, is it so hard to change the world? This paradox may be resolved in some ways by further clarifying aspects of collective learning, specifically, why under certain circumstances societies do not make use of what they have learned, why, at critical times, they block learning processes.

Eder suggests that the learning of societies is a phenomenon that would be impossible to explain by following the logic of individual learning. Breaking therefore with the long-held individualist (psychological) assumptions regarding the micro-level basis of macro-level learning, he advocates following a shift that has resulted from real changes in relation to the way in which social learning has been observed by those involved in collective learning processes. The key sociological point here is "that modern culture is perceived by its participants as the outcome of a collective enterprise, as the outcome of collective discussion, of collective argumentation in groups, organizations, institutions" (1999: 199). In essence, the creation of modern culture is understood by the actors themselves as a collective learning process. Eder argues that this perception of modern society "forces us to take the step from an individualist to a relational theory of action" (1999: 199). This relational approach is then filled in and developed according to certain

substantive assumptions of Habermas' communication theory, that human beings base their capacity to act rationally upon specific cognitive and moral competences (1999: 201). Pursuing this communicative approach to social learning, Eder turns to the work of Max Miller in outlining a model of collective learning processes, which allows for a key set of distinctions to be made in applying the theory.

Miller (2002), in integrating a perspective on communication theory with insights developed from a theory of systemic learning, represents a critical step in the light of the present work, specifically as it opens up the cognitive sociology approach to follow. Systemic learning relates to a form of 'structural knowledge', which presupposes the 'exploration of differences' as the central mechanism of learning through a given 'social discourse' or 'system of communication' (Miller, 2002: 3). In line therefore with Eder's approach, it is not the intentions or purposes of individual agents that is of concern, but the 'logic of discourse' that systemic learning essentially depends on. Following this, Miller's key critical position is that "if the continuation of discourse is externally determined by individual intentions and interests to such an extent that consensus and dissensus pathologies arise, learning will be blocked, and forms of an authoritarian, defensive, ideological, or regressive learning will result" (2002: 3). It is necessary to reflect further upon the concepts Miller raises here, as they will bear a fundamental importance for the analysis at hand.

A basic assumption is that conflict and discourse – as, for instance, in the case of responding to the financial crisis – do not always enable learning processes. They may in fact represent conditions that block all kinds of learning and, as I will argue in relation to the Irish case, may be performed with the goal of preventing any progress of knowledge. It is therefore imperative, according to Miller, that a clear distinction be made for a theory of discourse learning between "forms and structures of discourse which can enable processes of structural learning (including self-referential discourse learning) and those forms and structures of discourse which lead those efforts to fail, because otherwise (without the possibility of any such distinction) the mere illusion of a theory has been created" (2002: 27). This distinction highlights specific forms of discourse that systematically impede collective learning processes. In identifying these forms of discourse,

Miller poses the question, "how can the potential of differences or, more broadly, of conflicts be converted into a blockage of all progress?" (2002: 27).

Miller, in articulating a perspective on systematically blocked processes of learning, classifies three forms of social conflict, constituting the basic parameters for potential collective learning outcomes. The first two forms of conflict he identifies relate to the idea of a limited or finite conflict, a situation in which participants in discourse reach some understanding about the nature of the conflict itself. In one sense, the actors involved succeed in jointly identifying points of controversy and are therefore capable of proceeding communicatively with the exploration of differences, which is crucial for processes of collective learning; Miller refers to this as a rational dissensus (2002: 27). A second form of finite conflict refers to the transformation of a dissensual situation into a final consensus, an outcome which very rarely occurs in actual social communication. In direct contrast to these forms of social conflict, a third and critical distinction is presented, in which participants are unable to identify common points of controversy and where communication is ultimately powerless, one may describe an endless or infinite conflict (2002: 27). It is in relation to this latter form that we can speak of blocked processes of collective learning precisely.

Miller differentiates infinite conflicts into four forms of 'systematically distorted discourse', which in turn corresponds to four ideal types of blocked processes of learning; "authoritarian learning, defensive learning, ideological learning and regressive learning" (2002: 28). He furthermore distinguishes here between two basically different ways in which discourse becomes distorted, externally overruling the autonomous logic of discourse through the enforcement of either a consensus or dissensus. He argues that when discourse proceeds under such conditions of communication, learning pathologies arise; consensus pathologies in the case of authoritarian and defensive learning, and dissensus pathologies in cases of ideological and regressive learning (2002: 28). The four ideal-typical forms of systematically distorted discourse/learning blockages may be elaborated in relation to this distinction regarding specific learning pathologies. Authoritarian learning, firstly, relates to some external factor determining what belongs to the realm of collectively accepted beliefs. A system of learning based on imposition, coercion and 'toughness', it is enforced by simply excluding certain kinds of conflict or dissensus from public

discourse (2002: 29). Secondly, in the case of defensive learning, Miller explains "power is exerted to enforce a predefined consensus in a much more subtle and abstract way, as it can no longer be traced back to specific sources" (2002: 29). This system of blocked learning is therefore based on a 'collective pattern of defensive avoidance of dissensus', and any attempt to generate a possible dissensus will be censured before it crystallizes (2002: 29). Ideological learning, Miller explains, mirrors defensive learning in some ways, as it refers to the basic assumption that whatever can be learned must not place certain antagonisms in question (2002: 29). There are, of course, varying levels to this system of learning; he points outs "ideological learning is not always an expression of that dark side of human nature, it can also occur in less dramatic and less threatening ways when, for example, in sociology departments there is…a dogmatic controversy between advocates of different theoretical paradigms" (2002: 30). Lastly, regressive learning, which presents an oxymoron "that states and simultaneously revokes the essential property of learning" (2002: 29). Miller equates this form of learning with the idea of argumentum ad hominem; a given argument or point of view is rejected because the person stating or holding it is rejected (2002: 31).

As a dissensus pathology, regressive learning bears particular significance in the context of the proceeding critique. Systemic learning, Miller explains, does not depend on individual agents and their willingness to learn, it is rather the processes of discourse and argumentation that augment the possibility of such learning. The relation between discourse and individual agents is therefore turned upside down in this blocked process of learning, because in the regressive case, it is the individual intentions and purposes of agents that fully determine the continuation or rather "the stagnation of discourse" (2002: 31). Discourse, in this sense, becomes the vehicle for regression, the impositions of one's interests. Learning systems become causally determined and ultimately destroyed in the case of regressive learning by means of subjective interventions and intrusions upon the autonomous logic of discourse; Miller states that "here relevance and acceptance of communication regarding coherent and proper continuation of discourse may even become totally dependent on the individual and particular person who communicates" (2002: 31). As a final word on Miller's crucial insight into collective learning processes and their associated

pathologies, I will quote a distinction he draws between the relations of power and communication;

> *…blocked processes of learning depend on certain relations between power and communication that may lead to specific forms of systematically distorted discourse. Of course, as most sociological approaches in understanding power (cf. e.g. Lukes, 1986) emphasize, power is neither inherently good nor evil but rather a basic structure for action in all human societies. Power will only block learning processes if it systematically prevents the exploration of differences and thus also prevents a potentially infinite conflict from being transformed into a limited conflict that is mutually acknowledged and so could possibly be resolved. In its capacity to reflect on rules and structures of discourse self-referential discourse learning represents the only method for possibly breaking learning blockages However, if there is a struggle between, as Habermas (1992) would say, communicative power and social power the effectiveness of systemic learning will possibly be very low – at least if looked at in the short term; and in the long term, even if learning succeeded it could be too late* (Miller, 2002: 32)

By identifying elements of distorted communication, therefore, at the manifest level of public discourse, a pathology is indicated at the underlying structure of collective learning processes, following Miller's formulation, which in turn, I will argue, may be causally linked to the given normative culture. In bringing this approach to bear on the empirical problem of Ireland's response to the 2008 crisis, I will now put forward a critical-cognitive sociological approach, which will integrate the normative perspective of collective learning processes – along with the specified learning pathologies – with a cognitive theory of society, encapsulated in the concept of the cognitive order. It is crucial, in attempting to develop such a framework, which does not lend itself conveniently to traditional methodological approaches, to clarify the empirical parameters of the situation, thus allowing for the application of sharper critical-theoretical observations.

5.3 Cultural Models and a Cognitive Sociological Approach to Learning Pathologies

According to the critical sociologist, Alain Touraine, society does not just involve reproduction and adaptation, but crucially, it is also involves creation, i.e. self-production. Through knowledge, accumulated over time, it has the capacity to define itself and, therefore, to transform its relations with its environment, essentially, "to constitute its milieu" (Touraine, 1977: 3-4). Human society, he explains, is the only natural system that possesses the capacity to form and transform itself on the basis of its capacity to act upon itself; "Society is not what it is but what it makes itself be" (1977: 4). It is through, what is termed, historicity, consisting of three distinct synchronic components, that society is able to place distance between itself and its activity, thus gaining perspective and determining the categories of its practice; firstly, through knowledge, "which creates a state of relations between society and its environment"; secondly, through accumulation, "which subtracts a portion of available product from the cycle leading to consumption"; and, thirdly, through the cultural model, "which captures creativity in forms dependent upon the society's political dominion over its own functioning" (1977: 4).

The development of orientations which allow for the capacity of society to act according to its own historical action, by means of historicity, specifically in relation to its cultural model, entails the division of society into opposing classes; "it is not society but part of society, the ruling class, that takes over the responsibility for historicity and emerges from the society's functioning in order to go beyond mere self-production – through use of accumulation – to knowledge" (1977: 5). This dimension of the cultural model, which relates to the institutional establishment of relations of domination is particularly relevant in the Irish case, where a distinctive category of lower middle class assumes responsibility for the historicity of the society. In this context of cultural domination, as reflected also in the system of political power, the remaining constituents, predominantly the elements within the proletarian class, merely react to the process of historicity.

The sociological perspective on cultural models allows for society to be recognized, not as a totality or an order sustained by the unity of some social consensus, but as a complex system whose principle characteristic is the generation of its own orientations and thus, the conditions

governing its functioning (1977: 6). It is through struggles constitutive of social conflicts and movements, revealing the existence of domination, violence and ideological distortion in social relations, that such general orientations and conditions are understood; as Touraine notes, "it is in this respect above all that Marx's critical analysis retains all its value as an antidote to the optical illusion that leads each and all of us to perceive social relations as subject to some unifying intention or law" (1977: 6). The distinction within a society's field of historicity, therefore, captured in the concept of the cultural model, establishes social relations not on the basis of reciprocity or competition but on the basis of conflict. This is understood not simply as a conflict of interests or values, but a "battle for the control of historicity", partly open and partly concealed between the dominators and dominated, which determines the social and cultural orientations of the system of historical action. Society is therefore perceived as divided against itself, "each of its orientations is the object of opposing attempts at appropriation" (1977: 10);

> *The sociologist must not identify himself with the ideology of any actor, but in order to achieve this independence, without which his work is impossible, he must throw all his weight into the task of re-establishing the nature of the social relations thus concealed, in order to let those speak that have no voice, in order to illumine that which is hidden, forbidden, or lock away, in order to break the power of ideological discourse and the false evidence in the categories of social practices* (Touraine, 1977: 10-11)

In 'The Post-Industrial Society', Touraine (1971) sketches out an impression of the dominant cultural models, the basic parameters mediating conflict at the most general social level, through which the different stages of modern society have developed. With the transformation of production techniques and economic organisation in the development of capitalism, particularly through the nineteenth century, the capital/labour distinction is highlighted in this context as the dominant cultural model, according to which one may characterise the adversarial structure of conflict in industrial society. This structural distinction, Touraine suggests, remained stable, as the basis of society's historicity – the capacity to act on itself – until the post-WWII period, when new modes of crisis and conflict precipitated the advent of what he terms the post-industrial society, therefore shifting parameters and creating the conditions for the emergence of a new, overarching cultural model.

These novel conditions, which Touraine observes as emerging in the late 1960s, were born out of an "anti-technocratic social movement" (Touraine, 1971: 96). Technocracy, in this sense, does not refer simply to the replacement of political choices by some form of wholly technical choice, but to a form of power exercised in the name of the interests of the politico-economic production and decision-making system, which "aim at growth and power and consider society to be only the collection of the social means to be used to achieve growth and to reinforce the ruling structures that control it" (1971: 98). The development of this technocratic form of governance, which of course coincides with the adoption of neo-liberalism as a guiding ideological agenda, particularly in the US and Britain, is in turn resisted by new forms of social movement, representing specifically the alternative interests of students and the new constellations of urban working class. Such movements derive their strength from social forces that are defined by their place within the new relations of production and power, rather than "because they belong to social groups that are either in decline or are relatively far from the centres of decision-making" (1971: 98). Without delving further into the complexity involved in the development of these, then emergent, cultural models, Touraine diagnosed this period of social change as resulting in a new distinction between 'technocrats' (techno-conservatism) and 'new social movements' (radical pluralism). The present crisis may, therefore, be perceived as a culmination point of the tensions within this new cultural model.

The different modes of theorizing and explaining the 2008 crisis, reflected in Irish public discourse at the beginning of the present work, may be represented as highlighting the distinctions in this cultural model. The assumptions that underlie both perspectives characterise fundamental differences in relation to the coordination of social life; in the case of the techno-conservative perspective, it is, very generally, that social and cultural differences between groups should not be exaggerated and brought to the core of theoretical presuppositions about social coordination and political life; in contrast, the radical pluralist perspective, deriving from the counter-cultural milieus of new social movements, claims that such differences must be recognised and made salient. The form of diagnosis associated with the latter perspective, although very far from uniform, is based upon a critique of the socio-cultural orientation of western societies, making claims for further democratization, specifically including innovations in public participation.

Both perspectives are ultimately based upon a dissatisfaction with contemporary forms of democratic governance, and this is particularly evident in the EU, where the detachment of transnational institutions tends to exacerbate the general perception (O'Mahony, 2014: 242). Due to an increased level of institutional influence over the last twenty years, the techno-conservative critique has become muted, however, the crisis has presented a situation where the position must either take responsibility for its excessive approach, specifically in relation to the dependence on financial systems, perhaps leading to a desire for compromise, or further radicalize its programme. Since 2008, indications, particularly from the experiences of Ireland, Greece and Italy, suggest the adoption of the latter; as O'Mahony explains in relation to the crisis-response, "Governments generally, with the European Union at the forefront, combine further reductions in the residual welfare state with attempts to align national and international economic forces within a minimal regulatory regime and through emphasis on technical norms rather than a concern for general welfare" (2014: 242). The deep-lying problem with this perspective, specifically as it has become manifest in the European crisis, is that it seems to present a fateful choice between the continued market-efficiency of techno-conservatism and the future of democracy understood as a meaningful expression of public will.

From the above observations, the public discourse of the crisis is animated and given a discernible structure by a dominant conflict-mediating cultural model. However, it must be pointed out that modern forms of social organization generate multiple cultural models that interact with one another in the course of social practice, therefore, the substantive effects of cultural models depend on the relative power of the various communicative structures that underpin their formation in the first place. The construction of normative cultures, which generate the mode of communication that determines the thematization of principles such as legitimacy and responsibility, now becomes of ultimate importance. The concept of conservatism, which will be presented as the characteristic mode of political culture in Ireland, will be submitted here as a reason for the structural reflexivity deficit, reflecting a problematic modality of public discourse in which there is an inability to reflect upon the crisis in an appropriately democratic way and thematize possible alternatives to it. This, in turn, through the perspective of cultural models is shown to be represented at a higher level in the present state of the EU, in which the dominant

structure of communication is constitutive of a power imbalance that favours the asymmetrical political style of *repressive hegemony*, based on the dominant techno-conservative perspective, rather than, critically, the democratically oriented communicative structures of compromise, rational dissent and consensus.

Ireland, reflecting more generally on the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, and indeed Europe, currently lack the communicative culture and infrastructure, and the normative, deliberative institutions to foster an appropriate culture model to address the monumental challenges of the post-crisis situation. Klaus Eder (2014), in his analysis of the 'crisis of Europe', appeals to the 'normative power of Europe' and a new conception of solidarity in overcoming the consequences of the crisis; these, he claims, refer not just to abstract moral principles, but to a sense of responsibility accompanying the application of cherished and collectively shared moral principles on the transnational plane. A cognitive sociological approach, which will be presented in the next section, offers the advantage of relating public and institutionalised democratic culture to one another, also incorporating the concept of cultural models as a key component, in such a way that normative culture does not appear as over-idealised. The socio-cognitive context of such a normative culture is shown in relation to how it is socially constructed and made manifest. Understanding normative culture to have cognitive foundations means that socio-cognitively organised universes of meaning and associated rule capabilities become the key to understanding the processes of social change, and in turn the diagnoses of blockages to democratic innovation and transformation (O'Mahony, 2013).

The concept of cultural models, having drawn predominantly from the sociological insight of Touraine, yet continuing to pursue the distinctly normative-reconstructive approach of Critical Theory, oriented also towards the cognitive advancement of this critique, develops a sharper description of the conditions from which public discourse is generated in Irish society. Focus now shifts to the mechanisms constitutive of, and reproducing, the discursive conditions in the Irish public culture. Although cultural models determine the selectivity settings of a given society, this, it will be submitted here, presupposes the correlating mode of learning, operating at the meso-level, reflecting a dominant communicative structuring of that society. Constituting, also, another key component of the critical-cognitive sociology paradigm, which will be elaborated upon in the

proceeding section, the intention here is to develop an explanation of the mechanisms by which the principles of legitimacy and responsibility are refracted in a distinctive pathological direction, as presented in the Irish case. Ultimately, therefore, a cognitive-cultural model of an alternative mode of responsibility and legitimation is blocked.

Given the critical theoretical focus on language communication as one of the basic elements in exploring social relations, the emphasis of the explanatory critique moves to examine those elements or structures of communication that deny the possibility of learning, which occludes the conditions of the ideal speech situation. The counterfactual standards set out in the conditions of discourse ethics may, from this perspective, be characterized as "undistorted communication". Habermas (1970) develops the theory of systematically distorted communication in order to capture those patterns of communication in which there are disturbances that result in misunderstanding, or, more precisely, pathological forms of recognition. Of particular importance are those instances in which speech is not conspicuously pathological, where the participants themselves do not recognise any communication disturbance, therefore reproducing the system of reciprocal misunderstanding (Habermas, 1970: 369). Crucially, he explains, in such a situation, it is only a neutral observer that may notice the participants do not understand one another. The distinction here between manipulation and systematically distorted communication is an important one; in relation to the former, following Gross' (2010) assessment of Habermas, at least one of the participants is deceiving the other regarding the non-fulfilment of the conditions of communicative action which he or she would have apparently accepted, in contrast to the latter, which refers to a situation in which at least one of the participants is deceiving him-or herself, "regarding the fact that he or she is actually behaving strategically" (Gross, 2010: 337). Gross elaborates this distinction;

> "*In manipulation, a border is crossed. Communicative becomes strategic action: its goal is no longer mutual understanding, but an end deliberately hidden from one of interlocutors. In systematically distorted communication, a border has also been crossed. Interlocutors deceive themselves; they think they are in control of exchanges whose purpose is mutual understanding; in fact, they have ceded control*" (Gross, 2010: 338)

The narrative of the 2008 crisis in Ireland, presented as the empirical focus of the present work, was constructed through processes of public discourse and, therefore, it is recognized as constitutive of elements already existent as cognitive resources in the structure of Irish society, mobilised as the crisis demanded a political response. Anticipating the key methodological concept of immanent transcendence, much of the preceding analysis here will focus on the immanent dimension, the level of actuality, distilling the relevant principles for reconstruction out of the content of the discourse itself. The ideal, or counterfactual level is, however, now coming into focus and critique shifting to the transcendent dimension of modern society. The distinction, which will be explicated in the following pages, between, what may be referred to as, the democratic normative potential of modernity and the reality of democracy, specifically regarding the realization of the principles of legitimacy and responsibility, will be developed in relation to the way in which communication itself is structured, and, ultimately, how this is then shown to have become pathological in the case of Irish public discourse. Critically, such an analysis extends beyond communication, and examines what the learning taking place in relation to that communication and, moreover, how this determines the possibility of social and political change.

