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Weathering the Crisis?

Managing Democracy at a National Broadcaster

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A dissertation submitted for the degree of PhD (Social Science)

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DECLARATION

This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere.

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Mark Cullinane

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ABSTRACT

With post-2008 political and economic crises as its backdrop, this inquiry into the political roles and functions of public service broadcasting (PSB) in Ireland is principally concerned with examining the capacities for and actuality of critical and counter-hegemonic professional journalistic and institutional mediations of crisis. Recognising the diversity of influences on the normative identity of Irish PSB, the dissertation adopts a sociological approach that acknowledges the systemic embedding of media institutions in the broader field of power.

An initial tracing of the formative impacts of endogenous and exogenous forces on the democratic horizons of PSB suggests that the present crisis conjuncture does not represent promising terrain for engendering critical crisis and recovery imaginaries. A methodologically diverse intra-institutional empirical research agenda aims to explore at close hand Irish PSB's contingent navigation of crisis, encompassing ethnographic observation in the newsroom, practitioner interviews and textual analysis of broadcast output. These methods afford close analysis of practices of journalistic production and reflexivity, self-conceptions of the journalistic *habitus*, and ideological affinities of crisis framings in broadcast output. These analyses are supplemented by a participant observation study of the possibilities for public agenda-building in a key institutional venue of public participation in broadcasting governance.

The findings offer an evidential basis for the arguments that the crisis has prompted only minimal changes to professional norms and practices of representation and inclusion; that journalistic crisis framings tend toward effecting hegemonic repair by lending support to neoliberal crisis and recovery imaginaries; and that the institutional openings for the building of public counter-power are highly constrained.

The overall conclusion is made that the normative democratic orientation embedded in the professional and institutional projects of public service broadcasting help render it ill-equipped to act as a re-democratising countervailing power against the democratic regressions engendered by the present crisis of democratic capitalism.

'It should be considered a form of state violence in itself, because during the state of exception, specific types of knowledge and specific voices are privileged, while other types of knowledge and many other voices are discredited and become muted'.

Nico Carpentier (2011: 24)

PART I

CONTEXTS

Chapter 1: Crisis, Communication and the Public Sphere

I don't know what we could have done differently to put ourselves in the position to predict the magnitude of the fall. We reported the news forensically. We challenged the consensus and canvassed all views and published them.

Geraldine Kennedy, former Editor of 'The Irish Times' (Kennedy, 2015: 6)

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The political role of the press

When called in early 2015 to provide testimony at the Irish parliament's Committee of Inquiry into the Banking Crisis- whose terms of reference included scrutiny of 'the role of the media' (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2014) as part of its exploration of the domestic contexts of the recent crisis- senior editorial and management figures from major Irish newspapers and public service broadcasting deployed a defence of their record by marshalling evidence that they *did* demonstrate an editorial scepticism toward Ireland's "Celtic Tiger" boom (Mulhall, 2015: 980-1) and that space *was* made in print and on the airwaves to those outside the prevailing economic consensus (Kennedy, 2015: 6). If the volume of critical voices could in retrospect be plainly seen as insufficient, this was only, so went the explanation, because a pervasive consensus around the sustainability of Ireland's "economic miracle" meant that there was a relative paucity of critical voices in society from which the media could draw (Vaughan, 2015: 884).

While much recent academic research on the role of the media in relation to the post-2008 financial and economic crisis has focused on the extent to which it failed to sound the alarm of an impending crash (see Berry, 2013: 254), the implications of the editorial construction of innocence as articulated at the

parliamentary inquiry- in which an insufficiency of critique, insofar as it is acknowledged at all, is attributed more to a broad societal failure rather than a specifically journalistic one- is of particular interest to this thesis.

While this innocence has long since been punctured by decades of critical scholarship on media production and journalistic work- not least crystallised in Max Weber's characterisation of the press as political organisations and the journalist as a type of 'professional politician' (1946) - the present economic and financial crises represent a tantalising opportunity to leverage a disclosing critique on the contemporary political roles played by news media, seen here as saturated with normative as well as informational dimensions (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1986: 88).

1.1.2 Crises as moments of truth

The particular analytic value of moments of crisis in explicating journalism's political role lies in general characteristics of crisis, the exigencies and contexts of journalistic production, and the particular dynamics of the crisis in question.

While the objective aspect of crisis is captured by Sum and Jessop's crisis definition (2013: 396), following Debray (1973: 113) as a scenario in which a set of social relations can no longer be reproduced by the means heretofore employed, as 'objectively overdetermined yet subjectively indeterminate', crises are triggered by multiple inter-penetrating causes which do not come 'pre-interpreted' (Sum and Jessop, 2013: 396). As such, they must be subjected to sense-making processes that call to attention the inevitable significance of its subjective moment- *construals* of crisis (ibid)- understandings that specify its parameters, origins, and symptoms which precede and shape how crisis resolution is imagined. As Davies (2014: 32) puts it, conditions of uncertainty in general, and economic crises in particular, have the potential to cast into sharp relief for actors the 'incommensurability of rival normative-empirical worldviews' and the 'constructed nature of socio-economic reality' (see also Kouvelakis, 2012: xv-xvi).

Whether incumbent governing orthodoxies can scramble to reassert themselves sufficiently to retain dominant or even hegemonic status and dominate crisis responses, or whether challenger interpretations can gain currency that is translated into practical action is, in liberal democracies, at least partially dependent on how crisis is *mediated* in the public sphere (Franklin, 2004, Livingstone, 2009).

As central sources of information about the world beyond our personal experiences, mass media platforms are key sites for the discursive contestation of crisis construals- what Gurevitch and Levy (1985:19) describe as a key 'site on which various social groups, institutions, and ideologies struggle over the definition and construction of social reality', with the professional journalist's status as gatekeeper of mediated political communication underlining the significance of their political role.

Given that the *substance* of those mediated crisis construals are, inevitably, inextricably linked to both internal and external contexts of journalistic production, this thesis takes as its subject matter the *conditions shaping the mediation of crisis construals* in the temporal, material and ideological contexts of the recent global financial crisis- what Sum and Jessop (2013) describe as the 'North Atlantic financial crisis' (NAFC), and the institutional and cultural contexts of public service broadcasting in the Republic of Ireland. For reasons that are elaborated below, both the selections of crisis and institutional site of mediation represent particularly propitious territory for the critical exploration of relationships between media, society, economy and democracy, whose contemporary interpenetrations require sustained theoretical and empirical inquiry.

1.2 Crisis contexts- containing and managing the North Atlantic Financial Crisis in Ireland and Europe

1.2.1 NAFC in context

A detailed aetiology of the contemporary financial and economic crisis is unnecessary here, with the accumulation of a voluminous literature on the topic

since 2008 (see, for example, Stiglitz (2010), Krugman (2009), Calhoun and Derluguian (2011) and Mirowski (2013) on the US crisis context, Lapavitsas et al. (2012), Patomäki (2013) and Pisani-Ferry (2011) on its European instantiation and repercussions, and McCabe (2013), Donovan and Murphy (2013), O'Riain (2014) and Kearns (2014) on the Irish dimensions).

In general terms, the genesis of the North Atlantic Financial Crisis may be located in the neoliberal shift of the 1970s, whose epicentre was the United States. Symptoms of the current crisis trajectory manifested in a credit crunch in the sub-prime mortgage crisis of 2007-8, swiftly morphing into a full-scale financial crisis reflecting the consequences of long-run instability generated by de-regulated finance, hyper-financialisation and deferred sectoral crises, and generating crises of liquidity in the financial sector and of solvency in the real economy, and fiscal and sovereign debt crises associated with the cost of bailing out the financial sector (Sum and Jessop, 2013: 421).

The global contagion that followed was uneven, differentiated and mediated both by the internal configurations of national economies and the nature of their integration into regional and global circuits of capital (Jessop, 2013: 244).

1.2.2 Ireland's crash and crisis management

Ireland's developmental model as a whole- particularly since economic modernisation- has been indicted by critical accounts of Irish political economy including those of McCabe (2013) and Coakley (2012) as short-termist, lopsided and fostering dangerous dependencies on particular productive and non-productive sectors often beyond domestic control (see Chapter 4 of this dissertation). O'Riain (2014: 8) summarises orthodox accounts of the collapse of the Irish Celtic Tiger in terms of a distinction between a 'sustainable' period of growth in the 1990s (based on a healthy "real" economy with market liberalisation policies balanced by the maintenance of wage competitiveness and low inflation and bolstered by corporatist mechanisms) and a post-millennial descent into pathological development (characterised by the abandonment of fiscal restraint, the skyrocketing of wages, and the overheating of the economy

through the development of a credit and property 'bubble economy' (ibid: 61)), propelled by regulatory weaknesses, financialisation at home and abroad and further facilitated by currency union.

With the Irish economy dangerously dependent upon the construction industry and Irish banks' risky lending behaviours contributing to the build-up of enormous exposures to property loans (Whelan, 2013), the elite consensus positing the probability of a "soft landing" proved disastrously misplaced. The bursting of the housing bubble in the latter part of 2007 badly exposed the Irish economy's structural weaknesses, and as the global financial crisis intersected with Ireland's domestic crisis in 2008, a liquidity crisis was prompted in Irish banks which culminated in the arrival of senior banking executives at Government buildings on the night of September 29th who brought the message that the entire banking system in Ireland was on the brink of collapse (Carswell, 2011).

Thus began a multi-year programme of crisis management by the Irish state, with the domestic trajectory of crisis evolving from acute financial crisis to a fiscal crisis of public finances, underpinned by a broader economic crisis of the domestic economy in particular, and complemented in the five-part crisis schema of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC, 2009) by 'social' and 'reputational' crises. Proliferating economic hardship reversed gains in living standards and saw skyrocketing unemployment, with Ireland's declining creditworthiness leading to an eventual inability to secure lending to fund the day-to-day running of the country by the end of 2010.

Large-scale emergency state interventions, most notably a bank guarantee of unprecedented breadth (Carswell, 2011), bank recapitalisations that amounted to actual or effective nationalisation of almost the entire banking system, and the establishment of a state 'bad bank' which acquired impaired loans from the financial institutions covered by the bank guarantee and sought to maximise their value all represented the strength of the state's desire to protect and shore up Ireland's financial architecture. However, by transferring the burden of financial

crisis onto the public finances, these policy responses had the effect of 'limiting the knock-on effects of the Irish banking difficulties within the international financial system, but amplifying them within the domestic public finances' (O'Riain, 2014: 248). Laeven and Valencia (2012, cited in O'Riain, 2014: 240) found that the costs to the state of Ireland's banking crisis rendered it 'one of the most severe in world economic history'. A reduced capacity to secure funding on the bond markets saw, at the end of 2010, Ireland forced into a three-year bailout programme funded by the EU, IMF and World Bank at the cost of punitive interest rates- later reduced- and a strict programme of economic supervision entailing steep fiscal retrenchment requiring years of austerity budgets and state asset sales, banking sector and labour market reforms (see also O'Sullivan et al., 2014: 554-5).

The extraordinary (O'Riain, 2014: 242)- even unprecedented (Whelan, 2010)- extent to which policy responses employed fiscal consolidation was such that by the 2014 budget, 'In eight budgets over the course of seven years the Government have taken almost €30 billion out of the economy, a cumulative adjustment of almost one fifth of GDP' (Whelan, 2014).

That the axe was not swung equitably has been noted by Coulter and Nagle (2015) who identify the regressive character of cuts and their harsh impacts on vulnerable groups. In addition, Keane et al.'s (2014) analysis of the distributional impacts of budgets from 2009 to 2015 suggests that overall, those in the bottom decile of income distribution have had their incomes squeezed to nearly the same extent as those with the highest incomes, with more recent budgets disproportionately benefiting the better off (see also O'Riain, 2014: 250, Social Justice Ireland, 2015, TASC, 2015).

The primary goal of the state's crisis management- spanning two coalition governments- may be identified in terms of the promotion of a recovery imaginary based on the rehabilitation of the Irish economy within circuits of regional and global capital and political power. Evidence of such a strategy is supplied by, *inter alia*, the extraordinary lengths taken to preserve the banking

system, the compliant posture taken toward supranational bodies and creditors (exemplified by the failure to seriously propose the 'burning' of bondholders and the stratagem of converting vast quantities of promissory notes into long-term government bonds, thus irrevocably consolidating private banking losses into sovereign debt), the emphasis on fiscal retrenchment, the singular focus on "economic competitiveness" as the sine qua non of recovery, and the unequal socio-economic distribution of the burden of the crisis response. For these reasons, Irish crisis management may be described as entailing a *radicalisation* of neoliberal governance (Mercille and Murphy, 2015).

1.2.3 Eurozone crash and crisis management

At European level, the impact from the North Atlantic Financial Crisis was severe, triggering first banking crises and then sovereign debt crises in a range of peripheral nations, bringing into serious question the viability of the single currency. In common with Blyth (2013: 78) who describes the Euro as a 'monetary doomsday device', Sum and Jessop (2013: 427) identify monetary union without fiscal and political union as a structural flaw that made financial contagion inevitable in the event of a crisis of the magnitude of the NAFC. The poor integration of peripheral Eurozone nations (Lapavitsas et al., 2012: 1) into monetary union meant that 'as the contagion effects of the NAFC destabilized the Southern European economies…they could neither exit the Eurozone nor boost exports in a weakened world market' (Sum and Jessop, 2013: 427).

Crisis management by European institutions since 2009 has involved both specific interventions in the economies (and polities) of particular member states and overhauls to the legislative architecture of the European Union in general and the Eurozone in particular, with Barnard (2012, p.99) identifying 'four limbs' to European crisis management: financial reform (with an emphasis on banking oversight), crisis stabilisation (funding programmes to ameliorate the sovereign debt crisis), enhanced economic governance (ostensibly to prevent similar crises in the future), and (limited) growth measures.

The neoliberal character of European crisis management has been emphasised by many critics of European governance. For example, Blyth (2013: 52) argues that the selection of fiscal consolidation as a core plank of the European response to crisis arose from an ideologically-motivated definition of the crisis as arising from the unsustainable spending of 'profligate periphery states', rather than in private banking losses and moreover, their mutation into the responsibility of states via socialised bank debts. He further suggests that Germany's status as Eurozone hegemon has enabled the imprinting of the Eurozone and consequently the Eurozone response to crisis with an 'ordoliberal' flavour (a policy regime primarily distinguished by its explicit advocacy of state intervention in 'setting the framework conditions necessary for markets to operate effectively' (ibid: 133)), in which there is 'no room for the profligate except austerity' and 'no room for compensation apart from policies that speed the adjustment of the market' (ibid: 143). This is evidenced by the strict austerian and market liberalisation conditionality attached to bailout loan programmes agreed with some of the countries under greatest pressure, including Portugal, Ireland, Spain, Cyprus, and perhaps most extraordinarily symbolised by Greece's ongoing subjection to austerity and market liberalisation.

O'Riain (2014: 273) suggests that the broad European response to crisis mirrored the domestic Irish response in its overarching goals- to create a protective 'firewall' around the financial system (involving the mass socialisation of banking debts), with the ensuing fiscal crisis dealt with by fiscal retrenchment. The extent to which crisis management actions represented a radicalisation of neoliberalism is further apparent in the failure to successfully implement even moderate initiatives like enhanced banking regulation (Fleming and Chon, 2014) and a Europe-wide Financial Transaction Tax (Kalaitzake, 2014). Arguing that a crisis *of* neoliberalism has not been forthcoming, Jessop and Sum (2013: 436) describe the NAFC as precipitating a 'new phase of 'blowback' neoliberalism', seen in 'the continuing structural power of finance-dominated accumulation and accumulation through dispossession', a phenomenon also noted by O'Riain (2014: 3), Crouch (2011) Peck (2010), Mirowski (2013) and Davies (2014).

1.3 Crises in Democracy

1.3.1 Neoliberalism and democracy

That the neoliberal radicalisation associated with post-2008 crisis management has entailed profound democratic as well as economic implications has been foregrounded by critical political economists and radical democratic theorists.

What Wendy Brown (2005: 38) termed neoliberalism's 'political rationality' captures its status as more than a series of tenets about economics and finance, but nothing less than 'a form of governmentality' which aims at 'extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action' (ibid: 40) (a view echoed in Fraser's (2014) holistic conception of capitalism as an 'institutionalised social order'.

Dardot and Laval (2013: 301) summarise the principle tenets of neoliberal reason as, firstly, entailing an acceptance of the market as a constructed reality requiring active state intervention for its proper functioning and that the primary role of the state is to maintain a framework for the operation of the market based on the principle of competition. The norm of competition extends both to the state, whose every activity must conform to the same market principles, and to all persons via the dissemination of an entrepreneurial mode of self-government.

According to Brown (2005: 41), the subordination of the political sphere to an economic rationality entails not only the diminution of space for non-market rationalities but embeds a radically new model of political legitimacy in which the authority of the nationally-bound public is supplanted by the authority of the market, effecting a powerful erosion of liberal democratic institutions and practices (ibid: 38).

For Colin Crouch (2000, 2004, 2011) neoliberalism is a core contributor to the modern condition of 'post-democracy', in which the more 'maximal' participative impulses of democracy retreat into a more minimalist form, focusing on mere

constitutional essentials, epitomised in the occasional act of voting between competing political parties. In a formulation close to Gearty's (2013) concept of 'neo-democracy' in which nations 'play' at democracy by going through the motions despite their hollowed-out substance, Brown (2006) characterises post-democratic conditions under a neoliberal political rationality as entailing a situation where the formal machinery of democracy continues to exist as before but in the broader context of steady shrinkage of democracy's sphere of influence.

Crouch's account of the origins of the present post-democratic moment has close affinities with Wolfgang Streeck's (2011, see also 2014b) account of the structural underpinnings of the present crisis, which he contextualises as merely the contemporary instantiation of a long-run 'distributional conflict' within post-WWII 'democratic capitalism', in which governments have struggled to mediate between 'the two contradictory principles of allocation', 'social rights on the one hand and marginal productivity, as evaluated by the market, on the other', generating intermittent crises ameliorated through the engineering of spatio-temporal fixes that have shifted or submerged symptoms between institutional sites.

On this account, the collapse in 2008 of the era of the 'unacknowledged policy regime of privatised Keynesianism' (Crouch, 2009), entailing a catastrophic build-up of enormous levels of private debt facilitated by financial deregulation is only the latest site of conflict. The key consequence of that crash- the socialisation of private debt- represents for Streeck a new phase in the distributional conflict in which democracy has become more subordinated to capital than ever, noting that the capacity of finance to 'blackmail' democratic nation remains as potent today as it was in 2008, because with the failure of meaningful regulatory reform in the financial sector, 'the banks that were too big to fail in 2008 can count on being so' (Streeck, 2011: 25) in the future. A permanent neoliberalism is therefore enforced not just by conditionality attached to bailout agreements but by financial markets and ratings agencies who have the means to wreak economic chaos on nation states at will.

For Fraser (2014b), the power of ‘private and quasi-public regulatory agencies which make coercively enforceable rules that govern vast swathes of social interaction throughout the world’ amounts to the global emergence of ‘governance without government’, revealing for Crouch (2000: 20) the fact that ‘democracy has simply not kept pace with capitalism's race to the global'.

1.3.2 Crisis management and democratic crisis

In a later article, Streeck (2014a: 64) justifies the idea that 'capitalism's shotgun marriage with democracy since 1945 is breaking up' by pointing to an acceleration of democracy's neutralisation by capital, in which the market economy is increasingly insulated from democratic interference (see also Klein, 2008). This corresponds to a process described by Gill (1998: 23, see also Gill and Cutler, 2014) as the 'new constitutionalism', a project of governance reform which aims to 'allow dominant economic forces to be increasingly insulated from democratic rule and popular accountability'. Describing the new constitutionalism as a mode of embedding 'disciplinary neoliberalism' (ibid) into international law, and propelled by the 'capital mobility associated with the power and reach of transnational capital' (ibid: 25), it can be seen in the context of both Brown's (2006) 'de-democratisation' and Crouch's (2000,2004) 'post-democratic' concepts in that new constitutionalism makes use of existing democratic mechanisms, 'attenuating, co-opting and channelling' (Gill, 1998: 25) them in the interests of 'separating the economic from the political' (ibid) in order to make democracy safer for capital (see also Gilbert, 2013). Dardot and Laval (2013: 306-7) argue that neoliberalism’s opposition to effective popular sovereignty renders it an essentially anti-democratic doctrine.

Macartney (2013: 4) argues that the dominant modality of contemporary European governance- preceding but radicalised by crisis (ibid: 38)- corresponds to a deliberate new constitutionalist project, closely linked to ordoliberalism and neoliberalism, to 'insulate policymaking from democratic demands' (ibid: 7) by 're-structuring social relations in favour of capital' (ibid: 37).

The onset of the European debt crisis saw an increasing radicalisation of centralised policymaking, with a range of key measures (for example, the European Semester and Euro Plus Pact in 2011 and Fiscal Compact in 2012) embedding new constitutionalist 'lock-in' involving the supranationalisation of powers formerly retained at national level and representing a major enhancement of the EU's economic surveillance, co-ordination and disciplinary apparatus (see Barnard, 2012: 114 and Adams et al., 2014 for critiques).

For Macartney (ibid: 65), the increasingly coercive imposition of market discipline is exemplified by a radicalised 'anti-democratic statecraft' emanating from the European Union. That disciplinary action extended to the effective deposing- in 'virtual coups d'état' (Sum and Jessop, 2013: 427)- of the Prime Ministers of Greece and Italy by European fiat in late 2011 and replaced by compliant technocrats speaks to the extent of such a radicalisation, as did the fate met by the anti-austerity SYRIZA government in Greece when it attempted to chart a path out of crisis by breaking with austerian and neoliberal logics (Ovenden, 2015).

The widening legitimacy deficits and democratic decay at the heart of Europe has exacerbated structural divisions between Eurozone core and periphery. Habermas (2011) warns of a European descent into 'non-transparent post-democratic domination', with Smith (2014: 102) suggesting the demise of Europe as a 'post-humiliation regime'.

European crisis management may be characterised as entailing a de facto state of exception in which the 'old-European model of hierarchical dominance through law and instrumental steering' (O'Mahony, 2014: 252) has been powerfully reasserted (see also Auer, 2013).

As well as becoming subject to the de-democratising tendencies of European crisis management, democracy as popular sovereignty in Ireland has undergone further endogenous weakening. For example, whatever domestic steering power was left on macro-economic policy became even further centralised within a new

four-member body senior to cabinet level, the Economic Management Council- an institutional innovation described by O'Riain (2014: 270) as deepening the 'already strong oligarchic tendencies within Irish politics' (see also Beesley, 2015). Jessop's (2013: 428) description of bank restructuring, nationalisations and the establishment of bad banks as being 'pursued behind a veil of secrecy through emergency legislation and executive discretion' aptly describes the Irish approach, characterised by a range of shock-and-awe legislative tactics pursued by the Irish government aimed at securing external market 'confidence' at the cost of fidelity to ordinary parliamentary procedures.

1.3.3 Post-democracy and contentious politics

The political reverberations prompted by crisis in Europe suggest a pair of trends that are at first blush inconsistent. At the level of national and European governance, there is an enduring political dominance of parties and political groupings broadly committed to neoliberal governance (evidenced by the enduring pre-eminence of the European People's Party (EPP) grouping in the European Parliament), an electoral trend further supporting Sum and Jessop's (2013: 435) assertion that the crisis has not engendered a crisis *of* neoliberal regimes. However, a second, longer-run trend and one accelerated by crisis suggests evolving popular responses to economic and democratic pathologies generated by neoliberalism that increasingly promise to transform both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics.

Commenting on the proposed practice (since enshrined in the Fiscal Compact in 2012) of national budgets becoming subject to European Commission oversight, Habermas (2012: 130) suggests that even the mere suspicion that national governments are reduced to 'merely rubber-stamping prior decisions taken elsewhere…inevitably corrodes any democratic credibility' and that political elites in Europe are 'persisting unapologetically in their elite project and the disenfranchisement of the European citizens' (ibid: 132). Streeck (2011: 27) suggests that such a loss of democratic agency was not lost on citizens with widespread disillusionment arising from democracy's inability to contain

oligarchic capitalism likely to prompt ‘all sorts of political disorder, from declining turnout to a rise of populist parties to riots in the streets’, an analysis mirrored in the diagnosis of Peter Mair (2006: 25, see also 2013), whose pessimistic account of a range of secular trends in European democracies traces the causes and consequences of a hollowing out of contemporary Western democracy, which he describes as being 'steadily stripped of its popular component-democracy without a demos'.

Mair attributes rising citizen withdrawal from participation in electoral politics and increasing public distrust in parties and other political institutions to parties themselves, who are withdrawing ‘from the arena of popular democracy’ (ibid: 48), increasingly reduced to 'appendages of the state' (ibid: 50) and increasingly attuned to governance as an end ('office-seeking' (ibid: 47)) rather than as ‘associative organs’ (Honneth, 2013: 325) of publics, and vehicles of popular mobilisation. This is further evidenced by steep declines in party memberships (Mair and Van Biezen, 2001, Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012).

Axel Honneth (2014: 325) similarly argues that the phenomenon of political ‘disenchantment’ often attributed to modern populaces, manifesting in a ‘public turn away from state-mediated politics’ is far from being a simple outcome of ‘spreading privatisation or political disinterest’ (ibid: 326) but is in fact a ‘normatively substantial reaction’ by publics. He suggests that it reflects a ‘sober realization’ of the ‘increasing decoupling of the political system from democratic will-formation’ (ibid) arising from the awareness that democratic self-legislation in decision-making is only poorly realised and realisable within the structural constraints of the capitalist political economy which delimits the capacity of citizens to ‘impress upon the political economy interests and demands that are incommensurable with those of capital owners’ (Streeck, 2011: 29).

Because the imperatives of financialised globalised capitalism have rendered ineffective the spatio-temporal fixes of social democracy- hitherto a popular bulwark against capitalism’s depredations (Ryner, 2010, Varoufakis, 2014)- the ‘paradox’ (Macartney, 2013: 77) has arisen of the enthusiastic participation of the

European centre-left in neoliberal reform both before and during the crisis. This phenomenon has played a particularly important role in hastening the spread of disenchantment with the possibilities of parliamentary politics, but also in promoting counter-developments.

Disillusionment prompted by the neoliberal mantra of "There Is No Alternative" (TINA)- whether delivered by conservative or nominally centre-left governments- has both accelerated the splintering of existing party political loyalties and the development of oppositional political formations in Europe on both left and right. Mair (2006) suggests that political opposition today is increasingly coming in the form of predominantly youth and working-class grassroots movements which often eschew electoral politics on the grounds of disillusionment with the failures of representative democracy (see also Saenz, 2014).

The evolution of the *indignados* of the Spanish 15-M movement, an instantiation of the broader, diffuse Occupy phenomenon, into the horizontalist electoral political movement of Podemos (Delclós, 2015) demonstrates both the volatility of the political map and the new forms of electoral organisation demanded by electorates disillusioned with both the old social democratic left and the neoliberal right (Sitrin and Azzellini, 2014, Mason, 2012). This has been further underlined by electoral earthquakes like the sudden emergence of the 5 Star Movement in Italy in 2013, the virtual ejection of the two major parties from Scotland in 2015 as the rise of the independence agenda sponsored by the Scottish National Party continues to threaten the UK's constitutional settlement, the elevation to power of the SYRIZA party in Greece in 2015 and most recently, the British Labour Party's election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader which holds out the possibility of a break with neoliberal logics. On the right, with austerity biting, the political centre collapsing in on itself, and the ideology of European integration at its weakest, rightist, fascist, racist and xenophobic parties have benefited from increased support, notably in the UK, France, Finland, Netherlands, and Greece (Lentin and Titley, 2011).

In Ireland, mounting evidence of a secular decline in the dominance of Ireland's post-independence 'two and half-party' system (Blondel, 1968), accelerating electoral de-alignment and volatility (Mair, 2011) and collapsing public trust in domestic and European institutions (O'Riain, 2014: 261-262, O'Sullivan, Healy and Breen, 2014, Edelman 2015, European Commission, 2013)- including journalism (Suiter, 2015, Reuters, 2015, Edelman, 2015)- suggests that change is afoot here, too. The sporadic emergence of anti-austerity movements around particular policy impositions has galvanised oppositional politics in Ireland to an increasing degree. In particular, the Right2Water movement which emerged in 2014 in opposition to Troika-mandated water charges represents a serious grassroots challenge to governmental authority (Hearne, 2015), and whose diffuse organisational structure reflects the heterogeneous organisation of post-2008 oppositional groups.

The continuing electoral domination of the centre-right, therefore, lends a patina of 'business as usual' on a political landscape that is undergoing significant rupture across the continent.

1.4 Crisis, the public sphere, and democratic legitimacy

1.4.1 Crisis, ideology and power

Given the magnitude both of the crisis symptoms and the extraordinary interventions made by states to rescue the edifice of globalised, financialised capitalism in the wake of the 2008 crash, Ryner's (2010: 554) suggestion that 'even the sturdiest of hegemonic discourses have difficulties surviving such dissonance', raises in the domestic context the necessity of interrogating the achievement of relatively 'stable' neoliberal crisis management in Ireland since 2008.

Any examination of the state's capacity to secure the consent or at least quiescence of the population to increasingly authoritarian neoliberal crisis management techniques must explore the role of the *discursive* environment in

which crises are made sense of and acted upon by publics. This is because, as has been emphasised by neo-Marxist scholars from Antonio Gramsci to Raymond Williams, public compliance in liberal democracy is secured less through the actuality of outright physical repression but mainly through a mastery of the *ideological environment* of public discourse- via the achievement of cultural *hegemony,* or the more or less successful societal diffusion of a set of legitimating meanings, values and beliefs sponsored by ruling groups. When taking hegemonic form, these meanings acquire a type of power that is 'routine, institutionalized, organized and generally accepted' (Rutherford, 2000: 45), a definition that, following Gramsci, sees hegemonic power as representing an entire canon of naturalised, depoliticised 'common sense', which provide a background, tacit 'hierarchical series of normative rules by which social life is to be understood' (Allan, 2010: 84).

Underpinned by relationships of domination and subordination, elite hegemony operates through practical alliances of the powerful who work to maintain their power by determining the 'signs, meanings and practices that operate in the public sphere' (ibid), engendering tacit or active submission to authority. Hegemonic power emphasises that ideological leadership and the winning of governmental power are not one and the same thing (Gramsci, 1971: 57-58) but that the former must be regularly renewed via the intensification of persuasive mechanisms- backed by the threat of coercion- to prevent the proliferation of dissent.

Drawing on Sum and Jessop's (2013: 397) observation of the importance of crisis 'imaginaries' in shaping both the 'interpretation of crises and the responses thereto', the role of crisis construals in helping direct the flow of events and the legitimation of particular responses through the creation of 'truth effects' or the 'hegemonic or dominant meanings of crisis' (ibid: 437) is a central concern of this thesis because these construals can lead to '*strategic interventions*' (ibid, italics in original) in crises that powerfully shape their outcomes. The path-indeterminacy of crises means that they can lead to rupture in established social relations and institutions or a re-assertion of existing policy paradigms and power relations.

The outcome that eventually transpires is a function of a range of structural and contingent factors that are to some extent locally, temporally, politically and culturally specific. Exploring which crisis construals acquire hegemonic power and why means taking seriously the role of institutions of the *public sphere* in mediating crisis.

1.4.2 The public sphere

As observed by Fenton and Titley (2015: 5), the Habermasian 'public sphere', or *Öeffentlichkeit* has long occupied the status of 'dominant normative framework, critical touchstone and ritual allusion' in scholarship concerned with the relationships between media and democracy. The public sphere (Habermas, 1989 [1962]) refers in its broadest sense to a 'realm of social life' (Habermas, Lennox and Lennox, 1974: 49), 'in which the public organizes itself as the bearer or [sic] public opinion' (ibid: 50).

Described by Fraser (1990: 57) as a 'theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk', the public sphere represents an 'institutionalised arena of discursive interaction' distinct from the state and the market economy in which organised publics deliberate on matters of common import in order to bring about greater co-ordination between public will-formation and effective decision-making.

For Fraser (2014b), the ideal of the public sphere posits the existence of sites in civil society in which 'all who are governed can participate in free and open discussions aimed at assessing the legitimacy (or illegitimacy) of the powers to which they are subject'. Based on a series of communicative ground rules that ensure that discussion is 'open, unrestricted, inclusive, and fair', discourse in the public sphere generates 'normatively legitimate' outcomes because they reflect just and autonomous public will-formation free from the distorting effects of power imbalances.

As Honneth (2014) describes in his review of the development of European

public spheres since the 18th century, the institutional form of theatres of the public sphere, their criteria of eligibility for participation, their discursive modes, and their functions with regard to national political systems have taken a variety of historical forms. Broadly speaking, one may distinguish between the *bourgeois* or *literary* public spheres of 18th century Europe, crystallised in Habermas' frequently-cited description of the emergent public spaces of metropolitan literary salons and London coffee houses, characterised by their exclusive and elite character, and the contemporary *democratic* public sphere, propelled by the expansion of parliamentary democracy and the achievement of liberal rights of freedom and political rights to participation in the 18th and 19th centuries respectively (see also Marshall, 1950). With this 'constitutional framework' (Honneth, 2014: 263) in place for nationally-unified publics to engage in democratic will-formation, the necessity for technological means of co-ordinating discourse across anonymous, non-co-present publics across large territories increased. Such a need was met first by print media, then radio and television in the 20th century as well as, more recently, the Internet.

1.4.3 The public sphere, democratic will-formation and political legitimacy

The significance of the public sphere's conceptual ability to catalyse and guarantee efficacious democratic will-formation lies in its contemporary relationship with the idea of *democratic legitimacy*. This is a normative concept that 'provides the necessary moral justification for a political order to wield power and to make, apply and enforce laws' (Buchanan, 2002, cited in O'Sullivan et al., 2014: 547). Beetham's (2001, 1991, cited in O'Sullivan et al., 2014: 548) argument that the exercise of democratic political power is legitimate if it is 'established and exercised in accordance with legal rules, justified by shared beliefs of the population, and acquired through the consent of citizens' calls to attention the status of legitimate political authority as requiring ongoing renewal.

With the bourgeois public sphere having institutionalised a new principle of legitimacy- the idea that 'all acts of government…were to face up to the public opinion that took shape in the discursive exchange of arguments within the

forums of the public sphere' (Honneth, 2014: 256), Honneth considers contemporary will-formation in the democratic public sphere as the principle 'source of the democratic legitimacy of state action' (ibid: 255) and central to all democratic constitutions since the French Revolution (ibid: 327).

Although not corresponding to any formally-specified constitutional function beyond intermittent electoral processes (contra more direct, plebiscitary modes of democracy in the Rousseauian tradition), Honneth emphasises that nonetheless, the broad diffusion of the idea of popular sovereignty means that democratic legitimacy is now inextricably linked in the public imagination with the extent to which political decision-making is responsive to public demand (ibid: 320). This means that where governmental action floats free of public demand, this may now be perceived as the illegitimate use of 'merely borrowed authority' (ibid: 307).

1.4.4 Legitimation crisis

With democratic legitimacy tethered not only to electoral processes or guaranteed by the mere existence of democratic institutions (Heath, 2010: 31) but in reciprocal communication between publics and political authorities, the possibilities for a new kind of state crisis emerged.

In his work *Legitimation Crisis,* Habermas (1988: 36) sought to update the classical Marxist account of capitalist crisis tendencies in the context of the post-war welfare state compromise. He posited that the state's growing intervention in economic activity- including economic crisis management- meant that the state required enhanced levels of legitimacy in order to justify its increasingly pervasive influence over the lives of citizens, raising the possibility of the state being held accountable for administrative failures in managing the economy, provoking crises of economic rationality (ibid: 61) and even political legitimation (ibid: 68, see also O'Connor, 1973, Offe, 1984).

While the social-democratic compact enabling downward redistribution for a

time rendered class cleavages politically latent (Plant, 1982: 342), contemporary state responses to the crisis of democratic capitalism have increasingly been 'unmasking the opposition of social classes' (Habermas, 1988: 29). The bringing to consciousness of interest conflicts between classes is viewed as provoking social disintegration, the collapse of value consensuses, and 'the possibility of a large-scale loss of legitimacy for government institutions' (Heath, 2010: 1). In the context of the present crisis, Fraser (2014a) poses the question in terms of whether the state can maintain support for measures that are 'aimed ultimately at preserving class domination, without provoking a true legitimation crisis, without that is, activating the citizenry and causing it to question the class character of society and the private appropriation of social surplus?'

The increased autonomy of the market has meant that 'the state has been put at the mercy of the former's increased capacity for obstruction' (Honneth, 2014: 326-7), thus bringing into play Rodrik's (2011) governance trilemma- the impossibility of combining 'deep economic integration (globalisation), national government, and democratic politics' (O'Riain, 2014: 6) and the consequent development of yawning legitimacy deficits.

In the context of class societies- ones where the 'fundamental material interests of groups are in opposition' (Heath, 2010: 10)- in order to effect repair of the 'hegemonic economic imaginary' (Sum and Jessop, 2013: 293), social integration and value-consensus must be achieved by rendering conflict latent (Habermas, 1988: 27) through the deployment not just of coercive but ideological justifications (Heath, 2010: 12) for the maintenance of the established socio-economic order.

For Habermas, whether the state's efforts to mitigate the development of an administrative crisis into a legitimation crisis would be successful depend in large part on the contingent socio-cultural environment, including the strength of public 'socialisation to normative justification of the institutional orders to which they are subject' (Fraser, 2014a) and the extent of public motivation to 'demand legitimation of class domination, and failing to get it, to insist that it be overcome'

(ibid). In other words, whether an administration crisis is rendered apparent to publics as a legitimation crisis depends on the capacities of national political cultures and a public sphere capable of recognising and thematising the signs of democratic crisis.

1.4.5 Raising the alarm in the contemporary public sphere

The extent to which the achievement of individual rights in the constitutional state and the communicative affordances of new media technologies would be sufficient to realise the ultimate democratic promise of the public sphere- self-government through discursive means- has been the subject of profound doubt by critical theorists in the second half of the 20th century. Once again, the privatising and de-democratising energies associated with the neoliberal ascendancy were singled out for concern. Whether conceived as a venue of 'rational deliberation over universalizable aims' (Honneth, 2014: 281) in Habermas' formulation, or as a 'place of communicative arbitration of political disputes' (ibid) following Arendt's (1958) 'agonistic' public sphere, the privatising energies driving change in media style, organisation, content and consumption were seen as undercutting its possibilities as a public venue for realising democratic self-legislation.

Habermas' concerns about the contemporary public sphere are summarised in his diagnosis of the 'colonization of the public sphere by market imperatives' (2006: 422), taking the specific form of the 'intrusion of functional imperatives of the market economy into the 'internal logic' (ibid) of media production. In a formulation strongly redolent of Dewey's (1927) concerns about the effects of a commercialised public sphere, and the Frankfurt School critique of mass culture associated with Horkheimer and Adorno (1972), Habermas (2006: 422) posits a trivialisation of political discourse in contemporary mass media, in which logics of entertainment effect 'the dramatization of events, the simplification of complex matters, and the vivid polarization of conflicts' working to 'promote civic privatism and a mood of antipolitics', contributing to what Honneth identified as the 'privatistic hollowing out of the public sphere' (Honneth, 2014: 281).

It is a critique echoed by Pierre Bourdieu's (1999) polemic on a range of pathological tendencies inherent to television journalism with regard to its democratic functions including undue commercialisation, diversion, depoliticisation, trivialisation and dehistoricisation, amounting to a form of symbolic violence on viewers who are denied the possibility of exercising their democratic rights through the medium. Habermas (1989: 158) posits a consequent 'refeudalisation', of the public sphere, in which 'authority asserted its dominance over the people, whether medieval subjects or modern masses' (Rutherford, 2000: 20), with the mass media reduced to 'presenting and representing authority to supine groups of clients and consumers' (ibid).

While, as Fraser (2014b) suggests, all the conditions for an administration crisis and many of those for a legitimation crisis are contemporaneously present in Western democracies, the translation from first to second may be 'blocked' by the capture of public power by private and hegemonic interests. Her critique implying that mass media institutions of the public sphere may be capable neither of communicatively assisting in the maintenance of democratic legitimacy for the extant political order, *nor* able to sufficiently help translate an administrative crisis into a legitimation crisis, calls to mind Gramsci's formulation about the death of the old but the foreclosed birth of the new (Gramsci, 1971: 276).

Even in the context of representative liberal democracies where the promise of the public sphere of democratic self-legislation is realised only in sharply attenuated form, media institutions in the public sphere may nonetheless be seen as suffused with the basic animating logics of a more expansive public sphere, evident in their rhetorical valourisation of pluralistic political debate as essential to democracy.

Yet, because of the absence of formally-specified reciprocal links outside of elections between democratic publics and the executor of public authority- the state and its agencies- precisely how communicative democracy in the public sphere is supported by media institutions remains somewhat opaque.

Fraser's (1990) conception of 'weak' publics, where debate is geared towards the dual functions of guiding elite decision-making on the part of legislators and guiding voting behaviours on the part of publics, may be viewed as corresponding to the dominant paradigm democratic paradigm shaping contemporary journalism's political role (see Chapter 2).

In Habermas' (1996: 359) terms, the public sphere on this account guides political action by acting as a 'warning system with sensors that, though unspecialized, are sensitive throughout society'.

The analysis of such sensoria takes on an urgency in the context of democratic crisis, given the mass media's status as 'one of the principal vehicles through which the society-wide significance of particular problem definitions can seek recognition' (Johnson, 2009: 89).

Peters (1993, 2007) uses the metaphor of the 'sluice gate' to explain the (albeit idealised) formal operation of public sphere sensoria. This refers to the 'switching mechanisms through which the results of the opinion and will forming functions of an informal public sphere can be delivered up to the decision-making functions of the formal public sphere and then channelled back to seek approval from the affected parties' (Johnson, 2009: 89). Whether such 'influential thematisation' (Johnson, 2009: 91) catalysed in the periphery is allowed to take root at all, let alone progress upwards, depends firstly on the extent of civil society capacities to as Habermas puts it, 'ferret out, identify, and thematize latent problems of social integration', (Habermas, 1996: 358 cited in Callinicos, 2006: 32) and 'distil and transmit' resonating issues in 'amplified form back to the public sphere' (Habermas, 1996: 367). It further depends on the extent to which public sphere institutions, including the mass media, are sensitive to and willing to legitimise issue thematisations from below. Lastly, it is contingent on the sensitivity or otherwise of the judicial and parliamentary spheres.

If institutions of the political public sphere do not possess the sensory apparatus-

or cannot or will not deploy them- to detect and thematise the latent morbid symptoms of legitimacy crises, then the mass withdrawal of public consent for the present socio-economic order may not be appropriately thematised in the public sphere, inhibiting its efficacy. This is why the selection of the contemporary crisis as the entry point for an analysis of the mediation of contested imaginaries in the public sphere involves, irresistibly, a moment of truth for institutions of the public sphere, whose underlying normative horizons in relation to democracy and publicity are crystallised and forced to the surface as particular crisis construals and responses are selected, retained and form the basis for action.

Governmentality theory (Dean, 2009) suggests that the sluice-gate model is unlikely to operate in a manner that reflects the development of an autonomous public opinion under the hegemonic influence of anti-democratic power such as neoliberalism which 'rigs the game' in its favour through the diffusion of an ethic of 'self-control' (Lunt, 2009) and specific forms of 'rationality' (Brown, 2015), in part through social institutions like the media that shape 'the minds, bodies and conduct of subjects' (Lunt and Lewis, 2008: 17). This corresponds to the third face of power in Lukes' (1974) description; the hegemonic radicalisation of the second "agenda-setting" face of power in which actors have their 'perceptions, cognitions, and preferences' shaped in 'such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things' (ibid: 24).

The construction of journalistic innocence which defended its role in the crisis by pointing to the paucity of whistle-blowers and dissonant voices and the strength of ideological consensus loses cogency when the *generative* functions of ideology are taken seriously. It also begs the question of the extent and character of the role of media institutions in facilitating or countering the dissemination of particular ideologies.

One dimension of this generative role is captured in the idea of the structuring impact of 'opportunity structures' in political life and in the public sphere. In his typology of the main dimensions of the *political opportunity structure* that

mediates the extent to which the potential for public mobilisation can be transformed into contentious political action (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007), Tarrow (1998: 76) notes that periods of crisis can occasion unusually high levels of public contention manifested in collective action (ibid: 73) or the very opposite, de-mobilisation and 'sullen resentment' (ibid: 71). For Ferree et al. (2002b: 62), the political opportunity structure refers to 'all of the institutional and cultural access points that actors can seize upon to attempt to bring their claims into the political forum'.

Driven by a recognition of the need to rectify political opportunity theory's neglect of *cultural* dynamics in movement outcomes (McCammon, 2013), it is increasingly recognised by scholars that whether objective possibilities for successful mobilisations of contentious action are realised is determined in part by contingent *discursive* affordances and constraints. Ferree et al. (2002b: 62) describe this subset of the political opportunity structure as the *discursive* opportunity structure, a 'framework of ideas and meaning-making institutions in a particular society' (ibid: 62) which govern processes of issue thematisation. The 'pivotal role of the mass media and the gatekeeping functions of editors and journalists' (McCammon, 2013) is identified by Koopmans and Olzak (2004: 202, cited in Broer and Duyvendak, 2009: 338) who describe discursive opportunities as 'the aspects of the public discourse that determine a message's chances of diffusion in the public sphere'. That diffusion depends not simply on visibility in the public sphere but on the capacity of a message or set of messages to provoke reactions or 'resonance' (ibid: 204) points to the importance of attention not only to media dynamics but to political and socio-cultural dimensions. In particular, the 'privileged role of hegemonic beliefs and values' (McCammon, 2013) in a given public sphere is an essential condition of resonance.

1.5 Public service broadcasting and contemporary crisis

The selection of *public service broadcasting* in Ireland as the institutional focus of this study was made in part due to its sheer centrality to what Habermas et al. (1974: 49) describe as the 'political public sphere'- parts of the public sphere

where 'public discussion deals with objects connected to the activity of the state'- as attested to by the consistent dominance in terms of audience size for television and radio broadcasts (see for example, RTÉ, 2015c: 20) of the main public service broadcasting institution, Raidió Teilifís Éireann.

The selection is also linked to the unique characteristics of public service broadcasting (PSB) as a legal-institutional media form and how its location in public sphere, occupying a space somewhere between State and *demos,* ensures that the crystallising quality of crisis on the underlying normative orientations of public sphere institutions is at its most acute. This is due in no small part to PSB's precarious position on the horns of a structural dilemma pertaining to its conception of its place in the Irish public sphere, its democratic functions, and the seat of legitimate political authority. In the context of growing legitimacy gaps in representative democracy deepened by contemporary crisis management, the question of how PSB envisions the State-public relationship comes into sharp relief.

Simultaneously a peripheral part of the state yet with one foot outside it, broadcasting as it does in the name of a national community and in the service of a general public interest- we may follow Scannell (1990: 24) in asking in relation to moments of crisis, 'whose interests, in the last resort, broadcasting is there to serve- those of the state or the people?'

Following the period of initial flux brought on by the onset of crisis, in which social imaginaries become more deeply politicised and contested (McCullagh, 2010), the questions of whether imaginaries solidify around emergent, critical construals or whether old ones are reasserted- and why- lie at the heart of this thesis. This requires an assessment of the communicative capacities of PSB to problematise existing social, political and economic relations, and how this is (recursively) shaped by the affordances and constraints of the political and discursive opportunity structures in the public sphere.

In seeking to establish the endogenous and exogenous conditions of resonance

for different kinds of crisis construal, this study seeks to establish whether public broadcasting in Ireland functions more as an amplifier of ideological contention, giving voice to pluralistic crisis critiques or as a soporific, subsidising the explanations and justifications of the powerful, helping cut off the oxygen of publicity to existing challengers and discouraging potential carriers of counter-hegemonic discourses, thus raising the costs of collective action to potential participants (Tarrow, 1998). The diagnoses and prognoses of crisis definition and responses heard in public media therefore constitute a crucial intervention in crisis itself. As Cottle (2008: 853) notes, '[i]t is in and through the news media especially that the politics of protest and dissent is now generally conveyed to wider audiences'. Whether or not organised responses from below to the crisis of democratic capitalism in their manifold forms carry within them the potential energy of re-democratisation, the news media are 'powerfully positioned to keep this bird caged, clip its wings or let it fly' (ibid: 867).

In the context of a 'dead but dominant' 'zombie neoliberalism' (Peck, 2010: 108) in which neoliberalism which has to 'actively defend itself through increasing authoritarian statecraft' (Stanley, 2012, see also Bruff, 2013), the question of how its corpse is being re-animated post-mortem is urgent. With its origins in the consensual post-war Keynesian era of the *trente glorieuese,* does the normative model of democracy at work in public service broadcasting have the capacity to name the assailants of democracy and work toward the expansion of a democratic public sphere, or does it contribute- actively or passively- to its winnowing? Does it sharpen the political contradictions of financialised, globalised capitalism or are they sublimated under the hegemonic common-sense of the Irish model of neoliberal capitalism?

Such matters represent the central rubric of this thesis, and may be summarised in an overall research question which queries *how Irish public service broadcasting's democratic imaginary shapes its counter-hegemonic potentials and tendencies in the context of contemporary crisis.*

Such a research question demands a dual focus on, first, interrogating the

capacities shaping the parameters of institutional democratic and crisis imaginaries, and second, exploring the *actuality* of the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic content of these imaginaries.

These two aims in turn inform the dissertation structure, whose first two parts explore, respectively, the *democratic affordances and constraints* of Irish public service broadcasting's place in the political public sphere, and the *contingent institutional enactment* of such configurations.

The remainder of Part I of the dissertation approaches the question of the mediating influences on public service broadcasting's democratic identity by adopting a sociology of media view, which 'considers how media power functions within a larger social context' (Reese, 2001: 174). This is seen as a function of an array of interpenetrating influences, ranging from micro to macro- 'individual, routines, organization, extra-media, and ideological' (ibid: 178) that shape the political rationality and broader normative content of the project of public service broadcasting, additionally attuned to the locally-specific nature of the crisis conjuncture and its interaction with local hegemonies, cultural tendencies and public sphere institutions.