To explicate the concept of collective learning at issue here, following Eder initially, there are three fundamental points to outline; firstly, in response to the question of 'who is learning?', there is a transition from a single actor to a collective, interaction-based perspective (here using Habermas as the theoretical basis for such a shift); secondly, learning collectively presupposes a narratively-based shared universe of meaning; and, thirdly, in response to the question 'what do they learn?', learning refers to the acquisition of knowledge and "to learn how to learn". Importantly, Eder maintains, learning does not guarantee evolutionary social change, he explains, "learning, it is argued, does not guarantee evolution but provides the mutations for evolutionary processes to take place" (Eder, 1999: 195). The more traditional, individualistic perspectives on learning begin at the micro-level of social action, and through cognitive capacities and assumptions about rational motivations, accumulate to eventually constitute macro-social structures, in contrast, the perspective being adopted here takes collective learning processes as the starting point. The basis of collective learning is not individuals, but the social relationship.

The key point here is that modern culture is perceived as the outcome of a collective enterprise, of collective discussion and argumentation, and of organizations and institutions (Eder, 1999: 199).

Miller's (1986) communication-theoretical model for understanding collective learning processes may be directly appropriated here to explicate the critical approach to cultural models. He defines the concept of 'ideal' collective learning processes as attempts to solve cognitive inconsistencies through rational argumentation which requires that principles of 'generalization, of objectivity, and of truth are followed in such argumentative situations'. Following Eder's explanation of Miller, this ideal situation then serves the identification of situations in which learning is either prevented, interrupted or systematically restricted (or, as explained in the case of Habermas, distorted), which in turn leads to the development of a typology of blocked learning processes; authoritarian, ideological and regressive learning. Similar to the way in which Van Leeuwen connects instances of discursive communication to distinctive forms of legitimation, Miller's typology links collective learning processes to the communicative structures within which social interactions are taking place. Authoritarian learning, firstly, relates to situations where knowledge is accepted by its mere authority, the principle that a statement should be subject to a test of its generalizability no longer applies in this instance; secondly, ideological learning constitutes a more subtle form, where moral and normative questions are in some way presupposed, implying that the principle of objectivity can be suppressed which, as Eder explains, "entails that the arguments of the other (enemy) are not seen as part of the definition of the situation among those taking part in the argumentative process"; regressive learning, finally, refers to the most radical and clear-cut case of blocked learning processes, as here, the idea of argumentative rationality, the principle of truth, is given up.

The communicative structures in which these blocked learning processes are understood to be embedded are reflective of the broader normative order of society, that is, by the established practices generated and sustained by a given pattern of dispositions, reflected empirically in the Irish crisis-narrative. This normative order, guiding processes of communicative social integration, is mediated along horizontal and vertical axes. This may be considered in line with Touraine's distinction between the synchronic and diachronic structure of societal forms,

between the historicity of a given society, constitutive of its cultural model, in relation to the former, and the passage from one societal form to another, the latter. Whereas horizontal mediation refers to the different institutional configurations, evolving over time, and capturing social change in relation to normative complexes, vertical mediation operates through mechanisms in micro and macro scale, crucially, by means of the meso-level of communicative structures. O'Mahony, in developing a framework for the communicative structure of the public sphere, develops a distinction here between norm-reproducing communication, which includes a significant degree of normative elaboration, and norm-transforming communication, which then enters the "discursively carried cognitive-learning circuit" (O'Mahony, 2013: 311). Although the latter is fundamental to understanding processes of public discourse, equally so are the embedded normative structures related to the former, resisting normative elaboration by means of communicative-learning pathologies.

Miller (2002), as outlined in previous section, elaborates upon the approach to the conditioning of learning processes by the development of systemic learning, in which a conflict-based perspective on communication and argumentation is theoretically outlined. Following this, and the typology of blocked learning processes, O'Mahony (2013) delineates key structures of the communicative organisation of social integration which, he argues, facilitate integration by linking the institutional system of cooperation with the cognitive learning circuit of public communication. Essential components in the organisation of cultural models, these structures, which offer a suite of coordination mechanisms for normative practices, operate on two planes, corresponding to pathological and non-pathological forms of social integration.

The first three communicative structures, outlined by O'Mahony, are consensus, compromise and rational dissensus, and relate to those forms which operate on the non-pathological plane. To begin with, the structure of consensus refers to a form of communicative organisation characterized by circumstances where moral justification processes determine norm formation; as O'Mahony explains, "where morally structured justification relates to consensus over norms with high moral content, deliberative processes, especially those that bear on constitutional legal issues, have a big, and sometimes decisive, role to play" (2013: 314). Consensus here refers not only to the moral dimension, but to a shared epistemic and wider symbolic assumption in relation

to what is valued in factual, social and emotional worlds; a shared background context that within the horizon of the lifeworld, which may inhibit or support the achievement of moral consensus (2013: 314). Compromise, a second non-pathological communicative structure, operates on the basis of bargaining or, more precisely, rational argumentative processes; O'Mahony elaborates, "this kind of communicative organization presumes a high degree of symmetry in the distribution of social power, including epistemic and communicative capacity to effectively understand and present social positions" (2013: 313). A compromise-based form of social integration is one conditioned by moral norms, played out in relation to a morally regulated constitutional framework. The third non-pathological communicative structure, which lies somewhere in between compromise and consensus, is rational dissensus. O'Mahony, following Miller, explains this term as referring to the identification of differences arising in argumentation that leads not to conflict, but, as distinct from compromise, to agreement on rules for managing disagreements; "a state of rational dissensus frequently entails the construction of coordinating schema of a partly moral, partly ethical and partly pragmatic kind" (2013: 314). Understood as constituting the preconditions for democracy itself, the structure of rational dissensus provides a means of rationality, coordinating disagreement that could eventually lead to consensus or compromise.

The pathological communicative structures reflect problems in fundamental coordination mechanisms and a general failure of social integration. Firstly, permanent conflict describes a state of societal disintegration that is sustained by non-normative means, that is, by domination, potentially backed up by violence. O'Mahony uses the example of extreme ethnic conflict, where groups are separated by irreconcilable identity claims, to illustrate this. Although communication may continue in situations of permanent conflict, it is extremely polarized and proposed solutions often result in offending one of the contending parties (2013: 312). The second pathological structure, which will serve to best describe the empirical case at hand, is repressive hegemony; O'Mahony describes this communicative situation as involving "circumstances in which the ethos and interests of a particular group come to dominate over the – actual or potential – ethos and interests of other social groups" (2013: 312). This form of domination can occur across all of society at one time, as in the case of specific class interests, or it may be dispersed in various social spheres. Critically, O'Mahony makes the distinction that repressive hegemony may be

achieved, on the one hand, through the process of ideological distortion and subterfuge or, on the other hand, "by the unchallenged belief, even by the dominated, that the values of a particular group serve the good of all" (2013: 313). There is an emphasis on an ethical hierarchy in this structure, involving restrictions on compromise seeking and on moral norm formations.

The principles of legitimacy and responsibility, which have been developed as the normative anchors of the present work, demand a high level of inclusive and reciprocal public discursive communication, constituting the structure of rational dissensus and the possibility of leading to an innovative combination with the structures of consensus and/or compromise. Sustaining, therefore, a cultural model appropriate to more advanced forms of responsibility and legitimation, requires demanding and innovative forms of discursive communication, underlain by a robust democracy. The response to the 2008 crisis in Ireland constitutes a situation in which the terms of democracy remain unthematized, thus unable to shift towards responding in a way that would reflect such fundamentally important principles as equality and solidarity. Repressive hegemony is revealed by the crisis as the dominant structure; the mechanisms required to realize, never mind sustain or reproduce, such counterfactual normative ideas of responsibility and legitimacy are therefore severely weakened, specifically in relation to the prospects of a rational dissensus, and to a significant extent, non-present in the Irish context. The democratic regulation of the society is therefore recognized as poorly developed, resulting in the reproduction of a political culture with limited communicative structures of responsibility and legitimation processes – a conservative political culture that restricts the thematization of a democratic form of legitimation. Ultimately, it is held here that without dramatic episodes of collective learning, presented in the context of an acute crisis, such deeply rooted structures will continue to shape values, norms and general collective perceptions of what is perceived as possible, just, responsible and desirable in Irish society.

To summarize, there is a transcendental foundation to all societies, given shape by means of the construction of distinctive cultural models and expression through the associated communicative structures that constitutive generative mechanisms reflecting a combination of organisational principles. From this perspective, a spectrum of claims that can be asserted in public discourse and gain resonance as valid in a given society becomes discernible; on the immanent plane, it is

through this 'spectrum of relevance' that selections are made, by means of an appropriation of the cultural model putting varying emphasis and weight on validity claims. The cultural model determines what principles are to be valued positively, and those that are to be valued negatively, as a threat to the social order. There is always a distinction that must be maintained between the norms that are established and institutionalized in a society and this transcendent level, which contains an infinite potential. In the case of Ireland, however, the societal appropriation of what is transcendentally possible is extremely weakened. The empirical legitimation processes outlined earlier and the obstruction of the principle of responsibility by an emphasis on blaming in public discourse, shows that Irish political culture is not oriented toward the ideal level, unable therefore, to achieve a form of democratization which would allow for the thematization of such ideas as legitimacy, democracy, solidarity, co-responsibility, equality and justice, most critically in the context of a crisis.

The following section will introduce the concept of the cognitive order as a final theoretical component, allowing for the many distinctions drawn in the present and preceding sections to be integrated into an advanced critical-cognitive sociological framework. This approach will re-cast the relevant principles, communicative structures and associated pathologies, and the cultural model itself, by means of which claims are made immanently effective, in cognitive terms. It will delineate, in the clearest sense, the orientation of Irish society in relation to the coordinating mechanisms determining the societal emphasis on the three fundamental cultural spheres of modernity; the functional, moral and evaluative (mentioned earlier by reference to Peters). A social order dominated by functional and ethical-evaluative imperatives, the dimension of moral-legal, crucial for the survival of a democratic society, is observed to be severely diminished. The 2008 crisis has revealed, in Ireland, a society in which the efficiency and goal-oriented form of economic organization and functional coordination, along with evaluation standards associated with successful identity-building overshadow the moral component as the basis of social integration.

5.4 The Cognitive Order and the Irish Crisis Narrative

The distinction, which runs throughout the present work, between the immanent and the transcendent, the actual and the counterfactual, will now be advanced in relation to a further distinction, that between the Irish crisis-narrative, representing the normative conditions of social reality, and the cognitive order. Through the public discursive construction of the crisis-narrative, the principles of legitimacy and responsibility have been conservatively refracted to constitute the dominant political and public culture of Irish society. The conditions, therefore, for more advanced forms of responsibility and legitimation, are blocked by pathological communicative structures, resulting in blocked learning and, ultimately, non-normative modes of legitimation and the discursive mobilization of blame in the public sphere.

Two key distinctions will be developed in the following to delineate this fundamental concept; firstly, the essential elements presented in the last section, that of the cultural model and communicative structures and related learning pathologies, will be integrated as components within an overarching 'cognitive theory of society'; and, secondly, the concept of the cognitive order will be developed in light of the preceding empirical-theoretical work, to move towards a reconstructive analysis of the response to the 2008 crisis in Ireland, which will be developed upon in the following chapters. The cognitive approach that will be submitted here, predominantly following the work of Eder, Miller, Strydom and O'Mahony, has been developed essentially on the basis of a theory of collective learning, where collective learning may be understood as either as either a socio-cognitive accomplishment or, depending on its actual form, a pathology. This theoretical account arises from the interplay between public discourse and cognitive structures that constitute the validity conditions of normative orders.

The approach, at a general level, operates through the device of the cognitively grounded anticipation of the possibility of an alternative normative order. It is, following O'Mahony (2013), an extension of the formal pragmatic understanding of the relationship between the limited and unlimited communication community. By means of collective counterfactual anticipation of alternative futures in collective learning processes, possible directions of social change may be apprehended and applied critically to concrete problems. This anticipation is generated out of collective learning processes and given societal expression in the form of emergent cultural

models, that is, possible options for altered cultural models developed in, for instance, experimentation of new social movements and ensuing radical democratic innovation, making use of opportunity structures, such as in the case of a global financial crisis. The five communicative structures of social integration outlined in the previous section, in relation to which Ireland will be depicted as an example of repressive hegemony, are both mechanisms and outcomes of collective learning processes and will therefore, in the following, be deployed in relation to how the cognitive order is arranged and operating in the case of this specific structuration of the Irish cultural model.

The concept of the cognitive order represents a key development in the emergence of a cognitive sociological approach. In a critical way, the cognitive social theoretical perspective, which will be drawn from and advanced here, was conceived by means of a problematization, following the intellectual impact of the 'cognitive revolution' of the late 1950. It comprises such elementary sociological processes as information-processing, knowledge-production and utilization, communication and world creation, and their associated modes of structuration, including existing epistemological and methodological approaches (Strydom, 2007: 339). The outcome of this has been a significant re-contextualization of new problems, challenges and possibilities within, specifically critical, social theory, at the centre of which has emerged the cognitive order. Strydom (2007 and 2013) systematically maps the contemporary cognitive social theoretical field, emphasizing, principally, its critical capacity. Focusing on its latent, yet undeniably present, development within the tradition of Critical Theory, particularly through the latter half of the twentieth century, the approach may be delineated by means of a critique of Habermas' ontological turn, which would eventuate in the development of universal or formal pragmatics. Nonetheless, Strydom makes the argument for a sociological radicalization in Habermas' ontological perspective, embracing the latent cognitive potential in the approach, thus allowing for the adoption of the key concept of the cognitive order of society. By doing this, he claims that Critical Theory's diagnosis of society may be sharpened and its analytical tools improved, thus addressing a conspicuous gap in the Critical Theory paradigm, specifically its methodological structure.

Collective learning processes, as understood here, constitute the fluid, mediating mechanisms which allow for the outcomes of innovation and change to pass through each level of the cognitive order. Although collective learning permeates each scale, it does not necessarily follow a fixed logic, flowing from one end of the cognitive order to the other, as it were. O'Mahony (2013) illustrates the centrality of these learning processes in relation to the reflexive dynamics of the cognitive order; on the micro level, actors may initiate collective learning by adapting their cognitive models to process various forms of experience; such experiences, as ideal innovations, may then shape public discourse, which, in turn, reorients the perceived significance of the innovative experience; on the meso level, interactive and coordinative mechanisms penetrate down into the micro, thus further reshaping takes places which elaborates and extends cognitive competences in that dimension; the macro-level constitutes 'presuppositional' collective competences, which are absorbed through socialization and general social participation. Innovative collective learning processes are, therefore, partly achieved by 'pulling down' elements held in the latent potential of cognitive rule systems and cognitive cultural models, which reside in the upper levels of the cultural structure, rendering them immanently available to feed into discursive processes, that, in turn, may potentially lead to collective learning and transformation on a larger scale (O'Mahony, 2013: 352).

The communicative structures, outlined above, coordinate the social outcomes of political processes, and also highlight the impact of collective learning within the cognitive order of society. Ranging fom unconditional universal agreement (consensus), agreement to differ while fully respecting opposing positions and finding ways to go on evaluatively and normatively (rational dissensus), willingness to bargain while holding opposing values and interests (compromise), a state of domination where some group or groups successfully repress the interests or values or other, whether recognised or not by the repressed group (hegemony), and liminal conditions of unmitigated conflict, e.g., social, ethnic, or racial (permanent conflict), each communicative structure is associated with specific dimensions in the macro-cultural levels of the cognitive order. The three top-most levels, the cognitive order itself and cognitive cultural models, are constituted from the two higher levels of consensus and rational dissensus; at the lower level cultural model, the remaining structures of hegemony and compromise are foremost

– and at the immanent societal level, all five process-outcome structures are operative. Although this will remain quite abstract until the full composition of the cognitive order is explicated and applied empirically later, it is important to bear in mind that political interaction in democracies gravitate continuously to one or a combination of these structures.

The cognitive order in this sense may be characterised as the social mind/brain of society, reflexively structuring the individual mind/brain, offering an all-embracing suite of post-conventional generative mechanisms that make conventional rule-governed action possible – or problematise this action to such a degree that it is no longer possible. In identifying categorically distinct social capacities and competences, which combine in the construction of cultural models, the cognitive order allows for a recognition of the full range of social positions that modern society throws up at different times. It is an order constituted by a complex range of cognitive structures, each giving form to a distinct principle, which are normatively selected in processes of social struggle. These structures reflect what may be termed 'collectively shared meta-frames' at the very core of the reasoning processes on the societal level; in turn, this articulates principles – for example, freedom, legitimacy, dignity, equality, legality – whose fundamental relevance to modern societal organisation are beyond question, thus specifying, on the basis of incorporating the range of legitimated societal perspectives on each principle, a range of validity claims for each principle. Given the deep complexity involved here, and the varying distinctions regarding different cognitive structures, three distinct macro-cultural levels, corresponding to the micro-meso-macro scale, within the framework may be delineated for the present analysis;

(1) The cognitive order; the overarching structure comprising a range of meta-cognitive structures (schemata) operating transcendentally but mirrored immanently on the societal plane

(2) Cognitive cultural models; these operate as immanent relational models (schema combining) of legitimating reasoning that derived from the cognitive order

(3) Cultural models; as in the case of those presented in the last chapter, these operate within particular societies, reflecting the specific cultural structures at work in those societies, generating positionally induced variation on generalised cultural models

Levels (1) and (3) have been developed to a sufficient extent at this stage, (2) however requires elucidation. Cognitive cultural models represent the upper-most immanent level; closest to the transcendent dimension. The three-core cognitive cultural models, corresponding to the modes of reasoning in the cultural spheres of modernity referred to earlier, providing a structure to social life, are the model of functional reason, that of democratic reason (moral-legal), and that of aesthetic ethical reason. Given the critical-normative focus of the present work, the model of democratic reason is of most concern here; this may be understood as an orienting cultural structure, guided by the communicative structures of consensus and rational dissensus, for democratic reasoning that specifies the cognitive principles agreed to be important in democratic discourse. This perspective on the cognitive cultural model is not understood as a sphere of domination; it represents the totality of forms and conceptions that arise – or could arise – from the principles held at the level of the cognitive order. In this sense, the cognitive cultural model constitutes the level at which principles 'come down' from the cognitive order and 'come up' from evaluative normative considerations, thus determining the selections which in turn give definite structure to public discourse.

The importance of the cognitive perspective being proposed here, for advancing the present analysis, will be explicated in methodological terms in the following chapter, following specifically the concept of immanent transcendence. A key concept in Critical Theory, and central to its very self-understanding, this refers to the reflexive situation-transcending capacity of social actors to reach beyond concrete reality towards a counterfactual horizon of possibility to make possible the identification and resolution of collective problems, a process itself theoretically explicated through reconstructive critique. This reconstructive approach was used to access the relevant transcendent categories bearing on the problematic situation in question, thus leading to the identification of the principles of legitimacy and responsibility as essential to the critique. The intention here is to attempt to bridge the divide between different emphases within critical social theory and social science, pursuing a framework that ultimately tries to reach across this fundamental distinction and yet maintain the constructive tension of immanence and transcendence in the course of the analysis.

The constructivist-cognitive approach is understood here to include a combination of rules which present a means for categorizing, classifying and ordering the world. In that sense, following O'Mahony (2013) again, the critical theoretical idea of transcendence refers to the existence of specific forms of reflexive rule systems, such as efficiency, sovereignty, legality and legitimacy (O'Mahony, 2013: 328). These rule systems constitute "cognitive rationality standards" which, O'Mahony explains, include "rule-following and rule-elaborating competences that are diffused across key domains of modernity" (2013: 328). Transcendence, therefore, indicates 'cognitive presuppositions' that are specifically related to and defined within the distinctive spheres of modernity, "constantly being 'thought into' afresh as agents confront problems and seek orientation" (2013: 328). These cognitive presuppositions relate, on the one hand, to the latently available foundations of everyday interactive practices and, on the other hand, to an inexhaustible 'surplus' that has yet to be institutionalized in society. This reconceptualization of transcendence, O'Mahony argues, offers a sociological translation of the formal pragmatic presuppositions of communication; "transcendence has a social pragmatic core that goes beyond normatively framed proceduralism" (2013: 329). This 'social pragmatic core' is manifested in the framework in two senses; firstly, cognitive rule systems are not consensually-based rules, but are elements that emerge from the "synthesis of different discursively articulated perspectives", which, although they represent generalised rules, are still subject to the surplus latent potential of such rules systems and may therefore be discursively re-activated in episodes of collective learning; secondly, the transcendental social pragmatic presuppositions "add a stronger teleological or ends-oriented dimension to cognitive analysis", thus enabling the reconstructive disclosure of alternative, perhaps better ways, of dealing with problems or seizing opportunities that arise in social practice.