A macro-sociological framework for exploring the 'field' of mediating influences on public service broadcasting's political rationality and their impacts on the possibilities of counter-hegemonic mobilisation is offered, encompassing analysis of the formative influences of the state, market and demos on public service broadcasting from without; the influence of professional and administrative cultures from within; and at a more macro level, the pervasive impacts of the underlying political and democratic cultures that permeate society as a whole and which animate different models of democracy and the public sphere (O'Mahony, 2013: 31).

Following this framework, Chapter 2 offers a general account of the systemic contexts in which public media institutions are embedded, exploring its European development as a form of media with distinctive legitimating myths

and variegated ideological-practical relationships with their host states, economies and publics. Chapter 3 contributes an account of public service broadcasting's place in the Irish public sphere and polity, tracing its developmental trajectory in the 20th and 21st centuries from the social and political forces which birthed this institutional media form in Ireland to its subsequent buffeting by socio-cultural and political-economic currents.

Part II of the dissertation turns its attention to the empirical investigation of intra-field contingent institutional and professional dynamics of public service broadcasting's normative democratic orientations. Chapter 4 explicates a methodological approach to the intra-institutional analysis, justifying the range of methods applied towards attaining a better understanding of public service broadcasting's political rationality from within, the implementation and results of which are elaborated on in detail in Chapters 5 to 8 (inclusive).

The concluding Chapter 9, comprising Part III of the dissertation, synthesises the findings of the foregoing field and empirical analyses in the service of responding to the overall research question with a holistic account of the mediating influences on and hegemonic and counter-hegemonic tendencies of Irish public service broadcasting's democratic and crisis imaginaries.

Chapter 2: Public Service Broadcasting: A Field Perspective

The journalistic Order is inserted within the political Order, and thus is Ordered without any need for orders.

Darras (2005: 165)

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Media institutions in systemic context

Chapter 1 identified public service broadcasting as a crucial and unique node in the circuitry of the Irish national political public sphere, whose understandings and representations of crisis would play a role in influencing whether an *administrative* crisis of economic steering associated with the North Atlantic Financial Crisis and its domestic reverberations would spill over into a *legitimation* crisis of governance of the state and the socio-political order.

In the interests of applying an appropriate theory of media power that assists in deconstructing and analysing public media's role in crisis construal, this chapter offers a justification for a macro-sociological framework for identifying the mediating influences on PSB's hegemonic and counter-hegemonic capacities that places it within its systemic contexts in orbits of state, political, economic and professional power.

Recognising that organisational practices and structures tend to be 'either reflections of or responses to rules, beliefs and conventions built into the wider environment' (Powell, 2007), this thesis proceeds from perspectives that explicitly explain the character of normative media cultures as the outcome of intra-institutional, inter-institutional and extra-institutional influences, seeing media institutions as both 'economically and socially constrained agencies' (Corner, 2003: 370).

Nor does it, as per classical institutionalism, see organisations as defined simply by 'sets of norms and rules, more or less obeyed, more or less binding, internalized or legitimated' (Petre, 2012: 40). Instead, it adopts the 'new institutionalist' emphasis on agency and how the ecological environment of organisations involves the recursive shaping of institutional logics- (supra-organisational patterns of activity structured by symbolic systems) at the level of society and organisational-specific logics (Spicer and Sewell, 2010).

Hallin and Mancini's (2004: 8) view that 'one cannot understand the news media without understanding the nature of the state, the system of political parties, the pattern of relations between economic and political interests, and the development of civil society', echoed in Jakubowicz's (2007b: 16) idea of 'systemic parallelism' and in the work of Kaplan (2009) and Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1963) all emphasise the need to recognise 'the ultimate structuring power of political institutions and political culture' (Benson, 2006: 199) in shaping media cultures, while retaining the systems-theoretical and new institutionalist insight that processes of influence go both ways.

Adopting such a framework implies both the inadequacy of a media-centric research agenda and that recognising the interdependence of internal media cultures and external public cultures means that exploring the question of the media as agent or retardant of change requires contextual precision (Rosengren, 1981: 248).

This approach reflects Curran's (1999: 11) view of the potential complementarity of media-centric and socio-centric approaches, advocated on the basis of necessity both by Blumler and Gurevitch (1986: 70) and Schudson (2000: 175) and whose formative role in the project's methodological approach is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

2.1.2 Field and habitus

Bourdieu's (1984, 1993) concept of the *field* as the most appropriate level of analysis for organisational research (Powell, 2007)- shared by new institutionalism- is adopted here as the basis of an analytical approach that can assist in helping 'pinpoint the journalistic field's relative position vis-á-vis the range of other societal fields that compete to shape our vision of the social world' (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 19). It demands and proposes 'a new unit of analysis for journalism studies: between the individual news organization and the society as a whole, the "mezzo-level" interorganizational and professional environment of the field/institution' (Benson, 2006: 199, see also McQuail and Windahl (1993: 61)).

Defined as hierarchical 'series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations, appointments and titles which …produce and authorise certain discourses and activities' (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2006: 21-2), the spatial metaphor of the field underpins Bourdieu's explanation of the development in modernity in terms of the gradual differentiation of semi-autonomous spheres of action- including politics, economics, or cultural production- with each field representing a terrain of struggle between actors seeking to influence the trajectory of that field (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 3). As 'a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 96-7), the *relational* character of cultural fields is of essential importance.

Understanding the formative influences on journalistic crisis construal requires the acknowledgement of actor agency in the field and the intra-field and inter-field forces which help determine the kinds of position-taking possible by such actors who consequently 'organize the allocation of the symbolic resources necessary to structure our knowledge about, and by extension our capacity to intervene in, the world around us' (Freedman, 2014: 2).

For Bourdieu, the significance of the journalistic field arises from its mediating

role in a larger field of power comprising sub-fields that compete to impose a 'legitimate vision of the social world' (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 6). Benson's (2006: 199) conceptualisation of the journalistic field locates journalistic professionalism as playing a 'mediating role' between 'two poles of the state, one constituting market power, the other constituting non-market (or even anti-market) civic power', a distinction with particular salience for public service broadcasting. Another key field theory tenet shared by new institutionalism (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991) is that 'fields possess some autonomy from external pressures' (Benson, 2006: 188), although Bourdieu ascribes the journalistic field's stronger subjection to the *heteronomous* pole (denoting external influence) on the basis of its increasing subjection to 'the constraints of the economy and of politics' (1995: 41).

The closely-related concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977: 78) refers to the internalised sets of dispositions, rules and values that tend to go along with particular field memberships. The habitus represents a kind of 'socialised subjectivity' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 126) shared more or less by field members, which is both guided by and constituted in 'moments of practice' (Webb et al., 2006: 38), and operates as a 'feel for the game' (ibid) of daily life and participation in a field. The stability of the habitus is supported by the diffusion of *doxic* knowledge, or the 'universe of tacit presuppositions' common to field members (Bourdieu, 1995).

That the habitus- durable, yet flexible- is produced by 'shared cultural trajectories' (Webb et al., 2006: 40) and inclinations, values and rationales that are acquired from various formative contexts' (ibid: 58) implies that it is more than a deterministic product of class affiliation but also of immersion in particular cultural systems, rules and categories of meaning (Benson and Neveu, 2005: 18).

The status of the habitus as comprising pre-theoretical assemblages of assumptions and rules guiding action align it with Berger and Luckmann's (1966) account of the socially constructed nature of reality, which describes how socially-generated knowledge is produced by processes of habitualisation,

institutionalisation and objectivation. The habitus may be viewed as a reflection of the 'space of possibles' (Hesmondhalgh, 2006: 216) which constrain the 'thinkable and the unthinkable, the do-able and the impossible for agents in the field', and whose relational character, along with the field concept, 'allows us to conceptual-ize the margins available for intervention, resistance, and the renewal of journalistic practices' (Neveu, 2005: 206).

2.1.3 Media power in context

A key benefit of applying a sociology of media view which 'considers how media power functions within a larger social context' (Reese, 2001: 174) is that it facilitates the navigation of both the Scylla of an undue *media-centrism* (Schlesinger, 1990) whose narrow focus on individual news producers, content, or even the psychologism of individual reception processes elides the complex interplay between culture, media production and public resonance, and the Charybdis of an overly deterministic *socio-centrism,* exemplified by a political-economic functionalism which explains away journalistic actions and orientations as merely the outcomes of choices made and processes initiated elsewhere.

Such an approach aligns with Freedman's (2014) 'contradiction' paradigm of media power which, as well as rejecting the 'consensus' and 'chaos' paradigms respectively linked to liberal pluralist communication studies and cultural studies, urges caution against too strong a reading of the 'control' paradigm of media power associated with the materialist critiques of McChesney (1999), Mosco (1996) and Herman and Chomsky (1988).

Contrary to Bourdieu's extreme pessimism about journalists as uncritical 'doxosophers' (Bourdieu, 1998: 7) the contradiction perspective provides the basis of a framework that recognises 'structure *and* agency, contradiction *and* action, consensus *and* conflict', emphasising instability and contingency, foregrounding the ongoing potential for fissures and disruptions to hegemony generated from extra and intra-institutional sources (Freedman, 2014: 12). Such

an approach therefore responds to Cottle's (2007) and Corner's (2003) insistence on taking journalistic agency seriously.

The account of field relations in this chapter is also sensitive to the new institutionalist concept of *institutional isomorphism*, which refers to the ways in which organisational characteristics come into alignment with the characteristics of fields under whose spheres of influence they come (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991: 66). Their distinctions between 'coercive', 'mimetic' and 'normative' isomorphism (ibid: 67-73) provide a useful framework for tracing the sources and character of field influences and determining the extent to which the institutionalised habituses of administrative and journalistic professionals in public broadcasting become isomorphic with dominant symbolic patterns, regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980) and objectivated knowledge in other fields.

Following Benson's (2006: 196) suggestion of the need to 'restore attention to the political as well as economic constraints' on media production while retaining an emphasis on the capacities of publics to influence mediated crisis construals, the approach adopted here focuses on exploring the public broadcasting sub-field of the broader journalistic field with respect to its relationships with three critical sub-fields most relevant to the themes of the research. These comprise the *political* field (formal institutional politics), the *economic* field (the market), and the *civic* field (the public), a set of forces roughly corresponding to Tuchman's (2002: 79-80) specification of the major forces bearing on media.

Despite the socially, culturally and historically contingent nature of the normative orientation of public broadcasting and journalistic ideologies (whose Irish specificities are the focus of subsequent chapters) it is nonetheless possible to broadly situate the form of public broadcasting within recognisable institutional, extra-institutional and professional contexts shaped by field relationships in its Western European 'heartland' (Collins, 2005: 42). The following section provides an introductory overview into how PSB's relationships with their host states, domestic, regional and global economies and publics are navigated, particularly in the contexts of contemporary political,

social, technological and regulatory change.

2.2 Public service broadcasting: between state, market and demos

2.2.1 PSB and the state

2.2.1.1 From "state to "public service" broadcasting

The origins of state involvement in broadcasting in the early decades of the 20th century may be principally attributed to, first, the need for an authority empowered to manage scarce electromagnetic spectrum (Tinic, 2009, Curran, 2002: 195), and secondly, the desire of states to avoid bequeathing, through inaction, a nascent private radio broadcasting industry the same kinds of influence as that enjoyed by the newspaper industry (Honneth, 2014: 270).

Since then, state involvement in broadcasting governance has taken a range of forms. A straightforward typology is offered by Raboy (1999, cited in Seneviratne, 2006:12), who identifies three broad types of broadcasting systems: *private enterprise core systems*, dominated by commercial organisations where the state's role is limited to frequency allocation and regulation (United States, parts of Asia and Latin America); *public service core systems*, characterised by the persistence of strong public broadcasting institutions with relative autonomy from the state (usually supplemented by a mixed economy of broadcasting and most closely associated with Western European nations); and *state broadcasting core systems*, extant in parts of Africa and Asia, characterised by the persistence of monolithic state-controlled broadcasters with little autonomy and often only a nascent set of private and community-based alternatives. Other typologies have been offered by Moe and Syvertson (2009), Mendel (2000) and Hoffman-Reim (1996).

Hallin and Mancini (2004: 30-33) propose four ideal-typical models for the governance of public broadcasting in Western Europe whose development corresponds to the exigencies of national political cultures. The *government*

model, which is only minimally differentiated from 'state' broadcasting, involves direct control of public broadcasting by the government, a model they suggest is exhibited to varying degrees by Greece, Portugal and Spain but elsewhere becoming untenable for reasons of political legitimacy and broadly supplanted around the mid-20th century (ibid: 52-3) by forms of governance that 'insulate public service broadcasting to a substantial degree from control by the political majority' (ibid: 30). This corresponding to the second, *professional* model, where day-to-day control of public broadcasting was vested in broadcasting professionals, of which the BBC in the UK, the CBC in Canada, RTÉ in Ireland, PBS in the United States, and some Scandinavian countries are cited as exemplars. Two other modes of governance, the *parliamentary* or *proportional representation* model, and the *civic* or *corporatist* models, both involve the distribution of control over broadcast governance to different groups in society. In the former case, this is undertaken according to parliamentary representation as in Italy (Habermas, 2006: 420-1) and in the latter along social and cultural lines, as in the Netherlands (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 53).

By virtue of its focus on the Irish PSB instantiation, the focus of this project is on the second model of broadcasting governance which vests a controlling share of power (at least, day to day) in broadcasting professionals- what Mary Kelly (1983) identified as *formally autonomous* PSB governance systems.

2.2.1.2 Legitimating ideologies of public service

That public service broadcasting developed 'pragmatically, often with a good deal of piece-meal post hoc rationalisation' (Goodwin, 1997: 60, see also Hamada, 1997: 37) underscores the difficulty of specifying (or generalising across borders) the normative thrust of the new institutional form of public service broadcasting, a slipperiness frequently noted by scholars, government and even public service broadcasters themselves (Scannell, 1990: 11, Albertazzi and Cobley, 2013).

Collins (2005: 42) describes European public service broadcasting in its classic

form as comprising three core elements: 'publicly-owned not for profit organisation, a monopoly of service provision and a strongly normative programming policy emphasising national and high cultural themes' (see also Seneviratne, 2006: 26)

However, Syvertson (1999: 5-6) notes that even by the cusp of the 21st century 'no single understanding of "public service" had crystallised' across Europe, suggesting through a discussion of each of three historically significant versions of the concept that all three elements of Collins' definition are have fallen into anachronism. These include PSB's original 'technical-economic' (Syvertson, 1999: 6) justification as a *public utility* rooted in its origins as a centrally-controlled tool of the state and whose primary criteria of success are technical, notably the provision of universal access; as *broadcasting in the service of the public sphere*, as in Scannell's (1990: 14) association of PSB with the Reithian belief that PSB could powerfully contribute to 'the formation of an informed and reasoned public opinion as an essential part of the political process in a mass democratic society'; and *broadcasting in the service of the listener/viewer*, in which the PSB duty to satisfy 'the interests and preferences of individual consumers' (Syvertson, 1999: 7) is emphasised- validated through audience metrics- which Syvertson argues has held increasing sway with the loss of the monopoly position of PSBs.

Blumler (1992: 7-14) identified PSB values across Europe as entailing a *comprehensive remit* (offering omnibus services), *generalised mandates* (with PSBs granted broad freedom to interpret its functions under law) *diversity, pluralism and range* (recognising the need to provide programmes for many groups and tastes), a *cultural vocation* (the view that PSBs should play a role in 'sustaining and renewing the society's characteristic cultural capital and cement' (ibid: 11). Finally, they accepted *a place in politics.* As 'creatures ultimately of the state' (ibid: p.12), PSBs intervened in political life by assuming 'some responsibility for the health of the political process and for the quality of public discourse generated within it', with news and current affairs output elevated to a special status.

2.2.1.3 PSB, state and nation

The centrality of the 'service' concept intertwines with the character of PSB's relationships with the state. Given the strong extent to which the BBC represented the institutional and ideological template for PSB when exported elsewhere- particularly in Ireland (McLoone, 1991: 10)- a brief exploration of key aspects of its ideological and material relationships with the political field in the UK is warranted here.

Hood (1986: 55) notes that that the foundation of the BBC on the basis of a 'Trustee for the national interest' (Report of the Broadcasting Committee, 1925) in the form of a public corporation (Briggs, 1995, Seaton, 2003) should be understood in the context of a broader legitimation of the 'public service' concept, associated with a cross-party consensus about the suitability of public corporations to manage certain parts of the economy. Citing Raymond William's comments on the formative influence of the Victorian 'service' concept, Scannell (1990: 22) describes it as 'animated by a sense of moral purpose and of social duty on behalf of the community, aimed particularly at those most in need of reform- the lower classes' and that it was 'institutionalized in the bureaucratic practices of the newly emerging professional classes' (ibid: 22). He identifies in John Reith's (the first Director General of the BBC) Arnoldian emphasis on the broadcasting imperative for education and cultural improvement a culturalist expression of the Victorian value of service (Reith, 1924). Under his leadership, the BBC would develop a distinctive and influential approach to 'national' 'public service' broadcasting, which would become 'symbolically associated with the Western nation-state itself, and with the public culture of representative democracies' (Horsti, Hultén and Titley, 2014: 4).

Echoing Scannell's (1990: 23) description of the BBC ethos as suffused with 'a concern for social unity mingled with national pride', Goodwin (1997: 72) notes that public service broadcasting in the UK had historically emphasised 'delivering a uniform national culture to a uniform audience', based on the assumption of the

existence of a national community (Schlesinger, 1979: 20). This is a point emphasised by Morley and Robins (1995: 10-11) who suggest that broadcasting enjoyed a special status as one 'of the key institutions through which listeners and viewers have come to imagine themselves as members of the national community', fulfilling the dual functions as 'the political public sphere of the nation state, and as the focus for national cultural identification' (see also Scannell, 1992).

In the UK, Reith saw the BBC as serving as a unifying force in the *political* life of the nation, as an 'integrator of democracy' (quoted in Cardiff and Scannell, 1987: 159), and through 'making the nation as one man' (quoted in Scannell, 1990: 23). This role was endorsed by the state in the Annan report (1977: 79, quoted in Scannell, 1990: 24) which identified the BBC's role as 'natural interpreter of [great national occasions] to the nation as a whole' (Annan, 1977). For Blumler and Gurevitch (1986: 73), this is premised in part on the elevation of parliament to the status as 'the presumed institutional embodiment of the central values of British democracy'. That its vision of politics has privileged the national frame is supported by Horsti et al. (2014: 15) and Curran (2002: 209). More broadly, Scannell (1990: 23-24) notes that 'public service in *the national interest*' (italics in original) represented a journalistic rapprochement with the state, and a significant departure from the primacy of the 'public interest' ideal, which entailed struggles for press freedom that were often directed *against* the power of the state.

Propelling the value alignment between nation and public service broadcasting is PSB's ongoing dependence on the state for its ongoing funding, regulation and even legitimation. Despite the retention of license fee systems in most nations with 'strong' PSB systems (Moe and Syvertson, 2009: 398), designed to fund broadcasters at one level of remove from direct state subvention, the funding of public broadcasting may nonetheless be politicised as a means of influencing broadcasters (Blumler, 1992: 19). Governmental control of the legislative basis of PSB, control over its regulatory context, key internal appointments, and above all regular re-negotiations of its funding settlements, means that broadcasters are

forced to 'bear in mind the acceptability of how they work and what they produce to those who are ultimately in a position to determine their organizational futures' (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1986: 73). The closure of the Greek public broadcaster in 2013 (Iosifidis and Katsirea, 2014) demonstrates the vulnerability of PSB institutions to central government fiat, and how their dependence on their political masters has meant that they are often 'constrained to prudence' (Blumler, 1992: 13).

The influence of the political field over the field of public broadcasting extends to its mediation of another set of field relations- that between public broadcasting and the market.

2.2.2 PSB and the market

2.2.2.1 Commercial isomorphism

The end of the 'golden era' of public service broadcasting has been widely linked to its increasing imbrication in competitive domestic and global media markets. Blumler (1992: 7) describes this as the 'commercial deluge', entailing the dissolution of national broadcasting monopolies in the 1970s and 1980s which paved the way for commercial competition, and the decreased centrality of the national media sphere in the context of the globalising impact of cable, satellite and new media technologies (Horsti et al., 2014: 4). These changes have engendered challenges for PSB's reproduction in changed political, economic, regulatory and technological contexts, heralding for Katz (1996) an existential crisis of PSB (for an overview of threats to PSB in its heartland, see Lowe and Steemers, 2012). In response, PSBs have had to 'renegotiate the balance between their informational, cultural and economic roles' (McCullagh, 2002: 83).

The subjection of PSBs to a 'combined commercial, political and ideological assault' (Curran, 2002: 191) is aptly symbolised by their status as key targets (Spicer and Sewell, 2010: 922) of 'New Public Management', involving the introduction of managerial innovations to the public sector which had heretofore

been associated with private enterprise.

This entailed from the 1970s their transformation along business lines, 'In pursuit of competitiveness and economic efficiency, demanded by regulators and essential for survival,' (Murray, 2011: 77) changes that included outsourcing, the use of management consultancies, organisational restructuring, the use of performance management systems, and the flexibilisation and casualisation of labour (Spicer and Sewell, 2010: 922, Murray, 2011, Davies 2008, Born, 2004: 180).

While participation in the 'bare-knuckle fray for market share and operational efficiencies' (Lowe, 2010) has helped to ensure institutional stability (Steemers, 2003: 123), the 'survival strategies' (Steemers, 1999: 50) enacted by PSBs have come at a price.

By internalising commercial and competitive logics (Bardoel and d'Haenens, 2008: 340), PSBs have, according to the 'convergence hypothesis' (see also Iosifidis, 2007: 81) rendered them isomorphic with private sector media in terms of their 'style and ethos' (Steemers, 1999: 50).

Curran (2002: 203), Born (2003, 2004), Tracey (1998) and Mills (2015) in the UK, Lowe and Alm (1997) in Finland, Spicer and Sewell (2010) in Australia and Murray (2011) in Ireland have traced the impact of value transformation propelled by the incorporation of public broadcasting into a market environment. Such a process has gone well beyond commercial activities being 'de-demonised' (McQuail, 1998: 112) but extending to the embedding of market logics into public service mandates- even for those public broadcasters most insulated from direct market pressures like the BBC. This has resulted in direct state instrumentalisation of the broadcaster in line with national economic goals (Steemers, 1999: 49, Golding and Murdock, 1991: 23).

In technological terms, scholars including Steemers (2003) have noted the success of PSBs in transitioning away from the analogue era with successful and

even path-breaking use of new media technologies, from digital terrestrial television (DTT) to online catch-up services, with the EBU (2007, p.20) suggesting that the transition from public service broadcasting to a broader public service *media* (PSM) is yielding dividends.

More than a series of technological changes associated with the deprecation of 'legacy' analogue technologies and the embrace of digital transmission and internet platforms, the shift from PSB to PSM necessarily entails an at least partial reconceptualisation and practical reorientation of the public service project (requiring new legitimation strategies) and its relationship to (domestic and global) states, societies and media markets whose contours are coming into view (Horsti et al., 2014: 5, Spicer and Sewell, 2010). It is a shift whose European dimension has brought into sharp focus the uncertain supranational political support for public service media.

2.2.2.2 The neoliberalisation of European media policy

At the supranational level, Jakubowicz (2004) identifies an ascendancy of marketisation policies in the European Union as helping reshape media policy in ways that have diminished recognition of the social, cultural and democratic aspects of communication. With private broadcasters outnumbering their public counterparts in Europe by 1989 (Coppens and Saeys, 2006), they were emboldened to pressure European institutions to arrest the development of public broadcasters and denude what remained of their protection from market imperatives. Steemers (1999: 58) notes that the EU's focus on market liberalisation has meant that it has struggled to reconcile the concept of public service broadcasting with EU competition rules, in particular with respect to treaty rules on state aid (Kleist and Scheuer, 2006), leading Jakubowicz (2004) to describe PSB as a 'square peg in a round hole' in terms of EU audio-visual policy.

For private operators, the goal has been to either marginalise PSB through the promotion of a 'market failure' or 'monastery model', in which PSBs would narrow their focus to solely produce the kinds of output that commercial

competitors wouldn't- along the lines of the US model- or via an 'arrested PSB evolution' (Jakubowicz, 2007a: 8) strategy which would prevent or restrict public broadcasters from developing digital platforms, in effect ensuring its swift obsolescence.

Jakubowicz (2004: 295) characterises the evolving European compromise in terms of on one hand, the validation of the 'full portfolio' model of public service broadcasting, allowing for its digital expansion, yet refusing to shield PSB from 'regulations designed to promote competition in the internal market', an analysis supported by Moe and Syvertson (2009: 401) who note the ambiguity of simultaneous rhetorical support for PSB at national and European level yet the imposition of policies limiting their 'range and scope' (see also d'Haenens, Sousa and Hultén, 2011: 190).

Curran (2002: 191) notes that notwithstanding the impact of deregulatory regimes, tough competition, and influential organised hostility to public service broadcasting, many European PSBs are nonetheless weathering the storms rather successfully- particularly in terms of maintaining high audience shares- taking issue with the "terminal decline" thesis as advanced by Katz (1996).

2.2.3 Public service media and their publics

Debates on the alleged crisis of public broadcasting extend well beyond the matter of its survival. As the original technological, regulatory and competitive justifications for PSB's existence have faded, the question of how- and why- to secure the future of a reconfigured public service media as a distinctive and relevant institution of the national public sphere in the context of a rapidly changing mediascape has taken a renewed salience (e.g. Moe, 2009, Iosifidis, 2010, Glowacki and Jackson, 2013, F. Corcoran, 2004). Critical debates have ensued around the desirable role of the journalist in public life (Rosen, 1999, Charity, 1995, Glasser, 1999) as well as the proper role of the public in public media (Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007, Baldi and Hasebrink, 2007).

Carpentier (2011: 67) identifies 'participation *in* the media and *through* the media' (italics in original) as the key participatory components of audience activity in which publics may assert 'their right to communicate' (ibid: 68). Participation *through* the media refers to 'the opportunities for mediated participation in public debate and for self-representation' (ibid: 67), while participation *in* the media describes 'participation in the production of media output (content-related participation) and in media organizational decision-making (structural participation') (ibid: 68), each of which corresponds to the ideal-typical poles of *minimalist* and *maximalist* modes of participation. The former is characterised by the retention of power by media professionals, with participation restricted to 'access and interaction', with public involvement conceived along narrow lines, unidirectional, and depoliticised (ibid: 69). More maximalist forms of participation entail a more balanced power relationship between public and media professionals, with participatory modes going beyond mere access and interaction to substantive interventions in content and governance, and an acknowledgment of 'audience diversity and heterogeneity, and of the political nature of media participation' (ibid).

Whether due to what Bardoel (2007: 50) see as the tradition of enlightenment paternalism as representing the roots of PSB institutions' tendency to 'keep the people and civil society at a distance, while politics and the government served as the preferred partner in the past', or linked to the cultural legacy of the one-to-many broadcasting paradigm (Lowe and Bardoel, 2007), the public's limited practical role in the public media enterprise is an entrenched tendency.

Lowe (2010) suggests that while many PSB organisations have developed a strong rhetoric of the centrality of publics to the PSB enterprise, its practical translation has generally been limited. Participation *through "*mainstream" media, including PSBs, is most associated with the dedicated "access" programming genre, generally comprising dedicated radio phone in shows and in-studio television discussion programmes which afford some opportunities for publics to speak on air (McNair, Hibberd and Schlesinger, 2003, Livingstone and Lunt, 1994). However, by virtue of usually high levels of professional supervision,

Carpentier, Dahlgren and Pasquali (2013: 133) characterise these kinds of programmes as 'minimalist-participatory'. Participation *in* media is more restricted still, with opportunities for publics to produce their own programming very rare (for an exception, see Carpentier, 2003), with structural participation in PSB governance limited to generally minimalist forms.

Rather, what Scannell (1992: 322) describes as the 'democratic thrust' of public broadcasting upon its inception lay in the way that it opened access to 'virtually the whole spectrum of public life' to all, by 'placing political, religious, civic, cultural events and entertainments in a common domain' for the first time through establishing the 'right of the microphone' (Scannell, 1989: 322)- and later the camera- to relay events to the public. This "democracy as access" ideal continues to pervade the 'official canon' (Curran, 2002: 212) of PSB ideology today, in which 'access' and 'diversity' tend to be actualised as 'catering for different tastes rather than giving expression to different perspectives and cultures'. As Rakow (1999: 80) puts it, public participation tends to be 'equated with public access to the means to purchase, view and listen, not to speak and be heard'.

Under rationalised management and accounting mechanisms (Murray, 2011), public participation is rearticulated through the rubric of audience research, representing what Ang (1991: 7) described as 'market feedback technology', whose main function is to provide broadcasting executives with 'objectifying and controlling knowledge that can be converted into an economic commodity' (Belanger, 1993). More direct audience involvement mechanisms include 'audience council' structures (See Lowe's (2010) edited volume on civil society participation in European PSM organisations for nationally-specific examples as well as Kleinsteuber, (2008) and Nehls, (2008), for discussions on the operation of audience councils in German public broadcasting and Bakker, (2012) on user-generated content). Blumler and Hoffman-Riem (1992: 219) note that systems of public accountability for the activities of public broadcasters exist, yet are monopolised by a small 'circle of "licensed" participants', a sentiment echoed by Freedman's (2015) critique of how media policymaking is typically undertaken

far away from the public eye or voice. In a more positive vein, Enli (2008) points to increased experimentation by a range of European PSBs with participative initiatives, driven by new technological affordances.

2.3 PSB and normative democratic orientations

2.3.1 Public service professionalism

The account of public broadcasting's external field relations suggests its strong subjection to the logics of the state and market, profoundly shaping in turn its normative orientation toward publics. Conceptualising PSB as entailing not only an *institutional* project but a *professional* one allows for further insights into its mediation of field relations and political roles.

Champagne (2005: 57) suggests that '[g]eneric discourse on "the journalist"' occludes rather than sheds light on the precise 'field of relations' within which journalists in public service broadcasting are situated. Viewing journalism of a 'public service orientation' (encompassing institutional public service broadcasting but not exhausted by it) as a 'historically specific conception of the journalist's role in society with important consequences for the practice of journalism and the relation of the media to other social institutions' (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 36) allows for a more precise elucidation of what is distinctive about PSB praxis as a professional ethic and *esprit de corps*.

In recognition of weakly formalised codes of professional and institutional ethics and practices, Gans' (1979: 68-9) useful delineation of journalistic *paraideology* offers a productive starting point for the delineation of general values that guide journalistic activity. He conceptualises the dominant journalistic ethic of contemporary American news workers as a mélange of general, somewhat vague and flexible values and practices characterised by a mix of "liberal" and "conservative" positions. These entail explicit or implicit support for 'ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy, responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, individualism, moderatism, social order, and national leadership'

(ibid: 42). They also reflect a zeal for political and social reform captured in its support for honest, meritocratic government- leavened by support for capitalism (albeit a capitalism with a human face)- as well as the conceptualisation of representative democracy as the locus of political life and a disapproval of bureaucracy and populism.

The coalescing of these values into a distinct professional canon (later so broadly diffused within the media of the Western world that they would become the yardstick by which alternative normative models of the media in democracy would be judged) is located by Kaplan (2009) as occurring against the backdrop of a series of political realignments in the early 20th century United States associated with the weakening of the two main political parties and the advent of Progressive reforms (Hofstadter, 1990).

Dispensing with its former role as 'appendages' (Kaplan, 2009: 31) of politicians and an attendant 'explicit, formal partisanship' (ibid: 26) this new public ethic corresponded to the end of the 'advocacy' (ibid: 28) model of journalism and its replacement by the 'trustee' model (Schudson, 1998: 136), in which journalists accepted a new place in politics by providing 'news according to what they as a professional group believe citizens should know'. Founded on the basis of 'objectivity', and valourising journalistic autonomy and independence, it sought to secure 'a space for neutral, factual information and public deliberation outside the corruption, rancor, and partisan spin that normally characterizes public discourse' (Kaplan, 2009: 25).

This development was driven by the economic imperative of the need to serve 'politically heterogeneous audiences without alienating any significant segment of the audience' (Carey, 1965: 32), which was 'subsequently rationalized into a canon of professional competence and ideology of professional responsibility' (ibid: 33).

Journalism's paucity of 'esoteric knowledge' (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 37, see also Tuchman, 1972: 662) also propelled the rise of the new legitimating ideology

of professional journalism. Kaplan (2009: 33) describes how, with objectivity (and cognate principles of 'impartiality' and 'balance' and 'accuracy' (McQuail, 1983: 91) at its heart, the new professionalised journalistic ethic adopted 'Progressive notions of 'public service' and 'professional expertise became the rhetorical mainstay of journalism's occupational ideals and a defence against all external criticisms' (see also Shaw, 1991: 14). Summarising a cogent strain of critique against journalistic objectivity, Curran (2002: 155) suggests that it serves to 'obviate the need to evaluate what is true, avoid causing offence to the powerful and facilitate the meeting of deadlines'.

Kaplan further suggests that the adoption of this new ethic reflected the broader cultural change of the 'general expansion of professional authority and decision-making by experts and managers' (ibid: 34), influenced by the Progressive view that 'social problems were a question of facts and technical solutions best left to impartial, informed experts' (ibid) with the press taking on a gatekeeping role as 'technocratic, professional mediator of the public sphere' (ibid) through which all contending voices must apply for access.

Professionalisation built around the idea of journalism as trustee of the public sphere and democratic citizenship standing above the rancour of political partisanship supplied an ideal normative basis for the public service ethos of the 20th century public broadcasting monopolies (Christians, Glasser and McQuail, 2009: 10). This is in part because it satisfied the *political* need for a model of journalism detached from party partisanship yet with commitments to defending and 'neutrally speaking for the entire commonweal' (Kaplan, 2009: 34) and the *institutional and journalistic* desire for autonomy from government, proprietors and others seeking to influence it. The enduring centrality of autonomy and objectivity is illustrated by their centrality to Carpentier's (2005) account of key 'hegemonic nodal points' of the (dominant) identity of the modern media professional.

2.3.2 Normative media philosophies

Notwithstanding the vagaries and distinctiveness of the nationally-specific forms it has taken, as is suggested by the above account, the 'professional project' (Larson, 1977) of public service broadcast journalism cannot be separated from its close relationship with broader normative conceptualisations of the role of the press in society.

The shift toward trustee journalism entailed adopting an ethic of 'social responsibility' (see Nerone, 1995 for a discussion) which was famously schematized as one of four distinct models in Siebert et al.'s seminal (1963) *Four Theories of the Press.* McQuail (1983: 90) notes that the normative focus of the social responsibility approach to the media's role in society lies in its emphasis on enhancing the relationship between media institutions and democracy by reconciling the independence of media institutions with societal obligations. The democratic function of the press was now conceived of in terms of information provision to a mass public and the pluralist imperative to facilitate the airing of a diverse range of views, supported by a self-regulating, increasingly professionalizing (Petre, 2012: 48-53) journalistic class.

Of the numerous efforts to update the *Four Theories of the Press* schema of linkages between media and societies referred to by Christians et al. (2009: 6-14), including that of McQuail (2005), the authors' own three-level analysis specifying connections between (Western-centric) normative philosophical traditions of public communication, conceptions of democracy and media roles offers a useful heuristic framework which may be briefly applied here in order to link the above discussion of public broadcasting's field relations and dominant professional ethic with recognisable normative media traditions.

Each of the four normative media philosophies they refer to contributes recognisable traits to public broadcasting's normative thrust. The close consonance of *social responsibility* theory with public broadcasting has been noted above, with the public service ethos adopting an emphasis on

professionalism associated with minimalist modes of accountability based principally on self-regulation, its role in defending democracy as a 'fourth estate' (ibid: 55) and supporting democracy through the responsible provision of information to voter-citizens. We may identify the key contributions from the *corporatist* tradition a worldview that is co-operative in matters of 'national interest' and projecting an affinity with authority and dominant social institutions (ibid: 22). From the *libertarian* tradition, we may identify commitments to discursive openness and support for free speech in a 'marketplace of ideas'. The *citizen participation* tradition contributes to PSB the rhetorical elevation of the public as the *sine qua non* of journalistic enterprise even if in its professional orientation its practical embodiment is usually circumscribed.

Implicit in *normative philosophies* of the media in society are higher-level conceptualisations in relation to the 'moral foundations of democracy and democratic institutions' (Christiano, 2015), which provide an account of 'when and why democracy is morally desirable' as well as taking positions on what may reasonably be expected of citizens in democratic societies, how equality in representation should be secured, and the basis of democratic authority and political legitimacy (ibid). These directly contribute to media roles and functions that represent the practical embodiment of the public service orientation to democracy (Christians et al., 2009: 30-32, Schudson, 2008: 12).

Following Christians (2009) and Habermas (1994: 1) the axes of *liberal* and *republican* normative democratic theories represent, as two 'received views of democratic politics' a productive heuristic with which the general normative democratic thrust of PSB may be broadly and initially identified.

Although the precise normative complex of individual institutions may not be established on an *a priori* basis, the general legitimating institutional ideologies of public service broadcasting and its characteristic mode of journalistic professionalism may nonetheless be explored in terms of its liberal and republican moments, crystallised in the orientations to politics, political

communication and the state represented by both *classical* and *social* varieties of liberalism on one hand and *(national) communitarian* republicanism on the other.

2.3.2.1 Liberalism and PSB

The extent of the PSB affinity with *liberal* conceptions of democratic politics can be summarised with respect to how the mélange of *social responsibility, corporatist, libertarian* and *public participation* (Christians et al., 2009) visions of the media-society linkage characteristic to the public service enterprise are underpinned by their common adoption of a liberal pluralist model of society. This perspective views society as a 'complex of competing groups and interests' (Curran, 2002: 108) whose 'central credo', is 'the belief that the media in free societies serve the public as a consequence of being independent from government, accountable to the public through the market and influenced by the professional concerns of media staff' (ibid: 132). For Freedman (2014: 3) social responsibility theory is grouped under the broader liberal-functionalist 'consensus' paradigm of media power which views power in advanced liberal democracies as 'widely distributed, pluralistically organized, and contributes to a relatively stable social arrangement'.

More specifically, PSB's 'classical' liberal moment (roughly corresponding to Christians et al.'s (2009: 97) 'administrative' mode of liberal democracy) lies above all in its conceptualisation of its support role for democratic politics. For Ferree et al. (2002a: 291), classical liberalism represents a tradition, linked to Mill, Burke and Schumpeter, deeply sceptical about the desirability of political participation by ordinary citizens, adopting a 'realist' position that considers it 'both natural and desirable for citizens to be passive, quiescent, and limited in their political participation in a well-functioning, party-led democracy'.

Popular sovereignty is only weakly realised via the exclusive means of elections to representative bodies, in which citizens assert their private interests at the ballot box. Liberal paradigms view will-formation in the public sphere and in parliament in terms of 'the competition of strategically acting collectivities trying

to maintain or acquire positions of power' (Habermas, 1994: 3), with success or failure quantified by validation at the polls, a formulation with echoes of rational choice theory.

This liberal pessimism about citizen capacities and the desirable limits of popular sovereignty finds institutional expression in both the PSB emphasis on information-provision- implicitly based on an "information deficit" model of communication- to voter-citizens, rather than on popular participation, as well as a tendency toward valourisation of the formal sphere of parliamentary politics as the locus of political life (Curran, 2002: 211). The role of the public sphere is seen as 'strengthening a system of formal representation through political parties that secures the real basis of democracy' (Ferree et al., 2002a: 290).

The influence of the social responsibility tradition can be associated above all with the *monitorial* (Christians et al., 2009) role played by the press, corresponding to the provision of information deemed useful to a democratic public, a role corresponding to Schudson's *information*, *investigation* and *analysis* functions.

The influence of liberal normative democratic theory, along with the libertarian and citizen participation philosophies facilitates adoption of a *facilitative* (Christians et al., 2009) role, whereby competing voices are granted a platform from which to engage in issue thematisation and agenda-building, corresponding to Schudson's (2008) *public forum* function. Shaped by the corporatist tradition, the facilitative role also involves media granting space to 'legitimate claimants to public attention' (Christians et al., 2009: 31) that are consonant with the prevailing societal value complexes and the public service ethos in particular.

The cognate tradition of 'social' or Rawlsian liberalism imparts something of a moderating influence on the elitism of classical liberalism on the normative democratic orientation of public service broadcasting, imbuing it with a proactive social role that chafes against classical liberalism's emphasis on negative freedom. Rawls' emphasis on the necessity of attaining 'a significant measure of

publicly achieved equality' (O'Mahony, 2013: 50) via, for example, endorsing policies that mitigate inequality and promote equality of opportunity (ibid: 51) and an orientation to the realisation of the 'common good' (ibid: 54) is reflected in both journalistic paraideology and the centripetal thrust of PSB's advocacy of social cohesion supported by state policies.

2.3.2.2 Republicanism and PSB

Public service broadcasting's affinity with liberalism does not exhaust its normative reach, which extends to at least some degree in directions associated with varieties of republicanism. This may be principally related to the insufficiency, for the national PSB model, of a conception of democracy and democratic communication as merely the aggregation of interests. The liberal emphasis on instrumental, competitive modes of communication is replaced here with democratic will-formation that takes the form of 'ethical-political discourse' (Habermas, 1994:6) amongst citizens, aimed at mutual understanding.

While under liberalism, the victor of electoral contests wins the right to exercise 'legitimate domination' on an open mandate, republicanism's integrative desire for state and society to remain bound in at least some sense to communicatively-legitimated public power is further evidenced in the conception of political legitimation which draws on a stronger version of popular sovereignty to view the victor of electoral processes as remaining bound to the desires of the broader community (Habermas, 1994: 9).

We may view the PSB affinity with republicanism, however, as corresponding not to a radical republican view of politics as 'directed against the state apparatus' (Habermas, 1994: 6-7) informed by the insistence on decentralised self-governance and 'direct democracy' (Christians et al., 2009: 97) but rather more in line with the alternative classification of 'civic' republicanism, which 'honors the importance of a robust public life and cultivates the commitments to citizenship needed to sustain it' (ibid: 102). Counterposing it against a 'liberal-individualist' model of the public sphere, Fraser (1990: 71-2) notes that civic

republicanism stresses collective reasoning to discern a common good. This is reflected in the institutional desire of PSB to be a venue of public *debate*, where society comes to know itself, entailing both a valuation of *deliberation* and models of communicative inclusion that go some way, at least some of the time, beyond the elitism and communicative restrictions of classical liberalism.

Insofar as deliberation in the republican tradition is presumed to be preceded by the existence of a 'culturally established background consensus' (Habermas, 1994: 6) on society's basic values, Habermas' suggestion that contemporary republicanism's tendency to take on a *communitarian* hue can be seen as particularly relevant to public service broadcasting. Rejecting liberal conceptions of the ethical neutrality of the state (O'Mahony, 2013: 146), communitarianism is premised on essentialist conceptions of the common good shared by a 'concrete, substantively integrated ethical community' (Habermas, 1994: 4) which is based on 'ascriptive, communal identities such as ethnicities or nations' (O'Mahony, 2013: 88). For Rosenfeld (1998: 217), 'communitarianism can invoke the image of a tightly woven organic whole encompassing a single community with a unanimously shared conception of the good'.

Although frequently associated with more radically democratic modes of communication, in particular local community media (Brevini, 2015: 991), public broadcasting may nonetheless be associated with a nationally-focused variation of communitarianism given its historical role in nation-building and whose distinctively national modes of address aim toward the integration of the national community.

This can mean the activation of Schudson's (1998) *mobilization* function, in which media become advocates and encourage public mobilization in support of political projects and perspectives. However, the strength of the objectivity norm, allied with the prominence of the social responsibility and corporatist normative philosophies in public broadcasting implies that the radical and mobilization roles are likely to be de-emphasised or selectively channelled.

Given the earlier discussion on the susceptibility of PSB instrumentalisation by the state in regard to national aims of various kinds, we may see a likely outcome of this in a *collaborative* role with the 'between the media and sources of political and economic power, primarily the state and its agencies' (Christians et al., 2009: 31). Additionally, communitarian and social liberal concerns with societal cohesion allow for the activation of Schudson's (2008: 12) function of *social empathy,* particularly with regard to questions of social and economic disadvantage.

2.4 PSB, hegemony and crisis

Based on how public service broadcasting's field relations, professional ethos and normative models of the press in democracy corresponds to a settlement that balances the state desire for a model of media conducive to its material and ideological projects, the professional desire to autonomously mediate the public sphere and the need to maintain public support for the PSB form, we may identify the basis of both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic tendencies built into the DNA of the public service broadcasting enterprise.

2.4.1 PSB's hegemonic thrust

PSB's *institutional* material and ideological relationships to power- from its ideological valourisation of the nation state and of liberal democracy which demonstrably shapes its notion of 'service' in conservative and elitist directions, to its material dependence on the state and subjection to the dictates of the market- suggest the status of public broadcasting as a model vehicle for the maintenance of communicative hegemony around capitalist liberal democracy- in Althusser's (1972) terms, an *ideological state apparatus* whose powers of 'interpellation' assist in the construction of subjects amenable to its requirements.

Stuart Hall (1977: 346) argued that public service media, in common with other media, performed 'the critical ideological work of "classifying the world" within

the discourses of the dominant ideologies', explained by Garnham (1978: 16) in terms of the material and ideological proximity of PSB institutions to power- 'government, big business and the cultural establishment' who 'socialise' broadcasters to 'almost unconsciously' reproduce their value complexes.

The attitudes to politics that flow from journalism's *professional* canon and how it conceptualises its place in democracy have also been identified by critics, particularly those operating from a political economy perspective, as propelling a strong hegemonic function. Here, the principal charge has been that professional journalism conceals beneath a cloak of value neutrality a subtle but powerful partiality that serves to buttress incumbent social, political and economic sources of power via the reproduction of their ideological hegemony (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 36). For Kaplan (2009:35), the new professional ethic associated with social responsibility theory represented a rationalisation rather than a repudiation of journalism's relationship to political and State power. He argues that '[f]ar from eliminating the influence of particular class interests in politics and publicity, journalism's technocratic ideals took for granted the established hierarchy of power' (ibid).

Schlesinger (1979: 164) argues that the deployment of neutrality and impartiality 'can only have a meaning in the context of an existing set of values, and in the case of the BBC the relevant complex of values is that of 'the consensus', meaning that 'the social cartography which the news may offer is structurally limited by the organization's place in Britain's social order' (ibid: 165)- resulting in news media being 'indexed' (Bennett, 1990) to the parameters of elite opinion. Put simply by Miliband (1969: 223-4, quoted in Schlesinger, 1979: 165), impartiality and objectivity 'stop at the point where political consensus itself ends'. Schlesinger concludes that '[F]or being impartial in terms broadly pre-defined by the state, it is rewarded with the gift of independence' (ibid: 178).

The consensualist orientation of PSB journalistic ideology leads it into a veneration of the parliamentary state, which Schlesinger (again with respect to the BBC) defines as its overarching 'constitutional role' (ibid: 167) and toward

which the normative orientation of PSB journalism entails the 'extra-professional' dimensions (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1986: 73) of deference even to the point of the accordance of 'sacredness' (ibid) in line with its 'symbolic value in the political system' and that journalism 'should not undermine its integrity' (ibid: 74).

PSB's imbrication in national political and cultural projects renders the BBC, for McLoone (1991: 10) a 'hegemonic project' and a 'cultural manifestation of the liberal or social democratic thrust of the British state itself' (ibid: 11), representing 'a key site for mediating and promoting its underlying ideology' (ibid). The role of PSB as a 'centripetal, societally integrative force' (Blumler, 1992: 11) suggests that a national communitarian thrust contributes to the maintenance of the prevailing political order. This is understood on the Hallian basis that national cultures are 'riven with internal differences and divisions, but are unified through cultural hegemony' (Kapoor, 2008: 90) through the 'all-inclusive embrace' of broadcasting's mode of address as 'the big We' (McLoone, 1991: 10) which operates as a 'form of masking, forging links by denying (or at least playing down) difference', encouraging a 'sense of collective identity across the potentially divisive factors of class, gender, regional or ethnic background' (ibid).

2.4.2 PSB's counter-hegemonic thrust

Kellner's (1990: 16) reminder that 'Hegemony is thus a shifting, complex, and open phenomenon, always subject to contestation and upheaval' suggests that gaps and opportunities for contention always exist- gaps that are sustained by liberal normative models of journalism which ensure that at least some counter-hegemonic potential is always retained. This is a view captured by McLoone (1991: 11) who identifies 'in its commitment to impartiality and its obligation to represent all sections of society' the provision of a 'space for the kinds of dissident or minority opinion which in its hegemonic role, it sought to disavow.' This is propelled at least to some extent by what McNair, Hibberd and Schlesinger (2003: 109) describe as a cultural shift from 'obsequious deference to rigorous

adversarialism' in broadcasting. Similarly, Sheehan (1987: 70) describes broadcasting as inevitably embracing 'numerous contradictory impulses, even subversive ones', which, despite the 'enormous capacity' of the dominant ideology to 'absorb, tame and trivialise' challenges, cannot prevent challenges from arising.

The retention, to varying degrees, of the social responsibility ethic and 'fourth estate' function that seeks to hold power to account- through, for example, the exposure of 'graft and dishonesty in political machines' (Christians et al., 2009: 56) which is linked to a moral foundation in 'promoting social justice' (ibid) also represents an institutionalised counter-hegemonic force. It is supported by the need to attend to the maintenance of institutional public legitimacy without which they would be rendered both irrelevant to audiences and 'ineffective ideological institutions' (Hallin, 2005: 29).

Hall's (1988: 86) reminder that the claim of journalistic independence from 'political or economic interests, or of the state, is not wholly fictitious' reminds us of the real measures of autonomy enjoyed by media producers. The freedom media workers- themselves not a socio-economically or politically homogenous group- enjoy, organisationally and through the flexibility of journalistic norms, allows for the ongoing possibility of giving voice to critical perspectives. The counter-hegemonic potential of PSB as a bulwark against a solely commercial media has also been stressed by some formerly radical critics of the form. In this vein, Moe and Syvertson (2009: 403-6) cite Garnham (1986) and Scannell (1989) who emphasise the significance of (and the need to protect) the unique democratic functions played by public broadcasting.