On the immanent plane, in contrast, cognitive elements practically operative in social life come into focus. At the 'highest' ideal level in this immanent dimension, lying on the horizon between transcendence and immanence, are cognitive cultural models, the key component of the cognitive reconstructive approach, which allows for the immanent ideal translation of cognitive principles and facilitates their incursion into social practices. 'Lower level' cultural models, which are closer to Touraine's understanding, by contrast, offer substantively operating, rather than

ideal models of social organisation. 'Quasi-transcendent' cognitive principles do not, O'Mahony points out, simply flow into cultural models; "discourses stimulated by collective action induce different kinds of collective learning that agitate these rule systems into further operations that are then sifted into cognitive cultural models, into socio-cultural models, and into social life generally as group and individual level cognitive models and meso-cognitive interactive capacities" (2013: 329). It is, therefore, at the interface between the micro- and meso-levels that innovation and radical social change may be discursively formulated; that is, by social actors in various contexts generating reconstructive ideas about how relevant cognitive rules or principles could be differently applied to social life.

Eder (2007) provides further justification for embracing the concept of the cognitive order in critical social analysis. Following Erving Goffman's theory of frames as modes of organizing social reality, by means of coordinating interaction situations, he claims that frames can be understood in various ways, and they exist as cognitive tools before they are put to use. Constitutive of social interaction, therefore, they provide a means for linking social reality to the cognitive competence of human beings; according to Eder, what was lacking here was a theory that went beyond the contingency of situations. Goffman put forward the concept of the 'interaction order' by way of offering a solution to this problem, viewing cognitive frames as in-built regularities, constituted via language, shaping social practices. The 'interaction order', Eder argues, is full of norms, yet these norms do not create social order; norms, he explains, are broken, avoided and at times obeyed (Eder, 2007: 395). How then, he posits, is a social order in ongoing interaction, an 'interaction order', possible? The answer to this problem lies in the fact that it is not norms alone that create an order, but the rules structuring the practical use of norms, i.e. cognitive rules that allow people to make sense and use of norms. The concept of the interaction order works because actors take it for granted; Eder explains, "breaking the taken-for-granted world creates problems and it is in such situations that we can see the rules that allow the interaction sequences to be repaired" (2007: 395). The real order is therefore always in repair, most explicitly in the context of a crisis, and observing such repair processes reveals the cognitive ordering of the world; ultimately, "cognitive orders explain why people are capable of continuing to interact as soon as the normative order tends to get out of order" (2007: 395).

Strydom (2013), in explicating the components of the cognitive order of modernity, claims that it consists of the full range of "second-order, synthetic, reflexive or meta rules which emerged from the social orientations and activities of the different social groups and collective actors who had made an input into the processes of formation of the state, capitalism, intimate relations, science and technology, civil society, modern law and corresponding cultural forms" (Strydom, 2013: 2-3). The cognitive order may therefore be understood as the structured meta-cultural outcome of historical learning processes on all scales, while simultaneously constituting the conditions for further learning. The idea of meta-rules sustaining and modifying societal forms in the context of changing circumstances by successive generations, results in societal reproduction and yet continuous innovation. Strydom, in delineating the consolidation of a modern society from this perspective, explains the way in which given orientations, forms of action and the social practices of individuals and groups, engaging in and implicating various innovative processes, were ultimately given expression in modern cultural structures, a process and outcome he captures by the gestation of the modern cognitive order over time;

> *It is on this socio-structural and socio-cultural basis that over a period of approximately three centuries the cognitive order of modernity arose which would henceforth, in interaction with the prevailing social practices, constitute, generate, guide and regulate the formation of modernity and the actualisation, realisation and expansion of multilevel potentialities* (Strydom, 2013: 2)

In attempting to apply the framework of critical-cognitive sociology, the cognitive order plays a fundamental role. As a concept which seeks to encompass all possible societal positions at a given time, thus underpinning all possible communicative interaction in society, it takes immanent social form in cultural models. In this sense, cultural models organise societal differences and conflicts, so as to make a normative order possible, furthermore constituting the outcome of the cognitively organized interplay of transcendent rule-systems, which contain an infinite potential through the reinterpretation of foundational cognitive principles. Collective learning proceeds in a specific way, as indicated earlier, within a given cultural model and involves the 'pulling down' and making immanent, through cognitive-communicative modes of collective understanding and argumentation, the latent potential according to which a future different from the present can

be imagined and even anticipated (O'Mahony, 2013: 248). I will clarify these distinctions, which are operating at the different levels of the cognitive scheme, as they are made directly relevant to the empirical case at hand. To properly analyse the cognitive-communicative structures that characterise the response to the Irish financial crisis, encapsulated in a distinctive narrative of justification, it is therefore necessary not just to account for the structures themselves but critically, for how they are actively held in place in relation to the wider elements of the cognitive order.

The cognitive structures that shape the cultural models, and the corresponding communitive structures, specified above, have indicated a learning pathology in the Irish case blocking the possibility of an alternative public narrative in the aftermath of the crisis. Historically, Ireland has struggled to achieve the advanced level of responsibility, in a cultural sense, necessary to address the crisis it faced in 2008 in a justifiably democratic way and, subsequently, to navigate a moral path through its aftermath. The degree to which the ideology of conservatism has blocked the possibility of democratic innovation in the aftermath of the crisis may therefore be explained as a collective learning pathology. In Ireland, as dealt with in Chapter 3, the culture of the social welfare state project, emphasising redistribution and compensation, has always been weak, as it conflicted with the dominant conservatism sponsored by a highly influential Catholic church. Democracy, therefore, has tended to be a strictly representative, clientelistic and elitist form and social projects aimed at deeper social justice have been constrained. Hence, the critique of the idea of the response to the crisis from a critical-cognitive point of view, focusing on the blocking of a democratic, co-responsible mode of legitimation, indicates an imbalance in the immanent realization of the possibilities contained in the cognitive order.

In conclusion, the cognitive order presents a multi-level conceptual framework through which the deep-lying generative structures of social reality, manifested in the discursive mediation of the crisis response in Ireland as learning and communicative pathologies, may be located. The cultural components of the cognitive order constitute the essential structural elements of modern society, thus accounting for all possible social positions which may be taken up, at every level, in relation to a problem or issue. Normatively, this approach to the analysis of the distortions in Irish public discourse allows for the identification of specific blockages in relation

to the key cognitive generative capacities of modernity, thus resulting in the exposure of significant unrealized and unexplored areas in the cognitive cultural model of democracy itself. Irish normative culture, in emphasizing certain cognitive principles in public discourse, such as authority, control and efficiency, has been shown in the preceding analysis to constitute a blockage in itself to potential innovative cosmopolitan learning processes, in which such cognitive principles as equality, justice and democratic solidarity could potentially be emphasized as the basis of social order. From a critical-reconstructive standpoint, therefore, I developed the cognitive-cultural model of co-responsible legitimacy as a possible structural reconfiguration of the cognitive order through which a transformation of the conditions of communicative pathologies and learning blockages could be realized in the Irish case.

Overcoming the crisis, which persistently frames so much of our public discourse, requires such transformation. Touraine describes the post-crisis situation as a kind of liminal state in which the old socio-economic order has collapsed and yet another form of society is prevented from developing as a result of what may described as the stagnant response. Pointing towards a response based on the reconstruction of society, normatively carried by the emergence of a new 'moral subject' based on the adoption of universal human rights, Touraine's challenge is addressed here by means of the cognitive-critical approach, which allows for this potential reconstructive process to be made explicate in the counterfactual-transcendent domain. The mechanisms preventing this reconstruction are located, following Miller, in blocked processes of collective learning. From the perspective of the cognitive order, discursively overcoming these blocking mechanisms, which would allow for a situation of a consensus or dissensus pathology to be transformed into a situation of rational dissensus or consensus, may be reflected in new selective combinations of cognitive principles mediated through a different cleavage structure in the formation of cultural models. These new selective combinations therefore reflect the possibility of the normative reconfiguration of the cognitive order, precipitating the development of the innovative cultural conditions for a more reflexive mode of collective learning.

6.

The Reconstructive Methodology of Critical Theory:

An Empirical-Theoretical Mode of Inquiry

The critical-cognitive framework, presented in the last chapter, sets out a theoretical paradigm within which the empirical content of the thesis may be understood in relation to the relevant counterfactual dimension, therefore allowing for a reconstructive form of critique. Up to now, an outline of specific methods has been employed to identify the negative aspects of legitimation and blame avoidance in Irish public discourse. This is a crucial step in the diagnosis of pathologies in the communicative structuring of the crisis narrative, however, the reconstruction step, which will be outlined in the present chapter, seeks to develop the critique from the perspective of what is denied in the actual situation. In this sense, normative ideals or, more precisely, transcendent standards of legitimation and responsibility will be conceived on the transcendent plane, against which the actual level of their realization in the society at present may be methodologically assessed in a critical reconstructive manner.

Essential to the diagnosis of problems related to processes of public discourse is the reconstruction of the normative-pragmatic import of everyday social practices relevant to public communication and democracy. It is, therefore, on the basis of this interest in the possibility of a democratic form of public communication, contained in a more innovative culture of democracy, that a reconstructive approach is brought forth as the specific mode of critique in the present analysis. The concepts of legitimacy and responsibility have been introduced from the outset with this perspective in mind. Although they are realized in the actual situation in a deeply problematic way in the context of the Irish crisis, through their reconstruction in accordance with the normative potentiality contained in discursive forms of communication and learning, the transcendent dimension is exposed, allowing for a deeper explanatory critique of the deformations and/or social pathologies at the root of the problem. In what follows, the methodology of reconstructive critique, as it has been adopted in the Critical Theory tradition will be outlined as an initial step. Habermas' development of the approach, specifically in relation

to the concept of immanent transcendence, will then be delineated in order to provide a general impression of its methodological significance, and, in a final section, Axel Honneth's account of normative reconstruction will be presented by way of explicating a specific application of the concept which is most appropriate for present purposes.

Robin Celikates (2009) specifies the distinctive procedure of reconstructive critique as lying at the very core of the Critical Theory approach. Following a reassessment of Axel Honneth's focus on the concept of recognition through the idea of pathologies of excess recognition and the introduction of a concept of misrecognition inspired by Bourdieu, Celikates argues that critical theory must proceed in a specific reconstructive manner. There are, he argues, two conceptions of reconstruction, put forward through a review of Habermas's early formulation in 'Knowledge and Human Interests' (1968). The first refers to the understanding of critical social theory through an analogous description of the methodological structure of psycho-analysis characterised by the process of self-refection and, the second, to a distinction between reconstruction and critique, where the former is dealt with through the development of a formal pragmatics and the latter through providing a "robust normative basis for critical theory" (2009: 94).

Celikates contends that the earlier Habermas analogy regarding the reconstructive methodology of psycho-analysis, which is at the root of the Critical Theory tradition, has been too quickly dismissed and in fact, provides a promising direction for application. This methodological analogy is elaborated by Celikates on two levels; the level of the aim and that of the process (2009: 95). In relation to the former, he argues that the critical theorist's aim is to "trigger a process of self-reflection and to enable the subject to perform this self-reflection by herself" (2009: 95). A distinction between the process of self-reflection and that of transformation is highlighted here; it is not the theorist's place to prescribe substantive goals for society. In relation to the *process,* Celikates proposes that a critical theory as reconstructive critique ought to follow the methodological structure of psycho-analysis in the sense of enabling the analysis and, through internalizing the capacity for analysis, to carry on the process of self-reflection. Theory in this context plays the role of providing the analyst with the means to generate hypotheses, however, these cannot simply be deduced from the theory itself but must be developed, tested and continually readjusted in dialogue with the addressee (2009: 97).

This view of reconstructive critique, to echo Celikates' central point, "is not just about making explicit something that was already implicitly present", but through reconstruction, to identify normative and potential transformative moments (2009: 97). The intention, therefore, is to disclose what may be referred to as 'reflective unacceptability' in relation to a specified social problem. In line with the analogy briefly outlined above, it is up to social agents themselves to appropriate the proposals of the theorist and recognise the criticized social practices, institutions and self-understandings as unacceptable. In this approach, which is based upon a complex dialogical interaction between the analyst and the addressee, reconstructive aims guide practices of self-reflection, critique and eventually transformation. Self-reflection is animated by the epistemic and normative principles of the agents involved and the validation of the theory is ultimately subject to their judgement. For Celikates, reconstructive critique is therefore a form of metacritique, "a critique that aims at the transformation of those psychological and social conditions that block critique, and at the development and exercise of the relevant reflective capacities" (2009: 98).

Piet Strydom (2011a) goes beyond Celikates in mapping the internal development of Critical Theory's methodology over three successive generations, from its classical foundations in the left-Hegelian heritage, to the symbiotic relationship with the philosophy of pragmatism over the course of the twentieth century. He explicates the methodological core of Critical Theory, encapsulated in the concept of immanent transcendence. Constituting an exposition of an already present, but persistently down-played set of underlying meta-theoretical, ontological and epistemological assumptions in its development, this concept ultimately seeks to address an explanatory deficit within Critical Theory, more specifically, the application of a critical social science. Strydom states, "not only do the critical theorists need to go beyond a preponderant emphasis on normative critique, yet without surrendering it, but they are also required to come to grips with the advances and demands of the post-empiricist phase in the development of the social sciences" (2011a: 3). Indeed, a demanding position, embracing, on the one hand, in relation to the pragmatist standpoint, a reflexive, open-ended understanding of history, mediated by the process communication, and, on the other, in relation to the left-Hegelian/Marxian tradition, a

critical perspective, insisting that the constitution and organization of society requires more than just an understanding of problem-solving capacities (Strydom, 2011a: 62).

Strydom develops the concept of immanent transcendence with particular reference to the philosophical legacy of Kant and Hegel. Transcendent ideas are present in all forms of human life and, under certain conditions, are available in actual situations as partly grasped but still unrealized ideas which, if realized, could change society itself (2011a: 87). The concept at the core refers to the idea of reaching beyond a concrete problematic context through appealing to an interpretation of a principle or principles, such as freedom, responsibility, legitimacy, etc., that are currently unrealized to transform the immanent reality. He outlines the 'rights discourse' of the eighteenth century, which paved the way for the French Revolution, as an example of the concept in operation in social life. Although it has certainly remained a rather opaque concept, seldom referred to explicitly by the tradition's main figures, Strydom foregrounds three theorists who have provided a comprehensive elaboration; Habermas, Karl-Otto Apel and, more recently, Axel Honneth. Contesting the very nature and intentions of critique, each developed a distinctive perspective by means of a specific appropriation of Critical Theory's methodological structure. Habermas' articulation of the concept, influenced by his collaboration with Apel, indicates its centrality to Critical Theory.

In the following, the concept of immanent transcendence, the counterfactual foundation of Critical Theory, will be developed as an entry-point to a reconstructive methodology. By explicating the methodological value of such an approach, that is rarely taken up in any sustained way in the social sciences, a horizon of potentiality will be constructed, against which the conservative actuality at work in the situation may be normatively evaluated and criticized. Presupposing that there is a democratic potential being denied, as is suggested by the cognitive potential of the cultural model, the following will detail the steps required to disclose this. It will identify and reconstruct the essential 'transcending' principles of legitimacy and responsibility, emergent in the discourse itself and required in order to challenge the conservative standard that is sustained and reproduced by the Irish cultural model.

6.1 The Reconstructive Core of the Critical Theory Approach

Critical theory proceeds on a distinctive reconstructive path, but it addresses both the specific limitations and relative rights of competitor approaches within its own perspective on critique. Habermas, for example, recognizes both interpretative and nomological approaches, despite their limitations, as valuable to the development of social science, but insists on a critical social science that distinguishes the significance of its own explanation-based critique focussed on the normative foundations and requirements of society. The scientific character of Critical Theory, moreover, which recognizes an appeal to, and emphasis on, the possibility of the theoretical approach of reconstruction, resulting in the production of objective and explanatory knowledge, must also be understood in relation to this procedure of critique.

Immanent transcendence, as a methodological concept, refers, on the one hand, to an accumulated historical potentiality in the form of socio-practical ideas of reason, and on the other, to a cultural model within which reflective critical disclosure makes apparent a potential that may be realized to some degree in the society. This potentiality of reason, expressed in the possibility of innovative social practices, is not therefore to be understood as a transcendent ought, metaphysically projected beyond society. It is always operative in structuring social life itself, directing and guiding, or regulating social practices in some immanent way. Drawing on Strydom again, in general methodological terms, "the concept of immanent transcendence thus directs Critical Theory to focus on the dialectical tension that serves as the dynamic impetus of the ongoing process of the constitution, reproduction, organization and transformation of society, including the self-transformation of the agents" (2011a: 135). It is in relation to this conceptualization of reconstruction that Critical Theory's methodological structure, guided by the immanent transcendence concept, may be characterized best as reconstructive-explanatory critique.

Before elaborating upon the specific theoretical background and methodological implications of this concept, Strydom delineates three distinct modes of inference in relation to which Critical Theory proceeds at a general level. In explicating this threefold distinction, representing a correspondent dynamic within and across the framework's theoretical, normative, epistemological and ontological dimensions, the reconstructive aims of Critical Theory are made

clear. The vital association between Peircean pragmatism; on the one hand, specifically the logic of abductive, inductive and deductive modes of inference, and Critical Theory's 'counterfactual imagination', on the other, captured in the theoretical concept of immanent transcendence, and pursued through diagnostic, reconstructive and explanatory forms of critique; illuminates the methodological path. Strydom (2011) explicates this three-part dynamic association in relation to the 'semiotic process of sign-mediation' and the critical modes of engagement with a subject-matter; the abductive moment, 'firstness', he explains relates to a feeling or vague perception of something on the surface of social reality; the inductive moment, 'secondness', relates to a confrontation with the problem and a theoretically-elaborated diagnostic or reconstructive approach to the problematic situation; and lastly, the deductive moment, 'thirdness', refers to the testing and validation of the resultant theory and/or concept in the scientific/public domain. These inferential moments constitute the methodological development of Critical Theory, reflecting the steps which correspond to the three inferential moments in the present work.

Chapter 1 objectively disclosed a problem situation, descriptively constituting the 2008 crisis as it became manifest through the processes of public discourse in Ireland, situated in turn in the broader context of the global financial crisis. The initial, abductive moment, on the part of the analyst, which is initiated by a feeling of unease that something is not right in the society, develops into the second chapter, specifying further the problematic situation, where the implications of a conservative political culture are developed and linked, through the concepts of power and social class, to the notion of a distinctive political and public culture in the case of Ireland, thereby, it is argued, cultivating a style of politics reflected in a mode of communication. The second, inductive, move is made in the latter sections of the preceding two chapters, and also in the present chapter, involving a specific diagnostic engagement with the object domain delineated above, and presenting an analytical and normative focus on the problem through the procedure of reconstruction. It is at this point, following Strydom, that Critical Theory goes far beyond empiricist and interpretive approaches, "allowing a penetration of the various layers of the actual concrete situation to the deep level of structural rules or generative mechanisms which, although neither empirically observable nor interpretively discernable, can be unearthed with the appropriate methodological means" (Strydom, 2011a: 156). Finally, the reconstructive

work allows for an explanatory critique (Chapters 7 and 8 below) which seeks to account for the distinct causes of the designated problem, or social pathology, characterizing the situation.

Reconstruction thus fulfills a pivotal and multidimensional task. It pursues an attempt to make explicit the structuring or generating force of a problematic situation, not only in relation to the possibilities of the concrete setting involved, but also the formal structures "refracted as socio-practical ideas of reason…expressed in ethically relevant cultural model which are unavoidably at work" (Strydom, 2011a: 156). It sets out the immanent pragmatic presuppositions and possibilities of the concrete situation, constituting the actual context, while also establishing a sense of the latently operating transcendent structures responsible for its regulative generation. That which is reconstructed in respect of the transcendent features of the situation is latently present in the structuration of immanent social life, thus making the concept of immanent transcendence core to the reconstructive methodological approach of Critical Theory.

What remains of the present chapter will focus on the distinctive reconstructive methodology of Axel Honneth. Although he adopts the same inferential methodological perspective as Habermas, he activates Critical Theory's methodology in a different way, with a critical focus much more on the diagnosis, reconstruction and explanation of social pathologies. Whereas Habermas adopts the notion of autonomy in the sense of "collective democratic self-constitution and self-organisation", Honneth, contrastingly, "shifts from the moral-practical political sphere to the ethical-practical one in order to prioritize the normative idea of the good life" (Strydom, 2011: 207). The objective in adopting this approach in the present work is to establish the principles of legitimation and responsibility within a reconstructive frame, therefore, representing them in terms of the critical features of the Irish crisis. These principles will be viewed on the immanent plane as partly blocked by the mechanisms of public discourse within the Irish cultural model, a blocking process that may be identified and potentially re-oriented on the transcendent democratic reconstructive plane. A second fundamental task of reconstruction in the methodology of Critical Theory, is to put the reconstructed immanent and transcendent features of the situation in relation to one another; "the critical reconstructive demonstration of such mediation provides a framework of the formal features of the unobservable yet methodologically accessible depth-level structural rules or generative mechanisms of the actual concrete

situation" (2011a: 157). Before critically re-engaging with the empirical case, however, Honneth's distinctive approach to normative reconstruction will now be outlined in order to provide a framework for the methodological procedure.

6.2 A Normative Reconstruction: Sketching Honneth's Methodological Procedure of Critique

The transition from an approach which has closely followed the Habermasian path, specifically in relation to setting out the ideal communicative conditions of a democratic public sphere, to Honneth's deployment of Critical Theory in the analysis of contemporary capitalist society, permits a focus on a particular conceptualization and application of social pathology. Understood as a distinctive critical resource for the social scientific position of Critical Theory, this allows for a connection to be made, methodologically, between an empirical sociological perspective on an actual problem and a normative basis for critique in social philosophy. Zurn (2011) describes Honneth's formulation of social pathologies as 'second-order disorders' which capture substantial disconnects between 'first-order contents' and the second-order reflexive understandings of those contents (Zurn, 2011: 345). This approach therefore demands a much more advanced sociological perspective to appropriately identify and explicate these disorders, which may facilitate a critical social theory with an emancipatory intent. The proceeding chapters will endeavor to meet this challenge, through engaging sociological explanations of the cultural causes of the specific pathologies in this case, by adopting and applying recent theoretical developments in cognitive-critical sociology.

Firstly, however, Honneth's work illustrates a specific form of reconstruction within Critical Theory and may be applied methodologically according to a distinctive threefold process. For Honneth, the concept of immanent transcendence distinguishes the approach from all other currents and directions of critique, highlighting, in particular, the form of normative critique which has come to characterize its distinctive methodological orientation. In relation to applying this theoretically-informed, normative perspective, making a diagnosis, explanation and critique of a social anomaly, disorder and/or pathology, Critical Theory must abide by a specific stringent

condition; "to identify a pre-theoretical foothold for that perspective in reality and thus to root out its theoretical and critical endeavour in a moment or movement of immanent transcendence transpiring in social life or the actual situation itself" (Strydom, 2011a: 95). Honneth establishes the grounds for critique on the immanent plane, by identifying the violation of identity claims or claims for social recognition, disrespect and injustice over and above the authoritarian, ideological, distorting or obfuscating restriction of linguistically established rules and competences. He therefore focuses an anthropologically based perspective on moral experiences, suitable for identifying structural forms of violence and/or disrespect, as the immanent reference point to guide Critical Theory's normatively oriented and theoretically-informed mode of diagnosis, explanation and critique.

Honneth's articulation of the Critical Theory's methodology provides a relevant blueprint for considering how to proceed with a reconstructive form of critique. Introducing a genealogical dimension to the approach, concerned with the deformation of reason in the historical process through its realisation and actualisation, Honneth provides a concise formulation of his methodological project in a 2004 essay, 'A social pathology of reason: on the intellectual legacy of Critical Theory'. In identifying a common thread running throughout the history of the approach, he asserts that "the historical past should be understood from a practical point of view, as a process of development whose pathological deformation by capitalism may be overcome only by initiating a process of enlightenment among those involved" (Honneth, 2004: 337). It is this intertwining of theory and history that fundamentally unifies the Critical Theory approach.

The first methodological step, corresponding to abduction in Strydom's account of Critical Theory's methodological structuration, which relates to the ethical core contained in the idea of a socially deficient rationality, spells out the fundamental normative concern of the approach. Whether one takes Horkheimer's 'irrational organisation' of society, Adorno's 'administered world', Marcuse's 'one-dimensional society' and 'repressive tolerance', or Habermas' 'colonization of the social lifeworld', they all relate to foundational, normative concerns; "such formulations always normatively presuppose an 'intact' state of social relations in which members are provided with an opportunity for successful self-actualization" (2004: 339). This initially negative moment – an abductive sense that all is not well in capitalist society – conceives

the state of social relations to be a consequence of a deficiency in social rationality; an internal connection exists between pathological relationships and the condition of social rationality, thus explaining Critical Theory's continuous interest in the historical process of the actualization of reason (2004: 339).

The theory of social pathology seeks to grasp the historically available potential of reason, and furthermore explain how, on the one hand, this can be used by social actors in a process of collective self-realisation for emancipatory movements or why, on the other hand, it is blocked; "the explanation of the circumstances that have blocked or skewed the process of actualization of reason should have in and of itself the rational force to convince subjects to create a praxis of cooperation" (2004: 345). This first move, identifying a social situation characterised by negative features indicating the existence of a social pathology, was taken in the opening part of the present work. The description of Irish public discourse in the context of the 2008 crisis identifies a specific empirical situation, characterised normatively in the principles of legitimation and responsibility, which calls forth the need for detailed diagnostic analysis, which precedes the reconstructive critique.

The second methodological step, corresponding to an inductive inference Honneth develops in relation to the process of reconstruction, is to explain the pathological deformation of reason sociologically[10]. In the context of a tradition which is increasingly engaging in social criticism without any sociological component, as he observes; "The question why those affected do not themselves problematize or attack such moral evils is no longer seen as falling within the purview of social criticism as such" (2004: 345). It is clear for Honneth that Critical Theory must couple its critique of social injustice with an explanation of the processes that obscure the sources of that injustice, for, he argues, in line with the idea of 'reflective unacceptability', "only when one can convince the addressees by means of such an explanatory analysis that they can be deceived about the real character of their social conditions, can the wrongfulness of conditions be publicly

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[10] This second move in Honneth's methodological procedure may be linked with the previous chapter (4), with the identification of problems associated with the discourse of blame in the Irish context. Resulting in an inability to properly thematize the issue of responsibility, the intention there will be to casually explain the pathological factors at work, rooted in historical factors and associated problematic forms of political culture and class domination.

demonstrated with some prospect of acceptance" (2004: 346). In essence, normative criticism must be complemented by historical explanation; the process of the deformation of reason must casually explain the failure of a rational universal, a failure that, in turn, constitutes the social pathology of the present (2004: 346). Core to this feature, in both understanding the emergence of the social pathology itself, and in relation to what may be involved in overcoming such a seemingly inherent problem, is the idea of a historical learning process; "The future surmounting of the detrimental causal force of the capitalist form of social organisation depends on such learning" (Strydom, 2011: 115).

The third, and last, methodological step, corresponding to the deductive inferential moment, Honneth singles out relates to the concept of reflexivity at the heart of the Critical Theory approach. The reflexive dynamic he specifies is that between theory and practice; "explanation of the causes that may be responsible for obscuring social injustice are thought to belong just as little to the business of criticism as do perspectival characterizations of the conversion of knowledge into praxis" (Honneth, 2004: 352). Highlighting again the tradition's indebtedness to its Left-Hegelian roots, it must always consider as one of its essential tasks, the initiation of a critical praxis, which, by means of reflexively disclosing some transformative potential, can contribute to overcoming a social pathology. In outlining this feature, Honneth turns to the earlier (First Generation) origins of Critical Theory's methodological development, rooted in adapting approaches from psychoanalysis and moral psychology.

The resulting perspective presupposes that subjectively experienced and/or objectively attributable suffering among members of a society must lead to a desire for the alleviation and liberation from social evils, which the analyser (the Critical Theorist) imputes to his/her patient; Honneth explains, "all the thinkers belonging to the inner circle of Critical Theory expect in their addressees a latent interest in rational expectation or interpretation, since only winning back an interpretation rationality can satisfy the desire for liberation from suffering" (2004: 355). The culmination of this perspective on Critical Theory's application is therefore ultimately directed towards providing the means for a given society to thematize and reason through its own problems, and ultimately, to learn. The approach is to be understood as a form of reflection within a historically effective mode of reason, encapsulated within a cultural model, and, as

Honneth insists, it should not give up the normative motif of a rational universal, the idea of a social pathology of reasons or the concept of emancipatory interest.

An application of the above methodological procedure may be found in Honneth's 2014 (English Translation) work, 'Freedom's Right'. Drawing on the structural sociological theories of Talcott Parsons and Emile Durkheim, in combination with an interpretation of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right', a theory of justice is developed to explain the reproduction of values and principles which constitute the foundations of a democratic life. The procedure employed in the analysis is termed 'normative reconstruction'; "this procedure implements the normative aims of a theory of justice through social analysis, taking immanently justified values as a criterion for processing and sorting out the empirical material" (2014: 6). Such a procedure is both, on the one hand, normative, in that institutions and practices will be judged according to their normative capacity for the social embodiment and realization of socially legitimated values, and reconstructive, on the other hand, in the sense that only those social routines and institutions deemed indispensable for social reproduction are selected for analysis.

Placing the principle of freedom at the top of the hierarchy of modernity's values, Honneth emphasizes the structural conditions of contemporary societies which produce a sociologically informed understanding of what Hegel described, as 'ethical life'; "anything that contradicted the universal values and ideals of modern society's normative requirements by representing merely particular values or embodying backward ideals could not be viewed as suitable objects of normative reconstruction" (2014: 8). He then introduces the more comprehensive idea of 'social freedom', which theorizes those social conditions that must be realized for freedom to truly operate. He claims that values associated with such an idea of freedom are already immanently present, yet simultaneously denied, in the institutional settings of personal relationships, the market economy and the democratic public sphere. Social freedom offers a solution to the pathologies of legal (negative) freedom and moral (reflexive) freedom, where the methodological procedure of normative reconstruction seeks not to affirm and/or reinforce current practices and institutions, but to correct and transform them (2014: 8).

The approach of normative reconstruction, therefore, must always offer room for criticizing social reality; as Honneth argues, "the point cannot be merely to uncover and reconstruct instances of already existing ethical life, rather it must be possible to criticize these findings in light of embodied values" (2014: 9). This constitutes the very basis of reconstructive criticism. If there is an instance of an ethical life, to adopt Hegel's concept, representing universal ideals or values in the shape of institutionalized practices, these same ideals and/or values may be drawn upon in order to criticize given practices as being unsuited to what they are supposed to be representative of (2014: 9). In regard to this understanding of the reconstructive approach, he claims "we do not confront given institutions and practices with external criteria, the same standards according to which these institutions and practices are picked out of the chaos of social reality are used to criticize insufficient, still imperfect embodiments of universally accepted values" (2014: 9).

This approach provides a clear illustration of how a reconstructive methodology may proceed in critical analysis, developing a sharp conceptualization of social pathologies as a focal point of critique*,* and, importantly in relation to the present work, which seeks to follow the logic of the deformation of reason in the historical process. It represents an example of the way in which deficient forms of social self-understanding, orientations, practices, relations and institutions are targeted and new possibilities, modes of organization and transformative potential are disclosed and contained in the immanent context. The transcendent form of reconstructive critique, on the other hand, seeks to negatively expose unjustifiable features of socio-practical ideas of reason or *cultural models*, thus positively disclosing surpluses of meaning held within, that go unnoticed in the situation (Strydom, 2011a: 157). It is this latter form of reconstructive critique that will be taken forward as the basis of the explanatory analysis. In the following, therefore, the transcendent principles of legitimation and responsibility will be reconstructed as the key generative features in the construction of an Irish crisis-narrative.

Honneth ultimately recognizes social pathologies as second-order phenomena, blocking the actualization of reason at the first-order level of social action. Viewing the present work from the perspective of the three-step procedure of normative reconstruction and applying it to the specific empirical problem at hand, the democratic conceptualization of legitimation may begin

to be subject to critical reassessment, combined with the normative idea of co-responsibility. Firstly, in detecting problems through the observation of Irish public discourse, a narrative was identified which was found to be severely deficient in terms of meeting democratic justificatory requirements. The explication of causal mechanisms that work to systematically deform or damage conditions of mutual recognition is central to the reconstructive procedure here. In the remaining chapters, I will analyze, specifically, the core problem of non-thematization, a characteristic feature of a conservative cultural model, as a blockage to the prospect of generating alternative perspectives on the response to the crisis, disabling such contents from entering the normative stream of public discussion and debate. It is, therefore, at this level of the macro-cultural order that the pathology, in Honneth's sense, is identified. In essence, I have argued, drawing from a collective learning perspective, that the institutional response to the 2008 Irish crisis represents the conservative restriction of public discourse, specifically in the consideration of an alternative response and, ultimately, the blocking of social change. In developing this argument, specifically theorizing what exactly is being blocked in this context, the concepts of the legitimacy and responsibility are introduced by means of an immanent critique of the actual discourse, however, critically, the unrealized potential contained in these ideas were also disclosed on the transcendent plane, thus anticipating the present reconstructive stance.

It is through a combination of the foundational concept of immanent transcendence with the methodology of reconstruction that Critical Theory sets out the situational parameters within which the real mechanism. It is the specification of the contingent obstacle blocking the process of practical realization of structural possibilities, that allows for the location and identification of the generative problem or pathology to be explained. Of particular significance here, following Strydom, are those contingently intervening, interfering, impeding, retarding, deforming or blocking forces, factors, structures or related processes which only a "historical-sociological materialist or realist theory of society is able to specify and identify and thus make available as explanans in a causal explanation that can contribute to a critique of an undesirable, unjustifiable, pathological state of affairs" (Strydom, 2011: 138). Reaching down to the deep level of structural rules and causal mechanisms, therefore, the reconstructive approach to the actual situation signals towards a critical juncture where intervention could possibly stimulate transformation of

reality, as in the present context of the aftermath of the Irish financial crisis. The critique that follows, which depends on the depth-structures revealed by the reconstructive procedure, led by a distinctive cognitive theory of society, zones in on an instance of powerful interference of a societal structure or causal mechanism which could prove to be decisive for a successful and meaningful transformative critique.

In order to follow through with a reconstructive critique, the principle of co-responsibility will be combined on the transcendent-normative level with the democratically conceived process of legitimation, thus resulting in the counterfactual formulation of a co-responsible mode of legitimation. As the reflexive blocking of alternative and/or innovative social positions and opinions from entering public discourse in Ireland has been identified as generated at the macro-cultural level of the cognitive order, specifically, as I have claimed, through the ideological domination of an historically embedded form of conservatism, the analysis will now move to explicate this dimension. A radicalization of the Critical Theory perspective will be brought forward in the remaining chapters by means of embracing recent developments in cognitive sociological theory, thus advancing the critique in a radicalized direction. The objective in adopting such an approach will be to describe the way in which the cognitive-cultural order, in the Irish setting, has formed in such a way as to disable the possibility of learning, in a democratic register, a more advanced co-responsible form of legitimation.

7.

Re-Evaluating Irish Public Discourse in Light of the Theory: The Structuring of Communication and Diagnosis of Pathology in the Crisis Response

Before proceeding with the reconstructive critique, it is necessary to reiterate those specific elements that will be subject to reconstruction. This will involve re-evaluating the empirical material introduced in the opening chapters and revisiting the means by which the relevant principles of legitimation and responsibility are rooted out of the discourse. The analysis, however, will proceed within the parameters set out by the critical-cognitive theoretical framework developed earlier. This approach contextualizes the communicative structures involved in shaping the mechanisms of public discourse and also captures the dimensions of learning, and the associated learning pathologies and blockages, reproduced by cultural models within the structure of the cognitive order of society.

The critical aspects of the cognitive framework will now be recapitulated in order to highlight the key dimensions for understanding the positioning of cultural models, the role they play in structuring communication, and the diagnosis of learning pathologies, which disrupt or block normative innovation. The framework constitutes a hierarchical structure, at the top of which is the cognitive order, which encompasses the full range of established transcendent principles for the organisation of social life, below this is the level of cultural models, which, divided into two distinct categories in the present work, allows for the immanent realisation of the potentials contained within the overarching structure above it. Collective learning processes function as the mediating mechanism between each of the three levels, that is by means of communicative structures that connect the cognitive order to cognitive-cultural models and to the immanent cultural models at the micro level. To imagine the reconfiguration of normative transcendent principles, in this case legitimacy and responsibility, and to theorize the potential emergence of different cultural models capable of carrying a novel configuration, requires going beyond negative, realist approaches, and embracing a reconstructive position. Because, it is the infinite potentiality reflected in the unobstructed combinations of cognitive principles – appealed to

saliently in situations of crisis and/or moments of conflict, contained in the macro-cultural structure of the cognitive order – that allows for this framework to be a fruitful approach for critical empirical analysis.

The cultural model is the key analytical component here. Through moulding a specific form of public discourse, which follows a conservative direction in the Irish case, this concept gives shape to political norms and identities, in turn becoming stabilized and reproduced over time. It is, furthermore, in the context of public confrontation with the established conditions of a political and public culture that transformation, specifically through processes of innovative, discursive communication and learning, may occur. Crisis situations offer opportunities for such processes of social and political change to be initiated, however, this is crucially dependent upon a public culture capable of critical, reflexive engagement required in order to generate alternatives, and to thematize narratives that expose the contradictions and injustice of the existent state of affairs. Such alternative narratives failed to crystallize and resonate in the Irish context as it is shown to lack the political and public culture necessary for the discursive innovation required for this form of democratic learning. In complete contrast to this counterfactual sketch, conservative cultures function to contain and suppress such transformative processes, such cultures in fact endeavour to promote forms of non-thematization. The Irish case, therefore, encompasses the conditions of collective learning that correlate with a form of non-learning, sustained by a model of public discourse that blocks the exploration of alternatives.

The communicative structures, which facilitate the collective learning process within this framework, by drawing down cognitive order principles to the immanent level of social conflict and contestation, allow for cultural models to shape public discourse. As outlined in Chapter 5, these structures range from positive conditions of consensus, rational dissensus and compromise, to negative conditions of domination where some group or groups successfully repress the interests or values or other, i.e. hegemony and permanent conflict. These latter two communicative structures correlate with collective learning pathologies, following the Miller and O'Mahony formulations. The structuring of communication tends to take discursive effect in various combinations; for example, O'Mahony argues, "certain social issues may be subject to bargaining; others to rational dissensus; some issues are prone to indivisible type conflict; moral

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norms underlie consensus formation; repressive hegemony excludes or minimizes the impact of certain innovative ideals" (2013: 315-6). The collective learning pathologies that emanate from the communicative structures of repressive hegemony and permanent conflict indicate that just procedures and moral norms have become bypassed, and non-moral norms dominant, in discourse. Such circumstances may lead to generally repressive and authoritarian mode of imbalanced integration, as in the case of the society generated out of Irish conservatism. In that context, as reflected in the preceding empirical work on Irish public discourse and political culture, counterfactual appeals to validity beyond the existing normative rationality is completely shut down in favour of a normative facticity orchestrated by a repressive social power, reflected in the structure of the Irish cultural model.

7.1 A Critique of Legitimation and Blame in Irish Public Discourse

To illustrate a reconstructive critique and to understand and explain the deeper-lying causes of non-thematization, which is reflected by the ideological restriction in the exploration of alternatives in the Irish response to the crisis, I will now revisit and apply the approaches of Van Leeuwen and Hansson. As the principles of legitimation and responsibility are now contextualized as making up normative components within the cognitive order, it is possible to diagnose the pathologies and blocking mechanisms at work in the actual situation using these approaches. The purpose of the reconstruction, following Honneth's procedure, is to identify the deformation of reason in specifying the processes that constrain its historically available potential. The critique of non-normative legitimation and blame, therefore, in the Irish case is combined with an explanation of those discursive processes that obscure the sources of the associated normative principles. In what follows here, Van Leeuwen's discursive modes of legitimation and Hansson's critical analysis of the discourse of blame avoidance will be applied, thus highlighting specific examples of pathological communicative structures, which in turn discloses a reconstructive potentiality.