As such, we may follow both Schudson (1991: 146) who notes that 'both public and private media in liberal societies carry out a wider variety of roles, cheerleading the established order, alarming the citizenry about flaws in that order, providing a civic forum for political debate, acting as a battleground among contesting elites', as well as Blumler and Gurevitch (1986: 90) who argue that 'Both potentially and in practice mass media…have both legitimizing and

disruptive implications for the social order', involved both in processes of 'social control and social change'.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter's exploration of the general terrain of the field of public service broadcasting and its cultural orientations has suggested ways in which its inter-penetrating field relationships shape the theory and practice of PSB as a model of organising the public sphere with distinctive orientations to the public sphere and democracy.

Principally, it has been suggested that insofar as PSB's normative thrust aligns it to a far greater extent within the orbits of state and market power more than public power, it may represent a poor candidate as a media-institutional model with the normative resources to adopt a critical posture to the crisis of democratic capitalism.

Yet, the extent to which PSB may contribute toward the problematisation of hegemonic power depends meaningfully on contingent configurations of field relationships and aspects of the prevailing normative political culture which reciprocally influence the domestic political and discursive opportunity structures and enlarge or constrict the 'space of the possibles' within which public broadcasting may navigate.

The following chapter directly explores this question by exploring the co-evolution of the Irish political and media systems in the 20th and 21st centuries with a view to an assessment of the counter-hegemonic capacity of Irish public service broadcasting.

Chapter 3: Public Service Broadcasting in the Irish Public Sphere

Internal policies of the station are but reflections of larger policies of the nation.
(Doolan, Dowling and Quinn, 1969: 175)

3.1 Introduction

The new institutionalist insight of the necessity of viewing *organisation-specific* logics as localised configurations of *society-wide institutional* logics of 'material practices and symbolic constructions' (Spicer and Sewell, 2010: 913-4) that constitute the overall organising principles of the broader institutional order calls to attention the heuristic value of recognising institutions in their broader systemic context. Institutions are thus viewed as 'crystallizations of social practices of prior moments in history…rooted in power relationships' (Castells, 2009: 299), with relationships between media institutions and their economic, social and political contexts seen as 'bi-directional, symbiotic' (Horgan, O'Connor and Sheehan (2007: 2-3) and whose origins are recognised as lying in the outcomes of conflicts 'rooted in major social transformations' (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 62).

These reciprocal relationships are particularly relevant to public service broadcasting, given McLoone's (1991: 10) assertion of the central place of broadcasting in the 'mediation, promotion and maintenance of collective identity' in nation states in the 20th century. This is ably exemplified by Irish public broadcasting's explicit role from its inception in nation building (Gorham, 1967: 5) by 'preserving and developing the national culture' (Broadcasting Authority Act 1960) and to 'reflect the democratic, social and cultural values of Irish society' (Public Service Broadcasting Charter, 2004). F. Corcoran's (2004: 1) view that PSB in Ireland in the form of RTÉ has 'played a major role in dominating the symbolic environment in which Irish people construct their sense of identity and weave the "common sense" that underpins the everyday life of the community'

underlines the significance of its symbolic role.

This chapter responds to this imperative for a sociological view by charting in an introductory fashion the diachronic co-evolution of Irish media, society and economy over the course of the 20th century.

This is undertaken firstly through brief explorations of the co-evolution of political and media systems, the political and cultural implications of the dominant Irish identity project and their influences on Ireland's developmental trajectory and public sphere capacities.

Secondly, a political-economic focus is put on public service broadcasting's development in Ireland from its origins in state radio through its subsequent institutional transformations, with a focus on delineating the interpenetrating influences of state, market and culture on the normative orientations of the public service ethic in the Irish public sphere and the evolution of its political role.

This enables an initial assessment of the broader 'cultural model' (O'Mahony, 2011: 1) in which PSB is enmeshed, whose explanatory power for this project's research interests lie in how communicative practices provide 'the means to describe common worlds, as well as to evaluate and prescribe collective practices and states of affairs' (ibid) and indicating the extent to which Irish public broadcasting, as a crystallisation of Irish public culture, represents fertile terrain for critical responses to the post-2008 crises.

3.2 Irish democratic culture, nationalism and the public sphere

3.2.1 Political parallelism: Irish media systems and political culture

In their comparative review of national media systems which centres around the co-evolution of 'media system' and 'political system' variables (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 21), Hallin and Mancini (ibid: 198) locate Ireland (along with the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada) squarely within the 'North

Atlantic' or 'Liberal' model, as opposed to the other two main ideal-types posited, the 'Democratic Corporatist' model of North and Central Europe and the 'Mediterranean' or 'Polarized pluralist' model.

The authors (following Lijphart, 1999) suggest that 'majoritarian' (rather than 'consensus') parliamentary systems characterised by the concentration of power in governing parties and cabinets typically involve the proliferation of catch-all parties that compete not to win power for small segments of society but 'for the right to represent the nation as a whole' (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 51). Such a system promotes the development of similarly 'catch-all' media, associated with high levels of professionalisation built around the norm of objectivity, separation from organised social interests, and embracing the idea that the media, like other political institutions, 'represents a unitary general interest of society' (ibid: 243).

Each of these aspects is thoroughly institutionalised within the Irish political and media landscape, including a parliamentary system characterised by a winner-takes-all majoritarianism (leavened in practice by a tendency toward coalition government) and a cohering of journalistic identity around objectivity, impartiality and (formal) detachment from interest groups (O'Brien, 2011: 20, see also Foley, 2011), as well as attachment to the 'fourth estate' ideal of the role of the media in society (Chubb, 1984).

Hallin and Mancini (2004: 53) point to the significance of the extent and modes of institutionalisation of social and political pluralism for the development of media systems. The tendency in Liberal-category nations like Ireland to adopt an 'individualized' rather than 'organised' pluralism in which political representation is based around the relationship between individual citizens, political institutions with the informal mediation of "special interests" rather than the direct institutionalisation of organised social groups into the political process is associated with the professional model of broadcast governance. Unlike in Democratic Corporatist and Polarized Pluralist nations, organised social interests are excluded from participating in public broadcasting governance (ibid: 241).

The extent of political diversity is also highly consequential for the character of media systems. Ireland's 'moderate' pluralism, like other Liberal nations, is marked by high levels of political consensus about the basic structure of society, whereas 'Polarized' pluralism is characterised by a wide political spectrum and 'sharply opposed ideologies' (ibid: 60). Indeed, the authors suggest that Ireland's 'strong liberal tradition combines with the central role of nationalism to produce a consensual political culture' and that divisions between the main parties are 'more symbolic than substantive' (ibid: 240). Lane and Ersson's (1991: 184-5) placement of Ireland at the bottom of their index of political polarisation is cited in support of this (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 60). For media, the existence of a hegemonic political culture provides journalism with "a large ground of shared values and assumptions whose inclusion in the news is not seen as politically partial' (ibid: 239).

Ireland's socio-political history reflects a shift in media roles in this regard. While 'politicized newspapers had an extremely important role to play in the political mobilizations that formed the Irish democratic system' (ibid: 209) (see Legg, 1999, Morash, 2010), for Foley (2011: 32), professionalisation and political change propelled Irish journalism's transition 'from being a politically engaged group of workers to a professional group working for a post-colonial, less politically aligned press, one more concerned with nation building'.

Today, the era of *party press parallelism* (Seymour-Ure, 1974) has passed, and today '[m]ost Irish newspapers are politically conservative and have a middle-class orientation' (Truetzschler, 2004: 116). The shift away from serving defined political constituencies (Horgan, McNamara and O'Sullivan, 2007: 33) is also associated with the commercial pressures associated with the small population, enhancing the necessity of having a 'wide appeal in order to survive' (Chubb, 1984: 79) and related to the adoption of the 'new journalism' (Steele and De Nie, 2014, see also Wehrly, 2010) which eschewed contentious political partisanship (O'Brien, 2011: 19-20).

The extent to which political cultures are saturated by rational-legal or clientelistic forms of authority is also identified by Hallin and Mancini (2004: 55)

as consequential for both the institutional form and professional ethos of media institutions. The former, linked with Liberal nations, is a Weberian concept characterised by the adherence to 'formal and universalistic rules of procedure' whose characteristic institutional form is that of the bureaucracy- an "administrative apparatus that is autonomous of particular parties, individuals, and social groups […] and is conceived as serving society as a whole" (ibid). For media systems, the existence of a strong culture of rational-legal authority is associated with a more bureaucratised and therefore more autonomous public broadcasting institutions (ibid: 56) and also a form of journalistic professionalism with deep affinities with administrative professionalism, exemplified by their shared emphasis on 'rational and fact-centered discourses' and the 'notion of an autonomous institution serving the common good' (ibid: 57).

Clientelism (associated with Polarized Pluralist nations) conversely, corresponds to 'a pattern of social organization in which access to social resources is controlled by patrons and delivered to clients in exchange for deference and various forms of support' (ibid: 58). The failure of political systems characterised by clientelism to 'emphasise the separation between the public good and particular interests' can have a variety of impacts, including high levels of political and business instrumentalisation of the media, a low emphasis on transparency in political communication, and 'private rather than public communication patterns' (ibid).

The extant array of liberal institutions in Ireland based on rational-legal authority bequeathed by its pre-independence status as British colony (ibid: 73) 'underpins the professional model of broadcast governance and regulation' (ibid: 246) in Ireland with public broadcasting professionals, like higher civil servants, 'a self-regulating corp of professionals' (ibid) promulgating the upholding of common public and national interests. Yet, this exists in parallel with a cultural context long characterised by political clientelism (Lee, 1984) and an ingrained culture of secrecy and non-communication (Murphy, 1984: 58).

That a culture of secrecy around access to public information, backed by the presence of strong legislation around official secrets, criminal and seditious libel and the delayed and limited onset of a freedom of information regime has contributed to a retarding of the ability of journalists to critique the state leads Chubb (1984: 79) to describe limitations on Irish media not just 'on what papers can print but on what they can find out' (see also Horgan, McNamara and O'Sullivan, 2007: 46).

The ignominious pre-independence history of censorship against media deemed at odds with political- and moral- authority is chronicled in Rafter (2011) and Nowlan (1984) and included various forms of soft and hard repression against radical publications ranging from the imposition of 'knowledge taxes' (O'Brien, 2011: 17) to outright suppression of critical outlets and direct subsidisation of compliant media. Its twentieth century manifestations took political/military and social/moral forms, with the civil war, its aftermath and World Wars I and II seeing the expansion of censorship (Horgan, 2001: 2) whose casualties were dissenting political voices (Murphy, 1984: 52) accused of threatening the political stability or moral purity of the new political order.

3.2.2 Independence and national identity

Axel Honneth (2014: 263) notes that the political public sphere- a 'discursive sphere of democratic will-formation among a people that regards itself as sovereign' (ibid: 263) is closely associated with the emergence of modern nation states. These facilitated the creation of spaces of communication in which matters of common interested could be 'identified and publicly negotiated', and whose 'cultural precondition' of national identity (ibid: 263) provided the necessary cohesion for the formation of a political community (ibid: 313). Whether the character of national identity contributed to or mitigated against the public sphere's capacity to act as a means of democratisation depends for Honneth on 'whether the relationship among the citizens was understood as an expression of some pre-political, ethnic or biological unity, or instead as the embodiment of the new universal principles of freedom and equality' (ibid: 265-6, see also

Habermas, 1994).

O'Mahony and Delanty (2002) locate in the developmental trajectory of Irish nationalism- from its mobilisations in the latter decades of the 19th century to its later institutionalisation in the nascent independent Irish state- the emergence from the contending wings of the movement a hegemonic identitarian project whose character had a range of enduring legacies on Irish public culture that correspond to Honneth's first, pessimistic category.

From the clerical wing of the movement represented by the Catholic Church, a code of anti-modernism sought to imbue Irish identity with an 'uncritical, exclusive and anti-intellectual disposition' wherein the 'new state-nation should be preserved from reflexive scrutiny and critique' (ibid: 69) and led by an 'enlightened middle-class leadership' (ibid: 65).

From the liberal democratic wing of Irish nationalism, represented by the Irish Parliamentary Party, an emphasis on rational parliamentary democracy was contributed that similarly valourised propertied respectability and a version of citizenship focusing on duties rather than rights.

The revolutionary wing of the nationalist movement, which incorporated cultural nationalism as well as republican separatists, exerted a powerful influence through its aestheticised politics within which Irish identity was founded upon a pre-critical identification with the nation which the authors identify as a key 'architect of an anti-critical spirit towards interest conflicts within the nation' (ibid: 84).

The radical wing of the movement, mainly comprising agrarian and urban workers, is viewed by the authors as having been a relatively weak influence on the eventual shape of hegemonic Irish nationalism. Class tensions in the countryside and the city were, by virtue of structural and cultural factors (related to urban numerical weakness, rural isolation and the gravitational pull of nationalist identity), absorbed into a developing nationalist consensus (ibid: 91). This reflected a broader tendency for labour movements to become subsumed by nationalist movements (Honneth, 2014: 263).

The 'relational field' (ibid: 125) of Irish nationalism, leading into and after the Civil War, eventually coalesced into a broad master identity that was based around a 'conservative Catholic communitarianism' (ibid: 126), whose success in enlisting disparate groups in a highly class-stratified society into a strong identification with the nation afforded the new nationalist consensus an ability render social conflict latent and mask a deep social and political conservatism for the century to come (ibid: 15).

The expansion of clerical power (Coakley, 2012: 160) in the new state over, for example, welfare provision and the education system, helped amplify its capacity to wield a moral hegemony which powerfully shaped political culture and the public sphere via the embedding of an authoritarian strain of clerical conservatism. Its anti-modern project was policed via a combination of coercion and persuasion, where straightforward censorship was complemented by the technologies of sin, punishment, forgiveness and redemption (see Inglis, 1998).

The post-civil war establishment of a Committee on Evil Literature, under the pretext of protecting the public from obscenity, 'stultified the cultural community' (Murphy, 1984, p.53) by providing opportunities for the banning of 'both message and messenger' (Horgan, 2001: 14), with critical books and newspapers (often those suspected of having a 'socialist or communist tone' (Murphy, 1984: 54) targeted for their assumed lack of support for the 'cause of Catholic nationalism' (ibid).

Its purpose, according to O'Mahony and Delanty (2002), was directed at maintaining the material and symbolic interests of Ireland's middle class. The Catholic Church's success in attenuating the deliberative possibilities of an autonomous public sphere is exemplified by the depoliticisation of whole areas of life under Catholic teaching meaning that 'Christian verities' (ibid: 163) of, for example, charity and compassion obscured more radical prescriptions for inequality and oppression. This depoliticisation was complemented by important aspects of the political culture fostered by the more populist nationalism of Fianna Fáil, whose cultivation of 'web(s) of local patronage' (ibid: 154) served to narrow the sphere of the political, leading O'Mahony and Delanty conclude that

clientelism has helped effect a 'radical privatisation of life' (ibid: 154), reducing the propensity of citizens to organise politically and involve themselves in the public sphere.

Irish nationalism by the end of World War II had embedded itself as a mélange of "primordial Catholicism, rejection of foreign influence, conservative social arrangements, patriarchal familialism, restricted justice within the nation, economic protectionism, a minimal state and obedient individuation" (ibid: 156) and the suffocatingly authoritarian streak of the Church-State alliance had weakened Ireland's pre-independence public sphere which had lost "whatever capacity it might have had to clarify possible alternatives" (ibid: 146).

3.2.3 Modernisation and the neoliberal state

The abandonment of the autarky experiment after WWII and the turn towards an active, interventionist state that eventually embraced a globalising economy and accession to the European Union meant the end of anti-modernism. Propelled by the gradual decoupling of various spheres of life from religious authority, a slow secularisation was set in train. The loosening grip of the church's moral authority, combined with an internationalising culture, heralded new possibilities for the public sphere partly driven by the 'emergence of a secular intelligentsia and media power from the 1960s' (ibid: 171).

Unable to prevent modernisation outright, the *ancien régime* was still able, however, to both retard and channel its flow in conservative ways up to the present day, not least through economic developmental agendas.

In his critical economic history of the Irish state, McCabe (2013) locates the genesis of the conditions which would later shape the Irish instantiation of the 2008 global financial crisis in the ways in which the economy of post-independence Ireland was steered by successive Governments. He suggests that an orthodoxy in Irish historical writing positing a decisive break between the insular, anti-modern early decades of the Free State and the post-1960

expansionary period masks important continuities in the state's steering of the economy toward the maintenance of particularistic class interests.

Coakley (2012: 202) argues that while 'earlier developmental strategies were premised on asserting greater national independence', from the 60s onwards, 'further development was now to be achieved through subordinating Irish sovereignty to the requirements of North American and European capital'. This would be accomplished through strategically positioning Ireland within 'circuits of North Atlantic capital' (ibid: 203) in part by practising 'broker' (ibid) or 'comprador' (McCabe, 2013) capitalism, focused on courting foreign-owned multinationals to pursue export-led manufacturing, and later property speculation and financial activities. The condition of political without economic independence was thus maintained, albeit latterly with global rather than regional dependencies (Silke, 2014: 91, O'Hearn, 2001).

The path of FDI-led industrialisation which maintained the power of entrenched domestic interests (McCabe, 2013: 100) may be seen as emblematic of Ireland's negotiated modernisation in which expansionary economic activity from the late 1950s and consequent economic growth was engineered to take place without the profound social upheaval that might have been expected to accompany it (O'Mahony and Delanty, 2002: 168). Having sat out the period of the post-WWII welfarist consensus, Ireland was thus well-positioned to embrace the economic orthodoxy of the New Right, neoliberalism (if not its politically 'militant' period, associated with Thatcher and Reagan, certainly its subsequent 'managerial' period in which it was 'now simply a matter of 'good governance' and sensible adaptation to 'globalization' (Dardot and Laval, 2013: 190-1).

Ireland's status as an exemplar of neoliberal policymaking- albeit rarely one 'neoliberal in spirit' (Konings, 2012: 64) whose local vernacular subsumed its substance beneath the 'non-ideological' cloak of common-sense, pragmatic, even progressive modernisation (Kitchin et al., 2012: 1306 cited in Dukelow, 2014) has been noted by scholars writing in relation to public policy areas as diverse as planning (Kitchin et al., 2010), housing (O'Connell, 2007, McCabe, 2013, Norris &

Coates, 2010), health (Flynn, 2014, Tussing & Wren, 2006, Burke, 2009), welfare (Considine and Dukelow, 2009), economics (Kirby, 2001), and banking (Taylor, 2011).

Echoing O'Mahony and Delanty's (2002: 172) view of the ongoing endurance of "classical values of Irish political culture, emphasising authoritarianism, personalism, secrecy and a limited examination of issues' Coakley (2012: 161) argues that the conservative political culture has endured through Ireland's modernisation processes, encompassing urbanisation and secularisation, as well as membership of the European Union. He argues that the verities and mantras of neoliberalism have come to 'dominate virtually all political, social and economic discourse in Ireland' (ibid: 166), with Ireland's intellectual and political elites more or less successfully defending their 'strategic orientation of subordinating the country to the requirements of North Atlantic capital on the grounds of realism' (ibid: 211). Indeed, in O'Mahony's later formulation of 'techno-conservatism' (2014: 252) as the dominant cultural model shaping contemporary European politics, we may identify a secularised re-articulation to the conservative Catholic communitarian cultural model in Ireland and the basis for the contemporary ideological co-ordination between Ireland and Europe in the arena of economic crisis management.

3.2.4 Assessing the communicative capacities of the Irish public sphere

In another volume, O'Mahony (2011a: 7-8) describes the communicative capacities of the contemporary Irish public sphere as attenuated by the restriction of public participation, an inability to hold office-holders accountable, a narrow thematic range shaped by particularistic media agenda-setting practices, a low capacity for 'moral memory', colonisation by administrative power and economic actors, and the exclusion of 'pragmatic, moral-political and legal considerations' repugnant to the dominant conservative order. Citizenship has been 'largely conceived in passive rather than active terms' (O'Mahony, 2011b: 93) and democracy has, as a result, 'tended to be strictly representative, clientelistic and elitist' (ibid).

While modernisation has heralded a slow, tortuous uncoupling of democratic political identity from national identity, Skillington (2011: 98) suggests that the 'moral grammar' (Skillington, 2011: 98) of a contemporary 'authoritarian secular Catholic moral order' nonetheless intervenes in 'preventing the connection of ideas in a way that exposes the development path of the society, or its present configurations, to critique' (O'Mahony and Delanty, 2002: 179), including the fatalistic enlistment into submission to external economic forces (Skillington, 2011).

For O'Mahony (2011c: 203-205), deploying Miller's (2002) framework of conflict and social learning, the Irish public sphere is characterised by the entrenchment of 'consensus' pathologies, reflected in ideological blockages to learning represented by the repressive hegemony of Catholic traditionalism, anti-intellectualism and, latterly, economic rationalism as part of a hegemonic project that has enabled the successful projection of particularistic interests as the 'general interest' (O'Mahony and Delanty, 2002: 185).

While no longer capable of subjecting social cleavages and nascent critical discourses to outright 'anaesthetisation' (O'Mahony and Delanty, 2002: 185), the capacity of alternative value systems to assert themselves in the arenas of, for example, the family, work, gender, redistribution, the environment, and Ireland's economic developmental trajectory remain impeded.

Honneth's (2014: 293) account of contemporary public spheres as dominated by a 'background consensus secured by cultural hegemony' whose carriers and sponsors were 'able to control access to the public expression of opinion' through 'cultural mechanisms of exclusion' (ibid: 314) is echoed in Fraser's (1990: 64) account of how, in the public sphere, 'unequally empowered social groups tend to develop unequally valued cultural styles', generating 'powerful informal pressures that marginalize the contributions of members of subordinated groups'. Such pressures, in the Irish context, favour participants on the basis of nationality, ethnicity, gender, religion, geographical location, and economic

power.

Honneth (2014: 298) further charges journalism in a context of the decline of labour movements as tending to fall into an 'elitist solipsism' (ibid: 298), indifferent to whole swathes of society outside its central middle-class constituency.

Ireland's weak labour movement, overwhelmingly conservative print and broadcast media and whose ownership lies in vanishingly fewer hands (Truetzschler, 2004, p.116, see also Horgan, McNamara and O'Sullivan, 2007: 43 and O'Brien and Larkin, 2014) constrains its capacity to act as a plebeian public sphere (Negt and Kluge, 1993).

Elsewhere, Browne (2004, p.140) notes a general tendency in Irish media to contribute to sowing consent to the hegemonic global capitalist order by rendering invisible the 'governing ideology' (ibid: 130) of advanced capitalism via the naturalisation of its orthodoxies and when that wasn't quite enough, participating in the 'repression of dissent' (ibid: 131). Devereux (1996: 294) has pointed to its complicity in promoting neoliberal public policy.

The Irish public sphere's cultural pathologies and media concentration and lack of ideological diversity mitigates against the domestic public sphere as a site of democratic self-legislation on Honneth's (2014: 291) terms, failing on multiple grounds his criteria for a 'highly differentiated system of mass media' which 'enables its audience to take part in informed processes of will-formation by providing enlightening information on the emergence, causes and possible interpretations of social problems'.

If public service broadcasting was to succeed on this basis, it would have to act as a pluralistic counterweight, swimming against the grain of the dominant impulses built into the structure of the Irish public sphere.

3.3 The political economy of Irish public service broadcasting: an overview

3.3.1 PSB and the state

3.3.1.1 From state radio to public service broadcasting

For most of the 20th century, to speak of state or public broadcasting in Ireland is to speak of broadcasting *in toto*, as until the comparatively belated liberalisation of the airwaves in 1989 (as discussed by F. Corcoran, 2004: 45 and Murphy, 2008: 155), Irish public radio and later public television enjoyed a formal monopoly, notwithstanding the significant overspill of British terrestrial television signals (MacConghail, 1984: 74).

Detailed historical accounts of the social, political and economic factors shaping the foundation and subsequent development of Irish state radio and public service broadcasting may be found in the work of, for example, Gorham, 1967, Savage, 1996, F. Corcoran, 2004, Horgan, 2004, 2001, Pine, 2002, and Bowman, 2011. Here, the focus is placed on briefly tracing aspects of the transition from a state-controlled monopoly broadcaster to a semi-state monopoly *professional model* broadcaster (via the establishment of Raidió Éireann in 1960 (Savage, 1996)), up to its present day status as part of a *public service core system* (Raboy, 1999) in which public service broadcasting coexists alongside a commercial media sector.

Radio broadcasting in Ireland had begun with the establishment of the state radio station 2RN in 1926, (Flynn, 2002: 161), partly motivated by the assumed need to 'create an integrating cultural force for the emergent state' (Golding and Elliot, 1979: 33) and was staffed by civil servants under the direct ownership and day-to-day control of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs until 1953.

Chubb (1992: 64) notes that the principal political effect of running a broadcasting service as a branch of the Department was, perhaps counter-intuitively, to 'insulate it entirely from politics' as the station 'took a strictly

neutral position simply by broadcasting no political material at all'- even to the extent that TDs and Senators were formally banned from appearing (Golding and Elliot, 1979: 34).

'Smothered under civil service control and expected to promote unquestioningly the dominant ethos of Catholic Ireland' (McLoone, 1991: 15), Murphy (2008: 155) suggests that broadcasting in Ireland 'developed as a public utility primarily oriented towards a policy of cultural nationalism' (ibid: 67), and 'from its earliest days it set about the task of uniting its audience around common points of identification' (McLoone, 1991: 13). Chubb (1984: 81) suggests that it was not until the fifties that anything resembling 'political broadcasting' would emerge.

Following a series of well-documented political and civil service debates about what form a state-supported television service should take (including the possibility of a fully commercial model), and the 1960 establishment of the statutory Radio Éireann authority which would independently manage public broadcasting as a public trust, the eventual decision taken was to set up a public service broadcaster, part-funded by advertising but structured broadly along BBC lines (Horgan, 2001: 78 and Bowman, 2011).

Ideologically, the new broadcaster's relationship with the State would be characterised by an expansion beyond the culturalist aspirations of State radio into a more all-embracing national communitarian ethic. The integration of the 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) suggested by the embracing gaze of the new TV service on the populace as 'primarily national subjects with common interests and goals' (Murphy, 2008: 159) was made possible by what had by then stabilised into consensualist political order (ibid: 74).

While RTÉ has been described- partly by virtue of its establishment in the immediate wake of the abandonment of isolationism- as a key 'part of the modernising process in Ireland' and even 'its primary source of mediation' (McLoone, 1991: 14), Murphy (2008: 67) describes RTÉ's identity as a public broadcaster as 'routinely under pressure for re-definition as a national

broadcaster'. He characterises the definitional struggle over PSB in Ireland in terms of 'RTE's identity and practice as a national, cultural institution reflecting the catholic (and later, consumerist) values of the state or as a public informational broadcaster reflecting the UK and continental leaning towards 'a liberal pluralist public sphere' (ibid: 68).

These dual tendencies are reflected both in the democratic role legislatively ascribed to RTÉ and institutional literature which anchor Irish public service broadcasting as serving both a pluralist liberal democratic state and the nation.

In addition to committing the broadcaster to the Reithian (Burke and Briggs, 2005: 177) formulation of a national, free-to-air service that produces 'programmes that entertain, inform and educate' (Broadcasting Act 2009: s.114), RTÉ's democratic function is linked to constitutional compliance, specifying that RTÉ must 'uphold the democratic values enshrined in the Constitution' (ibid). The broadcaster's liberal credentials are established by RTÉ's own advocacy of 'fundamental democratic principles' (2014: 9) and delineated in a charter document (Public Service Broadcasting Charter, 2004) as including the need to 'cherish freedom from political control or influence and from all other vested interests' (ibid: 5), the elevation of the need to 'respect the sanctity of an individual's private life' (ibid: 4) and an espoused commitment to embrace the social, cultural, religious, ethnic and sexual diversity of Ireland and all its peoples.

Evidence of RTÉ's integrative national role is provided by its founding legislation which instructs RTÉ with regard to its duties around supporting 'national aims', including 'preserving and developing the national culture' (Broadcasting Act 1960, s.17). Contemporary evidence of acceptance of a role of this kind is provided by institutional commitments to 'project Ireland's cultural heritage' (RTÉ, 2004a: 17), to offer a 'distinctive Irish voice and perspective' (RTÉ, 2010: 4) on the basis of Ireland's status as 'sovereign in culture' (Curran, 2011: 2) and because of RTÉ's role as the 'daily keeper of much of what is ours- culture, history, language and identity' (ibid: 11).

Such commitments suggest a 'unitary view of the polity' (Delanty, 2003: 34) characteristic of republicanism, premised on the 'recognition of culture as defining of a people: the demos is based on an ethnos' (ibid: 29), with political community resting on 'a prior cultural community, defined in terms of common bonds, collective values and a shared sense of the common good' (ibid).

3.3.1.2 Freedom and constraint in practice

The new structural configuration undoubtedly represented a significant increase in autonomy for Irish broadcasting. Recognised as such internally (RTÉ, 1971), the broadcaster was placed in charge of most of its appointments; staff ceased to be civil servants (Golding and Elliot, 1979: 35); its access to a steady license fee income shielded it somewhat from commercial pressures; and it was legislatively beholden to only mostly vague stipulations regarding programme content.

However, this newfound autonomy did not mean a clean break from political influence. A heightened political awareness of the potential of the medium of television to mould the hearts and minds of viewers meant that RTÉ's independence had, from the beginning, sharp limits both in theory and in practice.

Golding and Elliot (1979: 51) point to a further ambiguity in RTÉ's constitutional position, noting that 'the role of RTÉ *in the state* has been unclear, that is the extent to which its general policy and purposes should coincide with those of elected governments'. This was all the more salient given Irish Taoiseach Seán Lemass' declarations that the new TV service would be considered as an 'instrument of public policy' (Ward, 2007: 170) and the government had 'the obligation to ensure that its programmes do not offend against the public interest or conflict with national policy as defined in legislation" (Horgan, 2004: 41).

In practice, Golding and Elliott (1979: 61) describe the broadcaster's relationship with the state as based on '[t]he tacit exchange of autonomy for responsibility', which, depending on how such autonomy is exercised by RTÉ, leads it to enjoy

anything from 'considerable liberal license to direct constraint' (ibid: 64).

Indeed, McLoone (1991: 13, see also MacConghail 1984: 730) goes as far as to suggest that 'successive Irish governments…have always viewed broadcasting's relationship to the state in ways which we might recognise as more Gaullist than strictly Reithian'.

Legislatively, the state retained an important series of powers over the new service (RTÉ, 1971: 3). These included Authority appointments, control over both the extent of RTÉ's ability to earn money from advertising and the license fee, the power to insist on governmental broadcasts on demand and, via the highly consequential Section 31 provision, the censoring of any material deemed inappropriate.

Each of these would become sources, particularly in the early years of the broadcaster, of 'constant tension, frequent friction and occasional crises' (Chubb, 1984: 83) between various Governments that often centred on the politically proximate genres of news and current affairs, particularly as investigative and 'public affairs' journalism found its feet in the late 60s (Chubb, 1984: 80).

What F. Corcoran (2004: 60) described as a 'Government assumption throughout the Sixties, that it should control RTÉ as tightly as it could a Government Department' was demonstrated in a well-documented range of episodes (MacConghail, 1984: 68-74, Horgan, 2004: 40, F. Corcoran, 2004) in which the forms of pressure applied ran the gamut from subtle forms of steering and veiled threats to the application of extreme pressure and even legislative reprisals against RTÉ's independence.

The intervention of most enduring significance came in the form of exogenously and endogenously-imposed censorship on and by RTÉ following the flaring up of violence in Northern Ireland in the late 60s and 1970s, with the ministerial privilege to direct RTÉ to refrain from broadcasting materials activated in 1971 for the first time (Chubb, 1992: 70, Corcoran and O'Brien, 2005). Purcell (2014:

65) posits that an internal climate of fear engendered by the enforcement of Section 31 and the sacking of the RTÉ Authority following an incident in which a senior IRA operative was interviewed (White, 1993: 105) 'never left the organisation' but 'deepened' in the ensuing years. This extended to an assiduous and overzealous interpretation of Section 31 that amounted to what was later found by the Supreme Court to be extra-legal self-censorship (Fisher, 2005: 71), with the whole experience leaving what a future RTÉ Authority chairman would later describe as an 'unhealthy legacy' (Corcoran and O'Brien, 2005: 93, see also Quinn, 2011: 72) in the broadcaster as it struggled in a range of ways to come terms with the post-censorship order.

The experience of Section 31, along with many other skirmishes, illustrated the difficulties faced by governments- used to a deferent political culture and to being in complete control of its domestic media representation- in resisting the temptations to meddle in the new broadcaster. They also cast into sharp relief challenges faced by the broadcaster- by no means itself an ideological monolith- in its efforts to embed a model of public media that had real independence from the State. A process of mutual acclimatisation and accommodation was to continue to evolve through experimentation, compromise and occasional controversy throughout the remainder of the century, and ultimately matured to an outcome where today the relationship between the State and its public broadcaster is a predominantly stable one (in spite of intermittent low-level conflict (e.g. McGee, 2014, McGee and Kelly, 2015)).

Outside the formal political sphere, that RTÉ helped provoke social modernisation in Ireland in the second half of the 20th century is an achievement often ascribed to it (Farrell, 1984: 116, see also Bowman, 2011: 227-9 for a brief review of scholarship on this topic). The ways in which RTÉ 'mirrored, perhaps stimulated, an iconoclasm' (Farrell, 1984: 116) is summarised by O'Tuathaigh (1984: 99) as entailing the promotion of secularism and the expansion of discourses around public and private morality as well as on the prevalence of inequality in Irish society.

3.3.1.3 Professional habitus and field relations

The surveillance to which it was subject, yet the 'studied vagueness' of its 'constitutional and legislative strictures' (Golding and Elliott, 1979: 61) meant that the broadcaster's acclimatisation to the limits of its autonomy would be predicated on a 'trial and error' (Orlik, 1976: 469) attunement to the cultural environment. Journalistic precepts like impartiality and objectivity- themselves impervious to straightforward codification- evolved not just in accordance with news values but as part of the 'underlying political ideology' (Golding and Elliott, 1979: 198) of journalism, they would be shaped by 'the broader prevailing social consensus' (ibid).

Hallin and Mancini (2004: 236) suggest in their discussion on the extent of the relative autonomy enjoyed by the BBC that 'the most important political limits on broadcasting are to be found not in political intervention from outside, but within the community of broadcasting professionals, in their commitment [to] a centrist, consensualist view of "responsible" professional broadcasting'. Golding and Elliot (1979: 62) suggest that guiding RTÉ's discharge of its 'responsibilities' are 'root assumptions about legitimate political contentions shared by government and broadcasters alike'.

The content of such assumptions is suggested by the recognitions by senior RTÉ figures of the broadcaster's responsibility in 'inculcating an appreciation of the basic values of the social and political order and a respect for the institutions on which this order is based' (ibid: 61) and the acceptance of an assumed requirement to operate within the boundaries of a 'tacitly acknowledged consensus within which all of us stay', (Orlik, 1976: 469) a consensus that is seen internally as 'best for stability' (ibid).

RTÉ's explicit exceptions to the legislatively-mandated dictates of impartiality and objectivity in news and current affairs output (Broadcasting Act 2009: s.39) include references to being 'not impartial about crime or racial prejudice or religious intolerance' (Golding and Elliot, 1979: 62) and more recently, embracing of 'fundamental democratic principles' including commitments to 'the

rule of law, freedom of expression and religion, parliamentary democracy and equality of opportunity' (RTÉ, 2014a: 9). These speak to the culturally-mediated nature of boundaries on impartiality, whose character here clearly reflects Southern political anxieties in relation to the conflict in Northern Ireland and legitimate authority, as well as, latterly, support for a social-democratic compact in an "inclusive" liberal democratic parliamentary state (McLoone, 1991: 14).

That RTÉ's practice of journalism is influenced by the broader field of media in Ireland is indicated by Orlik (1976: 471) who noted the status of RTÉ as something of a microcosm of the Irish press, given that 'virtually all' of RTÉ's reporters and correspondents came to RTÉ from newspapers, who 'think in terms of print' and whose news agendas were powerfully influenced by the contents of the daily (broadly centre-right) press.

Foley's (2011: 27) suggestion that the professionalising journalistic cohort has been drawn from 'the emerging urban middle classes, especially the Catholic middle classes' and Devereux's (1996: 299) study of RTÉ which identified the existence of a 'pervasive middle-class culture which dominates in the organisation' is supported by M. Corcoran's (2004) survey-based exploration of the demographic composition and ideological orientations of Irish print and broadcast journalists. This identifies the contemporary Irish journalistic cohort as 'predominantly middle class' (ibid: 30) as well as predominantly male (70%) (ibid: 28) and highly educated. The survey found a high level of support for the norm of objectivity with only a small minority (10%) in favour of "advocacy" journalism (ibid: 40). In their self-ascribed left-of-centre ideological orientation, their party-political affiliations (ibid: 36-37), as well as their strong support as a cohort for a range of social democratic precepts (ibid: 30-32), they appear to broadly conform to the picture of professional journalism captured by Gans' (1979) account of journalistic paraideology described in the previous chapter and to the social responsibility normative model.

Owing to its ambiguous relationship to the State, RTÉ has been, to an even greater extent than the print media, not fertile ground for explicit political partisanship-

although the much-debated (and mythologised) influence of the leftist Workers Party or 'Stickies' (see Purcell, 2014 for a discussion) on the broadcaster's political programming point towards some internal political heterogeneity.

3.3.2 Irish PSB and the market

3.3.2.1 The economics of funding PSB

Governmental control of the broadcasting purse strings and regulatory contexts for public and commercial media alike continues to constitute a powerfully influential set of exogenous and endogenous forces on and within RTÉ. On one hand, it has meant that RTÉ has had to be attuned to the sensitivities of the Governments of the day, any of whom if angered could inflict significant damage to RTÉ's balance sheets. On the other, the decision at the outset of the broadcaster's life to force it to rely to a significant degree on commercial revenue (Broadcasting Act 1960: s.20) meant that the organisation was, from the beginning, imbued with a commercial culture (MacConghail, 1984: 66), with a requirement to 'exploit…commercial opportunities' (Broadcasting Act 2009: s.114) later built into its public service "objects".

RTÉ's reliance on commercial income has fluctuated over the decades in accordance with both political and economic climates. Politically, the broadcaster has been subject to governmental reticence to increase or even index-link the license fee (F. Corcoran, 2004: 101), and its capacity to raise commercial income was even for a time politically interfered with (F. Corcoran, 2004: 46).

The collapse of advertising revenue associated with the post-2008 crisis saw commercial revenue dip beneath 50% of total revenue by 2011 (PwC, 2013: 13) but the continuing recalcitrance of the State to make up the shortfall via public funding plunged RTÉ into a deep financial crisis of its own. RTÉ's total funding fell by over 20% since 2007 (ibid) and the organisation has had to implement swingeing cuts in staff and operating costs (Curran, 2014).

Even with collapsing commercial revenue, RTÉ's dual-funded model still relies far more heavily on commercial revenue than most other European public service broadcasters, at 'more than double the EBU average' and almost four times that of other Western European PSBs with a license fee (PwC, 2013: 14). This leaves it deeply vulnerable to economic fluctuations (contributing to intermittent internal financial crises), to the cultural impacts of an increasingly commercial internal culture, and entailing a concomitant restriction of its ability to engage in medium to long term planning, with organisational energies dedicated to retrenchment and the deployment of 'survival strategies' (Steemers, 2003: 129).

Despite RTÉ's outlier status in this regard, it is supported by an orthodoxy shared by broadcasting executives (see for example, Curran, 2011: 21) and politicians that full public funding for RTÉ is both unattainable and undesirable and that the dual-funding model is not only a pragmatic solution to the challenges of delivering public service broadcasting to a small media-saturated market, but a desirable one that forces RTÉ to 'remain close and responsive to its audience' (ibid), affording RTÉ sufficient independence from both market and state.

3.3.2.2 Neoliberalism and the business of broadcasting

The material and ideological imprinting of the state's developmental trajectory on RTÉ extends into the broader structural integration of Irish PSB into the orthodoxies of neoliberalised, rationalised management, both State-led and increasingly self-imposed.

For Murray (2011: 118), this diffusion of marketised economic rationality in RTÉ is symbolised by the practice of externally and self-imposed reviews undertaken by management and financial consultants whose typical proposals of 'free market remedies for the problems of public service' (Bell and Meehan (1989: 106) have entailed, amongst other prescriptions, the promotion of flexibilised labour practices, the creation of an independent commercial production sector and underpinned by a general shift towards an increased organisational concern with economic efficiency.

Hazelkorn (1996: 36), in her analysis of labour restructuring in RTÉ, in addition to noting degraded conditions of staff, goes so far as to speak of the intentions of the recommendations of one consultancy report (Stokes Crowley Kennedy, 1985) as seeking to effect a 'managed privatization' of the broadcaster in its cocktail of 'fiscal and legislative restrictions on the state sector and incentives to the private sector'.

A subsequent RTÉ-led review (RTÉ, 1998) echoed the business focus of these recommendations, most notably in proposing the restructuring of the broadcaster into divisions individually responsible for revenue-generation (Murray, 2011: 126-9). This foreshadowed the later restructuring of the broadcaster into six 'Integrated Business Divisions' (ibid: 136), and is described by Murray as an explicit effort aimed at imposing 'an economic, quasi-commercial rationality on the organisation' (ibid: 137) that suggests that RTÉ had internalised the prevailing economic orthodoxies of the era.

Such changes weren't restricted to organisational structure or work practices but encompassed an increasing isomorphism with commercial competitors in terms of programme genres and content. Murray's (2011: 41) account of RTÉ's contemporary 'Management by Schedule' affirms a commercially isomorphic structuring role in RTÉ programme-making (see Kinsella, 2005: 7 quoted in Harris, 2005: 115, see also F. Corcoran, 2004: 16 and Quinn, 2001: 91).

Whilst helping accomplish the avoidance of overall institutional ghettoisation within a 'monastery model' of PSB (Jakubowicz, 2004: 284), this programming strategy has nonetheless come at a high cost, including an organisational bifurcation between "core" PSB functions and those run on a de facto or explicitly commercial basis. These aspects of its development mean that RTÉ cannot be considered a 'classical' PSB in the BBC mould, but as a 'semi-commercial' (ibid) type.

These costs are captured in the critique of *Sit Down and Be Counted* (Doolan et al.,

1969: 231), penned by a number of RTÉ resignees only a decade into the broadcaster's existence. The authors point to the imposition of 'systematised managerial techniques on creative people' as deeply 'culturally formative' (ibid: 234), embedding positivist philosophies of communication and management and leading to creative atrophy and suppressing critical broadcasting impulses. In particular, echoing Bourdieu's (1995: 42) critique of the formative impact of rationalised audience research on programming, they point to the establishment of the TAM ratings system in Ireland as the 'commercial basis of a system which began to regulate programming schedules', whose 'endless ramifications' (Doolan et al., 1969: 328) on programme production encompassed managerial interference in programming (ibid: 91) and extended to the internalisation of commercial and entertainment logics by programme makers (ibid: 329). Elsewhere, Watson (1996) has described the tensions to RTÉ's role in linguistic preservation and development engendered by its commercial imperatives.

3.3.2.3 From PSB to PSM

Recent RTÉ strategic policy documents and speeches from senior management suggest that the transition from a 'legacy' public service broadcaster to what RTÉ now describes on its website as 'Ireland's national public-service media organisation' (RTÉ, 2015a) is conceived as a mainly technological transition, entailing a minimally differentiated continuity with the traditional PSB mission.

Today, the strategic priorities identified by RTÉ involve, above all, consolidating its position in a multi-platform digital media environment, leaving intact the core ideologies of public service and the bases of its legitimation. This is indicated not least not by its justification for the continued institutionalisation of PSM in a mono-organisation configuration on the basis of its capacity to act as guarantor of cultural distinctiveness. As suggested by the broadcaster's Director General Noel Curran in a recent major strategic document, '[A]s a small country, Ireland needs a media organisation that has the scale and resources to guarantee a distinctive Irish voice and Irish perspective on the world' (RTÉ, 2013a: 7)- all the more necessary given the threat posed by globalising forces that are 'diluting

national and local culture like never before' (ibid: 6).

That the broadcaster still embraced a role in nation-building was suggested in a previous speech (Curran, 2011: 28) in which it was suggested that the broadcaster 'must be part of building Ireland's new future', contributing to 'Ireland's renewal and sense of common purpose' (ibid: 29). That this would be accomplished through isomorphic adaptation to political and State-defined economic exigencies was suggested by Curran's summary of the necessary changes to consolidate RTÉ's position for the future as including the need to forge a 'leaner, more focused, more competitive, more open, partnership based organisation with an enhanced digital presence' (ibid: 4), citing enhanced coverage of 'Innovation, including Science and Technology' (ibid: 28) as one of six 'output priorities' (ibid: 29) for RTÉ.

In his discussion of the broadcaster's five-year strategy document (RTÉ, 2013a), Cullinane (2013) argued that the promises of a more open and partnership-oriented RTÉ mainly amount to strategic *commercial* partnerships, in the interests of supporting 'the leadership of Ireland's digital economy' (RTÉ, 2013a: 188, see also RTÉ, 2014b) which aimed toward rapprochement with Ireland's private media sector who have long sought a curtailment of RTÉ's dominant position.

Despite a rocky transition from analogue broadcasting to a digital terrestrial platform (F. Corcoran, 2004), RTÉ's technological adaptation has yielded demonstrable success, evidenced in strong take-ups of its digital terrestrial service and online catch-up services (RTÉ, 2015c: 8).

Yet, in line with Bardoel and Brants' (2003) suggestion that neoliberal orthodoxies have had an impact not just on the economics of public service broadcasting but on its rationales for existence, we might conceive of RTÉ's 'institutional entrepreneurship' (Spicer and Sewell, 2010: 915) as entailing the retasking of PSM along increasingly neoliberal lines. This is exemplified by how its reorientation as a global media player with an Irish voice, and as a domestic

media organisation at harmony with Ireland's commercial creative technological class reflects a continuity within a minimally differentiated consensualist frame of national goals.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore the extent to which the Irish public sphere in general and public service broadcasting in particular has developed the institutionalised capacities for the kind of radical pluralism requisite to effectively subject contemporary crisis management to critique and increase the likelihood of administrative crises progressing to a broader crisis of political legitimation.

Principally, the chapter identified public broadcasting's imbrication in a conservative culture- political, identitarian and developmental- and ongoing subjection to the broader field of power, as exerting a strong delimiting effect on its critical potential.

In the first instance, it was suggested that the character of the hegemonic political culture in early 20th century Ireland- Catholic, nationalistic, authoritarian, secretive, suspicious of external influences, and valourising of the class interests and bodily hexis of a narrow portion of society- became naturalised in the character of the bourgeois public sphere. Linked with the depoliticisation of a heretofore more ideologically distinctive and diverse mass media and its concentration in ever-fewer hands, the journalistic field in which public service broadcasting would develop would be one marked by material and ideological alignment with power-holders in Irish society.

The subsequent modernisation of Irish society and economy in the second half of the century proceeded along lines that protected the material interests of those power-holders, but whose ideological character was masked in part by the integrative power of the nationalist consensus to anaesthetise interest conflicts, providing an environment particularly propitious for the naturalisation of

neoliberal policy and governmentality more generally.

In a society marked by low levels of politically-institutionalised ideological pluralism (evidenced in part by the dominance of conservative governance of minimally differentiated hues since the foundation of the state), the intrinsically hegemonic tendencies of public service broadcasting were always likely to be particularly strongly activated. The dominance of the hegemonic Catholic-nationalist identity project meant that the centripetal logics of public service broadcasting were not subjected to strong countervailing forces.

Co-ordination with the state and its aims was and is coercively achieved through control of PSB's governing legislation, appointments, funding, and the background threat of further interference. Ideologically, this is accomplished through mimetic and normative isomorphism with the bureaucratic and professional habitus of RTÉ's administrative and journalistic classes.

Both have a close affinity with the dominant bourgeois habitus, with the former representing an extension of state bureaucracy (and mimicking its propensity for secrecy (Quinn, 2001, F. Corcoran, 2004: 24)) and the latter, by virtue of a combination of class position and professional ideologies embodying a version of social responsibility tinged with a particular concern for social cohesion.

RTÉ's inexorable integration into broader domestic and global media markets via private-sector isomorphism in organisational structure, goal-setting, measurement and accountability practices represents a further vector of material and ideological consonance with broader State developmental ideologies. Dovetailing with RTÉ's close ideological proximity to the nation, the broadcaster is rendered vulnerable to self-instrumentalisation in the service of national goals.

RTE's imbrication in a centre right-leaning, commercial journalistic field represents a further structuring force, profoundly influencing both its agenda-setting practices (Browne, 2012a) and shaping the ideological character of the pool of potential recruits.

The professional insistence on autonomy from the public renders Irish PSB ever more tied to the field of power. That its pact with the political sphere of (relative) autonomy for responsibility constrains its constitutional role to prudence (Blumler, 1992: 13), strengthens its general alignment with the hegemonic political culture, and allows for its ready instrumentalisation by the state suggests its Faustian character.

The Irish PSB model can be described, like its British counterpart, as a project of 'consensus broadcasting', a 'harmony model' that 'presumes the existence of a reasonably homogenous and unified culture and society' (Butler, 1991: 100). This is an outlook that powerfully constrains its counter-hegemonic potential.

The vanguardist tendencies frequently attributed to RTÉ in propelling Ireland's social modernisation must be seen within the context of the strictures of a broader value alignment between broadcaster and state. While the discursive space allowing for the challenging of orthodoxies in the private sphere of, for example, sexual mores, has undoubtedly expanded and was at least partially facilitated by public service broadcasting (Doyle-O'Neill, 2013), RTÉ's control over the sluice gate for the critical thematisation of matters pertaining to the present crises- notably, economic justice- is mediated by less propitious circumstances.

It may be suggested in conclusion that the possibilities for critical, counter-hegemonic and democratising responses by either the political system, public sphere in general and public service broadcasting in particular to the economic and democratic crises of the post-2008 conjuncture were not promising, and that the 'morbid symptoms' of democratic crisis were likely to be elided by the normative sensoria of Irish public service broadcasting. This was likely both because the character of the justice claims involved, and their subaltern carriers of latent counter-publics (Calhoun, 2010) resonate poorly with institutional sensoria weakly calibrated to their frequency.

Although similarly adopting the basic liberal core, institutional structure, modes of rational-legal authority and management and professional ethos of its UK counterpart, Irish public service broadcasting's subjection to a political culture characterised by a strong Catholic communitarianism contributed to a dilution of PSB's characteristic liberalism- its main potential source of counter-hegemonic potential- in favour of its amplified communitarian republican moment vulnerable to an over-substantialisation of 'the pre-existing ethos of community in a manner that could only colonize public discourse' (O'Mahony, 2013: 41).

If public service broadcasting represents, on the whole, a poor candidate for a media-institutional form capable of thematising and responding critically to democratic crisis, the character of its embedding in the Irish media system and the Irish political opportunity structure, with its poorly-institutionalised pluralism and powerful integrative tendencies, renders Irish public service broadcasting even less of a likely counter-hegemonic force. Rather, it is constrained to a role, 'out of respect for national consensus', to a position where 'the main obligations of public broadcasting were to reflect the pluralism of society and diversity of audience, to avoid offense to significant streams of opinion, and to promote cultural values' (Christians et al., 2009: 10).

Chapter 4: From Field to Institutional Analysis: A Critical Empirical Approach

…editors, writers, contributors, and analysts, cannot but be influenced by the prevailing climate at a given point in time.

Gerry O'Regan, former Editor of the 'Irish Independent' (O'Regan, 2015: 1)

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter's exploration of the formative political, economic, professional and cultural influences on public service broadcasting's development in Ireland go some way towards explaining the character of its normative democratic horizons. Recognising Benson's (2006: 196) observation that journalism, as a semi-autonomous professional field, '*refracts* rather than simply reflects the play of external forces' (italics in original), a programme of research is called for that is attuned to identifying the determinants and modes of refraction. This necessitates closer empirical attention to how the specificities of the present crises are navigated in the practice of public service broadcasting.

In selecting the general institutional locus of empirical interest, of foremost importance is the consideration of the sources of public service broadcasting's power in the political public sphere. This project's interest in *media power* arises from the recognition of the critical role of media in shaping crisis construals insofar as they, according to Habermas (2006: 419) 'select and process politically relevant content and thus intervene in both the formation of public opinions and the distribution of influential interests', and exert power via the 'the choice of information and format, in the shape and style of programs, and in the effects of its diffusion- in agenda setting, or the priming and framing of issues'.

This suggests the desirability of an empirical focus on aspects of the institution most proximate to the production and dissemination of political meaning, guiding

the selection of *news and current affairs* as the principal institutional site of analysis chosen on their basis of their centrality to the daily production of political meaning and sheer pervasiveness (Cottle, 2000a: 20).

This chapter comprises two main sections. First, a brief review is offered into how empirical work in the 20th and 21st centuries undertaken by scholars of mass communication and media sociology has contributed to the understanding of the roles played by news media in circuits of political, social, economic and cultural political power. This is followed by a detailed specification of this project's empirical research agenda, entailing the selection and justification of specific research methods and the particulars of their deployment in the field.

4.2 Studying news workers, news institutions and news agendas: a review

4.2.1 Major research traditions

Schudson (1991: 142) notes that formal sociological scholarship on journalistic work dates back only to the 1950s. He delineates three dominant contemporary traditions of researching the social production of news since then- *social organisational, political-economic* and *cultural*. For Tuchman (2002: 78), these traditions represented counter-reactions to the consensualist orientation of structural functionalist approaches (e.g. Parsons, 1951) to the understanding of the role of the media in society (Murdock, 2002: 55).

The three contemporary traditions focus, respectively, on the interactions among and between individuals and institutions, on the place of the media in broader systemic complexes, and on news as a cultural form with ideological implications.

Empirical studies influenced by these traditions have emphasised the usefulness of attending to, *inter alia,* the minutiae of the news production process through ethnographic observation; the self-conception of journalistic professionals through interviews, surveys and similar approaches; the implications of the embeddedness of media organisations in political, economic and cultural

contexts; the textual analysis of news output, the fruit of journalistic labour; and the reception of journalistic output by audiences.

This review offers an attenuated summary of how research in these theoretical and methodological traditions have helped illuminate some of the key factors that structure media and journalistic relationships to power. The focus is placed on scholarship exploring the determinants of media agenda-setting (what the media invites us to think about and how) and how the media may be said to represent a 'vehicle of influence' (Curran, 2002: 158) for those engaged in media agenda-building ('those forces which set the media's agenda' (Reese, 2001: 174)). In so doing, it reflects Reese's (2001: 178) media-sociological classification of mediating influences that reflects a broad gamut from micro pole of *individual* influences to mezzo-level influences at the level of *professional norms* and *organisational routines and cultures* and macro poles of *political-economic* and *cultural-ideological* contexts.

For reasons of focus, the voluminous literature on media 'effects' (for reviews, see Curran, 2002: 157-165 and McCullagh, 2002: 151-68) is not explored, nor is a strong position taken on the extent to which *media agenda-setting* (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) results in *public agenda transfer* (the extent to which audiences 'acquire the same set of saliences as those present in the media' (McCullagh, 2002: 22). As Murdock (2002: 57) puts it, in this debate, 'accounts of powerful media have continually rubbed up against celebrations of audience refusal and resistance'. These accounts are characterised by the existence of the twin extremes of, on one hand, 'semiotic democracy' (Fiske, 1987), which suggests that any and all meanings may be derived from cultural artefacts, and on the other, views of the audience as 'passive dupes' (Taylor and Harris, 2008: 4) that unproblematically absorb the 'encoder's preferred meaning' of the media message in question (Bignell, 2002: 102).

The 'multidimensional quality of audiences' practices' (Dahlgren, 1998) is acknowledged here, where potential exists for both conformity and resistance to dominant readings of media messages- whether described in terms of 'cognitive

bricolage' (Horlick-Jones et al., 2007) or 'structured polysemy' (Dyer, 1979). The position is taken that as providers of a great deal of information about the world beyond our direct personal experiences, journalistically mediated representations of the world have at least some social significance both with regard to public issue salience and the interpretive frameworks in which matters are understood, cueing particular audience understandings (Curran, 1999: 9) that reflect distinctive modes of interpellation.

4.2.2 The social production of news

In his review of ethnographic studies on the sociology of news, Cottle (2003, see also Schudson, 1989, 1991, 2000 and Tuchman, 2002) points to the distinctive contributions of early 'formative' studies of newsroom 'gatekeeping' (Lewin, 1947) practices, with studies including those by White (1950), Gieber (1964), and Epstein (1973, 1975) offering compelling early evidence of the stability of professional editorial judgements across institutional contexts.

Later studies came to see newswork as a form of knowledge "production", whose character reflected the product of a range of influences, including organisational, professional and cultural contexts (Tuchman, 2002: 78). Schudson (1991: 143) describes how social-organisational approaches aim to 'understand how journalists' efforts on the job are constrained by organizational and occupational routines' (see also McCullagh, 2002: 74).

Under the influence of social constructionism and ethnomethodology, research adopting a social-organisational approach utilised observational and interview techniques (Tuchman, 2002: 81) to explore the formative impacts of professional socialisation, daily newsgathering routines, the division of journalistic labour and how journalistic ideologies are translated into daily practice.

Journalism's class composition (Gitlin, 1980: 259, Rapple, 1997: 75, M. Corcoran, 2004), working in tandem with credentialisation and the shared values of a professionalising craft (M. Corcoran, 2004: 40, Elliott and Golding, 1979,

Patterson and Donsbach, 1996: 466, Croteau, 1999) have also been identified as playing an important contemporary role in shaping the dominant journalistic habitus (see also Miliband, 1969).

Studies like those of Breed (1955) and Sigelman (1973) brought an organisational approach to the analysis of journalistic socialisation, shedding light on the determinants of professional conformity, deviance and control structures, while Shoemaker's (1991) contribution to gatekeeping theory emphasised the diversity of gatekeeping practices that take place within organisational and inter-organisational contexts, shaped by social, cultural and institutional factors.

A series of 'substantive' newsroom ethnographies of the 1970s and 1980s, encompassing those undertaken by, for example, Epstein (1973); Altheide and Rasmussen (1976); Murphy (1976); Burns (1977); Tracey (1978); Schlesinger (1979); Tuchman (1973, 1978); Gans (1979); Bantz et al. (1980); Fishman (1980); Gitlin (1983); Ericson et al. (1987); and Cottle (1993) saw researchers immerse themselves for often extended periods of time in the milieu of newsroom life- mainly in the context of American and British print and, later, broadcast media (Tuchman, 2002: 81). Work by Golding and Elliott (1979), Devereux (1998) and Cawley (2008) represent rare examples of Irish studies that deployed these methods.

Cottle (2007: 1) summarises their contributions as helping elucidate the many implications of the 'daily routines, bureaucratic nature, competitive ethos, professional ideologies, source dependencies and cultural practices of the news media'. He credits their findings with helping to qualify neo-functionalist accounts of media roles, from 'instrumentalist ideas of news control and conspiracy' to 'structurally "over-determined" theories of news as ideological reproduction' (ibid: 4) Nonetheless, he takes the view that the substantive ethnographies, by revealing the powerful structuring and constraining influence of journalistic "routines" which worked in tandem with the ideology of objectivity (Soloski, 1989, Hall et al., 1978), helped establish the reasons both why news took

on a 'relatively standardised form' across disparate outlets (Cottle, 2007: 4) and tended to evince a pliant ideological orientation towards 'social and political elites and the endorsement of the prevailing capitalist social system' (ibid).

Owing to the 'limited carrying capacity' (Zhu, 1992) of media and their status as 'rational enterprises' (Tuchman, 1973: 111), *organised selectivity* is inevitable in determining the thematic range and breadth in content of the topical agendas carried by media. Routinised newsgathering has been widely identified as a crucially formative response to the practical, technical and professional exigencies of daily newswork.

Under the influence of social constructionism, studies demonstrated how the "facts" gathered by newsworkers, far from reflecting a 'reality-out-there-to-be-described' (Molotch and Lester, 1974: 105) rather represent 'pertinent information gathered by professionally validated methods specifying the relationship between what is known and how it is known' (Tuchman, 1978: 82-3). Institutionalised 'typifications' (Tuchman, 1973) facilitated consistent and routinised ways of categorising and dealing with discrete phenomena, including assisting in the advance planning of news to ensure consistency and predictability of the news product (Golding, 1981: 70-1).

Bantz et al. (1980) employed the metaphor of the 'news factory' to describe the rationalised news production process, echoed in Golding and Elliot's (1979: 137) description of broadcast journalism as a 'highly regulated and routine process of manufacturing a cultural product on an electronic production line' whose final product carries 'the marks of the technical and organisational structure from which it emerges'.

News values, or the criteria governing the selection of news, have been the subject of much academic discussion (Brighton and Foy, 2007) not least in terms of their formative impact on what is ruled in and out of news agendas and the terms in which issues are discussed. Formal, oft-cited taxonomies of news values like that of Galtung and Ruge (1965, see also Gans, 1979, Barrat, 1986 and Palmer,

1998) point to their professional, pragmatic, cultural and even psychological determinants. Despite being 'nowhere written down, formally transmitted, or codified' (Hall et al., 1978: 54), scholars have widely observed that news values 'seem to be widely shared as between the different news media...and form a core element in the professional socialisation, practice and ideology' (ibid). Shared production routines and codes of professional ethics promote a high level of material and ideological consonance between journalistic production in newsrooms operating in both public service and commercial institutional contexts (Schudson, 2000: 188, Tunstall, 1971, Golding and Elliott, 1979, Sparks and Splichal, 1989).

What can be considered the 'cardinal news value' (Hall et al., 1978: 53) of news-that which is 'extra-ordinary', or which is considered a departure from what is considered 'normal' (Soloski, 1989) means that it is a practical imperative for journalists to 'share assumptions about what is normal in society' (Soloski, 1989: 215). This may be identified as at the heart of a host of entrenched tendencies of news, including its 'events orientation' (McCullagh, 2002: 87), its inherent affinity with 'episodic' (Iyengar, 1991) occurrences, focusing on the 'discrete and disconnected' (Curran, 2002: 163), its 'transient and ephemeral quality' (Park, 1940), and its temporal emphasis on recency and immediacy (Roshco, 1975).

This is crystallised in Gitlin's (1980: 263) line of critique, in which he argues that by focusing on the 'novel event, not the underlying, enduring condition; the person, not the group; the visible conflict, not the deep consensus; the fact that "advances the story", not the one that explains or enlarges it', the very ways in which news is defined helps ensure that it 'plays out within a field of terms and premises which does not overstep the hegemonic boundary' (see also Hall, 1973: 183, Edelman, 1988).

Affinities between news values, the production requirements of routinised newsgathering, and professional ideologies can be readily identified by exploring patterns of news *sourcing* (see Manning, 2001), defined here in the expansive sense as referring to 'individuals and organisations that either directly or

indirectly influence or shape the news' (McCullagh, 2002: 66).

That routinised newsgathering practices tend to result in a dominance of 'official' sources shaping and appearing in the news is one backed up by a large amount of scholarship (e.g. Sigal, 1973, Hoynes, 2002, Schudson, 1991: 148), and may be explained explored with regard to a combination of professional, political-economic and social-organisational imperatives.

Lippmann's (1922) suggestion that the professional imperative of facticity favours sources of news with a reliable and consistent 'machinery of record' was later followed up by Fishman's (1980) social-organisational exploration of how the journalistic division of labour in the form of the 'beat' system favoured well-placed institutional sources who could provide an 'information subsidy' (Gandy, 1982: 61) to resource-constrained journalists. The practice of making available pre-packaged news easily available for journalists at convenient intervals (see also Tuchman, 1978: 21) meant that journalists, in practice, 'leave much of the task of selection of news to its sources' (Sigal, 1973).

Arguing that access to the news as a source 'reflects the social structure outside the newsroom', (Gans, 1979: 81), indeed reflecting the 'hierarchies of nation and society (ibid: 119), Gans concludes that journalists are 'repeatedly brought into contact with a limited number of the same types of sources' (ibid: 144) (see also Grabe, Zhou and Barnett, 1999 and Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994). He argues that developing symbiotic relationships with sources whose preferred qualities of availability, reliability and authoritativeness lead journalists to privilege powerful, official sources who are granted 'habitual' (Molotch and Lester, 1974) access to news agendas by mere virtue of their standing- or their capacity to create staged 'pseudo-events', made-for-news set pieces designed to resonate with news values (Boorstin, 1992).

Other studies have suggested that the journalistic reliance on powerful sources is suggestive of more than expedient newsgathering but speaks to underlying affinities with power associated with professional and extra-professional

ideologies and paraideologies. Hall et al. (1978: 58) locate in the consensualist orientation of news media allied to legal and professional imperatives for "objective" and "authoritative" statements a tendency for journalists to seek sources accredited on the basis of institutional power, representativeness or disinterestedness which produces a 'systematically structured *over-accessing* to the media of those in powerful and privileged institutional positions' (italics in original).

They further suggest that this deference extends to ceding the definitional ground of events and issues to these sources, which they describe as '*primary definers*' of topics (Hall et al., 1978: 58, italics in original), placing challengers in a weak, reactive position against a dominant framing. This reduces the media's autonomous role to that of secondary definer status, which for the authors demonstrates how professional practices of sourcing '*ensures that the media, effectively but "objectively", play a key role in reproducing the dominant field of the ruling ideologies*' (ibid: 60, italics in original) (see also Murdock, 1973: 172, 1982)

McChesney and Nichols (2005) suggest that the reliance on official sources has a 'disciplinary effect on the range of legitimate news story', going so far as to conclude that as a consequence, the 'public is at the mercy of those in power to a far greater extent than was the case under partisan journalism'.

4.2.3 Media access: negotiated accounts

Seeking to moderate the 'essentially structuralist' claims of the primary definer thesis while remaining sympathetic to its thrust, Schlesinger (1990) and later Schlesinger and Tumber (1994) helped establish a rebuttal against too strong a conception of elite dominance, on the basis that the constantly shifting sands of hegemony necessitated the need to take *source competition* seriously.

Factors exogenous to the media, like political or economic crises and inter-elite disagreements (Hallin, 1986, Miller, 1993) as well as endogenous characteristics, including the insatiable appetite of news producers for a constant flow of news

(Altheide and Rasmussen, 1976), the conflict imperative of news (Bantz, 1985, Gitlin, 1980: 274), and the professional norm of balance and impartiality (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994, Golding and Middleton, 1982: 119) suggest the existence of both structural and contingent opportunities for profitable 'issue entrepreneurship' (Cracknell, 1993) by oppositional and marginal voices not granted routine access to the mediated public sphere.

A body of research (e.g. Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994, Curran, 1990, Gamson and Modigliani, 1989, Eder, 1992) has demonstrated the ways in which groups seeking inclusion in news agendas have, with varying but tangible degrees of success, strategically oriented themselves to the media in ways that have demonstrated the porosity of the media's agenda-building capacities.

This has been accomplished by, amongst other strategies, providing information subsidies to journalists in the manner of more powerful sources (Gitlin, 1980), the strategic promotion of issue 'frames', comprised of symbolic packages calculated to resonate with both journalistic paraideologies and with 'existing chains of cultural meaning' (Hansen, 2010: 101, see also Manning, 2001: 156 and Bosso, 1989), and taking advantages of moments where issues have escaped the 'bounds of cultural consensus' (Bennett, 1996: 379).

There are good reasons, however, to view the media as merely a 'half-open door' McCullagh (2002: 54) to both non-official sources and challengers to dominant ideologies. For one, while Goldenberg's (1975: 47) study demonstrated that 'resource-poor' groups can mobilise non-economic resources like 'size, legitimacy and credibility' to gain access to news agendas with the help of attention-grabbing 'stunts' (Molotch and Lester, 1974), he argues that the real challenge lay in securing consistent or 'regularised' (Goldenberg, 1975: 137) access. This leads him to conclude that these groups lacked the 'political, symbolic and material resources' (Manning, 2001: 159) possessed by resource-rich groups who were better able to 'initiate and sustain media contacts' (ibid). While elites may be caught off balance temporarily, allowing challengers to catapult an issue and even their chosen frames onto the media agenda, powerful sources are often

able to reassert source- and frame- dominance by either co-opting an issue (Hansen, 1993: 160) or by dint of their material and cultural advantages, able to assert routinised access following the establishment of a story (Linne, 1993, McCullagh, 2010).

Elsewhere, Gitlin (1980) argues that the *partial accommodation* of oppositional voices like social movements represents a crucial means of maintaining overall hegemonies in liberal democracies, citing what he views as the U.S media's hegemonic boundary management in relation to anti-war critiques in the 1960s. While successfully enlisting the media in a shift of the hegemonic terrain regarding the Vietnam war, he argues that oppositional demands were typically accommodated only after being refracted, 'fragmented', even 'domesticated' (Gitlin, 1980: 270) with news producers filtering out 'demands, individuals and frames which do not fundamentally contradict the dominant hegemonic principles' (ibid: 270-1) of capitalist society (see also Downing, 1980).

This study, and others like it, implies that the journalistic support for hegemonic formations 'operates in a reformist key' (Gitlin, 1980: 280). Hallin's (1994) suggestion that for media to remain effective ideological institutions they need to attend to their own legitimation suggests that the provision of at least occasional space for dissenting perspectives is one born of necessity.

Nonetheless, it is reasonable to conclude that the power to create and distribute meaning still resides with centres of material and political power (Deacon and Golding, 1994: 203), and that news media 'do not easily represent demands, movements, and frames which are inchoate, subtle, and most deeply subversive' (Gitlin, 1980: 271) of dominant hegemonies.

Elsewhere, bodies of work (Ettema and Glasser, 1998, Lewis et al., 2005, Eliasoph, 1998) have demonstrated the marginality of direct public opinion within journalistic output, particularly in terms of their routine exclusion as citizens with political perspectives (Lewis et al., 2005: 49, see also Cottle, 2000b, Lewis, 2001). This may in part by predicated on limitations in what journalists know

about their audiences (Ettema and Whitney, 1994) and ambiguities in the extent to which they *want* to know, crystallised by Gans' (1979: 230) finding that reporters and editors 'had little knowledge about the actual audience and rejected feedback from it' (see also Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002).

4.2.4 Media power and political economy

The idea that 'different ways of financing and organising cultural production have traceable consequences for the range of discourses and representations in the public domain' (Golding and Murdock, 1991: 15) is at the heart of political-economic approaches to studying the media, which focus on relationships between the 'prevailing structures of political and economic power in a society and the cultural products of that society' (Sheehan, 1987). Thinkers in political-economic traditions have linked the association between journalism and power with the imbrication of media organisations in distinct political and economic contexts, citing the critical influence of 'media ownership, advertising, the structure and logic of the market' (Curran, 2002: 110). It is a category that includes the work of Murdock and Golding (1977), Murdock (1982), Curran (1980, 1986), McChesney (1999), Bagdikian (2004) and Herman and Chomsky (1988).

As a heterodox analytical paradigm, different strands of political economy attribute varying levels of significance to the detail of the actual news production process and view the material impact of ownership structures on media discourses in different ways.

Some radical functionalist accounts which as a whole 'relate[s] the outcome of the news process to the structure of the state and the economy and to the economic foundation of the news organisation' (Schudson, 1991: 143) take the view that news output merely reflect structural political-economic imperatives. As an exemplar of radically functionalist political-economic thinking, Herman and Chomsky's (1988) 'propaganda model' emphasises the decisive impact of corporate ownership in terms of, on one hand, the shared interest of proprietors

in keeping oppositional discourses out of the public sphere in order to help maintain their class advantages; and on the other, how an institutional dependence on advertising ineluctably shapes media output. News organisations on this account must deliver the right kinds of audiences on a consistent basis and to 'create an environment in which advertising messages will be seen in the most sympathetic light' (McCullagh, 2002: 79, see also McManus, 1992).

While the existence of a long term trend towards media concentration is well-established (Curran, 2002: 130, McChesney, 1999), some of the more totalising aspects of functionalist political economy have frequently been disputed, not least by its elision of countervailing tendencies that pull the media in counter-hegemonic directions (see Curran, 2002: 151-55 for a summary). Querying some of the assumptions of more radical traditions, Curran (2002, p.130) points, for example, to a decrease in direct proprietorial control in the modern era, with media owners more likely to be 'market-oriented pragmatists'. Other strands, influenced by French neo-Marxism (e.g. Gramsci, 1971) recognise the 'semi-autonomous status of media' (Tuchman, 2002: 81) but suggest that media 'nevertheless 'exercise hegemony by limiting both the specific agendas of the political process and the cultural universes made available through media representations'.

While political economy approaches have ably and productively demonstrated structural affinities between commercial media enterprises and national, regional and global political and economic configurations, definitively linking this to news output is not straightforward. The 'convergence hypothesis' (Steemers, 1999: 50) referred to in Chapter 2 suggests evidence that the 'style and ethos' of programming on public broadcasters differs little from private competitors, a theme discussed by Brants (1998: 328) with respect to similar treatments of news and current affairs by European public and private broadcasters and Hoynes' (2002) analysis of US public television.

More broadly, the political-economic critique of news as a commodity suggests, *inter alia*, that topics that that are costly to cover, which are seen as potentially

alienating viewers or insufficiently interesting to those sections of the audience most coveted by advertisers are less likely to be covered (McCullagh, 2002: 79-80), and that the economic imperative to hold viewers' attentions leads to presentational styles that favour the dramatic, the entertaining, as well as emphasising a 'human interest' orientation (van Zoonen, 1991, 1994, McCullagh, 2002: 59).

Other influences on output exerted by the economic organisation of media enterprises include a long-term reduction in media pluralism, driven in part by the high entry costs for new entrants (Curran, 2002: 148), a factor associated with the decline of radical press in the UK and elsewhere; the homogenising influence of an increasing reliance on news agency services as newsroom staffing levels shrink (Krauss, 2000, Davies, 2008, Gitlin, 1980: 273); the formative influence of a competitive journalistic ethos (Ehrlich, 1995); and the impact of advertising (Curran, 1986).

While political-economic accounts tend to lay the stress on the economic rather than the political (Schudson, 1991), political influences on the media are legion. They include a 'wide range of coercive, regulatory and patronage powers' (Curran, 2002: 148) possessed by the state, which for Curran include legal limits on freedom of expression, partisan allocation of newspaper, TV and radio licenses, control over public broadcasting governance, control over regulatory bodies, and even the provision of financial aid to pro-government media- all of which have been deployed by different states at different times in the interests of instrumentalising the media as an agency of social control (Curran, 1978).

4.2.5 Cultural influences and the analysis of news output

Devereux (1995: 111, see also Curran, 2002: 108) writes that a 'growing interest in the ideological functions of the media' from the 1960s onward saw the utilisation of qualitative textual analysis methodologies like frame and discourse analysis to discern 'the ways in which news texts produce particular perspectives on social reality, while blurring or obscuring others' (Tuchman, 2002: 81).

Cultural approaches emphasise 'the constraining force of broad cultural traditions and symbolic systems' Schudson (1991: 143) over the news production process. It recognises that news inevitably 'draws upon the ideas, images and assumptions that are embedded in cultural tradition' (Curran, 2002: 128, see also Hallin and Mancini, 1984). Culturalist perspectives developed partly from a recognition that 'day-today "relative autonomy" of the journalist and news producers' was a reality in most modern media organisations (Hall et al. 1978: 57, cited in Curran, 2002: 113), leading researchers to 'pay more attention than before to wider cultural and ideological influences' (Curran, 2002: 113).

Given that cultural approaches to the analysis of news texts have encompassed a broad theoretical and methodological and topical diversity, it is sufficient here to refer to some historic and contemporary work particularly germane to the concerns of this project: specifically, research on media representations of social conflict and the present economic crisis.

Van Dijk (1988: 9) notes that the British tradition of ideological analysis of media output in the last quarter of the 20th century frequently focused on issues of class. In this vein, Curran (2002: 109) highlights the contribution of the Glasgow University Media Group, which made a 'concerted assault on a liberal conception of public service broadcasting as a disinterested source of information and balanced forum of public debate', demonstrating in a series of studies in the 70s and 80s that 'much television reporting reflected the assumptions of the powerful' (ibid) (see Glasgow University Media Group 1976, 1980, 1982, 1985).

Curran (2002) highlights other studies, including those by Halloran, Elliot and Murdock (1970), Cohen (1980), Young (1974), Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts (1978) and Beharrell and Philo (1977) which have looked at media representations of subaltern and "deviant" groups of various kinds (including protesters, youth gangs, muggers, and drug users). These took an interest in patterns of selection and bureaucratic constraints on newsmaking as well as exploring how issues are diagnosed and the extent to which news texts supported

dominant ideologies. Despite methodological and theoretical diversity, these broadly argued that the media construction of these issues was to a strong degree 'consonant with dominant interests' (ibid: 109), concluding in Hall's (1977: 340) terms that media frames issues in terms drawn from 'a very limited ideological or explanatory repertoire'.

The apparent readiness by which the voices and perspectives of the powerful are transmitted through patterns of issue representation without transgressing formal professional, institutional or regulatory prohibitions on partiality is emphasised by Schudson (1991: 144) who cites Bennett's (1982: 306) suggestion that broadcast news programmes 'achieve their ideological effectivity *precisely through* their observation of the *statutory* requirements of balance and impartiality' (italics in original).

This may be explained in terms of the cultural contingency governing the activation of journalistic balance and impartiality norms referred to in Chapter 3, with issues and issue positions existing within spheres of consensus, deviance or legitimate controversy (Hallin, 1986) rendering certain speech 'uncontested' or 'contested' (Gamson and Stuart, 1992).

Cognisant of the contingent status of the values underpinning issue representation, Cottle (2008: 858) cautions against the risk of adopting static assumptions about news framings based on past research, pointing to contemporary research around, for example, protest and demonstration reporting in a range of areas including the environment and war that he sees as pointing to the 'variable, shifting and sometimes more progressive alignments of the news media's reporting…than in the past'.

Contemporary literature on media representations of financial and economic crisis has further reinforced prior findings in relation to elite sourcing patterns and ideological affinities with political and economic power, which frequently conspire to produce framings of crisis that have supported neoliberal crisis construals and crisis management. Research by Berry, (2013), Wahl-Jorgensen et

al. (2013), Schechter (2009) Tambini (2010) and pre-crisis research by Davis (2000), Durham (2007), Kantola (2006) emphasises, variously, 'the role of elite sourcing, financial constraints, political pressure, advertising, deficiencies in journalistic training and resources and the impact of public relations' (Berry, 2013: 254) as contributing both to failures in anticipating crisis and a subsequent lack of critical engagement with elite explanations (see Marron, 2010 and Fraser, 2009 for further discussion in relation to UK journalism and Starkman (2009), Harber (2009) and Huxford (2012) on the US journalism context).

Analyses of European dimensions of the contemporary financial crisis and its aftermath have demonstrated, in particular, media tendencies to elide systemic critique in favour of reproducing hegemonic crisis frames, in particular colluding in scapegoating the governments and citizens of peripheral nations (Mylonas, 2015), a finding also established by Tracy (2012) and Sarikakis (2012), although Tzogopoulous (2013) identified a substantial media emphasis on the humanitarian dimensions of crisis in Greece.

A small but burgeoning critical Irish literature emerging from the post-2008 crises has begun to look at the role played by Irish journalism in proffering particular accounts of crisis and evaluating solutions. McCullagh's (2010) argument that the discursive space opened up for challengers in the immediate wake of crisis was short-lived, as a 'discursive fightback' by a coalition of Irish political and economic elites successfully helped reframe the crisis in ways more congruent with their material and ideological interests is one that has been supported by subsequent evidence.

Both Mercille (2014a, see also 2014b, 2014c) and Silke (2014, see also Preston and Silke, 2011) undertook studies using quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to discern the ideological orientation of a range of organs of the agenda-setting Irish press during a series of pre-crisis and in-crisis critical discourse moments. Both come to similar conclusions about the prevailing ideological orientation of the Irish press, which they characterise as conservative and supportive of both policies which led to the crisis and crisis management

techniques deployed by the state. Also in a political-economic vein, Fahy et al. (2010) found from a series of interviews with financial journalists' pre-crisis evidence of close relationships with their sources, contributing to soft reporting and even advocacy of financial interests, suggesting the belated journalistic adoption of a critical orientation only after the onset of acute crisis symptoms (see also the testimony to the Banking Inquiry made by Browne, 2015: 841). Cawley's (2012) press analysis found evidence of framing consonant with a favourable orientation toward neoliberal responses to crisis, notably via the consistent 'othering' of the public sector which is counterposed against the need for the state to adopt the logics of private sector in the interests of securing economic recovery. Elsewhere, Rafter (2014: 606) confirmed studies undertaken elsewhere that demonstrate the dominance of official sources in news discourse, arguing that coverage in the programmes analysed reflected a 'narrow insider perspective' and told through the eyes of (mostly male) journalists, pro-guarantee politicians, city and business group representatives'.

4.3 Methodological approach

4.3.1 Towards a methodological synthesis

The overall methodological approach is shaped in the first instance by the aim to complement the field approach utilised in Chapters 2 and 3 by undertaking a study focusing on the observed institutional enactment of public service journalism's field relations vis-à-vis the political, economic and civil society spheres and that, through the exploration of practices of inclusion, representation and participation, goes beyond the specificities of contemporary crisis and helps discern Irish PSB's overall approach to communicative democracy in the public sphere.

This is accomplished by the adoption of a pluralistic methodological approach that selectively draws on the research traditions discussed above. It aims to combine the utility of social-constructivist accounts in the sociologies of news and work that critically interrogate professional norms and daily practices of

journalistic work in the newsroom; that draws on political-economic and new institutionalist accounts of the affordances and constraints on institutionally-embedded professional autonomy; that recognises the value of critical cultural studies' emphasis on discerning ideological meanings in practices and patterns of representation in journalistic output; and that foregrounds the status of media production as a 'site of ideological-democratic struggle' (Carpentier, 2011) between media professionals, publics and other actors.

On this basis, four methods were applied. Firstly, ethnographic study through direct observation of newsroom work practices was undertaken, allowing the researcher to witness the daily operationalisation of journalistic ideologies and practices. Interviews with broadcasting professionals were conducted, facilitating the expression of self-conceptions of journalistic professionalism. Separately, textual analysis of journalistic output was completed, allowing for the examination of particular crisis construals evident in the product of journalistic labour. Finally, the research involved participant observation in an institutional mechanism of public participation in organisational governance within the broadcaster.

This synthesis of methods aims at a measure of methodological holism that is cognisant of Cottle's (2003: 17) observation that 'news "text" and production "context"' are not 'separate analytical moments', but 'mutually constitutive and interpenetrating'. As argued by Willig (2013: 5), the adoption of a field perspective, bridging 'micro and macro levels of investigation' to newsroom ethnography helps negate the limitations of many prior studies where 'ethnographers rarely investigated the political economy of journalism or the wider cultural implications of the daily practices of journalists' (ibid).

The complementarity of analysing both texts and contexts lies in the recognition that analysts solely of news output are 'confronted with the products of action but denied access to the processes which lie behind them' (Schlesinger, 1987: xxxii), problematically eliding key aspects of the 'circuit of mass communications' (Philo, 1999: xiii), including the link between media representations and the

material realities of their production (Golding and Murdock, 1991: 22).

In its attendance to the observed practices of journalistic production, the testimony of practitioners, the ideological implications of news texts and structural avenues of public access to the field of public service broadcasting governance, the project's methodology offers a tentative synthesis of the phenomenological/social-organisational, political-economic and cultural/textual traditions, responding to Tuchman's (2002: 88) call for recognition of the natural complementarity of approaches analysing empirically the multiple 'moments' of news production - 'its political-economic preconditions, its organizational enactment, and its textual articulation'.

4.3.2 Venues and methods of analysis

4.3.2.1 Newsroom observations

The ethnographic portion of the research encompasses two components- *newsroom observations* and *interviews*. As a bustling, concentrated venue of journalistic practice, the 'separate social universe' (Bourdieu, 1993) of the newsroom represented an ideal venue and vantage point for ethnographic observations, which took place over a three-month duration from April to July 2012 in the newsroom of the main RTÉ campus at Montrose in Dublin.

The approach taken sought to respond to Cottle's (2000a: 22) calls to, firstly, avoid an over-emphasis on journalistic routines, which he views as tending toward an 'organizational functionalism' (see also Eliasoph, 1988), instead taking journalistic agency seriously within its distinctive internal 'regimes of truth', including the objectivity norm and its 'closest correlates' of 'balance, impartiality, fairness, truthfulness, factual accuracy' (Cottle, 2003: 18). The approach also recognises that these regimes 'do not exhaust the epistemological claims of journalism' (ibid) and that ethnographers should be alive to the existence of variegated, subjectivist news epistemologies and professional praxis that go beyond official canons and frameworks. In addition, contra scholarship positing

a certain professional ignorance of audiences, ethnographers should recognise that an 'imagined audience' may nonetheless be operative, informing everything from story selection, content, and presentation style (ibid: 11).

The observational focus of the ethnographic work thus emphasises the study of, *inter alia*, the daily editorial decision-making, institutionalised modes of reflexivity, journalistic conceptualisations of and responses to external and internal crisis, with the vantage points adopted jointly determined by both the advance identification of suitable locales but shaped by the contingencies, constraints and opportunities of fieldwork. These included observation of the general newsroom milieu, daily and weekly editorial meetings, and flows of internal electronic communication.

4.3.2.2 Practitioner interviews

Recognising the insufficiency of a merely observational approach, the methodology acknowledges the need to take the indigenous, 'experience-near' (Geertz, 1976) meanings of journalists seriously.

On the basis that 'both questions and answers must be discovered from informants' (Spradley, 1979: 84) conducting semi-structured interviews while immersed in the institutional environment of the newsroom facilitates a more fluid approach to theory-building and theory-testing. A total of 32 semi-structured interviews were arranged and carried out while present in the newsroom, with selection undertaken on the dual basis of convenience sampling (including serendipitous encounters) and the desire to encompass a range of both journalistic specialisms and professional roles.

The overall goal of this research component dovetails closely with that of the ethnographic observations: to assess the professional orientation of the journalistic habitus with respect to its political role in a time of crisis. This is accomplished through a focus on the following meta-themes: a) journalistic conceptions of crisis and the durability of journalistic norms; b) the role of (public

service) journalism in the mediation of politics; and c) the rightful place of the public in the project of public service broadcasting.

Together, these observational and testimonial accounts of the journalistic habitus seek to contribute a more thorough understanding of public service journalism's political interventions, seeking to assess the sensitivity of the journalistic habitus to hegemonic and counter-hegemonic power.

4.3.2.3 Framing in news texts

Above all, the inclusion of the analysis of journalistic news and current affairs texts in the methodological mix may be justified on the basis that the selections made in news output inevitably betray particular issue construals by 'actively ruling in and ruling out certain realities, offering the maps and codes which…assign problematic events and relations to explanatory contexts' (Hall, 1977).

The selection of the specific thematic focus of the analysis was guided both by the desire to identify an issue complex particularly suitable for focused analysis, reflective of what Chilton (1987) calls 'critical discourse moments', as well as one which sharply demonstrated the intersection of the local, the regional and the global dimensions of capitalist and democratic crisis.

On this basis, a series of key moments pertaining to the political dimensions of what has become known as the Euro 'debt crisis' (Macartney, 2013) between 2011 and 2013 were selected, centring on a series of clashes of crisis management between national governments in Greece and Italy and supranational governance at the level of the institutions of the European Union. The exigencies engendered by this phase of crisis, it is suggested, would be likely to elicit with particular clarity journalistic "framings" (Hertog and McLeod, 2001: 148) of crisis- 'interpretive structures' (Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad, 2000, cited in Norris, 1995: 358) which 'diagnose, evaluate and prescribe' (Entman, 1993: 52) aspects of perceived reality.

A corpus of 156 television and radio items from the programme genres of news and current affairs pertaining to key phases of the Euro debt crisis was generated, representing a full population of coverage across defined topical and temporal axes, allowing for both a 'case study' (Van Dijk, 1988: 5) approach and comparative analysis within different parts of the corpus.

This analysis is aimed at exploring how the agenda of 'legitimate political controversy' (Cobb and Elder, 1971: 904) is shaped, inquiring into the extent to which observable crisis construals in journalistic texts either buttress and legitimise or challenge neoliberal crisis diagnoses and responses.

That frame analysis specialises in unearthing the 'deep structure' of ideological formations (van Dijk, 2011: 393) underpins its suitability for the task of interrogating ideological meanings in ostensibly non-ideological discourses.

The sensitivity to the ideological underpinnings of media texts seeks to answer the call of Downey et al. (2014) for critical media analysis to, at this present conjuncture of crisis and in conditions of neoliberal hegemony, (once again) 'rediscover' ideology, along the lines of that advocated by Hall (1988). Attention to ideology recognises the Althusserian view of the media's role as ideological institutions who "hail" or "interpellate" audiences as subjects with common understandings of crisis and interests in particular modes of crisis resolution (see also Van Gorp, 2007: 63). The constructionist (Van Gorp, 2007: 64) recognition of discursive frames as 'socially constitutive as well as socially shaped' (Wodak and Fairclough, 1997: 258) underlines the significance of interpellative practices through framing.

4.3.2.4 Managing public participation

Interest in the penetration from below of publics into professional journalistic practice is a recurring analytic focus within the three research methods outlined above, with newsroom observations, interview testimony and textual analysis

revealing much about the actual and desirable role of public voices and agendas-real, 'imagined' (Cottle, 2003: 11) and 'implied' (Schudson, 1991: 152) in daily journalistic practice. Given the 'permanent tension' (Carpentier, 2011: 10) between participation, representation and power, the ways in which public involvement in public institutions is envisioned and actualised speaks to underlying normative orientations to democracy and publicity (see also Hagen, 1999).

Following the completion of the period of newsroom ethnography, a serendipitous opportunity to directly take part in the broadcaster's formal, statutory structure of public participation in institutional governance allowed for an expansion of the research inquiry into public broadcasting's participative logics beyond journalistic practice.

With this component of the research aimed at answering the question to what extent do RTÉ's modes of participation in and through media reflect the status of the public as a partner in democratic communication, a brief review of RTÉ's historic and contemporary modes of interfacing with the public is followed a detailed study of the democratic affordances and constraints of the Audience Council, based on the author's period of two and a half years of participation as an ordinary member of the Audience Council.

In addition to a general discussion the Council's history, its place in the RTÉ governance structure and the evolution of its functions, the chapter recounts a series of episodes during my time on the Council that illustrate exogenous and endogenous affordances and limits on the Council's status as an avenue of public agenda-building.

4.3.3 Research ethics

The nature of the venues of research and methodologies employed necessitated paying close attention to the ethical implications of the project before, during and after the periods of primary research.

To this end, prior to gaining access to RTÉ and following discussions with newsroom management, I provided details on the project's proposed approaches to data gathering that sought to balance the informational and access needs of the research with the imperatives of mitigating disruption to a busy work environment, as well as the necessities of respecting individual privacy and maintaining appropriate levels of discretion and confidentiality.

Following the granting of access, this was subsequently expanded into a general information sheet on the research project and its methodology which was made available to all staff (see Appendix 5-1). In addition, prospective interviewees were provided with written documentation on, *inter alia*, the institutional ethical framework in which the research was undertaken (University College Cork, 2010), procedures for ensuring informed consent (Sin, 2005), anonymisation processes (following a modified form of those prescribed by the Irish Qualitative Data Archive (2008), as well as detail on data collection, management, secure storage and ethical publication of data.

The use of audio recording equipment was confined to formal interviews where express permission to make a recording was granted. All interviewees were given the opportunity to specify the terms on which interview data may be used, including their preferred extent of anonymisation. Requests for quote approval and the provision of interview transcripts were also honoured.

During my time on the RTÉ Audience Council, my status as a PhD candidate researching the organisation was known to colleagues, and my intentions to write about participative structures, including the Council, were communicated to the Chair in writing. In the accounts of Council business, individuals are neither named nor directly quoted, and internal rules about disclosures are honoured.

4.4 Conclusion

The four chapters that follow report on the implementation and findings of the research methods discussed above. Data accruing from the period of ethnography in RTÉ, including observations and interviews, is explored in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively. Chapter 7 focuses on the analysis of journalistic framing in news texts. Chapter 8 reports on RTÉ's participatory practices, as well as an extended case study of participant observation on the Audience Council.

In the concluding Chapter 9, findings are analysed holistically in the context of their contributions toward answering the research question.

PART II

EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATIONS

Chapter 5: Making the News I: A Snapshot of Journalistic Production and Reflexivity

5.1 Setting the scene

5.1.1 Crisis contexts

2012 was not supposed to have begun like this. To mark the 50th anniversary of television broadcasting in Ireland, RTÉ had commissioned a range of programming in the hopes of stimulating a celebratory, nostalgic and forward-looking mood about the nation and broadcasting's role in narrating the story of Irish life (RTÉ, 2012a).

With macroeconomic indicators suggesting the worst of the crisis had passed (though with few signs of substantive economic "recovery"), it seemed as good a time as any both for a period of organised reflection on the past, present and future of broadcasting and for my own planned ethnographic sojourn in the RTÉ newsroom. But while the research interest in gaining access to the newsroom was justified on the basis of its value in observing at first hand the journalistic mediation of national and international dimensions of crisis, the fallout of a series of immediate crises *internal* to RTÉ News and Current Affairs threatened the likelihood of gaining research access.

The most visible dimension of internal crisis was an editorial error which was (eventually) seen by the broadcaster as 'the most serious editorial question that has arisen since the late 1960s' (RTÉ, 2011a) at the broadcaster, arising from the libelling of a Catholic priest in the *Mission to Prey* episode of RTÉ's flagship television current affairs programme *Primetime* earlier in 2011, in which it was alleged that the Irish Catholic priest Fr. Kevin Reynolds had raped a teenage girl in Kenya and fathered her child.

Following the revelation that the accusation was entirely without basis and what

was widely seen as a belated and defensive initial response, a series of internal and external reviews were instigated, including a statutory inquiry (RTÉ, 2011b, BAI, 2012).

The outcomes of these reviews and inquiries included the departure of two senior newsroom managers, an RTE-initiated series of major personnel, editorial management structure and operational changes to the News and Current Affairs department (RTÉ, 2012b), as well as a damning report from the regulator, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, whose findings of a 'significant failure of editorial and managerial controls' (BAI, 2012: 4) and the existence of a '"group-think" mentality' (ibid: 6) led it to impose a fine of €200,000 on the broadcaster- close to the maximum allowed under law.

The atmosphere of crisis was not helped by a further significant editorial blunder that winter- widely seen as meaningfully shaping the outcome of the Irish presidential election campaign- nor by signs of internal dissent with the quality of RTÉ's investigation journalism (Coyle and O'Brien, 2012 and Milotte, 2012), reports of 'crushed' internal morale (Hilliard, 2012) and, sensing weakness in Montrose, opportunistic attacks on the broadcaster by politicians (Coulter and Cullen, 2012).

The broadcaster's deteriorating financial situation represented a further, graver still context of internal crisis, with an internal austerity drive in full swing by 2012. With much of the low-hanging fruit already picked, a sword of Damocles hung over every division of the broadcaster, with swingeing cuts to pay and reduced resources part of a response that also included the very real prospect of wholesale service cuts- not merely salami-slicing budgets- a context whose sensitivity was exacerbated by the growing pains of technological and work practice modernisation.

In 2012, "crisis" for RTÉ meant pay and resource cuts, editorial controversy, wounded morale and a fight not just in terms of restoring editorial credibility but organisational survival.

5.1.2 Gaining access

For a newsroom not accustomed to the presence of external researchers observing journalistic practices, the internal turmoil was nearly enough to prevent any ethnographic work taking place at all. The journey from initial contact with the broadcaster in April 2011 to the beginning of the fieldwork just over a year later was characterised by managerial concerns around internal sensitivities to external scrutiny, the potential for disrupting the life of a busy newsroom, and worries about confidentiality and security- concerns which only grew as the Fr. Reynolds controversy came to light in the intervening months. Nonetheless, an initial offer of a one-week period of research to be undertaken during the quiet summer months was later renegotiated, yielding the eventual agreement of an eleven-week period to begin the following Spring.

The period of fieldwork from April 16th to June 31st 2012 was a time of significant internal turbulence and uncertainty. It was a time of interregnum between the old and the new, bookended as it was by the departure and arrival of new senior editorial management in News and Current Affairs, and peppered with several occasions in which the newsroom became the news itself. For a project in which gaining a measure of trust from news workers would be critical, it was perhaps not the most felicitous time to be embarking on ethnographic fieldwork. For an organisation and news division used to successfully protecting its borders from outsiders, the newsroom had been suddenly exposed to the glare of a range of observers- a bevy of investigators, politicians, and now a young budding sociologist. When I did finally ascend the twisted staircase from the main reception at the RTÉ Television building to begin the fieldwork proper, I quickly became aware that I was entering a workplace under strain- a realisation that would shape the 51 days I would go on to spend there.

5.1.3 Doors opened and shut: maintaining and expanding access

The scale of the internal turmoil and its likely impact on ethnographic work came quickly into view, with a number of early encounters with staff who volunteered

details on the current newsroom atmosphere. One described the place as in a state resembling grieving following the recent departure of who was by many accounts a talismanic, highly respected leader. That the grieving process was to some extent a forcibly privatised one was conveyed by several staff who, cognisant the notoriously leaky nature of the Montrose 'fishbowl', did not feel able to express with confidence that their internal discussions would not appear in tomorrow's newspapers.

The body blow of the editorial crisis to newsroom morale was only worsened by the recent departure of many long-serving staff, with a popular voluntary redundancy scheme attracting a significant number of newsroom participants and consequently effecting a loss of institutional memory and contributing to a sense of flux and uncertainty.

Save for two carefully-worded suggestions from senior management- 'Less is more' and 'be gentle'-, I was let loose on the newsroom with only the briefest of introductions to either junior or senior staff, and allocated a spot at the back wall of the long, narrow open-plan newsroom, nestled between the teams of the Irish language *Nuacht* (Irish language news) and *Nationwide* programmes. The selection of such a secluded spot was, it was made clear, not an accident, providing an early reminder that achieving mere physical presence to the newsroom was only the first stage in a broader quest for access.

On the other hand, it was a vantage point not without benefits: principally, the close proximity to the staff pigeon holes for letters, both aiding in the identification of unfamiliar staff and providing a good opportunity to engage in small-talk with passing journalists.

My most immediate problem of access, however, was of the most mundane kind. Lacking an employee card to get in and out of the newsroom, I was reliant on the kindness of strangers to tailgate in and out of various parts of the campus, despite the prominently displayed signs admonishing the practice. When I was granted an access card a couple of weeks into the fieldwork, I found, conversely, that there

were few doors it couldn't open. However, crossing the inter-personal barriers required for useful observations and cultivating informants proved a substantially more difficult challenge.

The ethnographic literature (see for example, Geertz, 1973: 412) frequently speaks of the difficulties of researcher "invisibility" and the challenges of gaining a measure of acceptance by the researched group. Despite closely conforming to the field's demographic characteristics in many ways- as a white, educated middle-class man, I neither looked nor sounded out of place- a series of countervailing factors ensured that the challenges of access would not be easily overcome. These included the professionalised nature of the setting, the multiple internal contexts of emergency, in addition to my relative youth (24 at the time) and the critical posture of the research.

Intermediaries confided in me at various occasions that some hackles had been raised in various quarters by my presence, mostly down to uncertainty about the true motivations of the fieldwork and its timing. Introductions were intermittent and cordial when they did occur, although occasionally punctuated by a narrowing of eyes and questions about how I was going to use the information I gathered, and on a couple of occasions paraphrasing my explanation of ethnography as simply 'spying'. That conversations in my vicinity frequently took place in hushed tones did little to assuage my concern that I was not welcome.