- Authorization: The Role of the Irish Media

The authority of expertise and tradition, which Van Leeuwen identifies as a form of legitimation in addressing a 'why' question, will be brought forward as specifically relevant to the discourse in the Irish case. This refers to the selection and prioritization of certain experts in Irish media discourse in the response to the financial crisis, and secondly, to a political culture in which the authority of tradition is seen as particularly powerful. In general, the lack of any sustained public discussion regarding the possibility of alternative responses to the crisis will be highlighted as symptomatic of both these forms of legitimation.

This part of the analysis will focus on the media's role in the inflation of the housing bubble up to 2008, the government's subsequent rescue of the banking system, and the representation in the Irish media of European institutions and the IMF in promoting a severe austerity programme thereafter. In each of these crucial moments, it is difficult to discern any possible alternative strategies that may have been useful in dealing with the crisis – for example 'debt default' in the case of the bank guarantee – and explore why they were not apparent in the public debate and discussion. The essential argument is, following Julien Mercille (2015), that "in each case, it is shown how the media have largely sided with government policy and corporate interests while opposing fairer strategies" (2015: 2). This reflects a fundamental 'democratic deficit' in the way in which the crisis was responded to in Ireland. The public were effectively disregarded or blindsided in considering the measures that were to be implemented. This highlights the way in which the Irish media's representation of the crisis essentially echoed elite interests.

The Irish media's role in the inflation of the Irish housing bubble to begin with, and its unchallenged support for the subsequent response to its collapse, reflect examples of Van Leeuwen's modes of expert authority and the authority of tradition, and ultimately contribute to the justification narrative that emerged in the aftermath of the crisis. Between 2000 and 2007, the Irish Times alone published over 40,000 articles about the economy, only 78 (0.2%) of them made reference to the idea of a 'bubble' and the dangers associated with such a trend. As the global economic turmoil intensified in late 2007, and the severe crisis was looming, the media relied on 'experts' from the financial and real estate industry to describe what was taking place,

with an almost invariably sanguine outlook on the future of the property market and the construction industry in Ireland. There was an ostensible reliance on the 'views of experts' in the Irish print media and the legitimacy of their expertise was made clear by their stated credentials. Mercille, in regard to this, uses the example of a November 2007 survey of six 'property experts', all of whom held top positions within the very industry they sought to appraise and with which their fate was entangled (2015: 38). Expert legitimation was not only employed to try and maintain the public's confidence in the Irish property market, it was also used, he demonstrates, to great effect in discrediting those who were critical of the narrative; those of note in the latter regard, economist, Prof. Morgan Kelly and, journalist, David McWilliams (2015: 39). There was a clear distinction drawn in Irish media discourse on the type of expert to be taken seriously and those commentators that were to be dismissed as engaging in negative scaremongering. The experts' opinions contributed to the elaboration of a narrative which played a significant role, not only in relation to the causes of the crisis, but in terms of informing and positioning actors for the response to it, specifically in relation to 'what now needs to be done'.

Despite the increased frequency of 'expert' contributions in news media on the security of the property market and the underlying strengths of the Irish economy, when the property bubble burst and the crisis took hold in late 2008, a shift in the narrative therefore becomes apparent. This new motif reflected a change, specifically towards legitimating the response of the Irish government to the financial collapse. As Mercille states, "the media largely supported the government and business agenda, endorsing the bank guarantee, recapitalization with few strings attached, and NAMA", and furthermore, "the press gave relatively limited support to Scandinavian-style nationalization, which would have been fairer than the government plan" (2015: 47). It is in relation to the latter point, referring to the denial of alternatives through a highly restrictive mode of public communication that the second mode of authorization, that of tradition, as a form of legitimation may be introduced. The authority of tradition, according to Van Leeuwen's typology, in which rules of tradition are enforced by everyone in a given society, is brought to bear on the situation.

That alternative proposals to addressing the financial crisis were not explored in the Irish media to any significant extent points towards a form of legitimation operating through the authority

of tradition – it may be understood as an implicit answer to the 'why' question in Van Leeuwen's terms. Take, for example, the development of the narrative in relation to the NAMA proposal. As noted above, this was a prominent feature of public debate throughout 2009 and generated entrenched positions in relation to both 'for' and 'against'. Dismissing a viable alternative in the form of a 'good bank' strategy, put forward by the main opposition party, Fine Gael, in early 2009, which would have proposed the creation of new state-managed banks and the winding up of the existing failed financial institutions, NAMA (the '*bad bank*') became the dominant proposal in the media. Mercille claims, "any scheme that involved letting the banks fail or forcing the bondholders to incur losses was virtually excluded from the debate" (2015: 66). The narrative developed according to the idea that NAMA did not actually have to be explained, as it was, according to an Irish Independent article, "the only plausible option open to the Government" (Brennan, 2009). Mercille's work convincingly supports this perspective;

> *A Sunday Times editorial was also explicit, stating that 'No option now but to bank on the NAMA deal', while another, entitled 'Be positive: NAMA might just work', opined that the government 'must get the benefit of the doubt on NAMA, even if it is not perfect* (Mercille, 2015: 66)

The above quotation exemplifies the position that the Irish media had taken in the aftermath of the financial crisis, and moreover, the form of legitimation that was contained in the discourse. The narrative which emerged in connection with this position exposes a distinct mode of authorization at work in the legitimation process; firstly, in relation to a dependence on a certain type of expertise in the lead to the collapse of the property bubble, and secondly, in relation as to how the crisis ought to be responded to, pertaining to a reliance on tradition or 'the way things are/have to be'.

The concept of authority, specifically emphasizing the principle of leadership in terms of political authority, also constitutes an important element in a conservative culture. In this sense, it may be inferred that to question such authority in this context is to fundamentally challenge the society itself. In the case of Ireland, there is an 'authoritarian mindset' observed in relation to the development of its distinctive political culture. This refers not just to the central role of

nationalism in the wake of the formation of the state, or the unavoidable presence of the Catholic church in all state institutions, but to the inherited loyalty to one's specific political group in the development of the party-political system.

- Moral Evaluation: The Reflection of Underlying Norms

The instances of political intervention, outlined in Chapter 1., and the corresponding narrative developed by way of justification for the response to the crisis must be understood in their appropriate normative context. There are two essential components, which converge in an interdependent way in the discourse of legitimation, thus providing the basis of the moral-evaluative perspective in the Irish case. The first relates to the dominant global economic rationality of neoliberalism and, the second to a conservative political culture. It may be observed that in relation to their respective positions on such ideas as equality, justice, citizenship and a mode of governance committed to market principles, they find common ground in the post-crisis situation, causing diminution of both the culture and institutions of democracy. This combination of a commitment to the global ideological project of neo-liberalism and a political culture of conservatism generates a moral order characterised by anti-democratic impulses, critically however, in spite of the fact that both perspectives also claim to be proponents of democracy itself.

The position represented in the discourse related to moral evaluation, in this sense, reflects a highly elitist and exclusionary form of democratic legitimacy. The justifications given for the political interventions in response to the crisis exemplify this. The form of legitimation, therefore, to use Streeck's terms, prioritize market justice over social justice. The two rationalities, revealed in the course of the crisis-narrative, inadvertently converge to extend a cannibalism of democracy, to the point where the institutions and culture of democracy itself become devoid of meaning. Focusing on the discourse alone, one is unable to bring the critique any farther at this point, without a deeper historical and cultural approach to delineate the generative conditions that allow for a mutual understanding of what constitutes common-sense – the moral perspective, which anticipates the reconstructive analysis to come – and the democratic stakes

raised in relation to the implications of the crisis are becoming more distinct. Perceiving the measures taken in response to the crisis in Ireland as being illegitimate, from a democratic moral-political perspective, its sole objective was to defensively maintain the status quo. This, however, is not just confined to that specific instance, where the crisis has revealed otherwise latent processes, but representing the continuation of illegitimate features of Irish society at a systemic level. The next step must be the construction of what a legitimate, democratic communicative politics might, under alternative conditions, look like. This is where the reconstructive position discloses a horizon of possibility.

- Rationalization: Crisis as Opportunity

Van Leeuwen identifies two forms of rationalization in the discursive modes of legitimation, instrumental and theoretical. Taking up the instrumental, 'means and ends' form of rationality, the legitimation purposes of the crisis-narrative become clearer in relation to two important perspectives represented in the discourse; that the economic boom of the early-2000s must be seen as a tangible triumph for Ireland, and not just the outcome of financial speculation and the expansion of the shadow-banking sector into all areas of government; and secondly, the measures implemented in response to the crisis are justified by virtue of the notion that all in Irish society benefitted from the economic growth and therefore 'we' all had a moral obligation to compensate for it. In applying this understanding of legitimation; explanations and justifications given in the course of public discourse for responses to the financial crisis in Ireland, specifically by way of cuts to public services, were rationalised on the basis of certain goals, uses and effects pertaining to institutionalised practices (instrumental rationalisation). The discourse of theoretical rationalization, in Van Leeuwen's sense, is also relevant on the basis of a natural order of things in the Irish context, suggesting an underlying form of class-based logic at work. This form of legitimation, subjected as it is to processes of communicative manipulation and/or distortion, is employed in Irish political discourse to contain public debates, rather than seeking to resolve differences of opinion through the mechanisms of critical democratic engagement with a public.

Adam Masters' (2009) 'snapshot' frame analysis of a selection of key speech acts pertaining to the political management of the financial crisis in Ireland, between April 2008 and March 2009, supports the claim that a narrative developed in Ireland to focus a significant portion of the blame for the crisis on the public sector. From the outset, the crisis rhetoric of key Irish political actors focused on directing public attention away from themselves and towards the reckless activities of international, particularly US, financial institutions; on the one hand, as an external source of the crisis, and the public sector, specifically in relation to the 'social partnership' agreement, as the source of endogenous problems on the other. In relation to the latter, by linking the crisis to the need for public sector reform, the government were attempting to exploit the situation in generating popular support for pushing through measures for reduced state 'interference' in matters of economic management.

Masters' frame analysis highlights two specific instances in which the context of the crisis is used as an opportunity to push for public sector, welfare and education 'reform' – this may be understood as a euphemism for the dismantling of welfare programmes. Firstly, in his budget statement on 15 October 2008, Taoiseach Brian Cowen framed the crisis as being 'on a scale last seen in the 1930s', and therefore 'unprecedented times call for unprecedented action' (2009: 137). Framing the crisis in such terms sought to justify the extent of the reforms deemed necessary, i.e. public expenditure cuts, that would be proposed in the budget, and furthermore, through emphasising the need to take these decisions immediately and not 'wait until the storm is over', convince his audience, the general public, to follow the government's lead. Crucially, in light of the fact that public service reform was emerging as a major government initiative in responding to the crisis, Cowen acknowledged no responsibility in contributing to the actual causes of the financial collapse, persisting instead that the preceding period of economic growth was a success for his Fianna Fail government (2009: 137).

A second instance of exploiting the crisis situation to promote 'reform' is the Finance Minister, Lenihan's 'Statement on the economy', delivered to Seanad Eireann (The Senate) on 5 December 2008. The speech, introduced by acknowledging the severity of the financial crisis and the deteriorating condition of the government's fiscal situation, emphasised a 'reform' agenda, reinforcing the broader narrative of the crisis response (2009: 138). 'We are in very difficult

times', Lenihan proclaimed, 'a major gap has emerged between spending levels and tax receipts' because of the global financial crisis, resulting in, he specified, a projected government deficit of €3.5 billion for 2008 and €4.7 billion for 2009. Pointing to 'sub-prime mortgage debt' as the root cause of the crisis and the general deterioration of the global economic environment, he proceeded by focusing on the introduction of a range of measures to review spending in the public sector. Lenihan, in this particular speech act, carefully employs language that would not inflame rumbling public resistance to the suggested 'reforms'. It is worth tracing the analysis directly in the following;

> *Lenihan asserted that 'everybody in this room [the Seanad] is a public servant' and 'the kind of demonization of the Public Service that has featured in public debate…including political parties' had been deplorable. This linguistic move shifted the blame for any perceived attack on the public sector to his political opponents* (Masters, 2009: 138)

Here is an excellent example of what may be referred to as the communicative technique of 'blame-deflection', which will be elaborated upon in the proceeding section in relation to the principle of responsibility. Lenihan, through positively identifying himself as a public servant and denouncing those who demonize the public sector in general in the course of political debate, is skilfully elaborating the nationalist sense of 'us' and 'our' moral obligations in relation the context of the crisis-response, while simultaneously attempting to score political points against his parliamentary opponents. The Irish government, despite Lenihan's rhetoric, and with significant support from the mainstream media, were nonetheless persistent in placing a significant amount of blame for the financial crisis on the public service, which, as the discourse developed, had expanded during the economic boom to an extent that could no longer be afforded. It was also widely maintained, and often intensely argued, that fundamental change was required to reign-in the over-expenditure in Irish public sector (Ruddock, 2008). Of course, and this is exploited in much of the political leaders' crisis-rhetoric, there had been a long-run and increasingly tenuous relationship between this dominant representation of public services and the wider Irish public, fuelled to a significant extent by a chorus of voices in the media, and the crisis situation presented an opportunity to seize upon this muddled setting to 'reform' what was seen as an inefficient and wasteful set of institutions.

In relation to the role of the public itself, the language of blame in the crisis discourse seemed to actually succeed in generating a collective acceptance, or at least acquiescence, towards the measures implemented in response to the financial collapse which were contrary to any understanding of democratic justice. From the outset, political elites, through a carefully orchestrated use of crisis-management rhetoric, sought to emphasise this collective culpability, or perhaps more suitably a 'collective guilt', persistently appealing to 'we' and 'us' in public speech acts. Although there were isolated instances of resistance in Irish society, particularly from those unions representing public service workers, a concerted movement which went beyond resistance – offering a coherent alternative to the socialisation of private debt at the expense of social welfare programmes, public health and education, and the subsequent austerity programme – was absent at the crucial point in time.

The purpose of highlighting the development of the 'reform' agenda as a significant theme in the overarching crisis-narrative, in the speech acts of key political actors, and the intertwined discourse conveying the collective sense of national responsibility for the crisis, is to highlight the specific mode of legitimation at work. Rationalisation, therefore, in the sense of analysing reasons given in the course of public communication for decisions taken in response to the crisis, will now be presented as the mode of legitimation in relation to the development of this component of the narrative.

- Mythopoesis

A brief example in relation to legitimation of this kind, in the context of the response to the 2008 crisis, may be the sharp contrast drawn in Irish political discourse between Ireland and Iceland, mentioned in Chapter 2 as a comparative example of an alternative crisis response. Regarding the former, a core feature of the response, according to an extensive series of advisory reports by the National Economic and Social Council of Ireland (2009) entitled, 'Ireland's Five-Part Crisis: An Integrated National Response', was the restoration of the state's reputation in global financial markets. From this perspective, persuading other EU member-states, international institutions and markets that Ireland remained a 'competitive' place to invest was paramount, far

outweighing principles associated with any kind of democratic justice, and a narrative therefore developed accordingly. Ireland, by repaying all of its debt, much of which actually constituted odious debt, would be rewarded in time for 'doing the right thing' and maintaining the legitimate order; a moral tale. Conversely, Iceland, a comparable case in regard to the inflation and collapse of a massive credit bubble, as discussed in Chapter 2, represented a cautionary tale to be communicated to the Irish public. Iceland would be cast as a 'basket case' destined for financial ruin. In contrast to this representation, however, by resisting international pressure from the IMF and the British government to repay vast sums of private debt to foreign banks, and immediately commissioning a detailed public banking inquiry, which would not take place in Ireland until January 2016, Boyes (2009) refers to the Icelandic response as actually creating an exceptional 'human narrative' in the context of the international meltdown, demonstrating that citizens do not have to be powerless victims in the spokes of the machinery of global finance.

- Blame Avoidance in Irish Public Discourse: Obscuring Responsibility

The modes of legitimation were introduced in the preceding section in order to characterize a discursive feature of the crisis-narrative in relation to a specific normative principle. A critical aspect which may be identified in the discursive component outlined above, recognized most clearly within the moral evaluation and rationalisation modes of legitimation, is that of blame or, more precisely, discursive strategies of blaming. The techniques of blame-avoidance and transference were seen to be evident in the course of justifications presented for measures taken to reduce government expenditure on the Irish public services in the wake of the financial crisis, and, as events unfolded, developed into an essential element of the crisis-narrative itself. The general disorientation and confusion of the crisis-context presented an opportunity to attribute blame in public discourse, therefore revealing an explicit moral component in relation to the responsibility for the crisis.

As with the case of forms of legitimation, the processes of blaming and strategies of blame-avoidance constitute essential building blocks in the construction of the dominant crisis narrative in Irish public discourse. The interrelated modes of legitimation were highlighted as having played

a key role in the communication of the response to the crisis, specifically in regard to the type of expertise represented in Irish media, the promotion of a certain perspective on moral evaluation, the exploitation of the crisis context by political elites to 'reform' public services and, lastly, the formulization of moral and cautionary tales conveyed in public discourse. In the following paragraphs, decisive instances of blaming and the deployment of blame-avoidance strategies will be highlighted and analyzed using Hansson's framework. This will then lead to the development of a normative distinction in relation to which the implications for the principle of responsibility may be highlighted.

Hansson uses texts produced by government officeholders in the UK between 2008 and 2013 in order to show how his framework may be applied to empirically explicate moments of discursive blame avoidance (2015: 3). Following a detailed sketch of the way in which the above mentioned linguistic tools are deployed by way of initially identifying 'backgrounded agency' in government-produced texts and an account of the broader context in which such texts are generated, here closely following the work of Hood (2011) in relation to specific blame-avoidance strategies in public administration, the framework is integrated and abductively advanced within the empirical analysis itself. Through an intensively linguistic approach, Hansson selects a number of key speech acts which he correlates to a typology of blaming strategies, developed by means of the integrative framework. There are nine such strategies that may be identified in the discourse; 'total blame denial', pertaining to an explicit refutation of a problem or given accusation; 'excuses', which involves the recognition of a problem or wrongdoing, but also includes possible, often emotive, public explanations; 'justifications', Hansson argues, is where an actor turns blame into public credit through a form of positive self-presentation; 'problem denial and counter-attack', which constitutes a combination of the first two strategies; 'drawing a line' relates to the acknowledgment of a problem along with a preemptive apology, which is often, he suggests, accompanied by an explicit positive self-presentation; 'changing the subject', which one may argue correlates with the notion of agenda-setting, here pertains to what is referred to as 'topic control', in one sense, and manipulation of the audience, in another; 'restricting information', one may obviously infer, relates to the purposeful restriction of publicly relevant information in order to avoid or deflect blame; 'lying doggo' relates to avoidance interaction, as

he states, 'opting out of conversation or opting for one-way communication'; and finally, 'working behind the scenes', which relates to linguistic and non-linguistic means of coercion aimed at an opponent (2015: 19).

1. The first illustration of blame-avoidance in the development of the Irish crisis narrative, accessed through the official website of the Irish government, Oireachtas.ie, is a speech delivered by Minister for Finance, Lenihan, on February 4, 2009. At a crucial moment in the unfolding of the financial crisis, the stated intention here was to pass a parliamentary motion supporting proposed expenditure measures, already announced by the government, to "restore greater balance between revenue and expenditure", and, to affirm "confidence in the economic strategy of the Government". Employing Hansson's framework, there is a combination of discursive blame-avoidance strategies evident in this instance of political communication. To begin with, excuses, that is, admitting the existence of a problem but rejecting causal agency and/or intentionality, are present in the introductory remarks of the speech. Hansson suggests, in relation to this strategy, that "these explanations may play on the audience's emotions, especially their feelings of compassion, for instance, by claiming that 'events were beyond our control, or, that 'these were unforeseeable circumstances, or claiming ignorance and victimhood as someone suffering from an unfortunate lack of relevant information, possibly evoking the Bad Apple frame" (2015: 11). Lenihan's emphasis on 'exceptional circumstances' and the need to "follow the lead of the government…in the interests of our nation and state" relates directly to this mode of blame avoidance. Ireland was here portrayed as the victim of a global crisis, "we are experiencing an international recession of unsurpassed severity, prompted in turn by the worst crisis in international financial markets for 60 years", and the notion that 'we' must all "show social solidarity to tackle the unprecedented downturn together" strongly reflects this sentiment. With justifications, a second discursive strategy, closely related to the first but with the addition of an element of positive self-presentation, the speech moved towards redirecting blame. By evoking a kind of 'rescue narrative' in relation to the government's acknowledgment of the severity of the problem and their willingness to 'do the right thing', Lenihan now focused on public

expenditure; "As we have to get our cost base down, we have to focus our energies on spending at this stage. The simple arithmetic is that social welfare spending comes to 20 billion of the approximately 55 billion the Government spends on current goods and services". In addition to the logic of the 'rescue narrative', which appears in several of Hansson's discursive strategies, there was a 'matter of factness' logic presented here; the government's actions were now being portrayed as unquestionably necessary. The denial of any plausible alternatives was becoming an explicit feature of the narrative at this point.