My initial goals to embed myself in the milieu of several key agenda-setting news and current affairs radio programme teams and to secure interviews with journalists were both quickly dashed, with programme gatekeepers in both the cases of *Morning Ireland* and *News at One* (prestigious and popular daily news programmes on RTÉ Radio One) not at all keen to engage. Personalised letters delivered to journalists and editors elicited only a single emailed response. A more hands-on approach was required, yet catching journalists during idle moments was an enduring difficulty, as was the honing of a sufficiently non-threatening "elevator pitch" to encourage journalists to talk about their work. One exchange with a programme editor alerted me to the extent of the difficulties

facing a media sociologist in the newsroom milieu: my passing reference to newsroom work as entailing a process of "production" elicited the sharp response that news was principally what *happened*, not simply "produced". It was a reminder that, as has been articulated by numerous ethnographies, that sociologists often speak a language that journalists 'mistrust and misunderstand' (Schudson, 1991: 143, see also Hansen, 1998: 53).

Access to the twice-daily editorial meetings and weekly news planning meetings was granted, but the subject of some explicit and implicit negotiation. Daily editorial conferences had both a "public" and "private" component, with the first open to all newsroom journalists, and followed by a (usually brief) editors-only discussion. Having been asked on several occasions in my first week to leave at the end of the public component on the grounds that sensitive issues were due to be discussed, I subsequently beat a tactical retreat from this portion in the interests of demonstrating a sensitivity to their concerns. However, when 'sensitivities' were subsequently cited as a reason to exclude me from attending weekly editorial planning meetings, it was eventually decided that this was an unnecessarily restrictive stance. Such a reversal was, I felt, at least partly attributable to the intervention of senior newsroom management who, although at all times distant, aloof and only outwardly interested in my work insofar as it impinged upon their staff, nonetheless on several occasions intervened to ensure that my formal access, at least, to key sites of observation was not unduly impeded.

Testing the often-invisible lines demarcating my level of access was frequently necessary. For instance, efforts to observe a meeting of the Referendum Steering Group which oversaw editorial policy during the 2012 European Fiscal Treaty referendum were frustrated by inertia and non-communication rather than by direct refusal. On another occasion, when an all-staff meeting was convened to communicate updates on restructuring initiatives in the News and Current Affairs division, (including potential salary cuts and redeployments), my request to observe was met with a furrowed brow and a curt refusal; it was made clear that this was a family matter, and it wasn't my place to intrude on private grief.

On other occasions, pushing for greater access met with eventual success. Having been told by an informant early on that the newsroom's computer network was not simply an important work tool but in fact the very "nerve centre" of the entire news operation, I was initially refused access first on vague technical grounds and then on the basis that such deep access would not be 'appropriate' to a non-employee. Further representations made in stronger terms resulted in being granted broad (albeit read-only) access to the internal intranet including the newsroom communication systems.

As an observer rather than a participant, my lack of apparent function in the newsroom, paucity of prior acquaintances and spatial isolation meant that the opportunities for useful observation- let alone forging any kind of meaningful relationships- were constrained. My instinct to respect the privacy of the still-reeling staff, reinforced by a fear of rejection arising from my own sense of insecurity as an apprentice researcher, wrestled daily with my sociological curiosity to learn about journalistic practice and ideologies.

That on each of the 51 days of the fieldwork I ate alone in the canteen is testament to the failure of the ice to ever really break. However, although never fully surmounting either my own reserve or the middle-class guardedness of so many of the staff I conversed with, my time in the newsroom nonetheless yielded data from a range of sources.

5.2 Greasing the wheels of news production: editorial conferences

5.2.1 Structure and routine

At 10am every morning, news and programme editors representing a variety of RTÉ News programmes across TV, radio and online services file into a room just downstairs from the main newsroom and adjacent to the atrium of the RTÉ Television building. For at least half an hour each weekday morning but shorter in the afternoon follow-up meeting, they took part in the daily ritual of the

editorial news conference. These meetings served a variety of functions, including planning, co-ordinating, and self-critique, and represented a 'rich source of dense journalistic comment and verbalised decision-making', providing 'some of the most insightful professional exchanges, revealing journalistic values and judgements in action' (Hansen, 1998: 56).

Although the bulk of each meeting was nominally open to all journalistic staff, they were the main preserve of news and programme editors as well as section heads like those of online and sport, with correspondents and reporters rarely seen. The more senior staff typically took the seats around the large boardroom table in the centre of the room, with latecomers often forced to stand owing to a paucity of chairs. The morning meeting, which was the longer and more important meeting by virtue of its agenda-setting role for the rest of the day was usually headed up by the Chief News Editor, whose frequently late arrival was met with the hushed tones reminiscent of a school headmaster entering a classroom, quickly breaking up the polite murmurings. Sitting at the head of the table, the Chief News Editor would begin every meeting the same way: by first distributing copies of the news list, and asking the room if there were any issues they would like to raise, usually in relation to the previous day's output. Then, he would read from the news list a series of news items, many of which would have already been assigned to journalists earlier that morning. This was the centrepiece of the editorial conference, a key intermediary stage between newsgathering and publishing, with the discussions representing an important link in the chain of the co-ordination of the newsroom's journalistic and logistical resources. Story topics and news "hooks" were clarified, the journalist(s) in charge were named, crewing requirements were specified, as well as the type of report that was desired- be it a full 'news package' for television transmission or simply some filed copy for use online or on radio. Justifications would frequently be offered for why a certain story identified on the news list would be dropped or was no longer of interest. The Foreign Editor or their deputy would go through the day's prospective news from abroad in a similar fashion. Afterward, very brief updates from Online, Sport and the radio News at One were solicited where their plans for the day were outlined, after which the 'public' portion of the meeting

closed and senior editors held a usually brief and private addendum to the meeting to which I was not party.

5.2.2 Applying the editorial "nose for news"

The Chief News editor, rapidly scanning through the news list, applied news values in a quick-fire shorthand, picking and choosing from the menu of stories on offer. Casting his eye over the topics on the news list, he would briskly read out the title identifier- the story "slug"- and deliver his judgement. An item might be immediately cast aside with the phrases 'not very promising', 'we're not going near it', 'it's not very newsy', or 'unlikely to produce anything great' or simply 'dull stuff'. Another story might be designated a stay of execution with the words 'we'll watch it from afar' with a view to covering it if its potential newsworthiness is later realised. Other stories would be more enthusiastically embraced for a variety of reasons. A story might be so obviously suitable that no comment is required, or it might be adjudged to offer 'good actuality', provide 'good colour' or 'great pictures'. It might simply be 'a good yarn' that will interest the viewers. Generally, the most crucial thing is that a 'news line' or 'peg' is found to 'hang' a topic on. As might be expected from editors working predominantly within the television medium, a strong visual orientation was observed. If pictures could not be obtained from an RTÉ cameraman or an external source, even a strong news line would usually not be enough for a story to make the grade.

Potential items that are adjudged to be insufficiently worthy of a standalone package but which nonetheless deserve a mention are to be 'swept up into the main report' by the assigned journalist, evoking an image of the journalist as an efficient housekeeper, wasting nothing. Editors frequently asked for existing stories to be 'refreshed' for later bulletins. Stories that are commissioned but are not broadcast that day (usually for reasons of time constraints, and the necessary overproduction of news) are placed 'on the shelf' for future use. However, some of these stories- called 'held packages'- are 'time-tied', with a limited shelf-life, and must be broadcast before they 'go stale'. Packages on the brink of expiry are frequently mentioned in the editorial conferences (even described as having a 'bit

of a smell'), with waste frowned on.

With a lot of ground to cover and not very much time to do it in, brevity reigned supreme, with topics very rarely discussed in any form beyond a cursory affirmation or rejection of a story, let alone substantive discussion on topics. This strongly suggested the broad diffusion of shared knowledge about how to approach different kinds of items based on recognisable story templates. Regularly recurring examples included the "reax" (reaction) package, often a secondary package following a main story, involving the solicitation of reaction to a given story by conducting a series of tightly-edited short interviews. The near-daily presence of a "kicker" story- a piece of "light relief" to end a bulletin, was similarly used as the finale of the (usually afternoon) editorial conference, and usually offered by the foreign editor on duty. These stories- frequently involving animals in humorous situations- seemed to be at least as much about giving editors something to smile about after the morning's work as much as the viewers who would later watch the story, although it was clear that there were sharply different opinions of the suitability of these kind of stories, seemingly stratified somewhat by gender and age.

The judgment of the Chief News Editor was very rarely questioned at the meetings I attended; when it was, it was generally an editor or group of programme editors requesting that a story to be included on the basis of being a good fit for a vacant slot on their programme run-downs.

If the Chief News Editor is a sort of master sommelier, applying his expert nose for news to the day's abundance of potential programme segments, then the team around him are one part chef (selecting an array of ingredients for their programmes, arranging them just so) one part triage nurse (identifying the relative urgency and significance of stories) and one part air traffic controller (directing their fleet of journalists in and out of various stories and ensuring that completed reports arrive in on time).

5.2.3 "Home" news

Clocking in at around six pages though varying by day, the home news list distributed at every meeting was far longer and more substantial than the single page foreign list, reflecting the far greater resources available to RTÉ's domestic newsgathering operation. An organic, constantly-updated electronic document residing on the internal computer network, the news "diary" is gradually added to over time in the hours, days and even weeks beforehand. Despite the dynamic nature of the document's production and the variety of news contained within it, on a day-to-day basis much of it has a very familiar feel and structure, with a triad of heavyweight fields- politics, economics and the justice system- represented the categories that comprised the skeletal structure of news output and the bedrock of daily newsgathering activities in the newsroom. Political and economic news in particular are highly privileged news genres with dedicated staff and resources allocated to them through specialised teams- the RTÉ Oireachtas Unit which covers parliamentary affairs from its off-site base near the Dáil, and the internal business desk which specialises in economic and business news.

The primacy of these genres was reflected in the regular pre-eminence of political and economic affairs on the news lists. On days when the Oireachtas was in session, there would generally be substantial "Dáil" "Seanad" and "Committees" segments on the news list containing detail on the day's parliamentary agenda. "Taoiseach" frequently merited an item of its own too, with details of his daily engagements, whether they were photocalls, campaign launches or policy announcements. Presidential engagements were also a regular fixture. The laser focus of "politics" as represented in news list topics as beginning and ending with parliamentary affairs was striking, and crystallised by the comment, heard on more than one occasion over the summer, that there was 'nothing happening in politics today really', justified on the basis of a lack of activity in Dáil Éireann.

The primacy of governmental figures in the hierarchy of legitimate political actors was further suggested by occasions where journalistic resources were deployed to trail governmental figures on trips abroad. A case in point was the

example of the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Eamon Gilmore, whose temporary position as head of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2012 meant that editors felt that accompanying him on a major foreign trip was 'a box we had to tick'. The idea that the foreign travel of senior ministers on official business was often inherently newsworthy was also evident in historic editorial minutes accessible to me in the newsroom.

Economics and business coverage often appeared as more or less interchangeable categories that vied for supremacy at the top of the news list. Large amounts of daily coverage in relation to topics like economic data, bailout issues, and banking affairs were led by the duo of the Business Editor and the Economics Correspondent. These were even more rarely the subject of editorial discussion than political affairs, suggesting an implicitly legitimated greater level of autonomy for a small number of journalists with business and economic expertise. Hinting at the de-facto permanent residency on its programmes of RTÉ's in-house economic and business expertise, the Chief News Editor one day casually joked that the Business Editor would be appearing on a news bulletin for his 'daily slot'.

Court reporting is another of the ever-present features on the news list. Details of a selection of cases taking place in a variety of national and regional courts were laid out on the menu, and the Chief News Editor regularly took the time to identify during news conferences the cases of particular interest on a given day, suggesting that attention to the state's formal institutions of justice was seen as a crucial part of RTÉ's informational role.

5.2.4 Editorial conferences as a site of critique

As well as a routinised mechanism for directing journalistic resources, editorial conferences represent an important opportunity for editors to raise issues about various aspects of their work, including their own recent broadcast output.

The conference structure facilitates critical interventions by editors at the

beginning of the morning meeting, and in an expanded, dedicated slot at the "weekly review" portion of the Friday meeting. However, at the daily meetings, it was quite normal for no issues to be raised about the previous day's coverage. When issues were raised, they tended overwhelmingly to be of a technical or practical nature; sometimes in relation to the logistics of securing satellite vans and crews but most often these pertained to (usually) minor technological failures like the absence of, or grammatical errors in captions naming on-air speakers. For the Chief News Editor (whose professional background lay in print media) an errant apostrophe elicited frustration on the basis that it reflected poorly on the professionalism of the national broadcaster.

Suggesting the at least partial endurance of inter-media competitive logics ("Not Invented Here syndrome"), on several occasions editors demonstrated a reticence to unnecessarily legitimise a "scoop" from a domestic competitor, unless the story was deemed simply too big to ignore. Similarly, they exhibited a sensitivity to being instrumentalised by publicity-seeking individuals or organisations. This tendency is exemplified by internal regret at amplifying a Fianna Fáil politician's ultimately empty threat to leave his party in the run up to the Fiscal Treaty referendum, resistance to Sinn Féin's apparent desire to frame the first handshake between a party leader and a British monarch as a "historic" event (part of a more generalised heightened awareness amongst some editors at least of editorial vigilance required in relation to Sinn Féin's efforts to secure "disproportionate" levels of visibility) and concern toward a development NGO's effort to book advertising slots to coincide with a news report from Africa which had been financially supported by the same NGO.

It appeared that concerns of these kinds tended to be expressed by the more experienced editors, while some of the younger programme editors (one identified themselves me as a "new-schooler") tended to accept a story based on good imagery or its thematic content even if the coverage would assist a commercial or political interest.

An awareness of governmental tactics to drip-feed positive news stories and to

delay bad news until an opportune moment was also occasionally evident, exemplified by the general dismissiveness that accompanied the decision to cover the launch of "The Gathering" tourism initiative, where jibes were made about the government's motivations behind the scheme. However, this scepticism did not seem to influence the decision to produce reports, or the subsequent content of those reports. What was important was that there was news to report; scepticism was confined to backstage venues. The co-existence of a ritualised privileging of governmental voices and projects and a persistent low-level wariness and scepticism about politicians in general is further illustrated by an editorial directive on one occasion that a news item on a major, highly critical report on Ireland's track record on providing for children in care would be a "politician-free zone" on the basis that insincere politicians shedding "crocodile tears" would not be welcome on this occasion.

A marked editorial desire to avoid anything resembling a prurient, "tabloid" style was frequently observed. On a number of occasions, concerns were raised in relation to the high levels of coverage being devoted to particular items, such as the Anders Behring Breivik testimony in Norway, or the murder of Michaela McAreavey in Mauritius, concerns that were raised partly on the basis of taste in relation to the kinds of disclosures contained therein, whether in terms of "gruesome" imagery or the disclosure of information potentially distressing to relatives of the deceased. Concern over a sense of creeping internal "tabloidization" was expressed by a senior editor several times in which it was made clear that such a tendency must be resisted.

This latter sensitivity also expressed itself in how individual tragedies often elicited expressions of sympathy around the editorial table, with the disappearance of a young Irish supporter in Poland during the Euro 2012 football tournament generating a keen interest in deploying journalistic resources to Poland partly motivated by a humanitarian desire to attract attention to the search.

At least some editors were poorly disposed to the idea of imitating what they

viewed as some of the less attractive features of commercial rolling news stations. The rolling coverage of the Olympic torch's whirlwind tour of Dublin in advance of the London Olympics attracted the ire of one senior editor who criticised the 'non-stop of coverage of nothing' which was being done on the orders of senior news management. Again signalling something of a clash of journalistic cultures of an intergenerational kind, I noted that many of the younger and female editors had few concerns of these kind and often defended these kinds of set-piece event on the basis of their uplifting character and high viewing figures.

Invitations to comment during the Friday "weekly review" conference segment would frequently be met with silence, cursory expressions of satisfaction with particular pieces of coverage, or less often, a recapitulation of previous criticisms. Given that a high proportion of issues raised during the week were in any case of a technical nature, or speedily-resolved minor editorial questions in relation to, for example, proper levels of disclosure, it is not surprising that the weekly review section passed over quickly without much participation or engagement from the assembled editors. The paucity of critical reflections either on the substance of the week's news or their journalistic performance suggests that formal reflexive processes are narrowly exercised and mostly confined to daily exigencies.

Where praise was accorded to colleagues, it was typically in response to technical-practical heroics like reacting quickly and efficiently to a breaking story by quickly putting together a TV or radio bulletin; for braving uncomfortable conditions in the field; for quality imagery in a news report; or for an all-round job well done in covering a major set-piece event which required significant levels of planning and co-ordination to pull off.

Criticisms of colleagues was only observed a small handful of times. On the most significant of these occasions, one journalist strongly criticised an editorial decision not to broadcast a news story which had been filed in expectation of inclusion in a bulletin the previous evening. A short and rather tense discussion followed in which it was explained by an editor that concerns over potential legal

issues with one part of the item- concerning commentary in relation to one of Ireland's richest and most powerful men, Denis O'Brien- had resulted in it being withheld from broadcast that evening. Perhaps owing to my presence, it was indicated that discussion on this matter would continue elsewhere- a reminder that much editorial reflection, particularly on highly contentious matters, was taking place in venues well beyond my level of access, like the weekly meetings of the Corporate Editorial Board.

Only on a small number of occasions was external criticism or pressure discussed. One rare example of the latter came in the immediate wake of the publication of the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland report on the *Mission to Prey* debacle. It was suggested that pressure was being brought to bear by another wing of the organisation to report the story in a particular way- not elaborated on, perhaps due to my presence- which editors said they felt must be resisted and that it should be covered just as if the events had happened elsewhere.

On three occasions during editorial conferences, newspaper criticism of RTÉ journalism was raised. Two of those came from one source, the ex-RTÉ journalist Vincent Browne writing in the Irish Times, who in one instance criticised what he viewed as disproportionate coverage allocated to one high-profile murder case (Michaela McAreavey) compared to another in Limerick, implying a journalistic classism (Browne, 2012c), and in the other accused the broadcaster of being 'timorous and unprofessional' (Browne, 2012b) in relation to reportage on a story concerning the possibility of continued IMF funding of the State should the Fiscal Treaty be rejected by the impending referendum. Browne's criticisms in both instances elicited some personalised derision, although prompting a degree of debate- including a discussion on the relative news value of different Irish murder victims in Mauritius, Spain, Japan and Limerick- which would not have taken place otherwise. This did not amount, however, to seriously engaging with questions of ethnocentrism, classism or political subservience in reporting patterns.

Journalists conversely appeared more sensitive to feedback from sections of the

audience close to them- citing friends and family- that informed them when they felt coverage of given issues was problematic for any reason. This sort of feedback was used, it appeared, to help calibrate and moderate coverage, providing a rare example of audience feedback- even if conveyed through informal networks- playing a role in the meetings. However, letters, emails and telephone contact from the public containing criticism, praise or suggestions were only mentioned in passing a couple of times during my observations, suggesting their low salience in editorial decision-making.

5.2.5 Audience Research in the newsroom

Public opinion did nonetheless penetrate editorial meetings via monthly presentations from the Audience Research unit, which were delivered to editors once a month at the conclusion of the Friday editorial conference. These sessions, introduced on one occasion by an editor as 'doing the figures', suggested that audience research was primarily understood as a quantitative affair.

This was borne out by the nature of the presentations I observed, which involved the distribution of a document showing fluctuations in news and current affairs programme ratings, broken down both according to absolute numbers on a day-to-day basis and demographic data (age, gender, and the socio-economic groupings ABC1 C2DE) and compared with data from programme output from RTE's only domestic television competitor at the time, TV3.

On one occasion, much of the discussion comprised speculation on why ratings were down so substantially across the board compared to the same period the previous year. A variety of explanations were proffered for this, including the weather, the high volume of sporting events, and in particular an acknowledgment that the same month in the previous year was what the document described as a particularly 'strong month for news'. The view was expressed a number of times that people were turning off news and current affairs programming because of the preponderance of "bad news", with one editor suggesting that during tough times, audiences desire 'fluffy' escapist

programming about, for example, 'Gypsy weddings'. Overall however, editors did not seem particularly perturbed about falling ratings, and seemed more interested in long-term audience trends than short-term fluctuations. These reactions, the absence of any discussion on any ameliorative actions that might be taken to arrest declines and a more general cultural mismatch between rationalised audience measurement and newsroom editorial culture implied in an apparent low level of editorial interest in extended discussion on the data suggests that News and Current Affairs enjoys meaningful autonomy from at least some of the economic pressures that encroach elsewhere within the organisation.

5.2.6 Conclusion

As a key site of decision making, issue raising and information sharing in the newsroom (see Mulhall, 2015 for a detailed account of newsroom editorial processes), observational data suggests that these conferences are highly routinised and predictable affairs, geared toward the efficient distribution of journalistic resources and the continued smoothness of newsroom operations. Rather than what the Head of News would publicly describe as a venue of 'robust' (Carr, 2015) institutionalised self-critique, their principal purpose was to continually grease the wheels of news production, aligning the priorities of journalists, news editors, programme editors and producers to ensure a productive newsroom, with self-critique generally confined to questions of fine calibration rather than the querying of foundational norms and practices.

These observations reinforce many findings from other newsroom ethnographies, not least Golding and Elliott's (1979) ethnographic work in RTÉ more than thirty years prior. From the routinised (ibid: 83) and consistent nature of principles of selection (ibid: 93) which guided 'clearly defined and unproblematic' (ibid: 95) understandings of what constituted 'news', to the way in these definitions delimited the realm of the political to exclude extra-parliamentary activity (ibid: 95), to the preoccupation of editorial reflexivity with technical detail (ibid) and a cultural mismatch between journalistic culture and rationalised audience measurement (ibid: 112).

5.3 Other sites of observation

5.3.1 Handling politics: the case of the Fiscal Treaty referendum

While my observations of formal venues of editorial reflexivity for much of my time in the newsroom suggested- notwithstanding sources of internal turmoil- a period of relative editorial "ordinary time", the period of the EU Fiscal Treaty referendum campaign in May 2012 represented a disruption to this.

As the campaign progressed, editorial frustration around the conference table escalated, based on a concern with the perceived low quality of debate and a worry about audience intelligibility, reflecting a consequence of a combination of the complexities of Treaty itself and the intertwining of the referendum debate with the broader domestic political landscape.

Most of the difficulties appeared to arise from a frustration with how the referendum campaign period entailed a measure of unwanted external interference in normal journalistic practices. Editors demonstrably felt under great pressure from several Supreme Court cases- the Crotty, Coughlan and McKenna judgements- which shaped the holding, funding and representation in broadcasting of actors in referenda in Ireland (for reviews of these cases, see O'Mahony, 2009 and Barrett, 2011). The interpretation of the demands of the Coughlan judgement- granting equal airtime to both pro and anti-Treaty sides, enforced with widespread use of stopwatches and daily tallies- was a source of constant frustration. One journalist voiced a view that seemed to capture the mood- the idea that with all mainstream political parties on one side and 'every head-banger in town' on the other, finding what another described as 'credible interviewees' on the No side evoked editorial angst. That credibility was linked to representative status was demonstrated by the particular frustration of the Chief News Editor at having little choice but to provide airtime to non-elected individuals and groups campaigning for a no vote (see Chapter 6 for interview testimony on this topic). On the other hand, concern was also raised that Sinn Féin, as the main party in parliament campaigning for a no vote would have to be

accorded much greater coverage than their parliamentary strength would generally warrant.

While editors took pride in the broadcaster holding firm in a low-level conflict with the government's press office over the referendum nomenclature, which RTÉ had been under pressure to describe as the "Stability Treaty", a more serious definitional conflict was evident in the form of a recurring frustration amongst editors that the referendum campaign was in danger of being derailed by forces on the "no" side who wished to make it about other matters seen as irrelevant to the matter at hand.

The frustration with the lack of appropriately focused, rational and productive political debate and an apparent sense of responsibility to guide the campaign along those lines led in practice to the containment of referendum coverage within sharper technical boundaries. That this had a depoliticising effect was suggested by an informally-flagged decision to reduce the volume of debate formats as the referendum campaign wore on, and taking a stronger control of the editorial tiller by producing a range of 'non-reactive' planned news items about the referendum, some of which would not contain pro or anti treaty views but aimed instead at conveying neutral factual information. These items, which sought to supplement coverage from the campaign trail, included, *inter alia*, use of the Referendum Commission chairperson who would be invited on to answer listeners' questions about the Treaty (albeit in the constrained, rationalist terms of the explicit Treaty provisions), sober and strictly factual items on the separate implications of yes and no votes, and an item on the day of the poll itself containing information logistical information on voting and a 'neutral person on the importance of voting', as one editor put it (reflecting the broadcasting moratorium on campaign reportage in the hours before and during polling).

This desire to compartmentalise the range of issues raised in the campaign within stricter topical boundaries reflects a compromise between 'sacerdotal' and 'pragmatic positions' to electoral politics (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1986: 74) and may be explained as partly due to a general journalistic affinity for rational, fact-

centred discourses and a journalistic "agoraphobia" (Carpentier, 2007: 157) prompted by a highly political campaign that was poorly compatible with the aforementioned distaste for extra-parliamentary political contention.

The clash between the twin desires to compartmentalise and delimit debate yet to involve the views of what a senior editor described as 'non-political voices' is captured by the discussion and outcome of a proposal to undertake a 'town hall' exercise in which members of the public would very briefly explain their views on the referendum in a format described as an 'intelligent vox pop'. In seeking suitably 'interesting people' for such a segment, both an unemployment centre or a Chamber of Commerce were ruled out on the basis of the assumed partiality of individuals at those venues. A book club or tidy towns committee were adjudged to be more representative of 'ordinary people' with a cross-section of views. The finished product, a TV news item broadcast in extended form on radio, incorporated views of a number of members of the public including a pensioner's computer club, a fitness group, and participants at a poker night in a manner that resembled a conventional vox pop item. A journalist suggested to me that such an exercise was about finding 'real people, ordinary people' without any 'political axe to grind' and that there would be a need to ensure that an item like this would have to be more or less balanced in terms of "yes" and "no" voices irrespective of what was encountered on the ground.

Weeks in advance of referendum day, the newsroom swung into planning mode, led by staff dedicated to the organisation of special events. The full scale of the planning was revealed in a 30-page bound document which circulated around the newsroom in the days leading up to the referendum. The document explained in dizzying detail the remarkable scale of the logistical plans made to cover the referendum count on 1st June 2012, including the precise deployment of technical equipment and editorial personnel around the country.

From the vantage point of the newsroom's referendum nerve centre co-ordinating coverage, while the morning of the count saw a great flurry of activity, the realisation by mid-morning that a clear win for the "yes" side was a certainty

seemed to quickly deflate the air of expectation. For the rest of the day, the newsroom went through the motions of rolling live coverage, but with none of the drama that seemed to have been hoped for.

That contingency plans existed both for an unscheduled edition of *Primetime* and an extension of the *Six One News* which would be activated only in the case of a "no" vote suggested both the expectation of a "yes" vote and that only a result at odds with the government's desires merited emergency programming. It additionally suggested an implicit preference for political "stability", reminiscent of a casual comment made in jest by one editor to another on the eve of one of the two Greek general elections that Spring that in the event of a win by the SYRIZA radical left coalition they would have to hide their money under a mattress.



Fig. 5-1: Referendum coverage document

In a context of resource reductions in the newsroom which was regularly apparent in everything from satellite van availability to sharp restrictions around foreign travel, the scale of the referendum coverage stood out all the more. Its apparent significance to the prestige of RTÉ News suggests the 'sacerdotal' (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) status of these kind of events.

The end of the referendum campaign was met with a certain ambivalence by editors. On one hand, the sigh of relief from around the conference table by

editors who had long succumbed to campaign ennui was tangible. On the other hand, although satisfied with a job well done, at a subsequent review meeting, the only note of disappointment expressed was that, from the point of view of 'good television', it was all over so quickly.

5.3.2 Planning good news

The referendum was, however, only one in a whole series of major televised events that involved a substantial amount of advance planning and co-ordination by the newsroom. Set pieces like the visit of the Olympic Torch to Ireland in advance of the 2012 London Games, the 50th Catholic Eucharistic Congress, the 2012 football European Championships in Poland and the visit of Burmese opposition politician and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi- amongst many others- all took place in a period of a few months, with the news value of each teased out in a separate weekly editorial forum, the "futures" meeting, focused on near and medium-term planning of various news genres including "hard" news, special events and "feature" items. Regular attendance at these weekly meetings demonstrated the significance of the latter categories of events to morale, whose topical and tonal variety moderates the predictability of often rote, "ordinary time" news production.

Like the daily news conferences, pitches for both "home" and "foreign" future stories were evaluated, with the determining factors for selection appearing to rest on a combination of news value, novelty, the assumed interest of the audience, and the expected volume of news from other sources during the relevant period (during leaner news weeks, the desire for extra "feature" stories was much stronger).

While more relaxed and informal than daily editorial conferences, futures meetings demonstrated greater divergences in editorial attitudes regarding what sort of events should be covered and why. One example of this is a debate over how to approach the Olympic flame trip across the Southern border and into Dublin. While a single TV news package was originally envisaged by one editor,

several others desired expanded coverage, proposing a three hour live special that followed the torch run into Ireland, on the basis that as one editor put it, 'people like the ceremonial stuff'. At least one editor plainly felt this to be unnecessary and trivial, but the enthusiasm of the others won the day.

In another instance, the extensive coverage plans for the 50th Eucharistic Congress- a major international gathering of Catholics involving an array of ceremonies over a period of days- which was to take place in Dublin in June was an example of an event that was planned not on the basis of autonomous editorial selection but an organisational imperative based on the broadcaster's cultural role in providing for the country's religious majority. In an effort to navigate the sensitive cultural territory, a directive from management that television news would have to recognise the ongoing Congress every day of its duration, although in the interests of appealing to what one editor described as 'all religions as none'…ecclesiastical and theological stuff' was not desired. For some editors who were co-operating somewhat on sufferance, this instruction was broadly welcomed, although one editor argued that theological issues shouldn't arbitrarily be excluded from the event. Others were keen to ensure that a sense of the crisis in the Vatican (related to ongoing sexual abuse scandals) would be apparent from the coverage, and that the tone would not be one of banal celebration.

A third type of rationale for dedicating significant internal resources was represented by the whistle-stop visit to Dublin of Burmese pro-democracy activist and opposition politician Aung San Suu Kyi to accept a number of awards. Her visit was the source of visible and sustained enthusiasm by editors, who on this occasion used their editorial discretion to accord the visit significant resources, the centerpiece of which was a highly unusual live broadcast of the *9 News* from the award venue. In contrast to the plans made to cover events like the Queen's Jubilee (which was also the subject of an internal directive to be covered), the decision to accord the visit such reverence seemed less motivated by news value than born of personal admiration on the part of many of the editors, whose mood was visibly lifted by the event.

More generally, "good" news seemed to play a crucial set of roles in the newsroom. Whereas end-of-bulletin "kickers" were often mere amusing trivia for journalists to end a day, positive coverage of events fulfilled a different set of functions, facilitating greater levels of topical and tonal discretion by editors and reporters. Whether light-hearted "feature stories" sourced from around the country that could be picked off the shelf on a quiet news day, or to tonally balance a programme with too much bad news, the importance of a regular stream of positive stories lay in their counterbalancing role against covering the mundane and often grim political and economic scene that represented the bulk of their work.

5.3.3 Historic editorial meeting notes

While the observations above represent a circumscribed interpretive snapshot of daily editorial practice, notes from six previous years of editorial meetings appearing to correspond to the Friday editorial review sessions were available to me after obtaining access to the internal computer network.

A variety of functions that the meetings fulfilled were apparent, including praising good work by individuals and teams, justifying difficult editorial decisions, debating whether the right amount of disclosure was made in relation to particular stories, teasing out problematic terminological issues, discussing the management of editorial resources, reminding staff of their obligations in relation to matters like confidentiality, the need to preserve standards of taste and decency in their work, and clarifying legal responsibilities around the reporting of sensitive matters of various kinds, including court cases, vulnerable groups, and suicides. They also included non-editorial matters like discussing notable changes in viewership figures, problems of a technical, administrative or competitive nature, and updates from elsewhere in the organisation on matters that impact upon the newsroom, notably budgetary issues.

Given that the 2006-2012 period in question both preceded and followed the

onset of financial and economic crisis, this record represents a valuable source of insight into how editors reflected on their work in changing political and economic environments. For reasons of brevity, I focus here principally on how RTÉ's responsibilities in relation to crisis were practically interpreted as recorded in these notes.

It was noted in relation to a story run about a particular bank at the beginning of the banking crisis that such stories carried implications in relation to national interest and institutional self-interest. As crisis symptoms escalated, editors on multiple occasions alluded to the broadcaster's general responsibilities and how they were heightened by the present circumstances.

Unpacking the version of responsibility explicit and implicit in the editorial notes, it appears to principally involve, in practice, the timely provision of accurate and objective information to the public, avoiding alarmism, hyperbole and the spreading of rumour, dutifully respecting privacy, the law, and the good name of individuals, always prioritising getting a story right rather than getting it first, and giving due consideration to protecting the national interest.

Such concerns, many of which are captured in the recent Banking Inquiry testimony of the Head of News and Current Affairs during the period in question (Mulhall, 2015: 9)- as well as corroborated by a newsroom informant who told me that in the wake of the bank guarantee in 2008 staff had been instructed to regularly reassure the public about the safety of their deposited money- reflect an alignment between professional logics, institutional values, an awareness of its place in the state and the political surveillance that comes with it. They demonstrate a keen awareness of RTÉ's status as a national public service broadcaster with multiple audiences- domestic publics and government, as well as, internationally, foreign governments, media and financial markets.

Overall, they suggested that an appropriate journalistic response to crisis is founded upon diligent adherence to pre-existing notions of responsibility rather than requiring normative or practical journalistic innovations. The records

betray little evidence of views that the crisis had created a need for substantially modified journalistic practices, save for a sole reference to a call for greater diversity in programme contributors and a reference to the increased significance of the business desk's expertise to interpret ongoing events. References to public opinion appeared just as marginal as in my own observations.

What constituted "good" public service broadcasting in the eyes of the editorial team also gives insights into how they conceive of their role. One example was provided by the conclusion drawn from positive responses from international broadcasters, organs of state and the public to RTÉ's coverage of the visits in 2011 of US President Barack Obama and UK monarch Queen Elizabeth II that the case for public service broadcasting itself had been strengthened. Elsewhere, satisfaction and pride in work undertaken on and around the general elections of 2007 and 2011 accrued from high viewerships and perceived successes in maintaining standards of accuracy and impartiality, avoiding missing big stories, avoiding major complaints from political parties and keeping a focus on policy.

The extent of pride engendered by these events is redolent of MacConghail's (1984: 68) suggestion that through its coverage of the event, the visit of John F Kennedy to Ireland in 1963 helped embolden RTÉ and gave it confidence in its early years. This also calls to mind Golding and Elliott's (1979: 93) suggestion that PSB's 'quasi-official status' as broadcast 'journalism of record' is bound up with the idea of recording these kind of events as a 'matter of duty'.

5.3.4 Introduction of new journalism guidelines

The magnitude of the *Mission to Prey* editorial crisis was such that RTÉ was moved to enlist external assistance in an overhaul of its internal journalism guidelines in which all journalists would be immediately and compulsorily trained (RTÉ, 2011b: 11). I secured access to attend one of the group sessions in April.

Upon arrival, all participants were presented with a copy of the new guidelines and a form that indicated they had been read, understood and that the training has been attended. Delivered to a group of about thirty staff over about an hour, the session involved a brief overview of some of the key changes to the guidelines document since its last revision in 2008, followed by a lengthy question and answer session.

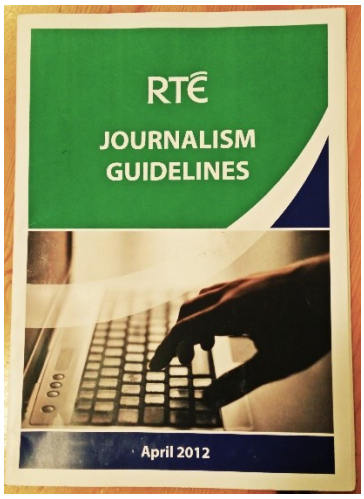


Fig. 5-2: Journalism guidelines document

The document (RTÉ, 2012c) was justified to the assembled journalists both in terms of the need to restore public trust in the wake of recent editorial failings, and the need to clarify journalistic responsibilities in a more codified form as newsroom cultural 'osmosis' could no longer be relied on to sufficiently inculcate journalistic values in staff. The main changes to the document as introduced by the organisers were, aside from its shorter length and addition of guidelines on use of social media sources, the introduction of a series of 28 'mandatory obligations' with which journalists were expected to comply. Given the events that spurred the document's production, it is unsurprising that a great many of these were concerned with responding to the weaknesses identified by the recent *Mission to Prey* inquiries and focused on delineating the precise chains of responsibility in the carrying out of journalism in RTÉ, particularly regarding more sensitive areas like secret filming.

The assembled journalists focused their questions on the new mandatory stipulations and what they meant for daily journalistic work- in particular the

legal, technical and procedural matters concerning chains of responsibility. A number of participants expressed alarm about the motivations behind some of these changes, a disquiet which led to a number of staff declining to sign the form on the basis that 'they place unwarranted responsibility on reporters and producers that should be made at management level' (Coyle and O'Brien, 2012). Several others spoke about a post-Reynolds 'chilling effect' where a climate of fear about legal reprisals was resulting in journalists increasingly pulling punches.

On the whole, the exercise- hardly worthy of its description as 'training'- seemed to me to be motivated by a combination of institutional self-protection (its blitz of pre-emptive responses to the findings of the BAI inquiry seemed clearly engineered to head off the prospect of the encroachment of government or regulator), the protection of its journalists, and a public relations exercise to help restore public trust. Notably, with *Mission to Prey* the sole referent of its "post-crisis" focus, the limited nature of the journalistic response to economic and democratic crisis was underlined. In any case, the extent to which journalism guidelines shape daily practices is questionable. The previous set of guidelines- itself years out of date- was never cited during my time observing newsroom life, suggesting that ways of doing things emerged from routinised daily practice diffused throughout the chain of decision-making, not from adherence to a rulebook. 'Osmosis', it seems, remained a powerful force.

Indeed, during a wander down a corridor towards the end of my newsroom sojourn, I met by chance a senior editorial figure who, before bidding me farewell, told me as much. He attributed the main source of 'suspicion' around my presence as rooted in a professional fear of external scrutiny, specifically in relation to the exposure of the reality of editorial decision-making as more 'instinctive' than 'scientific'.

This suggested to me a mismatch between the public face of professional journalism, described so often in terms of essentialised, proceduralised adherence to precepts like objectivity, impartiality and balance, did not quite

accord with the messy, contingent realities of daily newswork and the thousands of daily judgements that it entailed.

This, and other aspects of the response of the public service journalistic habitus to the crisis provided ample material for a series of interviews with staff, discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Making the News II: Practitioner Perspectives

6.1 Methodological approach

A chief benefit of extended on-site presence at RTÉ meant that the logistical challenge of arranging interviews with working journalists-whose availability to meet might be curtailed at a moment's notice- was mitigated by sheer proximity to them. The 32 formal interviews undertaken were conducted everywhere from journalist's desks, in the canteen, and at other indoor and outdoor locations spread over the grounds of the Montrose campus. Interviews were semi-structured, with topic schedules varying to a significant extent to account for differing professional roles and individual expertise (see sample question schedule in Appendix 6-1), and also influenced by the ongoing ethnographic observations and lines of inquiry organically emerging from the interview process itself.

Most discussions were recorded, with explicit interviewee permission- and later manually transcribed in full by the author using the Nvivo qualitative data analysis software. From there, interview data underwent two rounds of coding. First, responses were coded according to topics which were derived inductively from interview data, where individual responses comprised the unit of analysis. Seven topic categories were discerned in total, comprising: RTÉ and the crisis; RTE and the public; internal and external pressures on RTÉ; news content; journalism; funding and commercial imperatives; and RTÉ and politics, from which a total of thirty-one corresponding sub-topics were drawn. A second round of inductive coding involved the identification of thematic patterns within the responses coded to sub-topics- here, sentences and paragraphs comprised the units of analysis, allowing question responses to be coded to more than one theme. Themes were identified at both semantic and latent levels- that is to say, taking into account both explicit meanings and underlying conceptualisations (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 13).

For reasons of brevity and focus, this chapter explores a subset of three areas of thematically-organised interview data most closely associated with the project's key research themes. Firstly, the chapter looks at journalistic conceptualisations of crisis, editorial responses, and the durability of journalistic norms at a time of crisis. Secondly, journalistic views on the mediation of politics are examined, including the links between RTÉ and the national political agenda as well as how the role of extra-parliamentary politics on RTÉ is conceived. Finally, attitudes towards transparency, accountability and public participation in the project of public service broadcasting are explored.

With a relatively small sample size of thirty-two interviews, undue generalisations are avoided and all conclusions made are necessarily of a tentative nature. Care has been taken to avoid misrepresentation, either through incorrect transcription or distortions introduced by out of context quotation. The presentation of interview data reflects the relative strength of themes in terms of prevalence and intensity. For reasons of concision, interviewee responses are frequently shortened, with the convention of ellipses in square brackets […] used to indicate non-contiguous portions of quoted extracts. Ellipses without brackets indicate interviewee hesitation and pauses. In cases of longer quoted extracts which are reproduced separately, ellipses are used at the start of the extract to indicate that it begins mid-sentence. Square brackets are placed around the first letter of a quoted extract to show where a change in capitalisation is made for grammatical reasons.

Unless express permission was attained for the use of more personally identifiable information, responses are identified below only with respect to general occupational categories. This information is contained in the first letter in the alphanumeric code appended to each quoted extract, where [Q] refers to a news journalist, [R] to a current affairs journalist, and [P] to an editor or member of management in the newsroom or elsewhere in the organisation.

6.2 Journalism and crisis

6.2.1 On crisis anticipation and crisis response

RTÉ's performance in anticipating the 2008 economic crisis arose in several interviews, with failings tending to be admitted in the abstract but mixed with a certain pride that warnings *were* heard on its airwaves. The broadcaster's Head of Broadcast Compliance suggested that 'RTÉ has actually had quite a good record […] in pointing out, along the way, that what was happening was dangerous', but that the media as a whole weren't sufficiently critical- 'there wasn't sufficient interrogation about the possibility that it was a bubble…that there was going to be a crash etc.' [P102].

A senior manager in the newsroom expressed the view in relation to 'minority or dissenting voices getting heard' that 'I don't think that [the crisis] has changed it one way or the other' [P104]. A senior journalist suggested that dissenting voices simply weren't there for RTÉ to find- at least, not sufficiently credible ones. While acknowledging that '[w]e probably missed out on' [Q135] critics of the economic orthodoxy, this journalist asked 'but who were they?' questioning their 'locus standi' to secure journalistic interest. They added that 'there are not many people who can stand up and say, I told you so', and that those who did 'probably did it in sufficiently muted terms for them not to be heard'. Asked about the editorial response to crisis, the same journalist said that in general the crisis has not occasioned significant changes in programme guest selection, saying that 'in terms of having a black book of people you can't use or wouldn't use, there wouldn't be many names in it'.

Another experienced journalist however suggested that there has been a greater reliance on in-house expertise as a consequence of the decline of authority of at least some forms of external expertise, saying that 'politics and finance has become very discredited' [Q134], illustrating this by suggesting that 'if you put a stockbroker on the television and interviewed them […] you'll get emails and phone calls complaining'.

For some senior figures, particularly in the newsroom, severe doubt was expressed over the idea that Ireland's current crises represented something that presented challenges to journalistic practices of a more fundamental kind. The Managing Editor of News described the contexts of crisis as simply 'another element of the story', and that

> …the business of...of news is much the same, whether, you know, society is collapsing all around you, or, whether it's a time of...you know, peace and plenty and everything's fairly straightforward. [P106]

The Chief News Editor similarly rejected the idea that the current crises represent a particular problem for journalism beyond the quotidian challenges of news production, saying that journalistic scepticism always needs to be applied, crisis or not. To the suggestion that the crisis necessitated a problematisation of economic orthodoxies, they replied that such concerns are 'philosophical questions' which they would leave 'to the philosophers' and that they must dedicate their time and effort to 'dealing with the news of today' [P107]. This was echoed by a senior newsroom manager, who said that it was the role of 'economists and to some extent political philosophers' [P104] rather than journalists to establish just 'how fundamental is the crisis'.

One journalist demurred from the idea that the crisis was being adequately covered by RTÉ, suggesting that the crisis is manifold and ongoing. They argued that Irish society was largely unreflective during the 'boom years' [Q125] because 'we were largely comfortable', but that when 'the house of cards came crumbling down about 2007-2008', 'it was then that we realised there's no trust' between the public and a range of state and non-state institutions. This journalist suggested that in the light of a sense of disenfranchisement among sections of the population, 'we're supposed to be reflecting that society, and I don't think we're reflecting the society now'.

Another implied that not everything that should be said about the crisis had been

said by RTÉ or other media, partly because of what they saw as an uncomfortable proximity between many journalists and a number of financial institutions later implicated in the crisis by virtue of their status as beneficiaries of preferential loans, and partly because of the political constraints within which the broadcaster exists. On this latter point, this journalist bemoaned that with politicians often felt free to treat RTÉ like 'the punch bag, the ball that can be kicked around' [Q132].

Another journalist indicated that RTE's capacity to critically identify sources of crisis, even individual sources, was constrained by the fact that 'nobody has been charged or convicted of any offence in relation to the...collapse of the country' [Q124]. This means that while

> …everybody knows that millions have been lost through the financial collapse, but that doesn't mean that I can go up with a microphone to named individuals and say you're a crook, you know? You can't do that! [Q124]

In a much more positive vein, another journalist offered the view that RTÉ had done 'the best job' [Q127] of any media outlet in Ireland in making sense of the crisis, and that 'without our coverage, I think there would be an awful lot more confusion than there is'.

I asked journalists whether RTÉ had the job of contributing to national recovery through "positive" news stories over and above the usual programme requirements for "light and shade". While one interviewee suggested that there was an enhanced 'appetite for happier stories' [Q121] in the wake of the crash, most journalists argued that it was their job to reflect reality- even if it did make for what one editor described as a 'bleak diet' [P109] of bad news, and that they would treat government initiatives 'with the same amount of cynicism' [Q121]. Echoing this sentiment, another told me that they didn't feel 'the need to be Pollyanna', to 'sugar coat what is…an awful situation at the moment in this country' [Q125].

The view that RTÉ nonetheless had an obligation to 'cheer up' and 'boost morale' of gloomy audiences was expressed by the broadcaster's Group Head of Television who said that there was 'almost desperation for something to get away from our current travails' [P105].

Several journalists acknowledged the risks of being accused of complicity in state-sponsored national boosterism, but for one journalist, the opposite criticism- that RTÉ was 'damaging the national psyche', 'talking the country down' and even 'deepening the crisis'- was something they were 'acutely conscious of' [Q134].

The Head of Broadcast Compliance acknowledged that one source of external pressure that is making itself felt in the crisis is that of the business lobby, the 'Chambers of Commerce type people, the IBEC type of people':

> I am aware that if the Director General goes to a business lunch he is going to be cornered by businesspeople saying you know, if only RTE could be more positive, it would put up national morale, it would create a sense of confidence, it would get consumers spending again, and we'd get out of it. [P102]

One journalist spoke at length on the idea that in the newsroom, there existed 'a pressure, almost invisible pressure' to go along with a 'dominant narrative' on economic recovery. This was described as 'pressure on me as a journalist to kind of go with the good news…' in relation to aspects of state's espoused developmental model, which they said they have 'resisted', adding that it is difficult to 'get other voices on' because 'people who […] don't share that narrative are seen as oddballs' [Q130].

The Group Head of Television indicated that RTÉ's agenda with regard to what they described as 'the knowledge economy' was directly aligned with that of successive governments. Describing Ireland as 'kind of a centre of excellence for

European innovation', they said that 'it's an important part of the economy, it's important part of the...brand Ireland I suppose… […] we have a role to play, we have to reflect that…' [P105].

6.2.2 Personal and professional challenges of doing journalism at a time of crisis

Several interviewees commented on how their own knowledge gaps were exposed by the crisis, with one describing 'struggling each day to try and stay abreast of what was going on' [Q123].

Another spoke about feeling 'at sea' when the banking collapse occurred, likening it to 'looking up and seeing up this landscape that you thought was fixed and permanent has just sort of melted, contorted, and completely changed' [Q134].

Several said that it is their job to draw on the knowledge of those with the requisite knowledge. As one put it,

> …all we can do is do our best to find people as I say who do have an understanding, and then…draw on their expertise [Q135].

Journalists I spoke to who commented on the organisation's high profile editorial difficulties were unequivocal in their dismay. On the Reynolds affair, one suggested that it represent a moment of epochal significance in Irish journalism, saying that '[t]here will be journalism before the Fr Kevin Reynolds case, and after' [Q120].

One journalist spoke about the subjective experience of constantly delivering bad news to their audience- and how the Fr Reynolds affair, combined with RTÉ's internal cost-cutting has taken a further toll:

> It is our job to tell it like it is, and unfortunately how it is at the moment is gloomy. It is horrible. […] I mean...the last couple of months, particularly in light of the Reynolds thing, I haven't wanted to come to work myself... [Q127]

Describing the situation as 'utterly numbingly depressing' and RTÉ's initial response to the Fr Reynolds affair as 'beyond negligent' and 'an absolute disgrace', the journalist went on to say that recent cuts in remuneration amounted to nothing less than 'a tsunami of cutting people's lives apart' [Q127].

Another journalist commented on the extent of cutbacks in RTÉ and how the organisation's own internal financial crisis mirrored that of elsewhere in the country:

> …this organisation is having the guts sucked out of it as well, just as much as is happening anywhere else in the country [Q123].

Beyond morale, most interviewees I spoke to on the topic reported that the effects of the cutbacks had real impacts on the kinds of journalism that it was possible to do in RTÉ. A senior member of newsroom management told me that

> …undeniably, the economic crisis in this organisation has meant that we have much less room for discretionary action than we would've had before [P104].

This was a sentiment echoed by the Chief News Editor who said that spending reductions of about 20% were a significant disadvantage [P107].

Another journalist told me that with resource reductions cutting 'to the bone', the money required for 'extended research and investigation...just isn't there' [Q123], making it harder for journalists to get away from the daily news cycle and pursue other kinds of stories.

6.2.3 Journalistic norms: weathering the storm of crisis?

In order to discern if support for journalism's underlying professional precepts had been shook by the experience of crisis, I queried journalists on the enduring

relevance of ideas of objectivity, impartiality and balance. Fulsome, unqualified support for these principles was the most common response. For example, the Managing Editor of News identified these requirements as the 'vital' heart of public service broadcasting, describing them as 'what differentiates public service broadcasting from all the other sources that are out there' and key to the maintenance of public trust, because 'people should be able to know, well if you hear it on RTÉ, it has a certain status because you know they've gone through various procedures' [P106].

Another journalist spoke in support of the requirements, describing them as 'essential' and that if they are viewed by journalists as 'constraints', they have a problem [Q127]. In a similar fashion, another noted: 'One has to […] go down the middle, and that's right' [Q132]. Another journalist said that 'in RTÉ in particular, and in news […] your first function is to be objective and to be impartial' and that such an orientation was 'natural' [Q133].

In a formulation echoed by several other interviewees, one journalist suggested that the absence of these principles would lead to the undesirable outcome of open 'editorialising all the time the way some of the newspapers do' [Q131].

The Managing Editor sought to explain the journalistic impulse towards objectivity as being rooted in a desire to tell stories as a neutral conduit rather than an interested party. For them, 'journalists aren't people with missions that they're trying to sell. Journalists like telling stories, they like getting to the facts and they like getting on air' [P106].

The removal of personal agendas was identified by multiple journalists as a key component of the practical expression of these professional norms, including by one interviewee who said that 'you don't embark on a story with your agenda' because 'we have a bigger responsibility than anyone else in public life to get it…bang on' [Q121].

Another journalist linked the preservation of journalistic norms with their authority and public trust- they must always resist the temptation to simply 'tell it like I see it' and to 'be unleashed' [Q127] because this would diminish trust.

Several journalists spoke in support of the principles of objectivity, impartiality and balance *without* viewing them as excluding the possibilities of critique or the taking of normative positions. Identifying the 'essence' of public service broadcasting as 'explaining, challenging, holding to account...and taking...the story forward, into its next steps', one journalist explained that the "striving for, you know, truth and all of that' 'should be part of a journalist's DNA' [Q125].

This was one of the only explicit mentions of "truth" as a driving motivation of journalism. The search for truth, according to this view, must be supported- not superceded- by objectivity, impartiality and balance. This orientation towards a more explicit normativity was further illustrated by a journalist who insisted that the highlighting of inequality, for example, is editorially justified because its existence is 'wrong' [Q125].

Another journalist similarly expressed a desire to retain existing journalistic norms and that a normative role in the form of a watchdog function was readily compatible with these norms, on the basis that so long as one doesn't 'editorialise or give opinion […] cos that's not my job' [Q133], exposing hypocrisy by pointing out the contradiction between the words and deeds of politicians doesn't entail partiality because it remained 'fact-based'. Holding power to account means, according to this understanding, holding power to *its* account and is not normatively freighted beyond this.

A substantial number of interviewees voiced support for the journalistic norms of objectivity, impartiality and balance, but qualified them in various ways. Several, including the Head of Broadcast Compliance, described objectivity and impartiality as an 'aspiration […] [that] is actually terribly important…' [P102] '[e]ven if you recognise that it is not achievable…'. That it was seen as a 'valid academic subject' for the classroom suggests that deeper engagement with these ideas was not seen as professionally relevant.

There was a marked reluctance amongst some journalists, however, to essentialise objectivity in terms of clearly codified practice. A senior newsroom manager commented that the "rules" of impartiality, balance and objectivity are important but complementary to a journalistic *sens practique:* a feel for the game which is reliant on instinct and experience accrued over time:

> Obviously certain elements of science are applied to it, but...but most journalist calls are based on […] experience and based on a feel for what is the right thing to do at that moment in time... [P104]

This was illustrated by other journalists, one of whom spoke about how 'you kind of operate on a gut instinct' [Q135], and another who suggested that good journalism is about having a 'moral compass' [Q132], with both identifying 'fairness' as a quality emerging from the individual rather than codified in a rulebook.

With "fairness" rather than "objectivity" the preferred formulation of many interviewees, the impression was given that many journalists were keen not to have professional ethics altogether emptied of substantive normative orientations.

A few, however, offered a critical account of objectivity beyond negotiated support. One journalist offered the view that impartiality and balance are desirable values, but objectivity may not be, because it would inhibit journalism as a catalyst for social change- that journalism 'can break a consensus, question it […] pose problems which are implicit but can make those explicit' and that 'there is no value-free journalism' [Q126].

Another offered the view that whilst they personally supported conventional journalistic values, they are 'only ever be really used when they're thrown…used against you' where errant journalists 'step outside of the kind of..the..the dominant narrative' [Q130], further suggesting that story selection is itself 'a kind of editorialising' [Q130].

Another suggested that on occasion, the 'constraints' of fairness and objectivity sometimes prevented journalists from calling a spade a spade:

> Sometimes it's not really our position given the constraints on us about fairness and objectivity to actually say that something is a pile of shite [Q131].

Most critically, a current affairs journalist described the word objectivity as 'a bit idiotic […] in current affairs, and maybe even more insidiously in news' [R140], because it erroneously implies that journalist approach an issue with no perspective which would go on to shape their work.

6.3 Doing politics: voices in the crisis

6.3.1 Referenda and elections: screening politics

In the light of the ongoing Fiscal Treaty referendum campaign which, as previously observed, had engendered significant editorial frustration, I discussed with interviewees their views on editorial matters pertaining to elections and referenda- key parts of the formal machinery of democracy.

Reflecting the aforementioned tendency for journalists to desire a maintenance of objectivity, impartiality and balance as core professional tenets yet avoiding a rule-based dogmatism, a senior newsroom manager told me that the ultimate goal is 'fairness' in coverage, and that in general coverage 'doesn't have to be arithmetically balanced' but '[i]n the case of referenda, at the moment it appears that it does' [P104]. The Chief News editor told me that the idea of giving equal time to both sides often leads to journalists contriving what they described as the 'antithesis of news' [P107].

One journalist expressed their views on stopwatch-led balance in terms of a direct affront to their professionalism, describing as 'prescriptive nonsense' the idea of giving trained staff the 'donkey task' of

> … literally having a stopwatch in either hand, one is yes and one is no, and they spend entire programmes clicking on and off in order to try and reach

> exact balance, when we do that over the course of the range of programmes anyway. […] We are very very good at, eh, ensuring equal access to the airwaves [Q123].

Queried on the sources of frustration around the referendum campaign, many others were unequivocal in blaming interference arising from the legal context shaping the organisation and discursive mediation of competing sides in referendum campaigns (see Chapter 5). In particular, the impact of the Coughlan judgement, seen as forcing RTÉ to hold finely-balanced debates was, as one journalist put it, 'daft' [Q134] and which even 'distorts our political process'. This position was explained by another who felt that according equal time to both sides in a context where the political mainstream was almost unanimous in its support for the relevant treaty severed the legitimate, proportional link between parliamentary representation and coverage accorded [Q133]. In this vein, one said it amounted to 'public service broadcasting being beaten by a court system' [Q125], because it undermines the way that the public voted, which for another is the 'ultimate say' [P110], with another describing coverage as 'tainted' [Q133] for the same reason. An editor suggested that granting airtime to those 'who have little or no...mandate' [P110] is problematic because 'in striving for balance, you're actually distorting the picture' [P110].

Part of the frustration was related to the chief parliamentary beneficiary of time allocation during the referendum. In a situation in which, according to one editor, 'you had almost the entire political establishment and Sinn Féin on the other side' [P106], the Sinn Féin party was pointed out several times in this respect as an undeserving beneficiary of extra time. This is described by another as 'a godsend to Sinn Fein' that was without 'any sensible justification' [Q134]. The Head of Broadcast Compliance (also a member of the editorial steering group convened to oversee the coverage of the referendum campaign) said that in the absence of a diverse parliamentary representation on the "no" side in the Fiscal Treaty, there was a need to find non-parliamentary voices to ensure that one party- Sinn Féin- wouldn't 'totally dominate' debates [P102].

More generally, one interviewee expressed frustration about 'handing the debate over to people who don't want to debate what should be debated' [Q123], while another suggested that some of those suddenly granted airtime abuse the privilege by seeking to deceive the electorate, warning of the dangers of allowing 'extraneous issues' from people with 'very specific agendas', a lot of whom 'don't know what they're talking about'- yet, 'we have to let them say it' [Q133].

6.3.2 Other(ed) voices: extra-parliamentary politics and the public at large

On the broader question of RTÉ's posture toward the representational legitimacy of extra-parliamentary political voices outside election time- including those of citizens at large- journalists and management frequently spoke of what they viewed as RTÉ's good performance in representing "dissenting" voices *after* they break through to the political "mainstream". In this regard, the emergence of an increased number of independent TDs and their loose parliamentary alliance in the form of the "Technical Group" following the 2011 General Election was frequently mentioned as an established recipient of coverage. A member of the RTÉ Board told me that in their view RTÉ gives considerable coverage to more radical critiques emanating from the parliamentary political sphere but that 'the criteria by which people are given access' was heavily influenced the traditionalism of senior journalists who looked to the parliamentary process as the locus of political life:

> …the people who become senior within the organisation, the sub-editors, the news editors, the people who make the call, will tend to be people of a background which has always thought traditionally about it... [P103]

Commenting on the question of how journalists gatekeep access to the news in the context of source competition by campaigns, interest groups, professional associations and unions, one journalist suggested that although a 'semblance of coherence' is a prerequisite, '[i]t's often about who shouts loudest' [Q129], and even sometimes that 'we do certain things to keep some people off our back'

[Q135], suggesting an acquiescence on the basis of expediency to some-unspecified- voices clamouring for representation.

One editor suggested in strong terms that it is not RTÉ's job to represent the carriers of positions and ideas which have not proved to be 'credible', and that RTÉ must first of all reflect the existing balance of perspectives, primarily as established at the ballot box:

> …show me the alternative idea that has not had the airtime and show me the alternative idea that has not had airtime but remains credible. […] do we necessarily have to represent the communists and the neo-nazis just because...you know, for the sake of political debate? Actually, no, we don't..nor should we. If they want to put themselves forward for an election and get a mandate, by all means… [P110]

This topic of who should be defined as political agents was something I took up with another senior journalist, who suggested that 'to be taken seriously… […] you can't beat an electoral mandate' [Q135], and that the outcome of elections is the clearest guide to RTÉ in determining who should be asked on to programmes as political actors. With time allocated on the basis of 'what […] first and foremost, elections are showing' [Q135], they added that they were 'not sure that there's a whole lot of new voices out there offering anything' in any case.

A senior political journalist expressed the view that extra-parliamentary voices are given due coverage when necessary, but that their lack of 'democratic legitimacy' meant that they were not afforded the sort of status of Dáil parties. Noting that 'they're not taken particularly seriously by RTÉ, and I wouldn't really have a problem with that', they said that ultimately, when it comes to determining 'how seriously should we take some dude with a bull-horn outside the gates of Leinster House?", that 'it's with the numbers' [Q131]- preferably in the form of an electoral mandate.

The suggestion that 'there is a certain amount of pressure on us from people in

the Oireachtas to make sure that we […] cover proceedings in the Dáil and the Seanad, and they get very upset when we don't give enough time to them' suggests that this valourisation of parliament is partly due to exogenous pressure exerted by the parliamentary sphere, although their subsequent assertion that this was only natural because 'it's something that we should do as a public service broadcaster' [Q131] demonstrates an acceptance of this logic. A further comment to the effect that 'community-based politics or whatever' disadvantage themselves in media terms by having less hierarchical structures suggests a journalistic affinity with conventional leadership structures, a sentiment reiterated by a current affairs journalist in relation to the Occupy Dame Street group (the largest Irish instantiation of the Occupy phenomenon). In relation to the same group, another journalist commented that if they got less coverage than 'they probably think they should get', it was because 'in a strict sense of the word, they represent nobody but themselves' [Q134].

One journalist demurred from the consensus around parliamentary numbers as the legitimate basis of political representation, suggesting that it allocating coverage to parties based on past performance was the 'most anti-change thing we do', an 'utterly pro-incumbent' system that 'militates against radical change' [R140], particularly in a changing political climate where new, alternative political voices are emerging.

The long-established "access" radio phone-in programme *Liveline* was spontaneously raised by several interviewees, and discussed in terms that suggested that it operated on the basis of a radically different representational mode than news and current affairs programming. Describing *Liveline* as 'really the only unmediated programme on RTÉ', The Head of Broadcast Compliance suggested that its uniqueness lies in the fact that '…the vast majority of space is given up to non-professionals, to people who aren't representative of anything, who are just representing themselves' [P102]. They further commented that the agendas of *Liveline* contributors are '…significantly at times quite different at times from what is perceived to be the public agenda', and that it may be seen as facilitating a quasi-public, quasi-private discursive space, in which issues raised

can '…sometimes […] can move from there into the bigger wider public sphere' [P102].

Describing the programme as 'the crucial nexus between people…kind of getting the gist in the news of what's happening and then getting motivated, getting angry', another editor identified the '*Liveline* effect' as a critical part of a chain of action which allowed the public to use RTÉ to raise issues and agitate for causes, noting that 'it's been hugely..impressive I think, in...in being able to deal with social change' [P114].

News programming, on the other hand, must restrict itself to "legitimate" voices, because as another journalist put it,

> …people nearly read that as a verification […] that if you're on RTÉ, therefore you're legitimate. […] So you do have a responsibility that the voices you're putting out there are legitimate ones [Q133].

With one version of the public agenda playing out on *Liveline* and another on news programming, one journalist suggested to me that weaknesses in representational diversity in media output was directly related to a diminished diversity in the journalistic cohort. While in the past, journalists 'came from a wide range of backgrounds', today

> …that diversity is gone. We all now come through the same four or five universities, the same four or five training courses that trains journalists. […]. And the danger is that we're all terribly middle class […] and the diversity and the texture and the difference that we had in journalism in the past is being lost. And you see that then in maybe a failure to realise there are other voices out there that should be heard... [Q125]

Several staff spoke about how programme formats and time pressures of newswork mitigated against broader representational diversity in news, including one who pointed to the impracticalities of 'thinking too deeply' about

news production because 'it's what you can get, in the four hour window before the six hour..the six o clock news. It's put together in that short timeline and that's it' [P114].

Another journalist emphasised the perceived need for contributors on programmes to be available at short notice and appropriately articulate, and that untested contributors are too risky to be used, saying that 'it's all very well to talk about diverse voices and bringing in people from the margins and so on' but that 'You can't...put someone on air who is not ready...who has never done it' [Q125].

One senior journalist went against the grain, implicitly critiquing the representational mode that underpins the attribution of credibility to those asked on to the public airwaves. They cited the example of the Ballyhea Says No campaign group against bondholder payments (see O'Briain, 2013) as an example of 'a very interesting piece of local defiance' of the kind that should have a greater place in RTE programming, adding that they were 'slightly wary' of 'the amount of access we give to…what you could loosely […] describe as official Ireland', on the basis that, in an inversion of the representative logic used by other interviewees, 'very often' 'you have a sense that they're representing nobody other than themselves' [Q135].

One journalist offered an example of what they felt was an undue over-representation and inappropriate facilitation of financial expertise in the newsroom, telling me that RTÉ was involved in setting up remote cameras in the offices of a number of Dublin stockbrokers to facilitate easy access to the RTÉ Newsroom for the purpose of high quality live broadcasts for use in bulletins (see Nolan, 2010). According to this journalist, this was an 'appalling' privileging of 'free, unfettered access to the airwaves' to 'the very people who got us into this mess' [Q130].

6.3.3 Public service journalism, social change and campaigning

Journalistic attitudes to RTÉ's roles in relation to promoting social change were

solicited. A senior member of newsroom management expressed the clear view that RTÉ was 'not there to create a new agenda' but rather 'to narrate what is going on' [P104]. They added that although journalistic independence was crucial, 'we do have parameters that dictate, to some extent anyway, the subject matter of our journalism', and that 'sustaining the national debate' necessitates taking 'the apparatus of society seriously'.

The Chief News Editor ventured that although RTÉ should do 'a bit of both', its first duty is to reflect; only secondarily to change, suggesting that RTÉ's contribution to society should involve engaging in publics in an educative project aimed at creating 'a better society', seeing its roles as including imperatives to 'educate, report, uncover, disclose'. [P107]

Another editor evoked the Reithian formula that broadcasting should gently lead people to new ideas- 'Not leading them and telling them you have to eat from this trough, or you have to take a good dose of that, but leading them to the ideas that are out there' [P114].

Despite a general reticence to ascribe too much influence to RTÉ, several journalists identified the role of journalists in enabling, provoking and reflecting social change as important to its contribution to democracy. One correspondent described the life-cycle of an issue as 'like a chrysalis becoming a butterfly, where it takes off, and can't be ignored by news editors' [Q126], a sentiment echoed by an editor who spoke about how social change is pushed onto news agendas by specific issues and issue sponsors, which act as motors of change insofar as it 'forces the […] authorities to look at it in a different light' [P110].

One journalist told me although journalists can shine a light on something, after this initial thematisation where an issue becomes 'public, if you like…that was RTÉ's job done', after which '[it] was up to other people' to keep it on the agenda, to 'make the running' on an issue [Q135].

Attitudes on whether "campaigning" journalism had a place in the RTÉ newsroom

generally elicited a negative reaction, with journalists and managers alike citing the restrictions of genre, journalistic ethics and legislative constraints as reasons why it was not usually appropriate to openly advocate for particular causes. A senior manager told me that in a news and current affairs context, 'it's probably the one area of journalism that is difficult for us to do' [P104]. However, a strong strain of opinion was apparent that within those constraints, journalism, even in the newsroom, could and should engage- to a limited extent- in explicitly value-laden activities, so long as it was done carefully. Testimony on this suggested that in practice, this meant that any "campaigning" must remain within the realm of broad consensus.

When the Chief News Editor, for example, told me that they saw some room for campaigning journalism in news and I asked on what issues this might be acceptable, they responded that they could campaign for example on 'reducing child poverty' and on 'righting wrongs that are obviously wrong' [P107]. Another editor similarly suggested that it may be acceptable on some stories where there is 'definitely a bad guy out there, and you're hunting a bad guy' [P114].

A number of journalists made reference to an RTÉ News "campaign" of sorts on the high prevalence of road traffic accidents a number of years prior. A senior manager in the newsroom told me that a decision was taken to pro-actively ensure that road death statistics were not ignored or glossed over, but made prominent in the news for a period of time. They said however that this was a temporary initiative and that ultimately, 'we're a newsroom, we're not a series of campaigning journalists' [P104].

Another journalist, although speaking approvingly of the road traffic accident 'campaign', told me that there were 'very few' topics which might be similarly amenable to campaigning, offering the sole example of 'mental health' as something 'topical' which they felt RTÉ would be able to 'shine a light' on [Q121]. Citing a British newspaper that actively campaigns, one editor said that it has the independence [P015] to do this, implying that RTÉ did not.

I asked a number of interviewees about whether climate change might represent another suitable issue. Respondents on this were very dubious about the suitability of this topic, principally on the basis that as a "contentious" topic it would not represent fertile ground for RTÉ advocacy. According to one journalist, contrary to road deaths,

> Not everyone believes that climate change is an issue […] I don't think we can campaign on something where there's very obviously two…massively divergent opinions on something. [Q121]

Another journalist told me that in their view, merely placing climate change on the agenda without a definite news hook would be seen internally as unacceptable, saying that something like this was 'just so not gonna happen basically' because 'campaigning journalism is frowned upon' in the newsroom [Q130].

One journalist's insistence that 'you need a hook' [Q130] to raise an issue was mirrored by the Chief News Editor's clear view that climate change was a poor fit with news values, and that 'climate change was not critical, not urgent', representing neither a 'daily crisis' nor an 'occasional crisis' [P107]. Perhaps this is what another journalist meant when they said that when it comes to raising issues on the news agenda, 'you can't go too far off the radar' [Q133].

6.4 Knowing their place: the "public" in public service broadcasting

6.4.1 Visions of the "imagined audience"

Newsroom observations suggested that formal audience data played only a minor supporting role in newsroom life. Interview questions further probed journalistic and managerial attitudes to the relationships between RTÉ and its public, with a focus on conceptualisations of that public as well as the desirable forms that those relationships should practically take with regard to journalistic accountability and public participation.

References to audiences and publics made by journalists in interviews did not necessarily refer to either formal or first-hand knowledge, but often to an implied, imagined audience, a composite of a variety of sources that included family, friends, colleagues, informal encounters with members of the public, formal audience research, and also the broader national imagined community. A range of diverse and occasionally contradictory visions of the audience were articulated.

Meeting the desires of the audience was sometimes talked about in positive terms, including when the Group Head of Television told me that programming must match the expectations of viewers. Describing audience research as 'hugely important', and about 'understanding your market', they told me that Nielsen ratings represented the only way of measuring 'value for the public purse', which as a 'public servant' in a 'semi-state organisation', they had a 'responsibility' to emphasise [P105].

Achieving big ratings for programmes was described by many interviewees in the newsroom as both justification and reward for what they do. One editor directly linked good ratings with enhanced 'credibility' [P109], while another told me that 'big numbers' to a large degree validate a piece of output as a successful piece of public service broadcasting [P114].

Changing audience news consumption habits struck a chord with some editors who articulated a need to react accordingly. According to one, the distribution mechanisms of news needed to move with the internet age, but, in an affirmation of an assumed audience satisfaction with its content, the news itself did not need to change. Describing audience demands to see events 'pretty much as they're happening', this editor commented that 'it's the platforms that are changing rather than the content and the stories' [P110].

A recurring theme with many journalists was a strong confidence that members of the public will not hesitate to contact them if they're unhappy. Some spoke of

overflowing email inboxes, suggesting, if anything, a surfeit of direct correspondence from the public. One journalist described public contact as a sort of a centring mechanism, letting you know when they've deviated, 'when it's like the spinning top… […] goes off balance' [Q132]. Another editor told me that

> …when you're getting it really wrong...you begin to get the feedback straight away, and then you gotta make...change your tack... [P109]

Whilst public contact seems to be viewed as a helpful resource in taking the temperature of public opinion on a given piece of journalism, it was not uncritically celebrated by interviewees.

One journalist described a text-line for a programme with which they were associated as delivering a steady stream of both 'constructive observation, opinion and criticism' but also 'raw sewage- people who are angry at the world, and just want to vent spleen' [Q123].

Elaborating on the idea that the public feel a strong 'sense of ownership and entitlement' [P109] in relation to public broadcasting which emboldens them to make their views on programme output clear to journalists and management, several took refuge in the broadcasting canard that displeasing a broad swathe of different groups is itself an indicator of success. This is illustrated by one senior manager's claim that 'we're criticised for many things...usually in contradictory directions' [P104].

Editors and senior management frequently alluded to the impossibility of pleasing everybody all of the time in the context of general-interest broad-based channels aimed at all demographics. Although buoyed by strong ratings and what they saw as strong public trust and hard-earned credibility, several interviewees, including the Managing Editor of News, suggested the existence of ambivalent public attitudes to RTÉ, partly based on a sense that 'people regard RTÉ as part of the establishment':

> …I get the sense that in Britain there is a natural affection for the BBC..they call it Auntie Beeb, it's sort of some..almost part of the family, whereas RTE, because people feel that they own it, which they do, they therefore are annoyed when it doesn't reflect their own views or their own interests… [P106]

For their own part, journalists were markedly cool on accommodating public views regarding substantive news content, revealing a set of often negative or paternalistic attitudes to the public.

Among some interviewees there was a strain of thought that the public are often fickle, even intransigent. Discussing the challenges of facilitating public understanding of the Fiscal Treaty referendum, one programme-maker expressed frustration that even if RTÉ staff were to sit down with 'every single voter in the country and explained it to them, there would be a very significant body of people who just don't want to understand' [Q123].

One editor spoke about how 'audiences don't really engage' with 'big picture type of stories' like climate change or the Palestinian crisis, which the editor described as 'worthy but dull topics', which they still covered, albeit 'sometimes it's just with a heavy heart' [P114]. This is because, as another editor also put it, viewerships in current affairs programming tend to drop precipitously- 'through the floor'- on non-domestic items.

Whilst journalists and editors alike often expressed the view that they should not 'force-feed' [Q134] the audience with coverage on issues which they did not feel resonated with the public, instead reflecting what one editor called the 'ebb and flow' of public interest [P114], the example of Northern Ireland was offered by one journalist as an example of an area where significant coverage was accorded irrespective of assumed low public interest:

> …people in the South did not care what was going on in Northern Ireland a lot of the time. But we did it over and over and over again [Q127]

On the principle that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it", the Managing Editor of News suggested that audience expectations and ratings success discourage changes in programme formats, suggesting in relation to the *Six One News*, 'what's the point in changing it too much if...to a large extent it actually works' [P106]. Another journalist suggested that unless programme formats stay consistent, audiences will go elsewhere [Q123].

Another impact of the imagined audience lies in their assumed desire for news that spoke to them personally. One editor argued that coverage of issues is focused on what it means for the lives of Irish people, with the assumed insularity of the imagined audience absolving journalists of deep engagement with complex, systemic matters:

> Like, the Euro bailout overnight, ultimately what people want to know is what effect is that going to have on my life, not you know, the geo-political world of you know, the EU and how political leadership has failed, and how a blind eye was turned to the excesses of Greece and France and Portugal and Ireland [P110]

A sense that some demographics are increasingly beyond the reach of RTÉ's news and current affairs output was expressed by a small number of journalists. Suggesting both regional and socio-economic divides in RTÉ's audience, one told me that

> Inside the Pale and outside the Pale there are very different impressions of RTE and attitudes toward it. […] I think it is regrettable that RTE is consumed by a by and large, so many people who are better off than...lower down the socio-economic ladder [Q123]

Another applied a similar logic to immigrant populations, offering the personal anecdote that in places with large immigrant populations, 'nobody is watching RTÉ, nobody' [Q130], expressing a concern that RTÉ's future relevance is in question if swathes of the population are disinterested in its output.

6.4.2 Accountability and public participation

Many interviewees were also asked for their views on specific transparency and public participation measures implemented elsewhere, including "Editors' blogs", "public editors", media response programmes which allow the public to put questions to journalism professionals about their work, and the more radical 'public commissioning' proposal, put forward by Hind (2010), a form of participatory budgeting in which members of the public, as co-owners of the broadcaster, would each be able to exercise a share a share of power in determining what kind of programmes were produced.

A range of views were offered by interviewees on this topic, from a strong aversion to any increased accountability or participation measures to the more sympathetic view that journalism should facilitate higher levels of public scrutiny and/or involvement.

One common theme, particularly strong among senior editorial figures, was that the public should be kept at a healthy distance from encroachment on journalistic autonomy. When asked whether journalists are sufficiently equipped to- or should be tasked with- the responsibility of deciding which voices and ideas are granted access to the public airwaves, the Head of Broadcast Compliance said that 'I'd be nervous about..any..scheme.. […] which actually imposes greater...eh, restraint on broadcasters' [P102] and that calls for 'greater scrutiny of RTÉ' must be resisted because

> You have to trust your public service broadcaster to be fair in determining what sort of subject matter will be discussed on the programmes we report etc. […] I think you have to allow journalism its space, and sometimes that space may be misused, but..eh, I think generally speaking, that is a lesser...problem, than the alternative, which is actually somebody else telling journalists what is the news and what are the stories they should be covering [P102]

When asked about the desirability of involving the public in programming decisions, this interviewee went on to express both normative and practical doubts, suggesting that 'if you allow a degree of democracy to creep in to determining who are editors', editorial behaviour would descend into a popularity contest and 'you increase the likelihood of pandering to prejudice rather than challenging prejudice' [P102].

For several other interviewees, including an editor and a senior correspondent, direct public involvement in influencing journalistic content is undesirable for the similar reason that it would result in a thematic dumbing down- what one editor described as 'happy clappy stories about [...] stuff happening in their communities' [P114]. One editor portended the arrival of interminable 'Big Brother style television' [P110] should the public get a say in journalist output.

One editor adopted a firm line against any interference with journalistic autonomy, arguing that while journalists should be 'conscious of' and 'receptive to' public desires, this did not mean responding to 'every... request, crank or otherwise out there'. This is justified on the basis of respecting the boundaries of professional autonomy- just as lay people 'don't go into...a shop and tell the shopkeeper what to do' journalists are 'paid professionals' whose work is similarly not properly subject to direct public oversight [P110].

The strongest resistance of any interviewee was expressed by the Chief News Editor, who dismissed out of hand the idea that the public should have a greater involvement in RTÉ News, going so far as to say that they 'resist' ideas that involve solicitation of public views in determining what news should be. Focus groups should 'buzz off', and that 'corporate RTÉ' can do as it pleases regarding audience involvement, but that is 'their business' [P107].

The idea that RTÉ are already accountable to the public in important ways was voiced by many interviewees. One editor suggested that RTÉ are 'utterly accountable in terms of boards, authorities, viewers, etc.' [P110], a view echoed

by a senior newsroom manager who described RTÉ as 'pretty transparent' and 'open about what we do despite...opinions to the contrary'- although arguing that 'consistency' and 'value for money' were also important considerations alongside openness [P104].

Editors and programme-makers in particular frequently noted that much of their direct knowledge of the audience came from complaints. One editor suggested that 'most of my relationship with the audience..is..dealing with complaints' and that 'you sometimes get the sense that everybody out there is really unhappy with what you do' [P106].

Several journalists alluded to problems of perception regarding the accountability and responsiveness of RTÉ to the public, including one who outlined inadequacies in extant accountability mechanisms, saying that from the public's point of view, it looks

> …wholly unsatisfactory that the only real methods by which I could make RTE accountable are to take a BAI complaint, which is a very very flawed process, from everybody's point of view, or to go to the courts [Q123]

However, reiterating a point made by a number of other staff, this journalist concluded that the internal policy to personally respond to all complaints rendered RTÉ responsive to the public- that contrary to what 'most people' thought, they are not an 'untouchable' caste of 'D4 broadcasters' [Q123].

The Head of Broadcast Compliance (amongst other duties, tasked with responding to formal complaints) expressed broad support- with some caveats- for the present Broadcasting Authority of Ireland regulatory complaints regime, noting that it tends to 'force broadcasters to at least think about what they're doing and consider the consequences of what they're doing' [P102].

Several others suggested that the BAI process' lack of sanction meant that there was little or no redress for complainants even in cases where complaints are

upheld. One correspondent expressed concern that were journalists to acknowledge a mistake in writing to a member of the public, that may be used in evidence against them in a subsequent BAI complaint, which 'actually mitigates against…a broadcasting organisation being more open and saying, you have a real point' [Q130].

Journalists were more likely to cite personal links to members of the public they meet through chance encounters as a way of arguing they remained close to the public- using them as what one called 'my own personal kind of…opinion conductor' [Q133].

A second category of response took a more conciliatory approach to the idea that RTÉ's relationship with its public should be closer in various ways- as long as it was within what one editor put as 'within reason, and as long as it did not involve them RTÉ being 'driven by the public' [P110].

Several respondents advocated a more open, transparent and accountable RTÉ not on the basis of any apparent championing of public sovereignty and radical democracy but from a pragmatic perspective: if RTÉ open up a little, they would benefit from increased public understanding and appreciation of their work, and take the sting out of the anger or frustration of potential complainants. Speaking in relation to the desirability of a broadcast media response programme, one journalist told me that such an initiative might 'help…dispose of and deal with things that could potentially fester into complaints', enabling the public to 'understand better' and for journalists to 'articulate and explain' their decision-making [Q129].

Echoing the theme of enhancing public 'understanding' (rather than public participation), a senior newsroom manager commented on a previous practice of holding occasional roadshows or public meetings around the country where senior RTÉ staff would meet the public, suggesting that 'it might be time to do it again' because 'it's probably wise for us to go out there and explain ourselves as much as possible' [P104].

Another senior manager suggested however that the roadshows did not attract those members of the public who might have the most to contribute to such a process, saying that attendees of the meetings 'fell into two camps; those who were...very strong supporters of public service broadcasting and RTE and those who were very strong critics', with the result that managers felt that 'we weren't actually learning very much from it' [P102].

A senior journalist told me that formal accountability and participation initiatives are a matter for the 'wonks and the suits upstairs', describing the relationship between RTÉ and its public as mediated by individual programmes and personalities rather than through formal institutional means [Q128].

Some interviewees expressed a more fulsome enthusiasm for democratic openness between RTÉ and the public that transcended pragmatism. A member of the RTÉ Board suggested that

> …RTE has to create the possibility of ways of involvement of the public, otherwise the public will just go elsewhere…and it's not a question just of retaining them, I think that's the service [P103]

One senior journalist used RTÉ's response to the Fr Reynolds libel affair as an occasion when the broadcaster should have involved the public in the debate of what should happen next, suggesting that in the interests of giving 'effect to the accountability that we say we sign up for', a televised discussion programme on the handling of the Fr Reynolds affair should have been arranged [Q135].

The idea that what one editor described as the 'tradition of secrecy' of 'official Ireland' requires greater challenge was expressed by several editors and journalists, including a senior political journalist who went as far as to describe journalism as 'the last sort of unchallenged institution in the State':

> …you've seen the authority of the church, the authority of the political parties, the authority of the state, the authority of the banks, the authority of some of the regulators...all of them challenged in really fundamental ways in the last decade, decade and a half, and yet the media not so much [Q131]

This journalist added that 'apart from the libel laws, there's very little comeback for people' and that '[j]ournalists really don't like getting questioned, or challenged, and maybe it's time that more of us were. And not just in RTE' [Q131].

6.5 Conclusion

Interview data on the three broad topical areas explored above helped to flesh out in greater detail and in more explicit ways what was often only merely hinted at through observation and casual conversations while in the newsroom.

On the subject of the crisis and its implications for journalistic practice and theory, interview data suggested that the journalistic habitus was only weakly perturbed. Although general failings were typically acknowledged in terms of a failure to offer an early warning of impending crisis, that such a failure presented any institutional or professional implications appeared to be elided through a displacement and diffusion of blame within the broader contexts of an overall failure of media and economic expertise regarding the *prediction* of the bursting of the housing bubble. This did not strongly extend either to the recognition of the need for any particular ameliorative actions for journalism.

Interviews with journalists and managers in RTÉ reveal a broad support for the prevailing norms of journalism around objectivity, impartiality and balance, which on the whole were seen as timeless and not subject to re-examination by external events "in the world". However, somewhat varying interpretations of these norms suggests at once their durability, malleability and the simultaneous coexistence of varying news epistemologies (Cottle, 2007: 11), including a preference for describing the journalistic craft in terms of 'gut instinct' arising

from experience rather than a slavish adherence to rules.

Interview and observational data indicated that the greater impact of recent crisis came instead in the form of effects from RTÉ's internal turbulence, central to which were both the 'Mission to Prey' libel and its fallout, as well as what one interviewee described as 'our private economic crisis' [P104]- ongoing rounds of resourcing, staffing and pay cutbacks. Impacts on morale and the ever-increasing pressures of being asked to do more with less meant that the newsroom appeared to be dedicating its energies towards maintaining its level of service to the public as effectively as possible, rather than reinventing it (notwithstanding internal newsroom technological transitions ongoing during the period of ethnography).

The scale of the internal challenges, the energy consumed in responding to them and the limited institutional sites for professional reflexivity appeared to diminish the possibilities that crisis might occasion big changes in journalistic ideology and practice, facilitating the elision and bracketing of implications of crisis for journalists, editors and managers in their daily work.

On the topics of RTÉ's agenda-setting and agenda-building practices and supporting praxis of representation, interviewees were attuned to the idea of RTÉ as a crucial player in "national" debate and discussion, with the formal machinery of democracy playing a central role in helping guide the broadcaster's representative practices in news and current affairs, suggesting the broad diffusion of a 'sacerdotalist' (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1986: 74) orientation to formal politics. A range of frustrations around the covering of referenda were expressed, which seemed to be chiefly emanate from interference in journalistic autonomy arising from the perceived requirements of the Coughlan judgement during referenda which hinted at a broader unease with how the Crotty and Coughlan judgements served to disrupt, respectively, the frameworks of representative democracy and how politics is journalistically mediated.

Attitudes toward the representation of extra-parliamentary political voices and those of the public at large were characterised by concerns about their credibility, representativeness and newsworthiness, diminishing the possibilities of their

access to the airwaves. Nonetheless, a general, though sometimes qualified satisfaction with RTÉ's performance in representing "marginal" voices and ideas was evident.

Interview data revealed that some journalists saw themselves as performing a useful social role that went beyond the mere provision of information but included drawing attention to various wrongs. That this implies a catalytic role in social change than an outright campaigning role is attributable to the mediation between the desire to maintain a normative thrust to journalism and the constraints of professional ethics and legislative dictates, underwritten by the parameters of the broader cultural context within and outside the newsroom.

Responses on topics pertaining to the role of the public in journalism indicates the rhetorical centrality of the collective figure of "the public" to their work. Although "serving the public" and discharging the "public interest" appears to be a totemic *sine qua non* of public service journalism, this is generally conceptualised as necessitating an arms-length relationship with that public.

Attitudes to the imagined audience of public service broadcasting suggested they were a group whose preferences and foibles must often be accommodated and even pandered to (principally in the interests of maintaining and growing programme audiences), but at other times from which they must also be protected from (because a universal, comprehensive public service does not merely triangulate to the sum of audience desires). The public as a totality are valourised, but individual members of that public who engage with RTÉ are often looked at in a much more jaded and even suspicious manner.

The sovereignty of publics- as consumers of and the ultimate judge of RTÉ journalism- was repeatedly invoked but the view this sovereignty could not unduly impinge upon the independence of broadcasters was even more strenuously articulated. In the main, interviewees felt well-connected to their audiences and reasonably accountable to the public at large. Lukewarm attitudes were expressed at the idea of increased journalistic transparency, but attitudes

to the idea of increased public participation and even decision-making power in public service journalism revealed a deep unease, fear and strongly-expressed concern that journalism quality and essential professional autonomy would be undermined by any such arrangement.

Chapter 7: Framing Crisis in Europe

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 Democracy and technocracy in Europe: the cases of Greece and Italy

The topical focus of the textual analysis undertaken here centres on a series of events in Greece and Italy between late 2011 and early 2013, where the regional instantiation of the global economic crisis intersected with democratic politics in profound ways in what has become known as the *Euro debt crisis.* This saw the increasing imperilment of the domestic economies of the countries involved as well as threatening the cohesion and integrity of the single currency.

The immediate context in the Greek case is represented by an escalating political crisis associated with the state's bailout packages. The first, negotiated in 2010 with the EU and IMF, was the largest national bailout in history. It entailed a strict multi-year regime of cutbacks and market reforms for the country (Macartney, 2013). In the midst of strong public opposition to the bailout, ensuing political instability and the failure of the package to stabilise the country's economic position, a second bailout, this time topping 100 billion euro, was negotiated in October 2011 and intended by Europe and the IMF to be the decisive solution to Greece's economic crisis (Blyth, 2013: 72). In the midst of growing domestic dissent, in an unexpected development the Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou announced that the plan would be put to a confidence vote and referendum prior to approval.

The crisis in Italy (while not involved in a bailout agreement) was also occasioned by a serious public debt problem, the size of which was second only to that of Greece. The consequence of a range of long-run political and economic problems, including poor governance, sluggish growth, poor competitiveness and exacerbated by the economy's failure to rebound after the 2008 financial crisis, Italy's debt problem became a debt crisis in the context of anxiety about the integrity of the European monetary union and about the ability of the Italians to

fund their debt (Anderson, 2014). The size of Italy's economy meant that a bailout along Greek lines was unthinkable, but something had to give.

Over the course of just a few weeks in late 2011 between the end of October and November, both Greece and Italy, under direct pressure by European political elites and financial markets (Sum and Jessop, 2013: 427, Geithner, 2014, Campello, 2015: 203, Papadimitrious and Zartaloudis, 2015: 41), saw their democratically elected governments collapse and replaced by caretaker technocratic administrations. Over the following months, these temporary governments implemented the reforms viewed by European and global political and economic elites as necessary to stabilise their respective economies and to ward off bankruptcy. Elections were eventually held in both countries which restored "normal" democratic governance. In both cases, electorates delivered inconclusive results. In Italy, this resulted in two months of uncertainty, with prolonged negotiation leading to the eventual formation of a grand coalition. In Greece, a second election had to be called, in which the main conservative majority won by a margin just large enough to form a coalition. Despite marked swings to leftist and other oppositional groups, new governments with broadly compliant attitudes to European crisis management were in the end formed in both countries.

7.1.2 Crisis construal and framing

Interrogating journalistic sense-making of the range of issues implicated in the circumstances surrounding the collapse and restoration of democratic governance in the Eurozone periphery is the focus of this chapter. Such sense-making requires the establishment and retention of *crisis construals*- frameworks for understanding and assessing events, processes, and their contexts- and as outlined in Chapter 4, these crisis construals will be elucidated through the application of a *framing* approach to textual analysis.

Gamson et al. (1992: 384) have argued that the concept of the frame is central for the analysis of media content. A frame represents 'a central organizing principle

that holds together and gives coherence and meaning to a diverse array of symbols'. This emphasis on a frame as structuring and organising meaning is what extends it beyond a mere measure of the 'emphasis in salience of different aspects of a topic' (de Vreese, 2005: 53) and basic conceptualisations of agenda-setting (McCullagh, 2002).

The frame analysis seeks to shed light on what Gamson (1988: 221-4) calls the '*issue culture'* and *'issue climate'*. The former refers to the range of "relevant" ideas, clustered into "packages" which become the characteristic set of available ideas for engaging in discourse in a particular issue arena. Frames are part of culture, and political, professional and institutional and societal aspects of the prevailing culture help determine the stock of frames that can be utilised. For Gamson and Modigliani (1989: 3), media discourses both reflect and shape issue cultures.

Frames are seen here as providing the 'discursive cues' which 'evoke or align' (Hervik, 2011) messages with certain ways of looking at the world. Insofar as frames 'add up to something bigger than an individual story' (Reese, 2001: 13) and 'project knowledge ahead' (Reese, 2007: 150) by guiding the interpretation of information to come, one can approximate the extent of embeddedness of a particular issue culture by examining the consistency of the framing.

The latter term, 'issue climate', refers to the conditions that shape the extent to which there is fertile ground for re-framing of issues away from their prior dominant framing. Times of crisis may engender changes in issue climates, on the basis that '[w]hen official packages are in crisis and disarray, opportunities are created for challengers' (Gamson, 1988: 241).

The extent to which the general post-2008 climate may have created conditions conducive to challenger groups seeking to reframe crisis in particular ways will be explored by a frame analysis which focuses on these critical moments of crisis, helping shed light on 'how journalists straddle the contested and hegemonic discursive terrains' (Quinsaat, 2014: 575) represented by these topics.

Although framing may be accomplished, as noted in Van Gorp's (2007: 68) distinction, both 'by' the media (journalism professionals) and 'through' the media (in the form of interviewees and other sources who appear on programmes), the analytic focus in this chapter is placed, for reasons of focus, solely on the journalistic discharge of framing, as observable in textual output- corresponding to the outcomes rather than the antecedents of what Reese and Shoemaker (1996) call journalistic 'frame-building' processes.

7.1.3 Frame identification

If frames are generally understood to be 'principles of organizing information, clues to which may be found in the media discourse' (Reese, 2001: 14), then a series of methodological questions arise about how frames are defined and operationalised. A high level of heterogeneity in the definition and identification of frames in texts practiced by researchers is a well-established challenge in the literature, and its implications for data validity and reliability have been explored by Matthes and Kohring (2008: 260). For them, the opaqueness of the 'methodological black box' of the lone researcher in particular is a significant problem with framing methodologies, with arbitrary criteria for frame identifications producing classifications which may be inconsistent and whose provenance may not be clear to the reader. To mitigate this, a range of ameliorative measures are taken, including the delineation of sampling and coding procedures below, supplemented by appendices and the provision of individual coding decisions on request (see also Johnston, 2002: 86-8).

However, the recognition of the ineluctably interpretive nature of frame analysis- interested, as it is, in discerning latent meaning structures as well as explicit ones in holistic texts- forces one to acknowledge that researcher subjectivity cannot be simply erased through ever-greater commitments to methodological rigour, and that the navigation of what Gerhards (1995: 243) describes as the 'Scylla of subjective hermeneutics and the Charybdis of quantitative content analysis" is not so straightforward.

The approach to frame definition, frame scope and frame identification taken here is informed by the primary research question of this analysis. The analysis seeks to explore the extent to which journalistic frames in RTÉ news and current affairs output covering the Euro crisis tends to privilege- manifestly and latently- understandings of crisis which have affinities for either neoliberal ideological formations or more oppositional ones emanating from the political Left.

As de Vreese (2005: 54) notes in his review of disparate approaches to frame analysis, frames-whether they are identified inductively or deductively ("read off" from texts or identified on an *a priori* basis preceding textual analysis)- may be defined *narrowly* in *issue-specific* ways that are closely attuned to the specific topic or event under study, or defined more *broadly* via abstract *generic frames* that can be applied over a broad range of different topics, aiding comparative analysis.

The approach taken is also guided by the necessity for parsimony, the desirability of facilitating cross-topic comparisons and the view that establishing in advance too rigid a framework for analysis diminishes the validity of subsequent findings. As per Van Gorp (2007: 64), frames are conceptualised here as embedded in texts not as singular phenomena to be plucked out of texts via close reading but identifiable by proxy, through 'packages' of constituent elements, and that the range of framing devices (Gamson and Lasch, 1983) present in a text form frame packages which 'suggests a definition, a problematization, and an evaluation of the event and ultimately results in a number of logical conclusions- for example, with regard to who is responsible for the perceived problem' (ibid: 65).

7.1.4 Sampling strategy

It was necessary to identify the key political events which would inform the thematic and temporal parameters of the sample selected for analysis. Because of a number of clear structural similarities between events in Greece and Italy, the decision was taken to divide the sample in a manner that lent itself to a comparative approach. This resulted in the division of the sample into two topical

areas- (1) “slide toward technocracy” and (2) “return to democracy” reflecting the progression of crisis in both countries from the replacement of democratic with technocratic leadership, and the subsequent holding of elections in both countries. This generated a total of four sub-topical units corresponding to each topical area’s domestic instantiation (with Greece identified by the prefix “A” and Italy “B”).

As shown below, the four sub-topics demonstrate a straightforward common structure: in each case, an immediate catalyst prompts a range of consequences. In topic 1a, this is the announcement of a referendum by Greek PM George Papandreou in response to the bailout deal just agreed in Europe. In topic 1b, it is the build-up of internal and external political and market pressures on Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi in the wake of events in Greece. In both cases, these catalysts eventually result in the resignation of both Prime Ministers and their replacement by technocratic caretaker governments. Topics 2a and 2b are initiated by the announcement of the caretaker Greek and Italian Prime Ministers that elections were to be held, prompting the dissolution of their respective governments and parliamentary elections campaign which culminate in a return to “normal” democratic governance.

Timeline of key events			
(1) Slide towards technocracy			
(1a) Greece	31 Oct 2011 Greek PM Papandreou promises bailout on referendum 10 November 2011 Papandreou resigns, preparations made for caretaker government 11 November 2011 Caretaker technocratic administration sworn in led by new PM Papademos, plans elections for early 2012	**(1b) Italy**	8 November 2011 Berlusconi wins budget vote but loses absolute majority, announces resignation 12 November 2011 Italian PM Berlusconi resigns, Monti asked to lead technocratic administration 16 November 2011 Monti appointed caretaker PM of technocratic administration
(2) Return to democracy			
(2a) Greece	11 April 2012 Papademos calls election for 6 May 6 May 2012 Election: Stalemate result- no coalition formed. 16 May 2012 Efforts to set up coalition Government fail. New elections called for June 17 17 June 2012 Election: New Democracy narrowly wins election June 20 2012 Coalition agreement between ND, PASOK and DL- Samaras sworn in as PM	**(2b) Italy**	6 December 2012 Berlusconi withdraws support for Monti 8 December 2012 Monti announces plan to resign 21 December 2012 Monti passes budget, resigns 24 February 2013 Election: Deadlock as nobody wins. 27 April 2013 Coalition finally agreed with Letta as PM.

Fig. 7-1: Topical/ sub-topical divisions and timeline

A two-pronged effort was made to attain a full population of RTÉ News and Current Affairs audio-visual output readily accessible from RTÉ's online archive which directly concerned the topics listed above. First, the *Six One News* and *Primetime* online programme archives were manually checked for all coverage relating to any of the topics listed in the timelines, using the date ranges indicated in the figure above. This yielded a total of 72 segments across the two programmes. Using RTÉ's online search tool, searches were run to find stories during the search period which contained references to the events in the timeline.

These were noted and included in the sample. When duplicate results from the prior analysis of *Six One News* and *Primetime* archives were discounted, a total of 85 additional stories were attained which encompassed stories from other television news bulletins and radio news and current affairs programmes (see Appendix 7-1 for methodological notes on sample construction). Combined, this provided a total sample of 156 programme segments. For reference, these are listed in chronological order of broadcast with accompanying web URLs and other relevant item information in Appendix 7-2. In the analysis that follows, items are referred to according to the "EC[number]" convention.

7.1.5 Crisis construals, framing and ideology: analytical approach

Neoliberal (radical right) and *radical left* approaches represent two ideal-typical poles on either end of a spectrum on which journalistic understandings of the crisis in the Eurozone may be located. These positions represent two overarching 'metaframes' at a high level of generality (Dombos et al., 2009: 7).

Assessing to what extent news framings correspond to either metaframe necessitates the identification of issue frames and idea elements which 'provide a relatively coherent story/reasoning in which issue specific prognostic elements responds to issue specific diagnostic elements' (ibid: 6), which form distinctive "packages" of ideas and which collectively shape the metaframe.