The latter third of the speech, again drawing on Hansson's typology, highlighted a strategy of counterattack in the discourse, which, as mentioned above, combines the strategies of excuses and justifications, but crucially, is accompanied by negative other-presentation (2015: 13). Lenihan here began to transfer or deflect blame; "There are those who, instead of advancing constructive policies, prefer to focus their energies on trying to fix blame rather than the problem. There are those who look on and claim, 'I told you so', suggesting we are the authors of our own misfortune" and, "I can recall few cries in recent years from those opposite for less spending, lower social welfare increases, higher taxes and more levies. If this side of the House can acknowledge the past, surely those opposite can stop pretending they were on the side of the angels at all times". This shifting of blame was certainly directed towards political opponents, namely, the main opposition parties at the time, Fine Gael and Labour. Lenihan utilized this closing part of the speech to identify two groups more deserving of blame than had been appreciated up to then; the 'I told you so' group, which would have mainly constituted Labour parliamentarians and public commentators and intellectuals, such Morgan Kelly and David McWilliams, and, what may be referred to as, the 'on the side of the angels' group, which would have been composed mainly of Fine Gael and Independent parliamentarians, who, as Lenihan's speech insisted, were supportive of government policy up until the financial crisis and were then waiting in the wings to take power, thus replacing Fianna Fail in government.

2. The second instance of political communication which will be presented as a key illustration of the blaming strategies extant in the development of a crisis narrative in Ireland is a statement delivered by John Hurley, then Governor of the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland (CBFSA), on March 10, 2009, to a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Economic Regulatory Affairs. Public attention at this point had indeed become drawn towards questions regarding the role of financial regulation during the preceding years of hyper economic growth in Ireland, and it was in this context that Governor Hurley's speech, and particularly the blame deflection techniques employed within it, must be understood. Rich in crisis rhetoric, as Masters (2009) points out, the opening statement epitomized the 'blame game' nature of much of the political discourse in the immediate aftermath of the financial crisis.

Similar to Lenihan's speech act, Hurley's statement was introduced using a combination of discursive techniques, such as excuses and justifications, in order to frame a brief history of the recent 'disruption to global financial markets'. Referring to the crisis merely as a 'disruption', and in the next paragraph, as a 'slowdown', signifies that the intention here was to acknowledge the existence of a problem but to downplay its broader significance and, relatedly, the role Irish financial regulation could possibly have played. Global economic conditions, the regulatory action of the EU and the Irish government would be the focus of Hurley's blame. In regard to the first of these, he states, "The extent of the turmoil has been far worse than was envisaged and it is still very unclear when the crisis will end and what the ultimate effects will be. The financial crisis has fed directly into developments in the global economy". A justification, according to Hansson's framework, the Governor was here trying to absolve himself and the general approach to financial regulation in Ireland as having any significant bearing on how the crisis was unfolding. In fact, he argued in the statement, in accordance with this strategy of blame avoidance, that the CBFSA ought to be commended for implementing 'sound economic management' in response to the crisis; therefore, attempting to transform the blame into political credit. Hurley focused much of his attention in this statement on the EU, what he referred to as 'the Eurosystem'. The intention here was to place blame for failure of

regulation of the financial system squarely on the EU; referring to a group report from the European Commission on 'Cross Border Financial Supervision', he stated, "The Group concluded in its review that there have been real and important supervisory and regulatory failures. They suggest two initiatives to repair the supervisory and regulatory system within the EU". The intended inference to be drawn here it that the Irish Central Bank was acting within the rules of the Eurosystem and, therefore, the blame must rest with the latter. It was following the opening statement, during questions from the Oireachtas committee members, that Hurley engaged decisively in blame-transference strategies, insisting that the Irish government must ultimately bear responsibility for the severity of the 2008 crisis (Irish Independent: 2009a, 2009b). According to Hansson's framework, it may be argued that the Governor Hurley was attempting to avoid blame by changing the subject (Hansson, 2015: 16). In this sense, his engagement in the discourse violated the maxim of relation by providing irrelevant, or perhaps misleading, information to deflect blame, transferring it to other actors involved.

3. The final speech act, to illustrate the discursive blaming strategies in the crisis narrative, is an address delivered by then Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, on June 15 2010, to the parliament, making the case for a 'motion of confidence' in the Fianna Fail/Green Party coalition government. Accessed through the official Irish government website, taoiseach.ie, the timing of the speech is, again, vital and the language saturated with features of crisis rhetoric and blame avoidance. Following the establishment of NAMA and preceding the bailout agreement with the EU/IMF later that year, this represents probably the most uncertain period of time in the crisis; as Conor McCabe (2010: 169) points out, the Irish government had essentially put up "the entire Irish state as collateral for the crushing liabilities of six private banks". Although the government won the vote of confidence, solely by virtue of continued support from their parliamentary coalition partners, the Taoiseach's speech is revealing in its construing of legitimacy in relation to the crisis response and in its assignment of blame.

As with the preceding two cases, the general frame within which this speech may firstly be understood is in regard to the legitimacy of the government's response to the crisis; there was no alternative, the 'tough decisions' in relation to public expenditure were absolutely necessary and 'we' – once again noting the frequency of this highly symbolic pronoun from the opening section – will benefit from this 'decisive action' and 'leadership' as a nation. Taking up, once more, Hansson's blame framework, the strategy of excuses and justifications feature strongly in the opening paragraphs. Chiming with the broader narrative in Irish political discourse, the global nature of the crisis and Ireland's highly dependent position within it were emphasized; "This recession has changed the financial world. The lesson we need to learn from it is that we are in a competitive global market-place and soft solutions are not going to provide the basis for sustainable growth". As with Hurley's speech, the initial focus on the blameworthiness of systemic problems associated with international financial regulation, evoking also the victim frame, quickly moved towards positive self-presentation; Cowen stated, "Today we are held up as an example and people are talking about the Government's resolve and capacity to deal with problems that we have been confronted with". Note here, specifically, the implication of a difference between the exogenous origins of the crisis and the absent acknowledgment of endogenously produced systemic problems.

As with the Lenihan speech, features of blaming explicitly come into focus when references are made to political opponents; according to Hansson, the strategies of drawing a line and changing the subject are employed here. Firstly, in defending the government's choices to drastically reduce public expenditure and following a brief acknowledgment of "policy errors" during the economic boom, Cowen attempted to transfer blame to the opposition; "The irony of politics today is that the opposition parties criticized us during the good years for spending too little…When you are merely chasing votes, the truth makes an uncomfortable companion". Containing a strong element of positive self-presentation in relation to the "hard-won credibility which the country has now gained internationally" as a result of the response taken to the crisis, there is a play on the audience's emotions, specifically, that of fear; Hansson describes this element of

the strategy as argumentum ad populum (2015: 15). Cowen insisted that a change of government, or indeed any alternative, would threaten Ireland's economic recovery; the main opposition parties were being blamed here for promoting unrealistic and populist solutions to the crisis, "the policies being espoused by Fine Gael and Labour are more about chasing popularity rather than confronting reality". In regard to changing the subject, the second blaming strategy evident in this case, Cowen abandoned the language of crisis in the final section of the speech and attempts to begin to elaborate a narrative of recovery; "So now the country is on the road to recovery. It is important we do not jeopardize that journey. Rather we need to stay disciplined, focused and committed. There is no coherent policy platform being put forward by the opposition". Again, blame-avoidance was achieved here through switching the focus back onto the perceived incoherence of the opposition's argument and also, critically, evoking the fear of jeopardizing what has been gained by the "journey" travelled and the hope of a possible brighter future, "on the road to recovery".

These three speech acts reflect the prevalence of blame, and strategies of blame-avoidance, in Irish public discourse. Critically, this represents a discursive mechanism that obscures the higher-level cognitive order principle of responsibility. The empirical features outlined, in relation to both modes of legitimation and strategies of blame avoidance, are operating at the lowest, immanent level in the cognitive order of society. In this context, the cultural model is reproducing communicative structures that restrict the normative thematization of the principles being obscured. The communicative structure of repressive hegemony best articulates the obstructive forms of discourse outlined above, in which, contrary to the aim of forming a consensus in the course of discursive communication, the outcome is determined by the unchallenged belief that the values of a particular group serve the good of all. The conservative non-thematization of alternative responses to the crisis reflect the dissensus learning pathology at work in the Irish cultural model. Importantly, the claim here is not to suggest that the ideology of conservatism is inherently pathological, however, in the context of the crisis, when there was a need to publicly

thematize alternatives that could potentially have embraced some form of substantive political and/or social change, it was discursively blocked.

Although discursive legitimation of the Irish crisis narrative, which bypassed normative forms of legitimation, and the prevalence of blaming has been depicted as dominant features in the discourse of the crisis response, there is, when assuming a reconstructive perspective, always a potentiality. The possibility of overcoming collective learning pathologies, reinforced by communicative structures within a cultural model can be achieved through normative innovation and radical forms of thematization. This is fundamental to the reconstructive procedure, to identify those alternative sources of thematization, which introduces beliefs, commitments and evaluations to public discourse that were previously only latently present. This, of course, points in the direction of diverse forms of social movement, carriers of reconstructive potentials that engage in various forms of cultural and normative innovation that challenge the established structure of the cultural model.

7.2 Resistance in the Irish Public Sphere: The Source of Potentiality

Although the discourse represented a distinctive set of conditions corresponding to a narrative of justification, the manner in which the public itself responded is pivotal. Mixed messages emanating from Irish political elites throughout the latter half of 2008 in relation to, on the one hand, the prospect of a severe financial crisis and prolonged economic recession, and, on the other, the notion of a 'soft landing', which predicted a comparatively insignificant economic fallout, meant that by the announcement of the Bank Guarantee in September, there was an acute sense of uncertainty and confusion regarding the prospective impact of what was taking place[11]. Despite these challenging conditions, a coordinated public resistance, specifically against

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[11] '*Mixed messages*' refer to the way in which political leaders, specifically, the Finance Minister, Brian Lenihan, the Taoiseach, Brian Cowen, and the Governor of the Irish Central Bank, John Hurley, presented confusing, and often contradictory, accounts of what the implications of the immanent financial crisis would be for Ireland. This, I argue, would set the tone for how the crisis would be mediated in public communication over the proceeding number of years.

reductions in government spending in relation to health care, education and social welfare constituted an important feature of the wider narrative of the crisis in Ireland.

In a postscript to his 2009 book, 'Ship of Fools', journalist Fintan O'Toole makes the argument that the Irish government's response to the financial crisis may be characterized by the communicative techniques of fear, obfuscation and distraction. From this point of view, the generally muted reaction of the Irish public to the political interventions becomes more understandable. Indeed, the fear of a total economic collapse and the risk and confusion related to the possible consequences of alternative macro-economic approaches rendered the measures implemented as appearing necessary. It was, however, in regard to specific decisions related to the immanent prospect of massive cuts in government spending as a result of the financial turmoil, that the public was to cultivate a response of its own. Focusing therefore on the public's discursive role in the crisis, which was shaped by organizing collective resistance to the government's proposed public expenditure cuts, two protest movements, the 'Older People's Uprising' and the student protests against the re-introduction of university fees, will be presented to illustrate this critical dimension of the crisis narrative.

These protest movements must be understood in the context of the general climate of fear and intimidation, a feature of the conservative cultural model. Although indeed constituting a recognition of the perceived injustices of the crisis-response and creating space for the consolidation of oppositional discourses, they nonetheless reflect both positive and negative implications in the distinctive Irish context. In relation to the former, they positively uncover a reconstructive learning potential through the recognition of suppressed tensions which are made manifest and expressed in concrete societal struggles, yet, in a negative sense, they simultaneously reflect the relatively low level of opposition discernible in Irish public discourse. Considered in relation to the wider backdrop of the international response to the global financial crisis, discussed in Chapter 2, which saw the development of the Occupy Movement in the United States in 2011 and, in Europe, the emergence of sustained social movements against the imposition of austerity programmes.

Such social movements represent the horizon of possibility disclosed by communication communities that reach beyond their existing self-understanding and associated practical rationality. This creates real discourses that may incorporate the structural outcomes of learning processes that point beyond existing knowledge and normative arrangements. O'Mahony (2013), drawing off Peirce, points out that this form of learning involves "thinking of the real communication community as exploring systematic, and interrelated functional, moral, legal, and ethical horizons that point beyond its existing normative rationality" (O'Mahony, 2013: 305). In the present context, which takes as its normative point of reference the principle of legitimacy, this idea of 'going beyond' the dominant narrative suggests the actual building of an already, cognitively anticipated, normative order. Following this critical-normative lead, I will articulate a model of co-responsible legitimation, which establishes a counterfactual formulation of legitimacy combined with a transcendent notion of responsibility. Both emanating from a critique of different features of the discourse itself, this formulation will facilitate the normative reconstruction of the Irish model of legitimation.

Although the resistance movements in Ireland did not succeed in transforming the dominant crisis narrative, there is still important learning processes taking place through ideal innovation and argumentation within these communication communities. At stake in such societal conflict is the future direction of collective learning that are either adaptations of, or challenges to, existing practical rationality. O'Mahony (2013) delineates three gradations of learning in the real communication community which indicate shifts in the state of knowledge by drawing from counterfactual potentials in the 'unlimited' communication community, for instance, to re-frame a situation of injustice or illegitimacy. These gradations, therefore, provide the critical impetus for reconstruction at the societal level, and also allow for distinctions to be developed at the analytical level from the perspective of collective learning. Firstly, a kind of historical, or incremental learning deriving from the established understanding of the transcendent-cognitive order, allows for the challenging of the prevailing order of public legitimacy and the legitimated power relations between social groups within the historically embedded normative order, therefore, drawing from the existing epistemic and social resources. A form of comparative learning refers to a second gradation in the real communication community that concerns

engagement with the cultural models of other communication communities – social movements in the US and Europe that emerged at the same time – thus opening up learning potentials that have been transposed elsewhere. Lastly, a form of fundamental, or imaginative, learning reflects a communication community that is farthest from the existing practical social rationality and nearest to the counterfactual horizon of the unlimited communication community (2013: 307).

Although these distinctions in gradations of learning may often overlap, occurring simultaneously in the long gestation process of social change, it is the former two, what I refer to as historical and comparative forms of learning that are most evident in the Irish case. The latter may be understood in relation to the responses taken by other countries to the financial crisis. For instance, the example of Iceland is crucial here; the 'pots and pans' revolution of 2009, which constituted a sustained social movement, succeeded in changing the government and by extension the proposed response to the crisis, which was perceived as unjust. The democratic expression reflected here, specifically in relation to the transformative role of active citizenship and participatory inclusion, represented a potential source of comparative learning in the Irish case. Historical learning, relatedly, in this case, is comprised of impediments related to the sociological phenomenon of embeddedness – in essence, this refers to the absence of a capacity for fundamental learning in the general mode of collective learning in Ireland.

The first specific example of public resistance, reflected in the discourse, also highlighted as an instance of successful public demonstration to the imposition of unjust measures in response to the financial crisis, is the 'Older People's Uprising', which emerged in opposition to the abolishment of the automatic entitlement to medical cards for Irish citizens over seventy years of age. Announced in the emergency budget, 14 October 2008, the rationale for the decision was, according to Minister Lenihan, in regard to the need to "rein back ineffective universal entitlements" in the face of the rapidly developing global crisis (Lenihan, 2008). Despite the rhetoric of 'pulling together' and 'playing our part according to our needs", the announcement sparked mass protest almost immediately, with 15,000 older people and supporters marching on the parliament a week later. Rosie Meade (2015), in critically analyzing the development of this specific protest movement, identifies it as a defining event in the country's transition to an economic recession, exposing deep contradictions and troubling continuities in Irish political

discourse and practice (Meade, 2015: 162). Core to Meade's argument is the contention that the narratives which sought to frame such events, construed as an 'exceptional period', were an 'oversimplification' of the public mood. The inference to be drawn here is that "there was little in the way of dissent in Ireland, that conflicts over economic, cultural and social policy were a notable feature of Irish society, and that alternative ways of thinking and being were practiced by social movements, community groups and individuals across the state" (2015: 1-2).

The so-called 'Older People's Uprising' constituted two key moments; firstly, Age Action Ireland organized a public meeting on 21 October 2008, attended by 1800 people, and secondly, a march on the house of parliament which was coordinated a day later. The latter received significant media attention as it happened to coincide with a large student demonstration, highlighted below. Meade contends that by exploiting the populist, clientelistic and, one may add, parochial nature of Irish politics, protesters very successfully targeted elected representatives to demand the proposal be discarded, quoting the message from the Irish Senior Citizens Parliament, "Get out there! Get working! Get talking to your local politicians and demand that this be withdrawn" (Meade, 2015: 163). The movement undoubtedly highlighted the effectiveness of the older people's lobby in Ireland;

> *Carrying banners declaiming 'Older and Bolder' or wearing tee-shirts with the AAI logo, they performed their shared spirit of collective purpose, while, for some at least, picketing clinics or shouting down TDs signified a willingness to transgress the polite norms of political engagement* (Meade, 2015: 65)

Although the protest movement, through demonstrating an exceptional collective capacity to mobilize and picket, succeeded in its aim of winning concessions with regard to welfare eligibility thresholds, also raising the idea of a politically sensitive and mobile elderly population, Meade argues that it brought out more fundamental concerns about Irish political culture. The Older People's Uprising, she claims, revealed that 'counter-conduct' – the Foucauldian concept – works with and within certain constraints (2015: 176-77). In that sense, Meade posits that "protesters did not claim or hold out for new political horizons: instead, they projected the clientelist bargain on the national stage" (2015: 178). Therefore, in the wake of the Older People's Uprising, wider

discourses about welfare and the ways in which social policy is generally thought about and represented in Ireland remained largely unchanged, as indeed did the course of the impending crisis (2015: 177).

A second example of coordinated resistance to the government's response to the crisis is illustrated by the students' protests against university tuition fees. In line with the national responses to the crisis elsewhere in Europe, reduction in public expenditure in education was, almost immediately, an element of the Irish government's approach (Irish Independent: 2008). The re-introduction of university fees, which had been removed since 1996, would become the most publicly contentious measure in this regard and, more importantly, resulted in a well-organized and sustained protest campaign among Irish university students, organized by the Union of Students in Ireland (USI). From late 2008 onwards, both the USI and a newly established campaign group, Free Education for Everyone (FEE), engaged in blockading universities, picketing constituency offices of local politicians and, of course, coordinating large protest marches in Dublin, drawing considerable public attention. An estimated 10,000 students from colleges and universities around Ireland protested outside the houses of parliament on 21 October 2008 against the re-introduction of tuition fees. Although the resistance could perhaps be recognized as having been successful in relation to its objective of preventing the general re-introduction of university fees, with notable increases in annual registration fees at many institutions and the expenditure reductions in various grant schemes, it was far from completely successful. Most significantly, the momentum generated by both protest movements failed to change the trajectory of the crisis-response in Ireland. Although they represented a degree of success on specific issues, they failed to consolidate and crystallize into a wider movement, which could have offered a political platform for an alternative response to the crisis.

Civil and industrial unrest were certainly features of the immediate fallout from the financial crisis in Ireland. Disconnected from one another, however, and relatively short-run, protests against the government's response were focused on specific instances where, mainly workers, by means of a general strike and/or a sit-in (e.g. the case of Waterford Crystal and the trade union rally in Dublin at the beginning of 2009) sought to resist the imposition of measures which were perceived as unjust. Although it would take some time before these such instances of public

resistance would be translated into mainstream politics in Ireland, eventually gaining resonance through the development of 'anti-austerity' discourses and the organization of political parties, specifically around matters of social and economic justice, the critical interventions in the crisis had been made and ultimately implemented with little resistance. An important distinction to be borne in mind at this stage, which will be developed upon later in the critique, is in relation to ideas of organized resistance, which often spring up in opposition to perceived threats to such things as workers' rights and core elements of the social welfare system, and social movements, understood as innovative temporary public spaces in which moments of collective creativity provide society with new ideas, identities and even ideals (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991: 4). The latter ought to represent important moments of societal learning and, in the context of a crisis, seize upon the democratic potential for reconstructing an alternative vision for society.