These elements are dimensions of media discourses that deal with 'justifications, causes and consequences' (Van Gorp, 2007: 64) of particular events. They correspond closely to Entman's schema of four framing functions, which distinguish between the promotion of a particular problem definition, the causal interpretation of the problem so defined, the moral evaluation of responsibility for the problem, and the recommended solution to it (Entman, 1993).

Gerhards' (1995: 227) typology of framing dimensions, although designed to account for the ways in which protest actors seek to mobilise effectively and achieve resonance for their framing efforts, may be usefully adapted to provide

an analytical framework that is more detailed yet sufficiently abstract so as to encompass the sets of topics under analysis and to facilitate a comparative approach.

His frame elements are of two broad types- *diagnostic* frame elements, that establish the terrain and parameters of the issue as problematised- its systemic location and "stakes"- and *evaluative* frame elements, in which the behaviours and actions of actors and their outcomes are assessed.

Gerhards' (ibid) first element in a frame analysis is that of *issue definition and problematisation* and it is aimed at establishing the primary "where" and "what" of the issues as constructed in the texts- in this case, what Sarikakis (2012) described as the 'geographies of the crisis'. The frame element of *causes and causal agents* proceeds logically from the first, exploring the agentic - in terms of 'concrete persons and institutions' (Gerhards, 1995: 240) rather than spatial and systemic loci of the issue. The frame element of *issue resolution authority* concerns the ways in which the substance and legitimacy of actions by particular actors are evaluated. It is founded on assumptions about the locus of proper political authority and with regard to which particular actors 'are supposed to solve the problems' (ibid: 241). A further frame element, *response evaluation criteria*, focuses on the "why" of crisis resolution, establishing the justificatory basis on which actions should or should not be taken- also implying an attendant vision of the post-crisis.

An amalgam of Gerhards' and Entman's approach to framing provides the key elements of the frame analysis as pursued in this chapter: how the issue is problematised, that is, what kind of problem is it presented as, who is identified as being the main actors in the events, who is responsible for causing them and how and by whom is the issue to be resolved. Each of these elements acts as a useful indicator of ideological affinity.

With these criteria in mind, we may outline a simplified sketch of the political rationalities underpinning ideal-typical neoliberal and radical left construals of

crisis as they pertain to the Euro debt crisis in particular.

A neoliberal approach to crisis diagnosis is apt to foreground the local and the regional as epicentres of crisis, specifying in this case peripheral nations like Greece and Italy as aberrant European citizens who threaten the stability of monetary union and European prosperity as a whole. The resolution of crisis lies in the amelioration of present threats to the integrity of monetary union and the achievement of systemic "stability", achieved through transformative means. A neoliberal approach to crisis resolution privileges the authority of whomsoever has the greater power to bring that stability; and elevates expedience as the key criterion applied in the evaluation of particular actions of crisis management.

A radical left approach to crisis diagnosis identifies the sources of crisis in Greece and Italy as linked to global, structural factors in the financial and broader economic systems which erupted in the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 and enmeshed most specifically in a European and Eurozone-focused phase of crisis, centring around a sovereign debt crisis prompted by the conversion of private to public debts at national level. An emphasis is placed on capitalism's systemic imperatives and the power disparities at work in the political, legal and technical architectures of global financial and economic systems. A radical approach to crisis resolution is concerned with the democratic legitimacy of agencies of crisis management, and emphasises the need to evaluate crisis management efforts in terms of longer-term and ethical dimensions, foregrounding the realisation of social and economic justice.

Given that this frame analysis is focused on journalistic frames rather than the frames brought to bear by other actors participating in and represented in news discourse, it can be assumed in the first instance that these ideal-typical ideologies will not be represented *qua* ideologies but as diffuse elements of naturalised 'common sense' (Gramsci, 1971, Fairclough, 2001: 70), likely to correspond in practice to less clear ideological positions, for example amalgams of conservative and social democratic perspectives. This further compounds methodological difficulties inherent to the reliable identification of media frames.

The framing of the contribution of actors to crisis and crisis resolution reveals journalistic assumptions about the parameters of crisis- the genesis, structural and agentic dimensions of crisis, including attributions of causal responsibility and evaluations of the consequences of particular courses of action or inaction, and helps shed light on assumptions about the legitimacy of particular responses by particular individuals and groups, which are geared towards particular ends and particular versions of the post-crisis.

With these aspects in mind, as well as the desire to adopt a comparative approach in recognition of the series of shared structural features of events in Greece and Italy, it was decided to focus analysis on the following dimensions. Analysis of the first two sub-topics focuses on:

(i) *the representation of the Prime Ministers in Italy and Greece in the period leading up to their resignations and the implications of their actions*, (ii) *the representation of the (external) pressure applied to both leaders and governments, as well as the representation of their resignations* and (iii) *the representation of their replacement by technocratic caretaker governments.*

Analysis of the second two sub-topics focuses on:

(i) *the representation of the political choices facing Greek and Italian electorates* and (ii) *the assessment of the implications of electoral outcomes, both actual and hypothetical.*

To further facilitate cross-comparison of frames between the four sub-topics under analysis, these areas of analysis were translated- broadly following the schemata of Gerhards and Entman- into the abstract framing functions of (issue) *problematisation*, (actor and action) *legitimation*, and (outcome) *evaluation.*

Having deductively identified the parameters of analysis via the specification of relevant framing functions, an inductive analysis was undertaken on all 156 news

texts across the corpus to identify the precise ways in which these frame elements and frame positions are both explicitly and latently present in texts. This firstly necessitated the transcription of every item in the corpus of texts. This was undertaken with the assistance of audio recordings extracted manually from the video files on the RTÉ News online database.

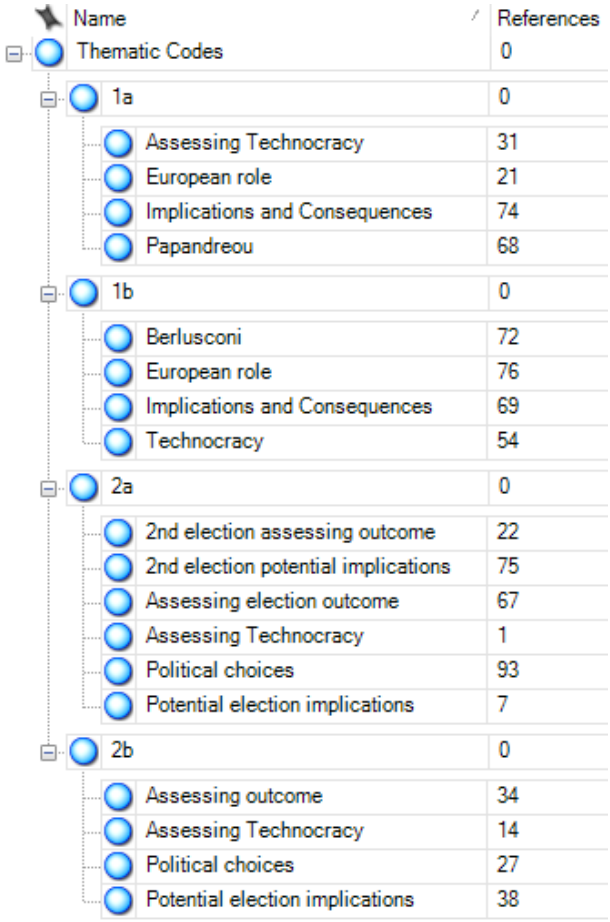
Following this, all journalistic speech acts were isolated and extracted from the transcribed corpus, placed into chronological order, and imported into the Nvivo QDA software package. They were then categorised according to the broad thematic and temporal units as shown in Fig. 7-2, reflecting structural similarities in both sets of two sub-topics.

Sub-topical area	Greece	Italy
Sub-topic 1 **Slide towards Technocracy**	(1a) Greek referendum announcement [119]	(1b) Pressure on Italy and Prime Minister [103]
	(1a) Referendum cancellation, Papandreou resignation and technocratic government in Greece [75]	(1b) Resignation of Berlusconi, introduction of technocratic government [168]
Sub-topic 2 **Return to Democracy**	(2a) Election announcement and run-up [17]	(2b) Election announcement and run-up [74]
	(2a) Election outcome, aftermath and second election campaign [232]	(2b) Election outcome and aftermath [39]
	(2a) Second election outcome and aftermath [16]	

Fig. 7-2: Sub-topic units (volumes of coded excerpts in brackets)

Excerpts- sentences and paragraphs- corresponding to the frame elements above were then identified for each topical sub-unit using the manual coding functionality of Nvivo, further sub-divided into a series of 18 thematic codes generated inductively from the texts (Fig. 7-3). The framing functions of (issue)

problematisation, (actor and action) *legitimation*, and (outcome) *evaluation* were identified by selecting excerpts which represented *contextualising* elements (language that plays a localising, spatialising role), *responsibilising* elements (language that makes attributions of responsibility) and *action evaluative* elements (language that conveys positions on actor legitimacy, intentionality, action justification, action consequences and outcomes). 843 excerpts were coded (rising to 1140 excerpts, including sources coded to multiple thematic codes) distributed according to the numbers shown in Figs. 7-2 and 7-3.



Name	References
Thematic Codes	0
1a	0
Assessing Technocracy	31
European role	21
Implications and Consequences	74
Papandreou	68
1b	0
Berlusconi	72
European role	76
Implications and Consequences	69
Technocracy	54
2a	0
2nd election assessing outcome	22
2nd election potential implications	75
Assessing election outcome	67
Assessing Technocracy	1
Political choices	93
Potential election implications	7
2b	0
Assessing outcome	34
Assessing Technocracy	14
Political choices	27
Potential election implications	38

Fig. 7-3: Thematic codes

Following this initial phase of coding, all material coded for each sub-topic element was collated, forming the textual basis of a qualitative analysis in which each block of coded text was examined as a whole in order to discern the broader tendencies of framing observed within the full population of texts on each sub-

topic unit. This process facilitates the identification of more or less coherent "idea packages" around which crisis narratives were found to be constructed and which are reported on below.

For reasons of length, full transcripts of the textual corpus, compilations of all extracts corresponding to each thematic code, and the Nvivo project file in which all coding decisions are recorded cannot be included in this volume. These may be freely attained by contacting the author.

7.2 Crisis and technocracy in Greece and Italy

The three areas of focus here comprise: (i) *the representation of the Prime Ministers in Italy and Greece in the period leading up to their resignations and (ii) the representation of the context of crisis in which they are embedded, including assessments of the direct consequences and broader implications of their actions/inactions, and (iii) the representation of their resignations and their replacement by technocratic caretaker administrations.*

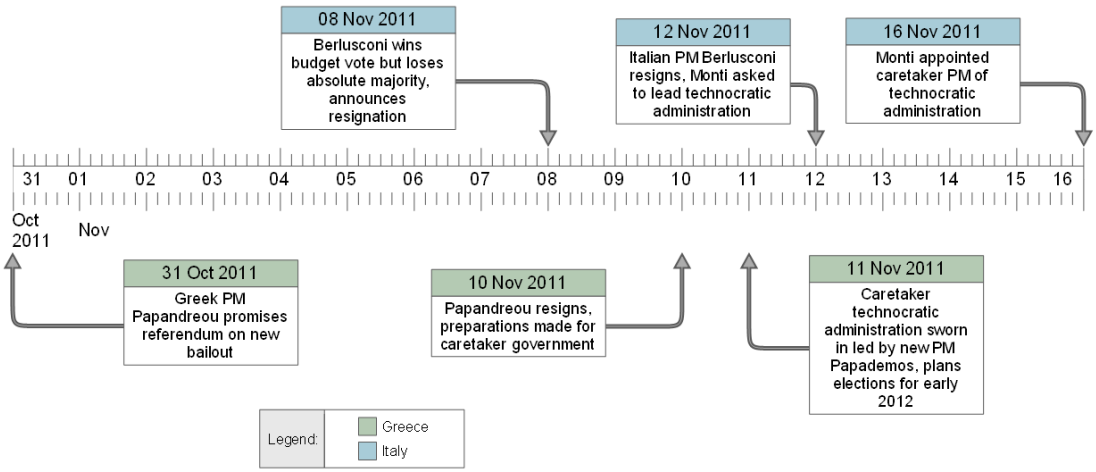


Fig. 7-4: Timeline of key events in subtopics 1a (Greece) and 1b (Italy)

7.2.1 Sub-topic 1a- Referendum, Resignation, Technocracy in Greece

7.2.1.1 (i) Framing Papandreou, pre-resignation

A *Primetime* report [EC25] sets the tone in dramatic style for how the decision to hold a referendum intertwines with a particular representation of George Papandreou, describing him in macabre terms as *'the most critical patient in the Euro's isolation ward'* who after having *'staggered home bearing the latest Euro bailout programme'*, performed an about turn and *'donned the political equivalent of a Halloween mask and hurled his referendum rocket'*.

The referendum announcement is described- each time with specific reference to Papandreou- in terms of its shocking and even violent character:

hurled his referendum rocket	EC25
pulled the trigger	EC3
dramatic and unexpected	EC13
seemingly out of the blue	EC13
shock announcement	EC13
shock decision	EC3
huge political gamble	EC14
bolt from the blue	EC19
taking everyone by surprise	EC28
bombshell dropped by the Greek Prime Minister	EC3 [see also EC4, EC16]

Fig. 7-5: Papandreou's referendum decision

The risky nature of the decision is noted in several stories, with three items describing it in terms of a 'gamble' [EC6, EC8, EC14]. Papandreou's rationale for his actions is queried in several items: *'What prompted him to do this? What was his thinking? What's behind this?'* [EC12, see also EC6].

Querying the "why" of the referendum segued into a querying of Papandreou's leadership. Describing the *'Greek situation'* as *'looking pretty much out of control'*, [EC7] a journalist speculates on the *'talk'* asking *'[h]as Mr. Papandreou cracked?*

Has he lost it?' That the decision to run a referendum may have been taken by Papandreou alone is emphasised on several occasions, including the rhetorical query as to whether he was *'on a solo run?'* [EC7] and two others that suggest his move was a *'unilateral'* [EC12] one, and that he failed to consult his cabinet [EC6].

Many of the references to Papandreou concern his weakening internal position in the Greek government. Beyond criticism of Papandreou from the main opposition party, internal dissent from within the Prime Minister's PASOK party features prominently in a range of stories where it is reported that Papandreou is coming under *'sustained criticism'* from MPs within his own party, which is *'convulsed by turmoil'* [EC4, see also EC18, EC16, EC19, EC28]. As the backlash against the referendum announcement- internal and external to Greece- intensifies, Papandreou is described as *'defiant'*, having *'faced down his government colleagues*' during a *'showdown'* whom he had *'shocked'* with his announcement [EC8]. Open journalistic discussion of the possibility of the Papandreou government falling is frequent, and can be found in items including EC8, EC12, EC25, EC4, EC6, EC16]. The backdrop of domestic *'political upheaval'* [EC25] is ever-present. In one interview, Greece's problems are laid at the door of its leaders: '*your political masters got you in to this position in the first place'* [EC26].

Overall, George Papandreou is framed in ways that tend to present him as a highly problematic figure who is behaving erratically, dangerously and even violently through the announcement of a referendum on the bailout.

7.2.1.2 (ii) Framing referendum implications and consequences

The consequences and implications of the referendum decision are discussed in terms of immediate financial outcomes as well as actual and hypothetical impacts on the broader economic system, coupled with assessments of what the referendum means for European crisis management. The Greek announcement is unambiguously described as having *'triggered'* a *'crisis'* [EC29], a responsibilising framing that pervades news texts on the topic.

The immediate consequences of the referendum are portrayed via a strong emphasis on drawing a direct link between the Greek decision and the deleterious financial implications via the representation of market opprobrium. What is described as an *'exercise in democracy'* [EC19] has prompted *'a sense of things unravelling very rapidly in Greece'* [EC9]:

the Greek decision smashed market confidence	EC3
triggering financial chaos	EC28
plunged the markets into turmoil	EC8
a firestorm right across the financial world	EC19
scared […] the markets	EC25
market backlash	EC3
market turmoil which the move sparked	EC19
likely to re-introduce turbulence into the markets	EC13
dreadful effect	EC7
financial system has shattered as a result of the Greek referendum	EC19

Fig. 7-6: Greek referendum- financial implications

Such an outcome, it is suggested, is no surprise. One item is introduced with the comment that *'predictably, markets reacted negatively to the Greek announcement'* [EC11], while in another the newscaster refers to *'the mantra'* that *'the one thing that the markets hate is uncertainty and here we go again basically'* [EC7], parlaying the received wisdom about the desires of markets into a weariness at what is taking place politically in Greece.

The *'enormous' 'ripple effects'* [EC27] of the decision are identified as victimising Italy in particular, with one item reporting that *'while it was the Greek Prime Minister that pulled the trigger, it's been Italy that has taken the bullet today'* [EC3], representing the decision as an act of violence against Italy, and described in others as having been *'hit the hardest'* [EC2] and having *'bore the brunt'* [EC11]. Italy's status as *'simply too big to rescue'* [EC29] contributed to *'a sense that Italy could go under'* [EC19] raising the prospect that *'the whole of the Eurozone begins to shatter'* [EC19].

The global nature of the ripple effects is described in an item which describes the damage done by Greece to Wall Street, which has already been *'incredibly fragile'* before *'this hand grenade/bombshell'* was *'lobbed in on top of it'* [EC27]. With viewers told that *'whole countries…are turning toxic'* [EC25], Greece is identified as *'damaged goods'* [EC11] and Europe described as tainted by association [EC7, see also EC11].

A recurring theme in the coverage is speculation about the consequences of a "no" vote in the planned referendum. It is suggested that *'[a] no vote will plunge the Eurozone into an even greater crisis'* [EC29], and that it had the potential to bring about a *'messy bankruptcy'* [EC2]. Even a delayed referendum vote, irrespective of outcome, is framed as undesirable: *'the Eurozone crisis simply can't afford three months of turmoil and political upheaval in Greece at the current time'* [EC29].

The prospect of rejection of the bailout in a referendum is represented in one item as having to *'trigger an immediate default of Greece and pressurize the country to exit the Eurozone altogether'* [EC13] and in another- paraphrasing the position of the Greek government- as raising the prospect of a *'disorderly default for Greece in which effectively investors walk away from the country in which the banks dry up and in which no one gets paid'* [EC114]. The link between a bailout rejection and Eurozone exit is made in another item where it is asked whether *'[i]s it as stark as saying, do we as a people want to remain or as a country to remain in the Euro or do we want to leave and go back to the Drachma?'* [EC6]

A "no" vote *'will all depend surely on how this thing is worded and how its sold'* [EC25], with others asking how *'could people be persuaded to support the bailout deal'*? [EC12], with several going so far as to speculate on whether crisis could be averted by playing on Greek's pro-Euro sentiments, including the provision of a *'sweetener'* [EC1] from the EU or creative phrasing of the question focusing on Eurozone membership, either of which might elicit *'a more positive answer'* [EC29] from the population.

Discussions about the possible consequences for Ireland are infrequent. When

they are directly broached, it is in terms of the *'consequences for us if the Greek government collapses, there's an exit from the Euro, disorderly default'* [EC27], to which the reply from the journalist is that the State would be well advised to keep their head down and look after its own interests- *'from the point of view of the Irish government, you just have to position yourself for the future. Avoid any kind of blame or as much blame as you possibly can [...] and position yourself well for the future. Make sure that you look after yourself.'* The *'resonance here in Ireland'* [EC25] of the bailout deal is described in one item by a newscaster in terms of Greeks being offered a favourable deal that should perhaps be extended to Ireland on the basis of *'being the best boys in the class'* [EC25].

The consequences of the referendum for European crisis management are frequently explored. Statements like *'Just when it seemed as if the EU had done enough to calm the markets, the Greek decision smashed market confidence',* causing *'chaos'* [EC3], with the reversal of *'all the gains of last week's post-summit euphoria'* [EC11] capture the tenor of framings on this topic, in which an intransigent Greece threatens European efforts at stemming the crisis.

With a recent European summit having been *'meant to have, to some extent at least get ahead of all of this'* [EC27], the Greek decision has meant that *'we are all back to square one',* with the referendum *'extremely disruptive to the plans and ideas Europe-wide to do with containing the crisis'* [EC5]. Another item bemoans that *'just when it looked like Europe had started to get ahead of the problems and could invite rich people to say, maybe you would like to contribute to helping us, suddenly things are starting to unravel again'* [EC7], with China now *'effectively scared off'* [EC40] and Europe's plans *'all gone up in smoke'* [EC19]. Greece is frequently presented as a problem nation subject to discipline by senior European figures. We are made privy to the *'thinly disguised fury'* [EC29] of European leaders who will *'want to get their lines straight as to what exactly they're going to say'* [EC29] to Papandreou at an upcoming EU summit, who *'can expect a very frosty reception'* [EC8] and who *'will also have to vigorously defend the way he announced this referendum'* [EC28]. Viewers are invited to adopt the perspective of EU figures and consider how to *'deal with'* and *'put out that blaze'*

in Athens, so *'things can be restored' [EC25]*.

The unremittingly negative terms in which the mooted Greek referendum is presented clearly identifies the mere act of holding a referendum as provoking a deepening of crisis in the Greek, Eurozone and world economies (reinforcing the manner in which the Prime Minister was framed), and which tends to legitimise the prospect of external intervention in solving the Greek "problem".

7.2.1.3 (iii) Framing technical government in Greece

European crisis management, Papandreou's resignation, and technocracy

In general, European intervention in pushing for Papandreou's resignation and the prospect of setting up of a technical coalition to approve the bailout is framed in ways that elide negative democratic implications of the European response and support the response as self-evidently necessary. That the resignation came as a consequence of European pressure is made clear in several items that demonstrate a shrewd awareness of *realpolitik*, including one in which it is acknowledged that '*[t]he Greek premier has just been replaced again under huge pressure from Europe and, in particular, the European Central Bank*' [EC60], described in simpler terms in other items as Papandreou being *'decisively faced down by France and Germany'* [EC31] or *'outflanked by the big powers in Europe'* [EC26].

External demands on Greece are nonetheless presented uncritically, including one item in which there are no less than four unproblematised references to European demands in relation to the need to swiftly appoint a new administration [EC33]. Negotiations by Greek politicians on the nature and duration of a notional interim government are described merely as *'continued brinksmanship'* which *'appeared to have exhausted the patience of the European Commission'* [EC33]. The idea that *'[t]he rest of Europe as well as the people of Greece'* [EC34] are *'watching and waiting, hoping a new government is formed quickly bringing to an end the political turmoil'* establishes the desirability of a

new government- any government- as linked to the end of the 'turmoil' [see also EC34].

Assessing technocracy

Only one item, an extended *Primetime* segment [EC26], engages in a problematisation of the democratic implications of Papandreou's ouster, focusing on the role of Germany and France. Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy are described as the *'assumed leaders of the Eurozone'*, whose intervention is described in terms of representing *'almost having a non-military coup trying to get a new government in place in Greece'*. The broader implications of *'the big two acting for the seventeen in Cannes'* are framed as symbolising *'a democratic deficit at the heart of the Eurozone'*, even going so far as to liken the impatience of financial markets with democratic processes to current European governance. A further problematisation of European governance and technocratic governance in Greece comes with the suggestion that *'this ideal European project [...] it's now effectively being run by these unelected guys in the ECB, and the markets'*, with technocrats who *'seem to call all the shots'*.

The appointment of Lucas Papademos as new Greek PM is met with a series of explicitly positive evaluations, rooted in the superior decision-making capacity of unelected leaders:

His appointment is the first positive news from Greece in 10 days and is helping to calm markets.	EC36
With the hopes of a nation resting on his shoulders, Lucas Papademos arrived to be sworn in as the new Greek Prime Minister. The fact that he is not a politician is seen as a strength in a country which teeters on the brink of insolvency due to years of abject political failure.	EC37
Welcome to the era of the technocrats: unassuming figures who have stepped out of the shadows to form unity coalitions that might push through unpopular measures and save the Euro from collapse. What they lack in democratic legitimacy, they make up in technical expertise and the apparent backing of the markets and Brussels.	EC38
In Greece, the new Prime Minister Lucas Papademos is also working feverishly.	EC73

Fig. 7-7: Assessment of technocracy in Greece

The description of New Democracy leader Antonis Samaras' initial refusal to sign an EU letter committing to the bailout agreement as *'an inauspicious start for the new technical government'* [EC38] establishes the criterion for success of the new government as full compliance with external demands, also captured in a series of other items:

Lucas Papademos will lead a crisis coalition charged with saving the country from default.	EC21
if that's the case then that would be… allow Greece to establish the government… approve the bailout deal. Get the eight billion that they need to avoid bankruptcy in December	EC32
With Lucas Papademos, the new leader, his first priority is to get the latest austerity package through, so that Greece can receive its next tranche of cash from the EU and IMF. Next week officials from the EU and IMF will visit Athens as every effort is made to steer Europe away from a deepening crisis.	EC54
the new technical government of Lucas Papademos who has to convince Greeks to accept more painful reforms and the international community that they have the will to do so.	EC38

Fig. 7-8: Aims of new government in Greece

There are no negative evaluations of Papademos, apart from one item in which it is acknowledged that *'the relief that people expressed, that the turmoil in Italy and Greece in the past ten days had more or less come to an end'* had given way to *'the reality, the realism'* that *'both countries face enormous challenges'* [EC38]. This clearly expresses the view that the installation of technocracy was viewed as representing an end to the current phase of crisis, although one whose euphoria was short-lived.

7.2.2 Sub-topic 1b- Resignation, Technocracy in Italy

7.2.2.1 (i) Framing Berlusconi

Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's role in the Italian and European crisis comprises a central part of journalistic narratives on this topic of this topic.

Many of the early references to the *'embattled'* [EC39] premier portray him as

under *'incredible pressure'* [EC61] domestically, with his own party and opposition alike frequently attributed as urging a quick departure, ostensibly due to *'a backlash over its* [government's] *failure to adopt reforms'* [EC40, see also EC44, EC61].

Amid strong suggestions of his imminent departure, denials of his resignation are repeatedly cited in a range of items [EC41, EC40, EC42, EC61 and EC63]. Market criticism of Berlusconi is amply represented, ratcheting up the pressure further still. References to the rising bond yields on Italian debt are frequently directly linked with Berlusconi's political future. We are repeatedly told of the extent of market frustration with Italy: how *'[h]e is very much seen as the problem'* [EC65], that *'it seems the market has lost confidence in Silvio Berlusconi'* [EC39, see also EC61], that his resignation is something *'investors have long sought'* [EC49] and that *'there is the sense that Mr. Berlusconi has to go otherwise this is going to drift into chaos'* [EC39].

Both before and after *'the game was up'* [EC49] when Berlusconi lost his parliamentary majority and announced his pending resignation, a broad range of items contain commentary that expresses incredulity at his intentions, portraying him as a wily political operator who may 'hold tough and stay' [EC43] or cause problems from beyond the political grave:

The ultimate survivor of Italian politics remained defiant and resisted calls to step down.	EC50
It's a very brave man or woman that would predict the demise of Berlusconi in Italian politics	EC43
he's still there and the Italians say Berlusconi's like a boomerang, just as you think he's going away, he comes back again	EC65
nobody in the markets and few people in politics trust Mr. Berlusconi even when he says he's going to resign, they simply don't believe him. They just want to see him out the gate	EC67
frankly, people in the financial markets and in the political world simply don't trust Mr. Berlusconi anymore and they will not believe that he is resigned until he's actually gone out the gates of the Prime Minister's palace in Rome for good.	EC47
many people won't believe it until they see it	EC60

to a certain extent, people can't believe he's gone until he is actually gone.	EC71
we've seen Mr. Berlusconi wriggle off the hook so often I guess we won't believe he's gone until we see him gone	EC60
Is Berlusconi really gone? […] it's risky to say it because the man has seven lives. Do you think he's finished?	EC52
Is there a sense in Italy that he is finished, or that he may come back?	EC57
but his People of Liberty party could still cause problems for the new Monti government.	EC76
Berlusconi's party wants the Monti government to be weak and its reign to be brief.	EC58

Fig. 7-9: Berlusconi's intransigence

Post-resignation, Berlusconi's legacy is assessed thoroughly negatively. In one item, his sleazy reputation is linked with the need for Italian renewal: *'it is not really a time when the world can look on at Italy and say, well the Prime Minister is having bunga-bunga parties and that sort of thing'*. [EC53] Despite vague references to Berlusconi's enduring popularity [EC40], only negative public opinion on his departure is referenced [EC57, EC55]. He is described in another as *'rarely in the headlines for the right reasons'* [EC50] and his resignation is described as bringing *'to an end one of the most scandal plagued eras in Italy's post-war history'* [EC69].

There is however some recognition that Italy's problems go beyond a single personality, crystallised in the suggestion that even with Berlusconi gone, *'the actual problems remain'* [EC71, see also EC48, EC66, EC60]. The question *'So will sacrificing Silvio change anything?'* [EC60] suggests that his removal represented merely an offering of sorts to the markets. Yet, as *'the man at the centre of the storm'*, the *'leading man'* in the *'soap opera'* [EC60] of Italian political life, Berlusconi's departure is framed as a necessary- if not sufficient- condition for the avoidance of European economic catastrophe.

7.2.2.2 (ii) Framing political and economic instability in Italy: implications, consequences and prescriptions

Once again, journalistic discourse on the implications of events in Italy focuses on immediate financial consequences, more systemic impacts, and what events mean for European crisis management.

Numerous items directly link the uncertainty about Berlusconi's future with deleterious financial consequences for Italy. *'Political instability'* [EC66], also described as *'deepening political crisis in Italy'* [EC64] -whose referent is Berlusconi's refusal to step down- is directly linked to *'financial turbulence'* [EC64], *'horrid'* [EC65] market performance and *'market jitters'* [EC66, see also EC40].

Market dissatisfaction is journalistically legitimated- rather fatalistically- with comments like '*until there's someone running Italy who is going to implement those reforms, the markets will lose faith in Italy and the situation will only get worse*' [EC65].

The upward trajectory of Italy's bond yield prices provokes discussion of the systemic implications of Italy's political and economic difficulties. This is primarily accomplished through an emphasis on the apocalyptic impact of unsustainable bond yields, focusing on the *'critical seven percent barrier'* or *'cut-off point'* [EC49], referred to in numerous items [EC39, EC42, EC41, EC44, EC61, EC62, EC63, EC64, EC65, EC66, EC73, EC58, EC59, EC74, EC68, EC60, EC46, EC74].

Bond yield hikes are linked to statements freighted with systemic import regarding the future of the single currency- with no less than the *'survival of the Euro'* [EC46] at stake, bond prices were *'heaping yet more pressure on the Euro'* [EC64], resulting in *'the country and the whole Eurozone slipped deeper into crisis today'* [EC66]. Regular reminders are offered of looming repayments due by Italy, threatening contagion [EC40, EC61, EC62, EC63, EC74].

The spectre of bond market bloodlust is evoked in another item which speculates how, post-Berlusconi, *'the most likely target is going to be the bigger scalp of France'* [EC71], with the *'signs of contagion'* [EC73, see also EC58] also present in Spain. One suggests that an Italian default could *'tear apart'* the Euro and *'send Europe and the US into new recessions'* [EC56, see also EC72]. The potential systemic implications for Italian contagion in the context of an inability to fund itself is linked to the inability of existing mechanisms to 'rescue' Italy, whose status as too big to fail is repeatedly reinforced [EC60, EC67, EC66, EC62, EC39, EC40].

The consequences for Ireland arise in several items and are usually discussed in purely economic terms. These included items which raise the prospect of poorer Italians purchasing less Irish produce [EC67, see also EC46] and another which contrasts Ireland's nascent *'recovery'* with the *'quagmire of bureaucracy and political instability'* into which countries like Italy are *'sinking'* [EC68].

Ireland's status as a model "bailout state" is suggested again in one item in which we are told that *'Angela Merkel has been singing Ireland's praises'* [EC59], and that Ireland is now *'the least of her worries'*. The same item goes on to suggest whether Merkel might be willing to ease the bailout terms on Ireland, given that *'we were after all first into the breach trying to stem the contagion'* in Europe.

The consequences of austerity for the Italian public, meanwhile, are discussed only once [EC57].

A range of items present European politicians and institutions as legitimate agents to deal with the problem of Italy, as well as legitimate issuers of demands on Italy:

Things are still not settled in Athens but the focus today was very much on Italy and the man at the centre of the storm, the Italian Prime Minister.	EC60
The European Union is watching events in Italy with acute nervousness.	EC66
The incredible pressure placed on Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi today means that Italy rather than Greece tops the agenda of Eurozone finance ministers.	EC61
I think across the… electorate in Italy he still has a good deal of support so it's quite a messy situation and in a sense Europe is now dealing with two political messes.	EC40
what difference will it make to the possibilities that Europe can righten the ship or are things now just going out of control?	EC42
this afternoon the package of European-demanded reforms got the seal of approval from the lower house.	EC69
he'll have to secure sufficient backing in parliament for some of the tough austerity measures needed to satisfy the markets and Eurozone leaders.	EC72
The new government will have to implement tough austerity measures to tackle the country's debt crisis.	EC56
his first task to implement urgent reforms demanded by Eurozone leaders including raising the retirement age, making the hiring and firing of workers easier and getting young people back to work.	EC76
At the same time though the change of administrations in both Athens and Rome had been intended to ease fears about market contagion but they don't seem to have of any great effect	EC59

Fig. 7-10: Italian governmental imperatives

Given the concern expressed in one item that *'maybe some big bazooka approach to quote David Cameron might be needed'* [EC59] to resolve the crisis, attention is turned to the prospect of deeper, more fundamental European responses to crisis, involving a redrawing of the Eurozone map and treaty changes that promote *'increased integration, convergence and discipline'* and *'cohesion'* [EC74, see also EC59]. Such concerns are amplified in a context where the EU's capacity to act decisively is openly questioned [EC65]. A journalistic focus becomes apparent on the European Central Bank as the actor who can act and indeed must act to secure Italian and European economic stability:

In the past few minutes the European Central Bank would appear to be weighing in and buying up Italian debt so it's possible that would bring some calm and some stability to the market.	EC39
I think… people get frustrated when they hear in relation to the ECB it's not part of their original mandate to go out into the market to buy up bonds	EC42
Ideally they [the ECB] are in a position where they could do something. I mean they are really the only people in a position to do something about this.	EC42
The only people who can actually solve this at this point are the European Central Bank by doing which it does not want to do, which is crank up the printing press and start buying Italian bonds in really really large numbers.	EC46
many now looking to the ECB as the great white hope in all this	EC67

Fig. 7-11: ECB as white knight

Although several items note the limited impact of ECB intervention to date [EC41, EC61, EC42, EC44, EC62, EC66], and a number of others [EC40, EC42] acknowledge the risks of further intervention, several comment on the undesirability of the ECB underwriting an irresponsible Italian government [EC42, EC62]- implying a recognition that the ECB's actions may have been deliberately limited to exert more pressure on the Italian political system.

7.2.2.3 (iii) From democracy to technocracy: framing technical government in Italy

Berlusconi's eventual resignation is described in news items as due, variously, to a combination of domestic political pressure, European political pressure and external market pressure [EC56, EC72, EC50, EC51, EC69], leading to his *'bowing to the inevitable'* [EC51]- in another, attributed to diminished investor confidence and *'the open contempt of German and French leaders'* [EC55]. Further direct attributions of European political involvement in his departure are made in a *Primetime* episode which suggests that 'Europe wanted to solve this financial crisis that was spreading across Italy and the first step was removing its leader' [EC60] The question is asked- in a fashion which does not suggest disapproval- who could *'claim credit'* for having *'ousted'* this *'beast of European politics'* [EC60].

The role of external forces in Berlusconi's resignation is occasionally

problematised, including in the same *Primetime* edition in which it is noted that his ouster highlights outside *'interference'* and illustrative of a *'democratic deficit where you have the ECB essentially deciding who's going to run Italy'.* The involvement of external agents is conveyed elsewhere in suggestions that a *'political revolution'* [EC71] had taken place, on *'essentially the orders of France and Germany'* [EC55, EC60] and '*finally booted from office not by popular vote but through the will of the markets*' [EC76].

A range of items counterpose the political disarray in Italy with the apparently ameliorating crisis in Greece, in particular the ongoing efforts to finalise a technical government in Athens [EC39, EC44, EC61, EC40, EC41, EC42, EC60, EC54, EC73, EC58, EC74, EC76]. This is best exemplified by EC41, which refers to the *'positive spirit of progress'* being made in the talks to form *'a new unity Greek government'*, while *'in Italy, things are getting worse'*. Journalistic normalisation of technocratic responses is also suggested by interest in whether an alternative to elections in the wake of a Berlusconi resignation may be possible [EC48, EC43, EC51, EC66]. Even before Berlusconi's resignation, mention is made of the *'interesting'* possibility of *'two former Eurocrats heading governments in Italy and Greece'* [EC43]. That such an arrangement might in fact be desirable came in the form of the evaluation of Mario Monti's appointment as 'senator for life' as *'one faint glimmer of anything positive'* and *'kind of a bright spot'*, [EC47, see also EC72].

The new administration, attributed to Italian President's Giorgio Napolitano's *'[d]esperate*' urgency to *'restore stability to Italy'* [EC49], is described using various nomenclature that frequently refers to its technocratic makeup [EC72, EC73] including one that notes that is contains 'academics and innovators, but no politicians' [EC74]. Monti, in terms starkly opposed to those ascribed to Berlusconi, is described (by way of reference to a previous guest) as a *'courteous, determined, serious politician'* [EC52] and the *'precise opposite'* [EC23] of Berlusconi- *'more reliable'* [EC54] and a *'technocrat, low profile but with the reputation of getting results'* [EC23].

His appointment is viewed as setting Italy *'on the path to political stability'* [EC74],

heralding *'a new beginning for Italy'* [EC56, see also EC72] but that he has *'got some very difficult things to do and to implement'*, involving *'great painful measures'* for Italians [EC52]. Yet, in the context of a mandate to '*save the Italian economic and many would argue the wider Eurozone'* [EC53, see also EC56, EC60, EC54] Monti's mission is portrayed in terms of an essential drive to stabilise, to cut, to persuade European political leaders and markets of Italy's viability:

ready to cut wages, raise taxes, change the way Italy works and convince markets that Italy remains a safe bet.	EC55
But Mario Monti faces a monumental task- preventing an Italian default that could tear apart the coalition of 17 countries that use the Euro	EC56
Europe and the European Central Bank hope that that new government can save Italy from a bailout.	EC60
The new government will have to implement tough austerity measures to tackle the country's debt crisis.	EC56
He now has to draw up a new cabinet, lay out his priorities, and then secure sufficient backing in parliament for some of the toughest austerity measures ever seen in Italy- all of which are needed to satisfy the markets and Eurozone leaders.	EC56
We assume that Mario Monti can only do what he must do if he has cross party support	EC57
he'll have to secure sufficient backing in parliament for some of the tough austerity measures needed to satisfy the markets and Eurozone leaders.	EC72
Leaders are desperate to signal they can bring the country's finances under control. The next government faces the tough task of doing just that and doing it without delay.	EC69
Mario Monti looks very likely to soon lead a new technocratic government with the sole aim of managing Italy's austerity drive, and fending off the need for a massive bailout.	EC70
formidable task of reassuring the markets that colossal debts can be reduced and economic growth restored	EC76
his first task to implement urgent reforms demanded by Eurozone leaders, including raising the retirement age, making the hiring and firing of workers easier and getting young people back to work	EC76

Fig. 7-12: Monti's mission

Monti's democratic credentials are queried on several occasions, including in one item where it is noted that he'd been *'appointed, not elected'* [EC57, see also EC52, EC55], and had no *'democratic mandate as such'*, but the tenor of assessments of

the task ahead of Monti suggests that questions like *'How long will Italians put up with'* [EC57] Monti's unelected status arise from an interest in gauging how long Monti might have to dispense austerian medicine rather than a concern with his democratic legitimacy. Other politicians, as well as the Italian public, are mentioned as possible threats to Monti's agenda, given that he will 'still have to get painful reforms passed by politicians not far from elections' [EC73], identifying the looming electoral process as something that might hamper the smooth operation of technocratic governance, something that makes investors 'fret' [EC73].

Monti's support from certain (non-public) constituencies is also highlighted, including where it is noted that Monti is 'who many believe the man that the money markets would like to see take charge' [EC54] as well as support from employers' groups [EC75] and *'Brussels and competition circles'* [EC47] by virtue in part of his capacity to take 'unpopular measures' [EC75]. The *'pro-growth measures'* planned by Monti, although likely to *'put a few noses out of joint'*, are described as just what the doctor ordered: the statement that *'it's probably better than a technocrat, somebody who isn't afraid to take unpopular measures does it'* [EC75], explicitly celebrates Monti's unelected status, while the verdict of *'[s]o far so good'* [EC75] on the pending Italian reform package suggests a journalistic support for his policy agenda.

7.3 Crisis and democracy in Greece and Italy

This part of the analysis focuses on (i) *the representation of the political choices facing Greek and Italian electorates in advance of elections* and (ii) *the assessment of the implications of electoral outcomes, both hypothetical and actual.*

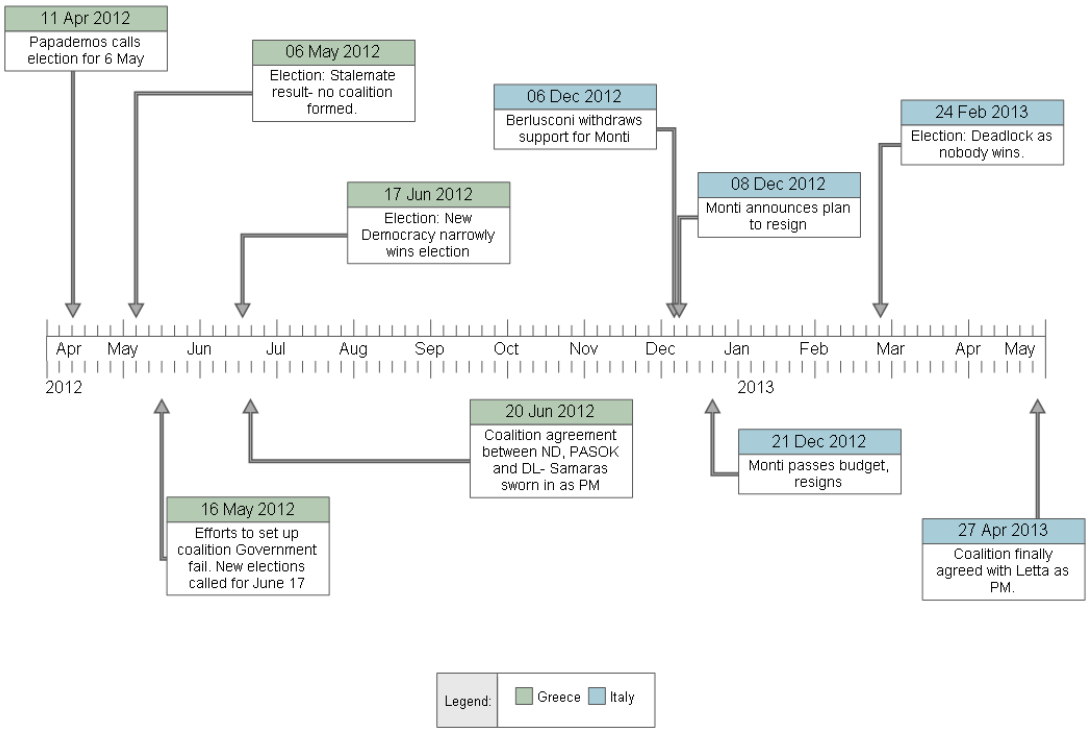


Fig. 7-13: Timeline of key events in subtopics 2a (Greece) and 2b (Italy)

7.3.1 Sub-topic 2a- Elections in Greece

7.3.1.1 (i) Framing the May parliamentary election

Representation of major political forces in the run up to the first election

Coverage of the first election campaign is sparse, with few suggestions of the potential implications of the outcome beyond a general concern with its destabilising potential [EC81], linked in one item to the decline of the long-dominant PASOK party [EC77] in the context of a backlash to austerity [EC80] where the *'established parties'* were coming under *'electoral pressure from more*

extreme challengers' [EC111] The *'far-right'* Golden Dawn is the only party mentioned [EC111] beyond the two largest parties- the radical left coalition of SYRIZA is not referred to.

A negative assessment of the possibilities of the election to deliver positive change in any way is conveyed in several other items, including one which suggests that the election is one which *'few [voters] believe will deliver either political stability or economic improvement'* [EC111, see also EC79]. This negativity is mirrored in journalistic discourse that emphasises the limited agency of any future Greek government in the context of the strictures of European crisis management. One item suggests that *'whoever is chosen faces a difficult choice, implementing more austerity with very little power'* [EC78], adding that the key challenge for the new government is not about policy choices but rather *'to keep the country from erupting into more civil disturbance'*. This suggestion that there is no space for effective political differentiation implicitly carries a validation of the technocratic experiment.

Assessing first election outcomes and implications

Assessment of the domestic political implications of the first election suggest a pro and anti-bailout/austerity dichotomy, in which the parties supporting the bailout and stringent austerity measures were punished by an angry public who are suffering [EC83, EC82, EC112, EC85, EC86]. The *'overall message'* of the election *'was clear: two-thirds of Greeks want no more austerity'* [EC109]. This *'realignment of Greek politics'* [EC86] is described in terms of the *'traumatic election results'* prompting *'disarray'* [EC85, EC117] in the *'political establishment'* [EC85] and broader *'Greek political system'* [EC117].

The immediate implications of the election are discussed first in terms of their negative financial impacts on markets:

political turmoil echoing through capitals and markets.	EC116
The Greek stock market fell to its lowest level since 1992 today as it appeared another election might be needed to break the deadlock.	EC114
That prospect sent markets in Paris, London and Frankfurt tumbling, with the anti-bail out parties expected to do even better in a new election	EC116
Both scenarios are causing worldwide losses on markets and prompted more speculation the country could be forced out of the Euro.	EC115
European shares slumped as markets were hit by deepening fears over the future of the Eurozone.	EC119

Fig. 7-14: Market implications of election

A stronger emphasis still is placed on the (undesirable) outcome of political instability, closely linked to the rise of new political formations on left and right:

One thing we can say is that political upheaval is going to lead to political instability.	EC83
Now, we've seen so much instability in Greece already, will the outcome of this election lead to even more instability there?	EC112
and so the only thing we can say is political instability is likely to continue in Greece for many months.	EC84
predictions that yesterday's election results would usher in a period of political instability have proven to be correct.	EC85
The fear is that political instability will now reign.	EC85
the significant rise in support for the anti-austerity parties particularly on the left suggests political instability will continue for some time.	EC113
The Euro zone economy can do without more instability in Greece.	EC116
The outcome of the Greek election, added to the result in France means the cat is now very much back among the Eurozone pigeons.	EC109
If a Government isn't in place in Greece by Thursday, elections will be held next month, leading to yet more uncertainty in the Eurozone, with opinion polls showing a surge in support for those parties opposed to the bailout.	EC117

Fig. 7-15: Foregrounding political instability

Journalistic concern that *'only a weak government can now take power in Athens, which can't or won't implement promised reforms'* [EC85, see also EC113] is further reflected in assessments of efforts to put together a coalition government that belie a preference for a pro-bailout coalition rather than fresh elections (despite an apparent recognition that it goes contrary to the wishes of the Greek people [EC84, EC86, EC113, EC114]), expressed principally through the portrayal

of SYRIZA as intransigent spoiler:

In Greece hopes flickered briefly that the two main parties supporting the EU bail out terms could join the Democratic Left party which holds 21 seats. That would be enough to create a coalition and avoid fresh elections.	EC116
President Karolos Papoulias's latest initiative is to try and form a government of technocrats to implement the EU-IMF deal, but with the main leftist party opposed, the efforts look doomed.	EC89
Parties opposed to the terms of the bailout are refusing to enter a coalition with those that support it.	EC117
The man on the driving seat was Alexis Tsipras, the leader of the Coalition of the Radical Left, who effectively blocked either option as it would mean more austerity.	EC93
Clearly, the anti-bailout parties are not prepared to listen to him because he wants a government of national unity.	EC85
SYRIZA party which came second in the election, refused to join a government or to back the EU-IMF bailout.	EC110
Their leader is Alexis Tsipras, the charismatic 37-year-old left wing radical who has most to gain if these talks fail.	EC118

Fig. 7-16: SYRIZA as spoiler

The source of this anxiety can be attributed to concerns about the fate of the Greek bailout programme in the event of a future SYRIZA victory, which is described in positive terms as *'keeping the struggling economy on life support'* [EC86] and *'keeping the country afloat'* [EC109].

That the situation prompted by the *'result that rocked the EU'* [EC110] was one for Europe to resolve is established in several items. One suggests that a *'potent test of the European project'* was *'once more coming from Greece'* [EC129], which will *'occupy European policymakers'* [EC94, see also EC85]. The suggestion that the Franco-German alliance 'underpinning the European project now faces a test over policies to deal with the crisis' [EC109] locates Greece as the locus of crisis-indeed, *'the acute problem'* in Europe [EC89].