Although there was indeed limited success in transforming the crisis discourse in this direction, the very idea of attempting to resist the imposition of the government's proposed austerity programme revealed the latent existence of another perspective on what may constitute a legitimate response to the crisis. In essence, it showed that there are other, future-oriented democratic interests at stake in this moment, which contest the legitimacy of the given approach. The dominant thematization of the crisis, however, through the development of a narrative which sought to justify the political interventions outlined above, hegemonically determined the way in which events would be construed in public discourse and, ultimately, contained the wider public reaction. This narrative, which maps the discursive unfolding of the crisis over time, illustrates the way in which disparate interpretations and explanations of what was taking place came to consolidate into a coherent justificatory structure, reinforcing the underlying normative order.

The political interventions which constituted the key elements of the Irish state's response to the crisis, reflecting also the general crisis-management strategy implemented, corresponds to the initial mechanism of selection in Jessop's diagnostic schema. The privileging of certain discourses for the interpretation of events and the legitimation of the decisions taken in response to this are illustrated within the three defining moments above. The legitimacy of the response, it will be argued below, correlates directly with the authority and perceived expertise of the political

leaders interpolating the events in public discourse. Control, therefore, over the crisis discourse was decisive and, as illustrated above also, this was maintained by seizing the agenda and generating resonant discourses in each of the key moments. The retention of resonant discourses, constituting the second mechanism in the evolution of the crisis, corresponds to the potential for effective institutionalization and integration. This depends, fundamentally, on the specific conditions of society at a given time, the discourse is retained because it resonates in the Irish context as the appropriate and legitimate way of responding to the crisis. By recursively strengthening the appropriate discourse in relation to the institutional crisis-response, the counter-arguments against the government's approach become weakened, but critically, not eliminated.

The public resistance highlighted here constitutes an important, yet latent element in the crisis narrative, which allows for a reconstructive potentiality to be realized in Irish society. Reflecting an alternative, normative form of learning in which the principles of legitimacy and responsibility are discursively reworked in the actual situation, these developments harbour possibilities that are shown to be blocked by the dominant interests reflected in the establishment narrative. The public discourse that shaped the narrative of the Irish institutional response to the crisis signifies distinctive social conditions and therefore a distinguishable mode of collective learning. From a normative reconstructive perspective, these conditions of learning that produced the narrative identified in the crisis discourse have deep roots in normative culture. The next chapter, drawing from Honneth's methodological procedure of reconstruction, will attempt to develop upon the normative potential carried and expressed by resistance movements to reformulate the principles of legitimacy and responsibility in order to disclose a transcendent potential contained in the cognitive order.

8.

A Reconstruction of Legitimation and Responsibility:

Disclosing the Democratic Potential of a Co-Responsible Mode of Legitimation

Having identified those elements in Irish public discourse, which are understood here as blocking mechanisms to the full realization of the principles of legitimation and responsibility, the present chapter, following Honneth's reconstructive procedure, seeks to develop the normative potentials contained in the cognitive order. As the historically available potential of reason is reflected in the content of this overarching macro structure, the mechanisms blocking the collective realization of this potential is located at the immanent level of the cultural model, in which non-normative communicative structures lead to learning pathologies that reproduce the conditions of non-thematization. The purpose of the chapter is, therefore, firstly, to explicate the normative contents in the transcendent dimension of the cognitive order that allow for the reconstructive position to be adopted, specifically relevant to legitimation and responsibility, and, secondly, to suggest the mechanisms and structures that require reconstructive treatment in the Irish case of the response to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

Reconstruction, as it will be deployed here, refers to the description of the normative principles at stake in the situation in their ideal transcendent form. In this sense, legitimation and responsibility must be theoretically elaborated in order to draw out the potential they contain, which is being denied in the actual situation. This relates directly to immanent transcendence, the guiding concept of Critical Theory. The immanent described in the previous chapter by the disrupting mechanisms of Irish public discourse and which reflects the reality of a conservative cultural model in which the normative principles are refracted in a distinctive direction, will now be placed in contrast to the transcendent impression of the principles that represent an untapped potential harbouring the possibility of normative innovation. In order for such innovation to take place, the thematization of the principles must be a constitutive part of public discourse, which requires collective learning that can transform communicative structures.

8.1 The Ideals of Legitimation and Responsibility: A Normative Reconstruction

The Irish crisis narrative represents a distinctive mode of public discourse, which in turn reflects a mode of discourse reflexively incapable of thematising alternative responses to what was taking place, as shown in the previous chapter in relation to non-normative legitimation processes and the prevalence of blame avoidance. The way in which events were construed in public communication, therefore, sought to legitimize a specific type of response to the Irish public. The careful management and framing of communication strategies was paramount in order to restrict the emergent, competing and/or alternative discourses from gaining significant resonance to challenge the dominant narrative, reflecting conditions of communication that constitute the reproduction of blocked processes of collective learning. Critically, however, this latent generation of a counter-narratives presents a significant challenge, specifically in relation to the principle of legitimacy conveyed through the dominant narrative.

As the narrative is discursively revealed through empirical observations of processes of public discourse, the generative, causal level, to which the specific forms of legitimation, and the conditions of justification may be linked, are contained in the cultural model. The identification of distinctive modes of legitimation, following Van Leeuwen's adaptation of Habermas, reflects the development of a narrative that is the product of a distinctive cultural model. By that, it is understood, the constitutive elements contained in the ideas of authority, morality, rationality and symbolism, are reflected in the discourse of a certain dominant position on the process of legitimation. Taking a reconstructive perspective on each aspect; the dependence on expert and traditional authority overshadows the possibility of a proper democratic form of political authority; the moral-evaluative component of the narrative seeks to comprehend the justificatory basis for the political interventions outlined in Chapter 1., which put the interests of the financial system above all else, thereby highlighting the absence of democratic justice; although rationalization, as a mode of legitimation, is introduced above in relation to the justification for drastic 'reforms' to public services, it also reveals an explicit attempt to seize the crisis as an opportunity to further an ideological programme, which in turn discloses a reconstructive potential; finally, the symbolism conveyed in the narrative, the reward and

punishment for practices deemed either good or bad, is a salient feature of the discourse, supporting what is contained in the preceding forms of legitimation.

The link between modes of legitimation and the idea of a narrative may be normatively developed in relation to the concept of justification. Boltanski and Thevenot (2006) help to draw an initial distinction here in untangling the concepts of legitimacy and justification[12]. In attempting to understand the imperative to justify as the basis of coordinating human social relations, they point out that it is not fully satisfactory to employ the notion of 'legitimization' in certain contexts, as it tends to confuse justification with forms of deceit "by rejecting the constraints of coordination and resorting to a relativism of values" (Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006: 37). Boltanski and Thevenot proceed by highlighting two major difficulties in the 'construction of legitimacy' from the perspective of justification. The first concerns the problem of order, specifically the requirement of reaching agreement that might lead to the constitution of a given social order. The conditions, they postulate, which allow for legitimate forms of justification to be established – where, for instance, two persons are challenging one another over the unequal importance of two facts that are being compared – may enter into tension with the governing principle of that order, thus possibly resulting in the development of relations of 'domination'. A second major difficulty in the 'construction of legitimacy', Boltanski and Thevenot point out, relates to the 'plurality of forms of agreement'; "How is that plurality possible when, as many have noted, universality seems to be a necessary condition of legitimacy?" (2006: 39). The solution to these difficulties, they argue, is to explicate the constraints with which a higher principle must observe in order to be acceptable and consequently applied in justification (2006: 39).

The form of legitimacy therefore reflected in the specific case of Ireland's response to the 2008 crisis indicates an unjustified legitimacy. The concept of power, which is discursively understood as a neutral societal resource offers an expository component here. If power is not continually regenerated in discourse and thus constantly renewed, it degenerates into a form of domination, i.e. rule without justification, in which a social order is maintained through ideology and/or fear

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[12] Simone Chambers (2010) explains the way in which the concepts of justification and legitimacy fold into each other in contemporary liberalism, especially in its Kantian version.

alone (2011: 970). Therefore, a critique of power, which involves the problematization of the existing space of reasons and justifications, is required to break open "rigid, encrusted justification narratives and reciprocally untenable clusters of reasons" (2011: 970). Power, furthermore, "is an expression of a binding of others through reasons; it collapses, together with the authority on which it is founded, when it no longer rests on acceptance" (2011: 970). The 'encrusted' justification narrative, therefore, revealed in the case of the Irish crisis-response, constitutes an example of ideological domination in Forst's terms. In that sense, ideologies are justifications of relations of rule or domination that have become insulated from critical challenge by distorting the space of reasons and presenting the existent relations of rule or domination as 'natural' (2011: 970). As observed earlier in relation to the key moments of the Irish crisis-response, where public discussion and engagement remained highly restricted, coupled with the broader mode of the non-thematization characteristic of a conservative cultural model, the narrative in this instance obviates normative democratic justification, depending almost entirely upon the legitimacy of the background social order.

The empirical observations of Irish public discourse I have made fall some distance short of the reconstructive normative dimension against which they will ultimately be judged. The vital emancipatory interest carried discursively in the account of the resistance movements above, although not sustained, and the broader deliberative transformations that the political system has experienced in the years since the crisis, indicate the existence of a critical potentiality, still persistent in the Irish context, which open up a transcendent horizon of possibility[13]. In order to elaborate on what is held in this possibility, I will now develop the concept of legitimation in a reconstructive manner. Drawing on the field of political theory once again, specifically, the normative approach of democratic theory, I will follow Joshua Cohen in exploring the 'ideal of a deliberative democracy' and consider the normative implications for a legitimate democratic social order. Cohen offers a comprehensive impression of what is entailed by a regulative

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[13] Such deliberative transformations which have taken place in the Irish political system include, the emergence of a critique of austerity (People Before Profit and the Anti-Austerity Alliance), a new emphasis on parliamentary committees, a sustained social movement in resisting the imposition of water charges, the establishment of a '*citizens assembly*' to discuss critical social issues, and finally the emergence of a minority government which has cultivated a new mode of consensus in Irish politics.

principle of democratic legitimation, developed in relation to the procedure of public deliberation.

> *By a deliberative democracy I shall mean, roughly, an association whose affairs are governed by the public deliberation of its member. I propose an account of the value of such an association that treats democracy itself as a fundamental political ideal and not simply as a derivative ideal that can be explained in terms of the values of fairness or equality of respect* (Cohen, 2003: 342)

To introduce the notion of a deliberative democracy, Cohen takes up three elements of John Rawls' discussion of democratic politics in a just society, particularly in relation to whether the term itself is naturally explained as a fair system of social cooperation. Firstly, a fundamental requirement for any well-ordered democracy entails alternative conceptions of what may be considered, 'the good life' (2003: 343). An ideal pluralist scheme, Cohen explains in regard to Rawls' perspective, "public explanations and justifications of laws and policies are to be case in terms of conceptions of the common good…and public deliberation should aim to work out the details of such conceptions" (2003: 343). Secondly, the ideal democratic order must satisfy egalitarian implications which are manifest to the citizens themselves. Aside from the obvious need for opportunities and powers in this context to be independent of economic or social position to allow for fair access to participation, Cohen adds, it is also "to ensure that the equality of citizens is manifest and to declare a commitment to that equality "as the public intention" (2003: 343). The third element of Rawls' prescription for a democratic social order concerns the need to provide a basis for self-respect, to encourage the development of a sense of political competence and to "contribute to the formation of a sense of justice" (2003: 344). This relates to the way in which a democratic politics should shape the way the members of a society understand themselves and their legitimate interests (2003: 344).

In developing these features, Cohen explains, Rawls pursues a formal and an informal line of argument. The former relates to the idea that "parties in the original position would choose the principle of participation with the proviso that the political liberties have their fair value", however, it is in regard to the latter, which Cohen focuses on and develops in regards to the

ordering of political institutions on the basis of the principle, "justice as fairness", that will be of concern here (2003: 344). The implication here is that if one accepts the ideal of a fair system of cooperation, then our political institutions themselves should conform "to the requirement that terms of association be worked out under fair conditions" (2003: 344). According to Cohen, therefore, the informal argument proposes the original position to serve as an abstract model to generate fair conditions, and by extension, strive to mirror our political institutions, in contrast to, he points out, "an initial-point situation in which regulative principles for those institutions are selected" (2003: 345). It is on this basis, that the three conditions of a democratic society follow a natural sequence according to the ideal of fairness, Cohen contends Rawls' fair system of cooperation and puts forward his own proposal for how these conditions may be accommodated, focusing instead on the presupposed ideal of public deliberation.

The contention is that, in attempting to develop the conditions Rawls sets out, assuming that the ideal of fairness can be 'mirrored' in the fairness of political institutions one should instead "proceed by seeking to mirror a system of ideal deliberation in social and political institutions" (2003: 345). Cohen, therefore, theorizes the notion of a deliberative democracy in the ideal of democratic association, in which the justification of that association proceed through public argument and reasoning among equal citizens. He argues, "citizens in such an order share a commitment to the resolution of problems of collective choice through public reasoning and regard their basic institutions as legitimate in so far as they establish the framework for free public deliberation" (2003: 346). He then proceeds by outlining a formal, substantive account of deliberative democracy, presenting an ideal deliberative procedure, containing five essential features; that it constitutes an ongoing and independent association with an indefinite future; that citizens share the view that the appropriate terms of association provide a framework for, or are the results of, their deliberation; that it is a pluralistic association, concerned with sharing a commitment to the deliberative resolution of collective problems but, simultaneously, recognizing divergent aims and interests; and lastly, understanding deliberative procedures as the source of legitimacy, that the results of the deliberation process be manifest and the outcomes evident; that there is a mutual recognition of the capacities to deliberate, i.e. to engage in public reasoning.

To this normative account of democratic legitimation, which characterizes the conditions of a deliberative procedure in a social order that is regulated by deliberative forms of collective choice, Cohen adds an "ideal deliberative procedure" (2003: 346). The intention here, by explicating the conditions required for deliberative decision-making through the formal conception, is to highlight the properties that the associated democratic political institutions should embody (2003: 346-7). Cohen initially cites three general aspects of deliberation in regard to the ideal procedure; "there is the need to decide on an agenda, to propose alternative solutions to the problems on the agenda, supporting those solutions with reasons, and to conclude by settling on an alternative" (2003: 347). Crucial to the project at hand, he argues, that the outcomes of any deliberative procedure are democratically legitimate only if they could be the object of a free and reasoned agreement among equals; "the ideal deliberative procedure is a procedure that captures this principle" (2003: 347). There are four components to be outlined here; (1) deliberation is free in that, firstly, the participants are bound only by the results of their deliberation and, secondly, that they act from those results; (2) deliberation is reasoned, to reference Habermas, "no force except that of the better argument is exercised" (1975: 108); (3) in this ideal procedure, parties are both formally and substantively equal, meaning, "everyone with the deliberative capacities has equal standing at each stage of the deliberative process"; (4) the aim of deliberation is to arrive at a rational consensus, "to find reasons that are persuasive to all who are committed to acting on the results of a free and reasoned assessment of alternatives by equals" (2003: 347-8). This four-part ideal procedure is developed further by raising, and then replying to, corresponding substantive issues about democratic association, namely, problems related to sectarianism, incoherence, injustice and irrelevance. Cohen's notion of democratic association as a fundamental political ideal in itself – through a critique of Rawls, the development of an ideal procedure for deliberation and the theorization of the requirements for the institutionalization of such a procedure – establishes a normative conception of legitimation as a regulative principle.

Advancing a reconstructive formulation of responsibility now, Karl-Otto Apel presents the most appropriate, and most advanced, perspective. Apel re-conceptualizes the traditional notion of responsibility, which he perceives as rooted to the idea of individually accountable actions. He

argues that, in order to face the novel challenges of collective responsibility that human beings face in modern society, the concept must be considered in the functional context of existent institutions and social systems. Arriving ultimately at the concept of co-responsibility, this idea suggests that all should be equally responsible for coordinating collective action by having equal access to discursively participate in determining solutions to the profound challenges of contemporary civilization (O'Mahony, 2015: 7). O'Mahony argues, contextualizing Apel's perspective within the broader academic discourse on responsibility in relation to the earlier work of Simon Caney and Hans Joas, that "discursively achieved co-responsibility emphasizes a mechanism for realizing shared responsibility that does not depend on ontologically fixed categories of the individual (Caney) or the collectivity (Joas) that might carry it, though individual responsibility can be realized in a mediated form through the discursively controlled operation of institutions" (2015: 7). Apel's proposal of co-responsibility, therefore, presents a concept which is not a directed phenomenon that constitutes the imposition of substantive principles by some form of elite, but is communicatively conceived as a reciprocal process involving the giving and taking of reasons by all affected parties (2015: 8).

In order to further elucidate this concept of co-responsibility, it is necessary to examine the steps taken in Apel's own formulation. In line with the methodological focus of Critical Theory delineated above, a transcendental-pragmatic component is developed as a response to the global problems represented in the concept of co-responsibility (Apel, 1993: 506). Apel's formulation is based in the possibility of realizing a normative principle of co-responsibility that depends upon the institutional conditions in which that regulative principle is communicatively generated. Discursively organizing and practicing co-responsibility, he argues, through world-wide networks of formal and informal dialogues, conferences, commissions and boards, depends fundamentally on a "generalization and projection of the function of democracy". Moreover, despite the fact that the substance of much of this world-wide dialogue constitutes little more than negotiations and bargaining among various groups, he insists, given the "glare of publicity" within which these events take place, they must at least pretend that they are dealing with their problems by reasonable arguments and, by doing so, are representing the interests of all those people affected (1993: 512). An appropriate interpretation of democracy is, therefore,

fundamental to developing an ethics of responsibility suitable to the novel challenges of modern society. As with the concept of legitimation, understood also as a regulative normative principle in this context, responsibility is employed initially by way of a negative critique, then elaborated in a reconstructive manner. The intention in both cases is to diagnose problematic features of Irish public discourse regarding the response to the 2008 financial crisis and, in this second move, disclose reconstructive potentials which are merely alluded to that situation.

As the objective is therefore, in analyzing modes of legitimation as part of a discernable narrative in the course of public communication for the response to the crisis, to reconstructively imagine counterfactual horizons of possibility, Apel's distinction, appropriated from Peirce, between the real and unlimited communication community is indispensable. The unlimited communication extends beyond the real communication community as an idealized horizon, confirming the validity of utterances in relation to the criteria of truth, truthfulness and sincerity. The dynamic between the real and counterfactual horizons of communication, represents a consistent reaching beyond of the existent forms of self-understanding and knowledge. From the standpoint of actual societal discursive process, "the further question arises as to how real discourses might incorporate the structural outcomes of learning processes that point beyond existing knowledge and normative arrangements" (O'Mahony, 2013: 305). The real communication community, which may be characterized by processes of ideal innovation and argumentation, in determining the directionality of societal learning, indicates which interpretation of counterfactual elements are drawn down from the transcendent order in changing the state of knowledge in reality.

The critical insight offered in Apel's development of the concept of co-responsibility is therefore that it emphasizes 'democratic practical reason' as being understood only by means of a communicative reason (O'Mahony, 2015). His conceptual elaboration of the principle of responsibility presents a mediated theory in which a new ethic of responsibility may be imagined, not confined to dimensions of micro or macro instances of ethical rationality, but evolving, through processes of cultural and democratic innovation, out of distinctive cognitive forms of societal communication. The task is to explain, in the given communicative setting of Irish public discourse, how counterfactual ideas, specifically the principles of democratic legitimacy and co-

responsibility, failed to gain any normative traction in the context of the response to the crisis, when they are most desperately needed.

In developing the principle of responsibility in the transcendent domain, a cosmopolitan perspective on the concept is considered, which will help to illustrate the normative dimension in this reconstructive methodological procedure. Bearing an intrinsic relation to the social principle of responsibility, Fine (2007) outlines a number of key commitments around which the cosmopolitan approach gravitates; these include, overcoming the national presuppositions and prejudices within the social sciences and the reconstruction in this light of the core concepts employed; recognizing that "humanity has entered an era of mutual interdependence on a world scale and the conviction that this worldly existence is not adequately understood within the terms of conventional social science"; and, the theorization of normative and prescriptive approaches to 'world citizenship', 'global justice' and 'cosmopolitan democracy' (Fine, 2007: 2).

Beck and Grande (2007), characterizing the approach as an alternative political vision – in the context of globalization – to the dominant neo-liberal focus on the market, submit the idea of cosmopolitanism as a radical, innovative response to the looming economic and political crises in Europe. A post-national model of democracy, constituting new horizons for European integration, the cosmopolitan perspective fundamentally represents a very specific approach to dealing with '*otherness*' in society, and among societies. They argue, "differences should neither be arranged hierarchically, nor should they be replaced by common norms, values and standards, rather they should be accepted as such and even have positive value placed on them" (Beck and Grande, 2007: 71). It is important to emphasize at this point that the concept of cosmopolitanism is not confined to a definition in spatial terms, and its basic principles may be revealed and applied everywhere, at every level and in every sphere of political activity; "it is exactly such a generalized concept of cosmopolitanism that provides the key to an understanding and shaping of new forms of political rule beyond the nation-state that have developed in Europe hitherto" (2007: 72). Responsibility, therefore, viewed through the prism of cosmopolitanism, constitutes an attempt to grasp socio-cultural innovation from a critical perspective, developing a position in line with the concept of immanent transcendence, within and beyond society.

Delanty (2006), moving towards a theory of 'critical cosmopolitanism', contributes a crucial distinction here. The 'cosmopolitan imagination' is presented as the means by which cultural models may be reconstructed to transform the social world. This approach, going beyond the mere acceptance of the conditions of diversity, is therefore articulated in "cultural models of world openness" through which societies undergo transformation; he explains, "the cosmopolitan imagination can arise in any kind of society and at any time but it is integral to modernity, in so far as this is a condition of self-problematization, incompleteness and the awareness that certainty can never be established once and for all" (Delanty, 2006: 25). While the creative conflict and combination of different forces at work in society – core/periphery, local/global – constitute an important aspect of cosmopolitanism, it is, Delanty argues, modernity itself that represents its central dynamic (2006: 38). Though the processes of globalization certainly enhance this dynamic, it is the different societal and civilizational forms of modernity – fundamental to its move towards self-transformation, held in the potentiality of human agency to radically transform the present in the image of an imagined future – that constitutes the essence of cosmopolitanism.

It is modernity itself, therefore, that holds the reconstructive potential for social and cultural transformation; according to Delanty, it is a transformative condition in itself. However, this, again, as previously mentioned, begs the fundamental question, following Eder, that if societies learn, why is the world still so hard to change? If cosmopolitanism, as an intrinsic feature of modernity, signals a condition of self-confrontation and incompleteness, and a general tendency towards self-problematization, how is it that it remains unrealized and deeply repressed in such contexts as Irish political culture? The principle of responsibility is here shown to be some distance from the cosmopolitan idea. This indicates, as it will be developed upon in the proceeding analysis, a cultural model that is lopsided towards a contradictory form of institutionalized responsibility, in which individual responsibility is fore grounded above all, pathologically manifested as blame games in the discourse of the crisis. Co-responsibility, furthermore, and indeed a cosmopolitan understanding of responsibility, require a demanding reciprocal recognition of different principles of responsibility somehow present in the situation. The dominant conservative political culture in Ireland, as reflected in the distinctive political style

and class structure, precipitates a trend of non-thematization in Irish public discourse. It is this tendency that blocks any form of self-problematization, which may in turn lead to the forms of democratic transformation.

A co-responsible mode of legitimation, therefore, represents a transcendental combination. That is, between the normative insights on the concept of justification narratives and the possibility of a deliberative democracy, on the one hand, and the reformulation of responsibility in Apel and the theory of cosmopolitanism, drawing from Delanty, on the other, ultimately constituting an alternative cultural model to the conservative hegemony evident in the Irish case. This counterfactual model of legitimacy has, therefore, been made conceivable by a critique of the response to the financial crisis, disclosing novel reconstructive potentialities. Overcoming the distinctive modes of legitimation, and mechanisms of blame, therefore, in Irish normative culture, manifested in its public discourse, requires a theorizing a new form of learning – a non-pathological form of learning based on cultural innovation and the communicative structure of rational dissensus.

By presenting the idealized, counterfactual forms of legitimation and responsibility, culminating in the co-responsible mode of legitimation, the extent to which their diminished realization in the Irish context of public discourse is made explicit. This basis for reconstruction is made possible by appealing to the principles as cognitive order principles, harbouring an unlimited potential that can be normatively realized in combination with one another by new communicative structures. It is, therefore, through transforming the structures at the level of the cultural model that innovation can begin to take place on the societal plane. This is the key point, the Irish cultural model blocks normative innovation in specific ways, highlighted in the previous chapter, but, from a cognitive perspective there always a potentiality for learning, which can generate new communicative structures and transform the cultural model. The next section will attempt to illustrate the way in which the cognitive framework can be used to reconstruct the Irish response to the 2008 crisis by virtue of a reconfiguration of the cognitive order.

8.2 Reconfiguring the Cognitive Order: A Reconstruction of the Crisis-Response in Ireland

The critical-cognitive approach offers a unique perspective on culture as a multi-dimensional reflexive structure composed of dynamic and relatively stable components which become activated in the form of communication structures, collective learning processes and pathologies. This in turn allows for the maintenance or transformation of the components that make up the culture model itself, and the resultant norms and identities that represent the constitutive elements of modern society. This cognitive approach will now be put to use, reassessing the empirical-theoretical critique developed throughout on the Irish response to the 2008 crisis. This will, on the one hand, be intended to illustrate the application of the theoretical framework, and to exemplify its critical-explanatory value, and, on the other, advance the reconstructive critique itself, illuminating aspects of the situation which have remained, up to now, undisclosed.

The operation of legitimation and responsibility as specific cognitive principles in the crisis discourse indicate the available generative structural competences, or, alternatively, following Celikates (2006), the 'structural reflexivity deficits' in public discourse in Ireland in the twenty-first century. They also indicate both existing generative structures of 'downstream' cultural structure formation and institutionalization by means of the incursive and recursive functions of the cognitive order. Such functions depend on capacities for transcendental reflection in the sense of future-oriented reflexive self-critique as collective learning. It should be stressed here that, qua capacities, Ireland has available to it the full range of cognitive principles and associated sense-making capacities of modernity. However, to the contrary, qua competence, it exhibits, on particular issues, and more generally, a highly restricted range of generative powers. Irish public culture exhibits a highly restricted interpretation of the various available cognitive principles, a consequence, I have argued, of the conservativism which animates its public discourse. The actual selection is not made at the level of the cognitive order, but 'lower' down the cultural structure in the formation of cultural models through discursive struggles and selection mechanisms. It is at these lower, immanent levels, that the cognitive order is either enabled or blocked.

Drawing further from the critical reconstruction, based on the short-run observation of discourse and the long-run historical analysis, it is therefore possible to identify underlying conditions

affecting public discourse and cultural model formation. These also include the cosmopolitan/national division, the increasing role of finance capital and the financialization of society, the economic dependence on the construction industry and house-prices, the colonization of the public sphere through international media conglomerates, the instrumentalization of reasoning, the rise of new forms of right-wing thinking, and the long-run forms of domination and hegemony in the class system. Ultimately, this indicates the degeneration of democratic public discourse and the emergence of profound communication pathologies and blockages. These factors indicate the second-order explanation for what has been identified as a first-order problem. The primary level of explanation lies in the tilting of the cultural model in a conservative direction. This has had profound implications for the cognitive-generative structural capacity to shape the direction of social change in the case of Ireland. The direction of force from the cultural model upwards, towards the cognitive order, and downwards leads to conditions of domination of large sections of the population that are effectively disenfranchised and who do not enjoy many of the other conditions of modern democracy. The existence of such wide-ranging domination at the level of the cultural model, built upon a structure of pathologies and blockages, is in turn connected directly to the secondary explanatory structure provided by the various factors listed in the last paragraph. What is suggested here is that cognitive principles, separately and jointly, are discursively mediated in the light of normative, evaluative, emotional, and interest-related cultures, as they make their way into socio-political life. On this basis, it is shown how the cleavages that emerge at the cultural model level ultimately derives from discursively achieved mediation of cognitive principles with a view to selective combinations.

This view to selective combinations represents the outcome of the formation of distinctive cultural models, critically reflected here in the Irish case through the representation of the cognitive cultural model of democracy. It is in this respect that the cognitive principles of legitimacy and responsibility are normatively brought to the fore in the re-assessment of the crisis response. It is, specifically, in the blocking/enabling dynamics between the cultural models-level and the cognitive order that the co-responsible form of legitimation is reconstructively constituted. The essential problem relates to a type of legitimacy model – representative elitism

– that configures responsibility in a conservatively hegemonic way – within the Irish cultural model. This has the effect of diminishing responsibility both in the sense of an inclusive conceptualization of justice but also in relation to the general 'sustainability' of the society. Co-responsible legitimation seeks to remedy both defects of this narrow model and the narrow, conservative kinds of collective learning on which it is founded, i.e., authoritarian or regressive learning. Certainly, systems of deliberative democracy and the horizons of discourse ethics provide a kind of orientation towards what it would be like but, even without their full development, the counterfactual perspective allows a reconstructive insight into more general, and perhaps more easily correctible deficiencies of the irresponsible culture of democracy and the narrowness of current procedures in the Irish case. The fundamental problem in this context is that the public sphere, which is essential to democratic learning processes and to establishing a reconstructive horizon, does not function very effectively and is unable to get at the true moral and ethical causes of the severity of the crisis.

The crisis response, finally, analyzed from the perspective of the critical-cognitive approach, illustrates the incongruent relationship between the cultural model of Irish conservatism and the potentiality of future democratization. The latter is a process that depends on a vibrant public discourse, guided by communicative structures that facilitate the continuous exploration differences and, in times of crisis, constitutes a repertoire of cognitive potential which society can draw from in overcoming systemic failures. In contrast, the conservative cognitive model characterizes a mode of public discourse, reflected in the unfolding of the Irish crisis narrative, which encapsulates a repressive communicative structure that seeks to contain and restrict the exploration of alternatives. It is a condition, deeply embedded in Irish culture, that is beleaguered with contradiction and a society unable, and unwilling, to grasp the opportunity to change. The conservative model, therefore, contrary to the perception of a rather dull mode of engagement which seeks to contain public discourse, actually constitutes a highly sophisticated, yet subtle set of cognitive mechanisms deployed culturally to resist social change.

The cognitive principles of legitimation and responsibility were identified as core to the analysis in the case of Ireland, constituting the essential elements of the reconstructive critique. By observing the narrative of the crisis-response in Ireland, which indicated problems relating to

these specific elements – for instance, the absence of alternative positions being seriously considered in the public debate – the construction of legitimation through a distinctive mode of public discourse was identified. The principle of responsibility was then introduced and explored through a critical assessment of the prevalence of blaming, and blame avoidance, in Irish public discourse, therefore anticipating the critical disclosure of another, related form of pathology, disrupting the realization of a democratic mode of responsibility. The approach taken to both principles represents a fundamental, and critically valuable, perspective offered by an appropriation of the cognitive order concept. That is, contrasting societal interpretations of the same elementary cognitive principles, which correlate in the present case to a distinction between the conservative reality of Irish normative culture and the unexplored reconstructive potential contained within innovative, discursive forms of collective learning of a new cultural model. Through the reconstructive procedure of critique, therefore, legitimation was reframed counterfactually as an essential democratic principle, following Habermas in the main, and responsibility was reframed, also in a counterfactual register, following Apel, as co-responsibility. These principles were then combined at the transcendent level, embracing the range of potential existing in the cognitive order of society, and critically brought to bear on the situation through the theorization of a co-responsible form of legitimation.

The distinction, which is captured in the foundational Critical Theory concept of immanent transcendence, is played out in the thesis between this normative-counterfactual reconstructive standard of co-responsible legitimation, and the conservative reality reflected in the mechanisms of Irish public discourse. I therefore make the argument that it is the normative culture of conservatism, encapsulated in the development of Irish political and public culture through the twentieth century, that constitutes the blocked learning processes in this case. To overcome and transform these conditions of learning, would be to reflexively transform the structure of communication and, ultimately, reconfigure the selective combinations of the cognitive order. The absence of proposed alternative responses to the financial crisis indicates the restricted available generative structural competences, or, to put it differently, structural reflexivity deficits, of public debate in Ireland. In developing this critique, therefore, implications regarding

the domination of the ideology of conservatism came into focus as a source of a regressive structure of communication.

Conservatism, generally, refers to a political and societal position which is oriented towards what happens to be in existence at a given time and its preservation. Following its conceptual development as a feature of the contemporary political field through an account of its essential foundations in the work of Freeden, it is often a position which is difficult to pinpoint due to its malleable nature. Clearly, however, it represents a perspective which stands diametrically opposed to the reconstructive position developed here, which imagines transcendent-counterfactual horizons as playing a decisive part in social relations. With the principle of tradition given pride of place in the social order, the conservative position takes its cultural bearings, as a rule, from the basic values of the family and the promotion of personal responsibility. I therefore equate the domination of conservatism in Irish normative culture with the reproduction of blocked learning processes by closing off the exploration differences, which could potentially lead to conditions of rational dissensus, and, specifically relevant to the case of Ireland's response to the crisis, deficient thematization in public discourse, which blocks off the possibility of normative cultural innovation and the exploration of radical democratic alternatives as a more general response to the present status quo.

Placing this distinction into a broader sociological framework, it may be claimed that the dominant conflict-mediating cultural model of modern society is represented by a new adversarial structure, conservative technocrats (techno-conservatism) versus new social movements. This cultural model has certainly become more salient in public discourse in the post-crisis context, with the intensification of longer-run debate over austerity and Keynesian expansionary economic policies, however it remains indeterminate in terms of what the future holds, beyond the crisis aftermath. Although it reflects the immense global socio-economic changes of the last 40 years or so – generating a much more diverse set of cultural positions and interests beyond the old left-right distinctions – the resolution to this new arrangement cannot be a return to the neo-corporatist, post-war agreement, even if such intermediating structures will continue to play an important role. The effects of this new cultural model depend on the

relative power of the various communicative structures that underpin their formation in different contexts.

Care must of course be taken in employing such a generalizing concept, given the degree of differentiation of practices in modern society, however, I contend that the form of conservatism reflected in Irish public discourse – sustained by a communicative structure of repressive hegemony – in the aftermath of the crisis constitutes a distinctive ideological position that is fundamentally inadequate in dealing with the complex and varied challenges we face in the twenty-first century. This is, therefore, an urgent problem and it demands, particularly on the part of the critical sociologist, asking deeper questions regarding the possibility of a different future. For the past number of years, Ireland has been held up as a success for the techno-conservative response to the financial crisis on the transnational plane, referred to as "Europe's poster child for austerity" (Roche et al., 2017: 107). Despite this rhetoric, however, social and economic inequality have increased exponentially in Ireland since the crisis, accompanied with a further dismantling and degeneration of welfare state provisions, and the correlated immiseration of the most vulnerable in the society (Wickham and Hearne, 2017).

We are entering a period of time in which the very future of society is becoming a matter of contestation and debate. The dominant stance reflected in the Irish normative culture must be transformed if it is to democratically engage with the implications of this challenge, which are of profound importance. This critical juncture has highlighted the absence of an innovative, discursive form of learning, which is, however, now coming more to the fore through the activation of new social movements. Society must be reconstructed from below, with authentic emancipatory practices, brought forward with a democratic purpose. This, however, requires overcoming the pathological – regressive, defensive, ideological and authoritarian – forms of collective learning reflected in the response to the crisis, and initiate the cultivation of a form of cosmopolitan solidarity. This, furthermore, necessitates a rejection of reductionist fallacies which depict society in essentialist and unchangeable terms, for a complex, contingent view of social relations which embraces the full range of potentials contained in the human form of life.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to exploit the response to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis to develop a critique of Irish society. The conjectural moment, which the crisis represents, offers an opportunity for learning, not just in relation to how the crisis came about and how it ought to be resolved, but to reflect on the conditions of learning themselves, that would delve deeper into the socio-economic, cultural and political structures sustaining the very system that led up to the point of crisis. In essence, the argument is that the crisis could possibly have been responded to differently. In exploring this counterfactual idea, which is based more on what is absent in the response to the financial crisis in Ireland, in the domain of public discourse, a justification narrative was identified, following the key political interventions in the crisis, which sought to legitimize the response. This was then placed in the broader European context, which delineated an integration strategy that followed a commitment to processes of financialization, specifically through the latter half of the twentieth century. By placing Ireland in this wider context, a comparative perspective was established, which discussed the experiences of Greece and Iceland as cases where the legitimacy of the crisis response was publicly challenged – in the case of the latter, with a significant degree of success, whereas the former resulted in a tragic outcome. The final empirical chapter above (Chapter 3), which pertains to the analysis of the crisis response, highlighted the principles of legitimacy and responsibility as key elements emerging from the discourse. These elements were revealed dialectically – in the case of the former, through the discursive modes of legitimation, which were shown to normatively restrict the democratic principle of legitimacy, and, in the case of the latter, through an analysis of the discourse of blame in the context of the crisis narrative, which severely obscured the principle of responsibility.

The theoretical and methodological orientations of the work follow in the tradition of Critical Theory. The perspective adopted also highlighted the need to go beyond that tradition in order to fulfil the potential of the approach itself when applied empirically. Beginning with the concept of the public sphere, the theoretical framework then introduced a theory of collective learning, which, following Habermas and Miller, involves the idea of learning pathologies, key to the

proceeding analysis. The remaining elements of the theoretical framework constituted the development of the cultural model in the context of a cognitive sociology, ultimately resulting in the introduction of the cognitive order, which would eventually allow for the empirical problem at hand to be reframed in novel critical terms. In terms of methodology, the thesis adopted a procedure of reconstruction, following Honneth, as a 'methodology of inquiry' that aligned with the empirical-theoretical approach pursued from the outset. Fundamental to the enterprise of Critical Theory, reconstruction in this sense makes use of the empirical information, gained through a combination of methods in earlier chapters, unearthing a normative potential in the concrete situation, which goes unrealized due to learning blockages at work in Irish society. In this specific case, this referred to the principles of legitimacy and responsibility, ultimately proposing the possibility of a co-responsible mode of legitimation.

The remaining two chapters, 6 and 7, combined the theoretical elements with the relevant dimensions of the empirical situation to proceed with a critique of Irish society, facilitated by the response to the 2008 crisis. Chapter 6, therefore, delineated the conditions of learning within the Irish cultural model, focusing specifically on the problem of normative repression, resulting from an emphasis on nationalism and class within the political culture, and, in a second move, on the problem of conservatism as the dominant ideology. At issue here was not some inherent pathology associate with conservatism, but the particular form of Irish conservatism, which was shown to be adept at sustaining long-lasting contradictions, specifically in relation to the realization of socio-economic rights. For example, in the context of the aftermath of the crisis, Ireland passed some of the most liberal pieces of legislation ever put forward, while inequality and social deprivation, reflected most explicitly in homelessness figures since the crisis, have increased exponentially. Finally, these observations are 'fed through' the critical-cognitive theoretical framework developed earlier. By explicating the various levels in the cognitive order of society, the identification of pathologies operating within this structure becomes possible. In this case, the problem is located at the level of the cultural model, where the relevant principles bearing on the situation – legitimacy and responsibility – are being blocked or distorted in the course of learning processes and, therefore, remaining normatively unrealised in Irish society.

In conclusion, Ireland certainly represents a unique case in terms of responding to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and its aftermath. From economic miracle, to one of the first 'victims' of the Great Recession, to eventually becoming the European success story of economic recovery, this exceptional narrative may now be viewed quite differently. In the aftermath of the crisis, Ireland seems to have been shielded somehow from the rise of populism across Western liberal democracies, reflected in the rise of the far-right in Europe and the interminable chaos associated with Brexit phenomenon in the UK since 2016. Although this may indeed be taken as a positive reflection of the strength of Irish democracy, which having survived the financial crisis, and accepted the sacrifices in order to return to prosperity, it may also be understood as a reflection of the extent to which Ireland is dependent on events elsewhere. This relates both to a continued dependence on an economic model based on foreign direct investment and inflated real estate and also in the sense of the ideals carried by social movements, which promote emancipatory social and political change. Ireland, therefore, may be considered a 'laggard', denying learning opportunities when they present themselves in order to preserve its precarious standing in the modern world.

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