Despite several mentions of European figures being *'keen to dampen' 'open speculation'* [EC116, see also EC89, EC110, EC125] about Greece being forced to leave the Euro, a torrent of warnings and ultimatums issued by mostly European political figures dominate the intra-election and second campaign period,

emphasising the dire necessity of Greece respecting the terms of the bailout agreements if they desired to remain with the Euro and to remain solvent. This is crystallised in one item's warning of *'a chorus of voices saying no funds will be released until a stable and compliant government is in place in Athens'* [EC115, see also EC85, EC112, EC86, EC119, EC120, EC88, EC121, EC95, EC123, EC126, EC110, EC128, EC129]. In the context of such unanimity, it is notable that the sole Irish voice- Michael Noonan's paraphrased warning to Greece to *'stick to EU and IMF commitments''* [EC119]- is described as *'Ireland [...] offering the hand of friendship to Greece'*- a striking ascription of *'friendship'* given that was on offer from Ireland was manifestly the iron glove of austerity wrapped in the iron first of austerity. What one journalist described as *'pressure'* on Greece *'building up from outside'* [EC85] was legitimated by journalists who, perhaps emboldened by the unanimity of European elite concern about the possibility of an oppositional government taking power in Greece, themselves give credence to a concrete link between the election of a leftist government and a Greek default and Eurozone (or even EU) ejection (despite SYRIZA's explicitly pro-Euro stance). Elite *'fears'* [EC98, EC128], *'questions'* [EC118, EC94] and *'concerns'* [EC125] about such an outcome are naturalised by a range of journalistic commentary:

Bear in mind the implications of a… second election which may throw up again a sizable anti EU-IMF block which would perhaps inexorably leads to a default and an exit from the Eurozone.	EC120
the strong message coming from particularly Berlin is, you can't walk away from the austerity program, from the bailout terms and remain in the Euro. To what extent if at all is that message getting through?	EC88
I think they've been trying to say to Greek politicians, look, just think of what you're doing. We need a stable and reliable government in Athens that will stick to the terms of the bailout. We don't necessarily want to tell you how to run your business. It's a democratic process but at the same time Greece has to stick to the program.	EC120
Is it your feeling […] that the resistance to the austerity program as is presently constituted that people are prepared to go the whole way to default and to leave the Eurozone? Do you think there's an appetite for that there?	EC109
if an elected government rejects the demands in the EU-IMF bailout then Greece's potential exit from the Euro will come a step closer.	EC109
the political crisis intensifies with the country's very future in the Eurozone at stake.	EC90
Greece must vote again with a decision to make about its future in Europe and whether it stays in the Euro.	EC110
Euro or Drachma, the past or the future, those are the choices political analysts say are facing Greek voters as they go to the polls tomorrow in a crucial election, the result of which could determine the fate of the country and the single currency.	EC128

the result could determine Greece's future within the Euro	EC102
The results of this election are crucial to Greece's future in the Eurozone and the fate of the single currency.	EC100
The results could decide whether the country stays in the Eurozone.	EC129
in an election which it's widely believed will decide the country's future in Europe.	EC99
Opinion polls suggest that anti-bailout parties will emerge victorious. The consequences of such a scenario raise the possibility of a default and questions over Greece's further membership of the Euro.	EC94
Polls suggest it could win the June election and if a new Greek government does not commit to the program then it is hard to see how the Troika can release fresh funds.	EC110

Fig. 7-17: Greek election and Euro membership

A range of items link the political uncertainty to financial uncertainty, with the concerns of the markets again foregrounded. These include one with the election imminent in which we learn of *'global markets anxious that the result of the vote could trigger a potentially calamitous Greek exit from the single currency'* [EC96] [see also EC121, EC95, EC125, EC122, EC94, EC96], buttressed by items emphasising regional and global economic consequences [EC128, EC100, EC127, EC122] One item lists a potential outcome as the possibility of civil war in Greece [EC125]. While the negative, even apocalyptic implications of default are foregrounded, a number of items include more positive assessments of such an eventuality, including one in which the 'views expressed by many people' are cited that an exit would 'be better for the Greeks […] and better for Europe' who has already 'priced in' the possibility of a Greek 'departure and default' [EC92, see also EC91]. The suggestion that Greece's 'horrendous levels of debts' must be 'dealt with' whether they're 'in the Eurozone or out' [EC91] suggests an inevitability about further restructuring of Greek debt irrespective of the election outcome, while others suggest the desirability of a Greek exit for Greeks and for markets [EC125, EC110].

Several items speculate on how *'Athens can produce a stable government'* [EC110] with an interviewer speculating on whether the French President might be able to *'convince the Greek electorate to go the other way and to vote for parties in favour of austerity?'* by deploying his *'charm, his Gallic charm'* on *'the Germans'* to get concessions for the Greeks [EC110], with another suggesting the possibility

of *'sweeteners'* [EC97] if a *'pro-bailout party'* is elected.

The *'knock-on effects'* [EC110, EC95] for Ireland from a potential Greek Eurozone exit are also speculated on. One item explicitly attributes increases in Ireland's borrowing costs, which had been *'stable for months'*, to *'fears'* [EC123, see also EC124] of a "Grexit". A series of other items speculate on the way in which *'tremors'* [EC110] from Greece could affect Ireland [EC124, EC125, EC110, EC97]. These are mostly negative but some contain hints of opportunity, including the idea that Ireland might conceivably look to *'cut some of its debts with a Greek-style deal?'* [EC95] On the whole however, in the context of a visit from the Olympic torch to Ireland, the sentiment that *'Many will be hoping it is the only Greek fire that will visit our shores this summer'* [EC110] better encapsulates the tenor of the speculated implications for Ireland of a Greek Eurozone exit.

7.3.1.2 (ii) Framing the June parliamentary election

Representation of major political forces following the first election and into the second

'Anti-bailout', 'anti-austerity' and *'pro-bailout', 'pro-austerity'* are terms regularly used [EC86, EC83, EC112, EC116 EC84, EC85, EC113, EC118, EC119, EC121, EC109, EC94] as shorthand for the two main political forces that emerged from the first election, New Democracy and SYRIZA, led by Antonis Samaras and Alexis Tsipras respectively. The former is also presented as, variously, part of a *'far-left coalition'* [EC85, EC113] the *'hard left'* [EC109, EC129] with the latter identified in the more moderate terms of *'centre-right'* [EC81, EC111, EC83, EC113] and *'conservative'* [EC85, EC86, EC114].

SYRIZA's status as front-runner [EC116] is made clear, with one noting that the *'momentum is clearly behind'* [EC118] Tsipras, the *'charismatic 37-year old left wing radical'* [EC118]. SYRIZA's platform is described as, in terms attributed to its supporters, desiring to remaining with the EU and the Euro but for the abandonment of austerity [EC85]. SYRIZA's own view that a Euro exit would be

averted is described in the sceptical terms of its spokesman *'boldly insisting'* [EC127] and making *'claims'* that it would stay in the Euro [EC96]. SYRIZA's platform is styled as *'fairly uncompromising'* [EC97] with the emphasis on the bailout repudiation and its negative consequences foregrounded.

Beyond the already established journalistic validation of a link between a SYRIZA win and an inexorable Eurozone departure, that Tsipras' increasing appeal to voters was problematic is conveyed in several items, including one in which a SYRIZA win is described as *'a significant headache for EU finance ministers'* [EC93], and another which suggests that Tsipras' message has *'gone down very badly in other European capitals as you can imagine'* [EC97] This is reinforced by the idea that Tsipras was sending 'tremors through Europe' by virtue of his assertion that the bailout would be 'torn up' [EC118, see also EC93] by a future SYRIZA government.

Journalistic acknowledgment of Tsipras' popularity, unlike the other party leaders who are '*perceived to be out of touch with the mood of the nation'* [EC118], is not meant as a compliment- several items imply that SYRIZA's resonance with the national mood is suspicious. One item devotes significant focus to the complaint of a dissident former SYRIZA candidate who accused the party of *'exploiting the rage of society'* [EC101]. Elsewhere, SYRIZA's anti-bailout but pro-Euro position is described in terms of *'seductive promises'*, which voters might *'prefer'* to believe than *'the economic calamity that a Euro exit could entail'* [EC96, see also EC127]. Another item speaks of a public fatalism which plays into the hands of SYRIZA: *'life is simply so hopeless that they feel that they can be seduced if you like or confident enough to vote for the radical left'* [EC102].

The responses to a "vox pop" in which a journalist puts the European threats directly to members of the Greek public are described as conveying *'a sense of fatalism'* by the presenter [EC97], despite the fact that contributors shown explicitly repudiate those threats. Summing up the options open to the Greek electorate as *'demoralizing choice between risking a Euro Zone exit on one hand or voting for the parties widely accused of getting Greece into the mess in which it finds*

itself' [EC127] denies voters agency or any positive rationale for voting left.

While New Democracy is described as *'a conservative party'* that *'wants to stay in the Euro'* [EC102] and more *'pro-European'* [EC129], SYRIZA is described as presenting *'a substantial threat to Greece's continued existence in the Eurozone'* [EC102]. The contrast between "compliant" New Democracy and "threatening" SYRIZA is underlined in another item which reports on the political choices of a number of voters describing one as voting for *'parties committed to largely abiding by the bailout terms so the country can stay in the Euro'* [EC129], and another couple in favour of *'SYRIZA, the party that wants to repudiate the terms of the bailout'* [EC129, see also EC97]. Others casts doubt on the practicality of SYRIZA's plans, suggesting that *'some economists here say their* [SYRIZA's] *figures don't add up*' [EC97], and even legitimising New Democracy leader Samaras' view that bailout repudiation would *'send Greece crashing out of the Euro'* [EC128] by noting that that this position is one with which *'European leaders agree'* [EC128, see also EC99].

Assessing the outcome of the second Greek election

Reference is made to *'many observers'* who assessed the result in Greece by describing the New Democracy vote as being *'driven by fear of a Euro exit'* with the more emotive terms of *'anger driving huge numbers of voters into the arms of more radical parties*' [EC106] principally referring to SYRIZA, whose rise in support is described as *'startling'* [EC100].

As it became clear that Greece would have *'pro-bailout rulers'* [EC103] led by New Democracy, PASOK and SYRIZA's refusal to participate in coalition with New Democracy is described in negative terms as *'the kind of brinksmanship the single currency could surely do without*' [EC100], again suggestive of a support for a national unity government and disdain for partisan disunity. This is reinforced by the implication that the opposition's desire to remain *'outside of the tent'* [EC100] is merely a strategic gambit, placing future political gain above national stability.

References to the election bringing *'relief to Brussels and Berlin'* [EC100, see also EC106] and receiving a *'broad welcome across Europe'* [EC105]- including by Ireland's Tánaiste- validate the election result as positive, particularly in the absence of any dissenting voices. Journalistic suggestions that *'a disorderly exit from the single currency has been averted'* [EC106] and the statement that *'Greeks awoke to find their cash machines still working and the country was still a member of the single currency'* [EC106] go further still in this vein.

A remarkable suggestion is made by a correspondent that the hard line take by *'Berlin and Brussels'* in advance of the election was aimed at damaging SYRIZA, as *'they didn't want to lend legitimacy' 'to that particular party'*, *'who were saying that the bailout could be overturned or changed'* [EC103]. Given the uncritical reproduction and naturalisation of the European stance in RTÉ coverage, this post-hoc admission suggests at least tacit collusion in such a delegitimising project. Speculating on the likelihood of significant concessions, it is suggested that Greece *'doesn't have much of a hand to play here'* [EC104] with a moralising attitude present in the question to an interviewee about what response the new Greek government *'should get, deserves to get from the rest of Europe'* [EC107].

7.3.2 Sub-topic 2b- Elections in Italy

7.3.2.1 (i) Framing technocracy

Unlike in Greece, where a short-lived technocratic government gave way to elections in a planned manner, the longer period of technocratic rule in Italy ended in more dramatic fashion with the withdrawal of support for Mario Monti by Silvio Berlusconi's party in November 2012. This precipitated elections in the following Spring. The period around this event presented the opportunity for a round of journalistic assessments on the legacy of technocratic rule. These were universally positive and emphasised in explicit terms Mario Monti's success in restoring Italy's finances and thus its international credibility:

It's just over a year ago since Mario Monti came to power and pulled Italy back from the brink of fiscal disaster.	EC148
The political experiment of Italy, putting the economist and former European commissioner of the head of government to make hard decisions has just come to an end after a year	EC133
And Mario Monti, who has got a lot of praise outside Italy, might he run?	EC133
the man who's given Italy a year of stable government	EC150
Mario Monti's government has managed to steady Italy's precarious finances. Ahead of the election he's warned Italian politicians not to undo his government's achievement in saving Italy from the crisis.	EC150
he's seen as a stability figure, someone who has brought Italy back into the centre of Europe, he's respected by EU leaders, he's respected by the financial markets, which has resulted to the Italy's cost of borrowing really decreasing.	EC150
Remember, fifteen months ago Italy nearly went bankrupt and it was only the actions of Mario Monti, the technocrat Prime Minister who introduced reforms and austerity measures that brought Italy back from the brink.	EC155
The outgoing Prime Minister, Mario Monti, did attempt modest reforms that restored Italy's international credibility	EC137

Fig. 7-18: Assessing Italian technocracy

7.3.2.2 (ii) Framing the choices facing Italians

Representation of major political forces

The incumbent Prime Minister, Mario Monti, the centre-right People of Freedom party led by Silvio Berlusconi, the centre-left Democratic party led by Pier-Luigi Bersani and the new Five Star Movement led by Beppe Grillo constitute the four political forces discussed in the run up to the Italian general election of 2013.

Silvio Berlusconi, who had been *'forced'* [EC149] and *'hounded'* [EC154] out of office but who was now miraculously rising *'from the political grave'* [EC136, see also EC137] is described as responsible for bringing *'the Eurozone debt crisis to a crescendo'* [EC146]. His long history of involvement in scandals, as well as his ability to avoid justice for his role in them is frequently raised [EC149, EC147,

EC152, EC146, EC136], contributing to a sense of incredulity about his candidacy and his enduring popularity [EC146, see also EC133, EC136]. Berlusconi, described in one item as *'the 76-year-old political schmoozer'* [EC146] is presented as a representative of *'the populist vote'* [EC152] as evidenced by his TV-friendly campaigning style and eye-catching promise to, for example, abolish a *'hated'* [EC152] property tax.

Even before he had announced his candidacy, Mario Monti is discussed in broadly positive terms by virtue of *'praise'* [EC133] received outside of Italy. His unwillingness to *'throw in his lot with any party'* [EC150] and readiness to *'be Prime Minister once again if there was an unclear result'* [EC148, see also EC135, EC150] is presented without critical comment, suggesting a normalisation of technocratic norms. Monti's poor skills as a campaigner are noted on several occasions [EC136, EC150]. As *'the man voters appear to blame'* [EC151] for austerity, it is hinted in another item that he is considered an unfortunate fall guy given that he was only implementing measures *'that many people feel Italy was forced to take at the time'* [EC136].

The *'phenomenon'* [EC152] of Beppe Grillo, also discussed in the context of an item focused on *'the populist vote'* [EC152] is described as *'threatening an even bigger upset'* [EC152] than that promised by Berlusconi. His new grouping, the 5 Star Movement, is described as a *'protest movement'* [EC142] and *'not a political party'* [EC152]. The party's success in having *'harnessed the web to fill piazzas up and down Italy with hundreds and thousands of supporters'* [EC152, also EC136, EC140] is recognised. We learn that the *'wildcard'* [EC136] grouping, an *'anti-politics movement'* [EC137, see also EC154] is *'really designed to capitalise on peak cynicism within the Italian public about the political past, about the political culture'* [EC136, see also EC137] However, *'not everyone is convinced that populism is what Italy needs'* [EC137] and concerns are raised about his lack of political experience and failure to devise a *'clear political program beyond the five principles they are looking for'* [EC140], although the group's desire to quit the Euro is its only cited policy [EC152, EC137].

Pier-Luigi Bersani, despite being described as the *'front-runner'* [EC148] in the polls, is given little attention in the run up to the election. Several items refer to the disparate wings of his party which he must unite if he would be to lead [EC151, EC136]. We are told, however, that he has *'promised to freeze the reform process'* [EC151] instigated by Monti.

As polls opened, the overall political choices facing Italy were described rather derisively as that between a *'multi-billionaire accused of tax fraud and sex with an underaged prostitute, the former communist, technocrat and a comedian'* [EC140], summarised more demurely, if no less reductively in another as *'a choice between protest and populism on the one hand and established parties on the other'* [EC153].

What's at stake: The meaning of the election and the potential implications of particular outcomes

The collapse of the Monti government following the withdrawal of support by Berlusconi is met with several items in which warnings from European elites about the implications of the upcoming election. A warning issued by European Commission president Barroso referred to the need for continued austerity, *'irrespective of who is prime minister'* [EC148, see also EC132, EC149], a concern setting the tone for the journalistic framing of the election's context and imagined implications. Agreement with Barroso is conveyed with the suggestion that the bond yield reductions enjoyed by Italy under Monti were now likely to go the other direction- *'as political instability beckons that's likely to go into reverse, quickly'* [EC148].

With the election described as *'the most important election in Italy in a generation'* [EC153], a pronounced emphasis on political instability and its undesirability to European elites and markets- particularly in terms of Eurozone integrity- is evident in a range of items in the pre-election period.

EU leaders will not relish the prospect of two months of political uncertainty in Italy, its impact on the cost of the country's borrowing and any knock on effect for confidence in the Euro.	EC150
The last few months have brought with them some respite from the darkest days of the Eurozone crisis, where the very existence of the currency was threatened. But, this coming Sunday and Monday, elections in Italy could stir up the hornets' nest once again.	EC146
If the wrong result emerges after these elections, the markets could be seriously spooked by Italy's prospects, and the Euro could be under threat again.	EC146
Political deadlock its feared, will stall reforms. That could turn markets once more against Italy, reigniting the fires of Eurozone contagion.	EC146
to vote in a general election which depending on the results, could have a major impact on European markets and maybe even reignite the EU debt crisis.	EC136

Fig. 7-19: Negative implications of Italian election

The potential implications for Ireland of the election outcome are discussed only once, where it is suggested that *'Ireland needs stability on the financial markets'*, ergo, *'Italy [...] needs to be a stable country'*, adding that a hung parliament or coalition inimical to Monti's policies would be *'exactly and precisely the thing that Ireland does not want'* [EC150, see also EC146], an explicit validation of technocracy, austerity and a conflation of Irish government crisis management strategy with the Irish nation.

Journalistic concern with the apparent disparity between the *'consensus'* [EC143] (again, a consensus of *'many observers'* [EC141]) around what *'Italy needs'* [EC151] and what was likely to emerge from the electoral process was a recurring theme. The *'deep-seated reforms'* [EC137] defined as necessary are explored in a range of items, whose neoliberal character is summarised in one item which describes Italy as suffering from *'a chronic lack of competitiveness and an overly bureaucratic business climate'* [EC137, see also EC143, EC141]. That this is aligned with the desire of the markets is evident when the correspondent says that *'[m]arkets are looking for a government that can take the kind of tough reforming measures and really get to grips with Italy's deepening economic problems'* [EC153].

Yet, we learn that *'few politicians appear ready'* [EC151] to deliver the necessary reforms, with the question asked whether there is *'any national politician…who has the power and strength and the backing to be able to carry out those reforms successfully?'* [EC146] Journalistic dissatisfaction with the parties is also evident in the idea that *'the parties that reluctantly supported his* [Monti's] *efforts in Parliament largely abandoned talk of reform on the campaign trail'* [EC137].

The *'confused and disillusioned electorate'* [EC137] are described as possessing a *'real cynicism about politics here'* [EC151] as well as being *'fed up with austerity'* [EC151]. A *'significant protest vote against painful austerity measures'* [EC139] is expected, meaning that *'a lot of voters will be taken away from the established parties'* [EC140]. It is clear that this is viewed as problematic, because a large *'protest vote'* may result in an *'inconclusive result'* which *'would be damaging for Italy's credibility'* (linked to market *'anxiety'*) [EC140] and would represent *'possibly the worst outcome'* [EC146].

A glimpse into what might constitute a desirable election outcome is offered in several items. One cites the view of *'most external observers'* who *'feel a Bersani-Monti alliance is what Italy needs'* [EC151], with the position of these notional external observers legitimated in another item in which the correspondent suggests that such an alliance would 'probably keep Italy's credibility intact and would signal to the European Union, at least, that Italy will continue along the path of reform' [EC136]. This would be contingent, however, on Bersani having *'reconciled'* the *'far-left'* [EC136] elements within his coalition, suggesting that his value as Prime Minister would be his ability to provide popular cover to the continuation of the Monti agenda. This is supported by the suggestion that Bersani, in comments attributed to him, would continue *'fiscally correct measures and reforms'* and be *'responsible in government'* [EC143].

Such comments suggest a close alignment between the desires of Eurozone leaders, financial markets and what journalists define as necessary 'reforms' for Italy.

7.3.2.3 (iii) Framing election outcomes and implications

The *'shocking'* [EC143], *'truly remarkable'* and *'astonishing'* [EC142] election outcome is described in negative, even somewhat apocalyptic terms in a range of items. As the *'worst possible outcome'* [EC155, see also EC144], the immediate financial implications are again foregrounded, with references to the adverse effect on bond spreads and share prices [EC154, EC141, EC142, EC143, EC144].

Against the background of the prediction of a hung parliament, the emphasis on political instability [e.g. EC142, EC144] again casts a long shadow over the election's assessment. We learn that the election threatens to shatter the achievement of at least a pause in the Euro crisis which had been *'somewhat dealt with in recent months'* [EC141] but now *'the prospect of immediate and damaging instability looms large'*, with *'more danger for the Eurozone'* [EC154] which could threaten its *'fragile recovery'* [EC154] and raise the prospect of the Eurozone crisis *'reigniting'* [EC141].

The performance of Berlusconi is described as *'shocking news'* [EC153] the scale of whose success was such that *'it could disrupt hopes for the kind of stable and reforming government that Eurozone capitals so desperately want*' [EC153]. Conversely, Bersani's 'failure to win' is described as a bitter disappointment' [EC154], a partial statement and highly suggestive of a journalistic internalisation of Bersani's status as preferred candidate of political elites elsewhere. Mario Monti's 'dismal fourth' [EC154] is similarly bemoaned; despite being *'the man who appeared to have single-handedly restored Italy's international reputation'* [EC153], his failure is explained by the fact that he was *'installed at the behest of the EU to impose austerity'* [EC142, see also EC143].

With regard to Grillo's strong electoral performance, we are told that that Italians have elected a 'comedian-led protest movement with one quarter of the vote' [EC143], eliciting German disapproval [EC141]. The accusatory question of *'[h]ow are Italians feeling about what they have done this morning?*' [EC143] is strongly suggestive of journalistic disapproval; a sense only enhanced by the

correspondent's suggestion, citing Italian voters he spoke to, that they behaved nihilistically- that they delivered their *'protest vote'* in the knowledge that it was not going to *'help things'* [EC143].

The nub of the *'problem'* arising from the election is that Monti's reforms and austerity measures have been *'roundly rejected'* by voters, and this goes against the *'clear diagnosis about Italy's economic problems'* which requires *'deep-rooted economic reform'* [EC155] to overcome. In the same item, the correspondent speculates that the parties elected may be *'intrinsically antithetical towards reforms and austerity measures'* [EC155]. In another item, the presenter notes that we were *'reminded'* in an interview with European Commissioner Olli Rehn that *'to some extent it doesn't matter how electorates feel about austerity, there is only one plan in place for Europe'* [EC143], suggesting an acceptance of the idea that that the expression of voter desires in the electoral outcome may be moot.

When, two months later, the Italian parliament was eventually on the cusp of electing a workable government, it is described as the Italian President taking control of the situation, putting his *'foot down'* and getting *'those around you to be reasonable as you see it'* [EC145]. The very small number of items that cover the formation of the new government conclude that the *'months of political deadlock'* [EC156, see also EC157] are over, although there is no discussion on the implications or otherwise of the new *'broad coalition'* [EC156] government coming to office, beyond querying *'what kind of man'* [EC145] is new PM Enrico Letta and whether his premiership provides good prospects for *'a functioning government'* [EC145]- which, in the context of what has gone before, can only be assumed to refer to a government that can function to implement the policies that the EU requires of it.

7.4 Conclusions

7.4.1 Findings in summary

The analysis undertaken in this chapter uncovered a range of recurrent framing tendencies in the corpus of texts pertaining to the Euro debt crisis across the three frame dimensions of *issue problematisation*, *actor and action legitimation*, and *outcome evaluation*.

Where patterns of *issue problematisation* in Greece are concerned, democratic processes (both in the case of the proposed referendum on the bailout in 2011 and the elections in 2013) are themselves identified as threats to the smooth operation of European crisis management. Similarly, in Italy, the political failure to enact particular kinds of reforms is powerfully thematised as threatening Eurozone stability. The proposed referendum on the bailout in Greece is consistently represented in negative terms, with a pronounced emphasis on the range of negative actual and hypothetical consequences for Greece, Europe, Ireland and the world. In Italy, it is the building political and financial pressure on Italy's economy and political leadership that comprises the main early thematic focus of the crisis there, as European pressure for rapid economic reforms in Italy grew and bond markets threatened to cut off Italy's capacity to fund itself.

Analysis of the second set of sub-topics in both countries suggest that the primary mode of contextualisation and problematisation of elections is again through their presentation as threatening the stability of a newly-becalmed Eurozone. Like in Italy, contextualisations of Greece's impending elections are characterised by the destabilising potential of increasing political polarisation- an outcome problematised because it may result in "ungovernability", arresting the unencumbered implementation of European-directed crisis management and, notionally, reigniting the embers of crisis. This is evidenced in a recurring preoccupation with political and financial instability- in particular with regard to repercussions in financial markets and concomitant threats to European and

global economic stability. This is at its strongest in the framing of the second Greek election as entailing a moment of truth for Greece's ongoing participation in the Eurozone as well as the fate of the single currency, a construal of the election that aligned with the escalating rhetoric emanating from Brussels and Berlin. In Italy, this is particularly apparent in the almost wistful valourisation of technocratic rule under Mario Monti. He is represented as having heroically restored Italy's international credibility but whose achievements are now threatened by an unwelcome return of the political. The potential for elections in both countries to undermine a nascent Irish economic recovery are underlined, with market instability arising from undesirable electoral outcomes discussed in terms that clearly locate the electoral preferences of financial markets as in accordance with Irish national interests.

In both countries, dominant issue problematisations are closely linked to modes of *actor legitimation* that demonstrate in the first instance a pervasive delegitimisation of political incumbents in both countries (Papandreou in Greece and Berlusconi in Italy) and later, opposition figures (Tsipras in Greece, Berlusconi and Grillo in Italy). The immediate problems facing both countries are inextricably linked to the principal actors of the respective Prime Ministers, both of whom are the subject of sustained, consistent and sometimes personalised pathologisation. Critical discourses around the actions, inactions and intentions of both men amount to their stigmatisation as causal agents of crisis. Journalistic judgements on these figures turn on the extent of their opposition to the policy preferences of European institutions, European political leaders and financial markets.

Regarding the representation of the electoral choices open to voters in both countries, journalistic recognition of public anger, political polarisation and splintering of political loyalties in both Greece and Italy exists alongside a concern about the potential inability for compliant governance to emerge in either country. In Italy, the emphasis is placed on the threat to Mario Monti's reform agenda represented by competing populisms in the form of a knave (the dreaded return of Silvio Berlusconi) and a clown (the unknown quantity of the comedian

Beppe Grillo and his 5 Star Movement). In Greece, a subdued treatment of the competing parties in the run-up to the first election intensifies in the second with a focus on the conservative New Democracy party and a resurgent radical left in the form of SYRIZA. Journalistic framings of both parties, particularly in the run up to the second election, contrasts the (albeit partly discredited) conservative party's responsible and compliant approach to negotiating Greek's economic future with an emphasis on the hair-raising implications of SYRIZA's insistence on seeking a new deal for Greece, whose intransigence is consistently represented as a threat to the stability of the existing order. The public resonances of oppositional groupings in both countries are encoded as threats to order domestically and in the Eurozone and global economies. Of particular note is the tendency to caricature SYRIZA in Greece as dogmatist, oppositional and a vehicle of populist anger and unproductive fatalism, rather than demonstrative of popular desire for an alternative Europe based on substantively different values.

The journalistic delegitimisation of incumbent political leaders and oppositional groups proceeded alongside the legitimisation of the subsequent drift to technocracy- occasionally in fulsome terms. Overwhelmingly positive assessments of Papademos in Greece and Monti in Italy at both the beginning and end of their tenures contrasted sharply with the framing of eventual elections in both countries as threatening a return to crisis, serving to normalise the "solution" of externally-imposed technical governments to the "problem" of recalcitrant domestic prime ministers and electorates. Evidence of journalistic support for a Monti-Bersani coalition in Italy and a national unity government in Greece on the basis of their ability to provide stability demonstrates a desire for technocracy by other means- a politics without politics. Conversely, the impression is given that the rise of oppositional voices on the left is a reactive, dangerous response, not freely chosen and not intellectually justified.

This is supported by the assumption, pervasive in the corpus, that Italy and Greece are problems to be solved by, if necessary, European fiat rather than domestic electorates, with the EU identified as the proper locus of crisis

resolution authority. The assessment of *action legitimation* therefore tends to flow from compliance with whatever outcome will deliver stability as defined by markets and European political elites, propelling an elevation of the agents of technocracy- the European Central Bank, financial markets, caretaker technocratic administrations- as legitimate actors and issuers of demands. There is ample evidence to show that "Europe" is identified as the main locus of authority for the resolution of crisis, evidenced not least by regular uncritical representation of the drumbeat of threats made by political and economic elites to both countries.

With regard to *outcome evaluation*, the onset of technocratic governance in both countries is framed positively and assessed similarly positively afterwards, particularly in Italy's case. While the resignation of both leaders was broadly attributed to non-democratic pressures from financial markets and European decision-makers, this remained largely unproblematised. The elevation of Lucas Papademos in Greece and Mario Monti in Italy as technocratic heads of interim administrations are framed as positive developments, indeed as the *sine qua non* of Eurozone integrity. Journalistic discourse assessing the new technocratic governance in both countries evinces, at their most democratic, a mild ambivalence at the extent to which European crisis management has reached into domestic politics, and at their least democratic, an explicit relief at the potential of the new technocrats to do what their elected counterparts wouldn't or couldn't. The achievement of "order" and the efficacy of particular modes of decision-making represent the bar by which the new technocratic administrations were initially evaluated, with a pronounced elision of the issues for democracy that such "solutions" entail.

The celebration of technocracy contrasts with the thoroughly negative assessments of the inconclusive electoral outcomes in Italy and the first Greek parliamentary election of 2013. The implications of both are viewed with singular dismay, only dissipating with the eventual establishment of coalitions broadly compliant with the terms of European crisis management. The negative implications in terms of market opprobrium and the problems for European

crisis management are foregrounded in both countries, with the resultant uncertainty explicitly linked in both countries with the fully-fledged reassertion of the Euro debt crisis. Partial positions in relation to desirable outcomes are conveyed under cover of references to expert opinion in about what is best for Italy and Greece, which substantively support the position of parties with a compliant attitude to European crisis management. A clear distinction between "bad" and "good" electoral outcomes is demonstrated by the muted, relieved response to the eventual cobbling together of coalitions broadly compliant with EU crisis management, following months of negotiations in Italy and after a second election in Greece.

7.4.2 Journalistic crisis construals: a conclusion

The analysis undertaken in this chapter deployed a framing approach to examine the ideological tenor of journalistic crisis construals using a series of recent momentous events as supranational crisis management and domestic politics in European peripheral nations clashed in ways that both crystallised and heralded an escalation of the contemporary democratic crisis.

Analysis of the journalistic discharge of framing functions along the dimensions of issue problematisation, actor and action legitimation, and outcome evaluation revealed an issue culture in close alignment with neoliberal crisis construals.

This is evidenced by, inter alia, a journalistic tendency to pathologise the democratically-elected leaders of Greece and Italy for their assumed lack of compliance with the dictates of supranational crisis management; to subsequently offer implicit and explicit support for the subsequent deposing of both leaders; to view the imposition of technocratic replacements as benign developments; and to demonstrate an aversion to a return to democratic governance in both countries.

The identification of Greece and Italy as aberrant Eurozone members whose pathological governance and political cultures presented an imminent threat to

Eurozone integrity and regional and even global economic stability serves to identify the locus of crisis in ways that elide both its systemic origins and ethical dimensions, and pave the way for the legitimation of a state of exception in which profound interference in domestic politics- up to and including the usurpation of democratic electoral processes- becomes accepted and even celebrated.

The simultaneous acknowledgment of yet failure to problematise an undemocratic element in the end of the premierships of Berlusconi and Papandreou is indicative of an editorial submission to the *realpolitik* of increasingly radicalised European crisis management and an internalisation of the disciplinary logics of supranational crisis management whose patience with even the patina of electoral democracy had run out. This weakness, evidenced in the extent to which journalistic discourse took up the mantle as a conduit and amplifier of elite anxieties over events in both countries, is suggestive of a higher valuation of market autonomy over democratic sovereignty, itself premised on the thorough internalisation of an economic rationality that evacuates normative criteria in the evaluation of crisis diagnoses and decision-making.

Such a neoliberal rationality ensured that the implications of events abroad successfully elided problematisation of crisis management at home, with the firm emphasis on how events may affect Ireland's economic recovery- premised on a broad strategy of compliance with external demands- playing into Irish governmental desires to distance itself from the travails of the European periphery and to advocate for Ireland's special status as a compliant, recovering casualty of crisis.

In so doing, the possibilities of airing heterodox crisis construals that expand the space for critical engagement with questions of democratic legitimacy, the political and economic logics of crisis management (and its social consequences), and the possibilities of an alternative Europe are foreclosed; leaving little room left but for a grim acceptance of the headlong rush towards post-democracy.

Chapter 8: Letting the Outside In: Public Participation and Accountability in Irish Public Service Broadcasting

8.1 The public in (and on) RTÉ: an overview

8.1.1 Introduction

Although incorporating accounts of the actual and desired extent of the influence of public opinion in the newsroom as well as practices and ideologies of representation, the empirical explorations of the foregoing chapters have focused principally on journalistic practices, professional self-conceptions, and textual crisis framings. Given the project's overarching interest in the conditions of possibility of contemporary crisis engendering democratising responses from public service broadcasting, empirical scrutiny is warranted to assess the democratic constraints and affordances of institutional openings beyond the newsroom for publics to intervene both in and through broadcasting.

This chapter accomplishes this through a brief overview of such (historical and extant) institutional openings, followed by the detailed account of a participant-observation case study of a key venue of institutional public participation, the RTÉ Audience Council.

8.1.2 "Access" programming

Public service broadcasting in the Reithian tradition, as discussed in Chapter 2, has long relegated the public to the predominant status of "silent partner". In Ireland, however, the idea that public service broadcasting has and continues to play a powerful role in providing a venue for the nation to talk both to and about itself is central to its self-image and institutional mythology. The medium of radio has been particularly important to this, captured in RTÉ's description of its Radio

1 station as 'the authentic voice of the nation- the place where the national conversation takes place' (RTÉ, 2013a: 64). In this context, the role of participatory or "access" programming- particularly on radio- has played a distinctive role in RTÉ since the 1960s.

Characterising Irish talk radio as a kind of 'public confessional', Doyle-O'Neill (2013, see also 2015) traces the development of talk radio in Ireland from the early years of the newly-incorporated RTÉ from the early 1960s onwards, singling out the significance of a number of long-running, mould-breaking programmes (*Dear Frankie* which started broadcasting in the 1960s, *The Gay Byrne Show* in the 1970s, and *The Gerry Ryan Show* and *Liveline* in the 1980s) which were all built around- and thrived upon- the participation of members of the public in contributing at first questions and later stories and points of view. To an even greater degree than television, such programmes may be seen as central to RTÉ's contribution to Irish liberalisation in the second half of the twentieth century, in particular helping to denude barriers between private domesticity and the public sphere.

The extent to which these and other subsequent "access" radio and television programmes can be considered "strongly" participatory or democratic is questionable, not least owing to the extent of editorial control retained by broadcasting professionals (see O'Sullivan, 1997 for a discussion of the participative affordances and constraints of the *Gerry Ryan* show). Separately, regular studio discussion programmes with panels of invited guests have been charged with being dominated by well-heeled professionals (Lynch, 2014).

RTÉ's history provides a number of more maximally participative exceptions. These include the "Access Community Television" initiative which ran for three series starting in 1983 and the Right to Learn project in 1993. The former series, which explicitly aimed to 'democratise the television process' (M. Murphy, 2012), allowed communities and groups to produce their own programmes and air them on television. These were undertaken with the support of RTÉ professionals but, uniquely, editorial control remained with the community. The producer/director

of the project later recounted how 'conservative forces' (ibid) in and outside RTÉ succeeded in shutting down the project. The latter represented a collaboration between RTÉ and University College Dublin, involving a five-party series on unemployment, education and the media with the participation of unemployed people.

Just as community-made programming on RTÉ briefly flowered and withered, so has programming whose subject matter was talking about RTÉ itself. The *Mailbag* programme, which ran for 14 years from 1982, remains the sole example of an RTÉ programme focused on airing public views *about* RTÉ, albeit through the non-dialogic format of reading out letters. Both the contexts of its origins and its demise (recounted in A. Murphy, 2012) suggest that it was never viewed as fulfilling an essential function.

8.1.3 Other participatory venues

Outside the context of programming, the possibilities for public participation involvement in RTÉ takes a variety of other forms, mostly of a restricted variety. These include occasional opportunities to respond to public consultations via written submissions, an internal complaints mechanism (with recourse to adjudication by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland), and Freedom of Information requests (less than half of such requests were fully granted in 2012, (RTÉ. 2013c: 142) and less than a third in 2013 (RTÉ, 2014c: 143) and 2011 (RTÉ, 2012e: 116)). Based on information received from the broadcaster's public information office, just three consultations were undertaken in the period 2004-2015- one on the topic of the Irish language (RTÉ, 2013b) and two which informed the development of RTÉ's Public Service Statements in 2010 and 2015. For a time, as noted by interviewees in Chapter 6, regional public meetings were occasionally convened where station representatives addressed publics and took questions (F. Corcoran, 2004: 42), but this practice has long since fallen into abeyance.

It is perhaps through "audience research" (whose influence in the newsroom was

briefly discussed in Chapter 5), however, that the public exerts its strongest influence on RTE, albeit in aggregate form. The work of the broadcaster's Audience Research Unit is a 'multi-faceted endeavour' (Fahy, 1992: 7), serving at least three separate functions: providing audience size and composition metrics critical to RTÉ's commercial activities through ratings data; underpinning modern scheduling practices; and fulfilling a legitimating role, in part through providing the broadcaster with data on how the public views the organisation.

Ratings data in RTÉ is supplemented by qualitative data collection methods such as focus groups (used on a "relatively infrequent" basis) (RTÉ, 2008: 9), and more substantially, by the online RTÉ Audience Reaction Panel (ibid: 8, RTÉ, 2010b: 98) since 2007. A further source of data built into the television viewership measurement system (TAM), "audience appreciation", represents a hybrid between qualitative and quantitative data- a numeric value of perceived quality assigned to programmes by the sample of viewers who also contribute ratings data (Fahy, 1992).

Notwithstanding qualitative data gathering innovations like the Audience Reaction Panel, Murray (2011: 238) argues that 'today the relationship between a public broadcaster and its audience is defined primarily by ratings data', with the schedule representing its practical manifestation. In her analysis of rationalised management practices in RTÉ, she argues that the centrality of ratings data to scheduling decisions serves several purposes that reflect RTE's public and commercial sides. On one hand, it allows RTÉ to plausibly claim that it is highly responsive to its audiences- unpopular programmes may be axed, and popular ones may be given "better" timeslots and/or renewed for further series, enabling RTÉ to argue that it is delivering maximum viewerships for its programming investments. Ratings data, of course, is also the 'currency of advertising sales' (ibid), a key source of the broadcaster's income.

Linking management by schedule to the gradual extension of market logics into RTÉ as a whole, she suggests that a key consequence of rationalised scheduling along these lines is that it 'reflects and reinforces a redefinition of the audience',

citing Croteau and Hoynes' (2006: 38) 'market model" which views audiences as "consumers of media and as commodities to be bought and sold by advertisers' (Murray, 2011: 237).

The range of audience research tools used by RTÉ can be said, then, to collectively represent a relatively 'minimalist' (Carpentier, 2011: 17) form of public participation in the organisation. Most audience research data is controlled tightly by RTÉ and shared on a need-to-know basis with relevant staff; the topical agendas for research are set by RTÉ; and the potential participants in audience research only represents a small sample of the public.

Audience research as practiced within RTÉ can be described as much more closely resembling top-down instrumental market research than bottom-up expansive public communication, circumscribing the democratic possibilities of public engagement.

It is thus in keeping with the weakly participative tenor of the other ways in which the public can seek to bring to bear its influence on RTE through other participation and accountability mechanisms, which largely have no binding force and are subject to RTÉ's co-operation which may be given or withdrawn at any time.

For example, even in cases where public complaints are upheld by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, these rulings are not backed by any sanctions. Similarly, public consultations undertaken by RTÉ have an advisory rather than a binding character. With contributions not made public, and consequent policy development undertaken wholly out of public view, whether public opinion gathered in this manner has any formative impact is impossible to ascertain.

Freedman's (2015) account of media policymaking as carefully restricted to political, economic, administrative elites resonates with the Irish case. This is buttressed by the long-established tendency for a neoliberalised RTÉ to initiate and be subjected to reviews and restructuring projects overseen by business

consultants (Murray, 2011), reflecting an institutional isomorphism with the political and economic fields.

The decline of a range of democratising practices- however weak and partial- including the opportunities for publics to produce their own programmes; the possibility for viewers to air their views about RTÉ on dedicated programming; and the holding of public meetings, all allow for the argument to be plausibly made that RTÉ in 2014 is no more "open" and "democratic" now than it was in decades prior.

This may be explained in terms of the entrenched tendency, discussed in Chapter 2, for public broadcasting to conceive of its democratic functions on a "trustee" basis, by privileging public "access" rather than "voice". The centrality of public trust- as measured by quantitative metrics and instrumentalised to legitimate its continued autonomy from the public- as the bedrock of the desired relationship between RTÉ and the Irish public is demonstrably clear.

RTÉ's 'Vision Mission Values' statement (RTÉ, 2012d) defines RTÉ's 'Vision' as 'to grow the *trust* of the people of Ireland as it informs, inspires, reflects and enriches their lives' (italics in original). The broadcaster's most recent editorial guidelines go further in this vein, stating that '[t]rust is the cornerstone of RTÉ' (RTÉ, 2014a: 4). With 'trust' elevated as the basis of the public's relationship with the broadcaster, 'participation' is defined in weak terms. For example, perceived success in fulfilling RTÉ's 'Mission' commitment to 'enable national participation in all major events' (RTÉ, 2009) is justified by vaunting high viewership figures for a series of televised 'major events' (PwC, 2013: 60). Participation is conceived of here in the sense of mere access to observe.

RTÉ use metrics like audience share, reach, appreciation, and trust (see, for example, RTÉ (2012e: 108) as "key performance indicators" which demonstrate compliance with RTÉ's public service obligations, or as the broadcaster's 2002 annual report puts it, 'The public's recognition of RTÉ's strengths is evident in strong ratings and high audience share' (RTÉ, 2003: 2). High levels of public trust-

as revealed by internal survey data- are regularly reported (e.g. PwC, 2013, RTÉ 2015c) and invariably used to argue that the broadcaster 'continues to enjoy the respect and confidence of the Irish public' (e.g. PwC, 2013: 49). Such assertions are commonplace despite the mostly quantitative nature of this kind of data which typically invites respondents to respond to fixed prompts in relation to concepts like "trust" and which do not give respondents the opportunity to self-thematise issues or to elaborate on what it is they do or do not trust RTE to do.

8.2 The RTÉ Audience Council

There is, however, one recently-instituted mechanism- the RTÉ Audience Council- through which "the public", by means of a statutory, representative committee, have come to occupy a place embedded within the governance structures of public service broadcasting. Between September 2012 and December 2014, I sat as an ordinary member on the Council, fully participating in its activities. The remainder of this chapter provides a discussion of its establishment, the evolution of its place and function within the broadcaster, an overview of some key experiences and episodes arising from my period as part of the Council and an assessment of the extent of its performance and potential as a democratising force acting on and within public service broadcasting.

8.2.1 Co-opted by design? Council structure and constitution

Roughly modelled along the lines of that previously established by the BBC (BBC Trust, 2008: 19), the first incarnation of the RTÉ Audience Council was established voluntarily by the broadcaster in 2004 as part of a range of 'accountability and transparency measures' (Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, 2002: 12-13) which were linked to RTÉ's successful application for a license fee increase in 2002. The first Audience Council was additionally justified by RTÉ in terms of the need to 'facilitate communication, and to enhance accountability' between RTÉ and its audience (RTÉ, 2007). The original Council was set up as an 'advisory group to the RTÉ Authority' (ibid) with an initial term of four years and comprising 22 members

plus an RTÉ-supplied secretary. The group's membership was split between 'representatives of the major social partners and interest groups, as well as viewers and listeners from throughout the island of Ireland' (RTÉ, 2004b: 3) and a member of the RTÉ Authority. A chairperson would be selected by Council members annually from within their number. The selection of the 'representative members' were invitees from nominated organisations that included the then social partners- IBEC, ICTU, IFA and the Community & Voluntary Pillar as well as a range of other (mainly state) bodies. The 'individual members' were selected on the basis of applications from the public solicited via advertisements on RTÉ platforms and publications and with a view to attaining a geographic spread.

The main business of the Council, according to a document issued in 2007 (RTÉ, 2007), would be to discuss matters pertaining to the 'public interest tests' set by RTÉ for itself, which include, inter alia, 'fairness', 'accuracy', 'independence from vested interests and freedom from political control or influence' and a variety of stipulations on programming around thematic, regional, demographic and cultural diversity. The same document identifies RTÉ management as the principle focus of the Council's interactions. With contact with the general public described as taking place via a website and annual report, it was clear that *interactive* engagement with the public was not envisaged as central to the Council's remit, and that its gaze would predominantly be directed inwards and upwards.

Following its dissolution at the end of 2009, new broadcasting legislation (Broadcasting Act 2009: s.96) put the Audience Council on a statutory footing, and a new Council took its place in July 2010, reflecting the stipulations of the act. In crucial structural and functional aspects, the legislative provisions relating to the Council reproduced that of its original instantiation, including the retention of RTÉ control over appointments and the practice of an RTÉ Board-nominated representative sitting on the Council, which would now number fifteen. The tradition of reporting upwards was further embedded with requirements for an annual report to both the relevant Minister and the Board of RTE. The legislation identified the Council's 'principal function' as being 'to represent to the board of

its corporation the views and interests of the general public with regard to public service broadcasting by the corporation'. To enable this, the Act contained specific provisions allowing the Council to hold public meetings and also to empower the Council to require RTÉ to broadcast an hour of televisual and radio programming every year at a time agreed by both parties. In two key respects, however, the autonomy and democratic credentials of the Council deteriorated significantly, both of which were to be pivotal in both my own nomination onto the Council and the nature of my experiences while a part of it.

With RTÉ free to undertake appointments any way they wished, rather than the public application process previously undertaken, members were selected on an *ad hoc* basis, with many- including the author- appointed on the basis of personal connections with Board members and RTÉ management (in my case accruing from the then-ongoing ethnographic research).

Under the new legislation, the Council itself would no longer annually appoint a Chair from within its own number but the Board would appoint one to it, granting it a further enhanced level of control over proceedings. In a still further consolidation of RTÉ influence, the practice of RTÉ supplying a secretary to the previous Council was continued.

All of this meant that when in September 2012 I took my seat at the enormous table in a top-floor room of the RTÉ administration building adjacent to the Board room, I sat not only with 15 or so other handpicked members of the public but also an RTÉ-appointed Chair, secretary, a member of the RTÉ Board and even the Secretary of the RTÉ Board who attended many of our meetings despite not being a member. Overwhelmingly middle-class, professional, urban, liberal and white, RTE's free selection of public representatives was a committee of the respectable and comfortable.

Conversations with colleagues and a review of internally-circulated documentation obtained prior to my appointment suggests that following an extended period of acquainting themselves with various arms of the broader

organisation by means of a range of presentations, briefings and question and answer sessions with various RTÉ personnel, the Council had begun to advance and progress some practical proposals which would give effect to its core legislative duties. Some of these- which included the proposal of a media-themed radio programme and a public event- were beginning to come to fruition by the time I joined the group.

The vignettes that follow recount some of the pivotal episodes during my tenure which reflected and shaped the Audience Council's interpretation and discharge of its functions, demonstrating the ways that the Council looked upwards, outwards and inwards in an effort to establish an identity of its own within the broadcaster.

It did not take long, however, for it to become clear that the terrain for doing so in an independent fashion was not altogether promising. Despite its legislatively-mandated ability to write its own operating rules, and a mode of decision-making in which each member had a nominally equal share of power, the Council had at an early stage adopted both a set of standing orders (RTÉ Audience Council 2011) and a series of informal practices that together embedded a conservative, hierarchal orientation that reflected a clearly-apparent desire to ensure that the group would be subject to significant measures of top-down control.

Confidentiality was established as the default status of nearly all Audience Council documentation save for the meeting "communiqués" which were written by the secretary, often in collaboration with the Chairperson. Although these were eventually made publicly available online, their content betrayed little of the substance of meetings beyond formal decisions. More detailed minutes were not kept. The rules, although not granting general decision-making powers to the Chair, nevertheless vested in that role various ancillary powers, including those of determining the agenda, venue and duration of meetings, as well as the ability, along with the Secretary, to speak publicly for the Council (RTÉ Audience Council, 2011). The draft version of the standing orders even contained a provision allowing RTÉ to terminate the membership of any member of the Audience

Council at any time.

In the ways that the statutory Council took on the shape of its non-statutory forebear (with an even greater democratic deficit in key areas), the limited diversity of its constituent members, and in the rapid establishment of a conservative *modus operandi* via a restrictive ruleset, the second Audience Council had immediately absorbed important elements of the institutional culture of its host organisation that would shape its trajectory over the remainder of its term.

8.2.2 'The Media Show' and the limits of participation

When I joined, the Council was reflecting on what on appeared to be a significant achievement: the successful progression of a Council proposal for a media-themed radio series into an 8-part run transmitted earlier that year. The original proposal called for the programme to deal with a broad range of media-related topics (including democratic issues and the political-economic implications of media structures) in a format that facilitated direct dialogue between programme makers and listeners, also explicitly noting the necessity of a transmission time which would assist the programme in building a sizable audience.

With no Council input sought beyond the initial pitch, the programme that transpired bore little relation to what was, in the main, a forward-thinking original proposal. *The Media Show,* whose production was outsourced to an independent production company, was transmitted on RTÉ Radio 1 at a "graveyard" Saturday evening slot. Thematically, the series was not strongly attuned to the democratic or political-economic dimensions of media, instead focusing on the emergence of new forms of media and how existing media organisations were adapting to new digital technologies and competitive environments- a focus reflected in the emphasis on interviews with media elites from RTÉ, its competitors, and regulators. Public involvement in the programme was incorporated, albeit via the restricted, non-dialogic form of a series of brief *'Mediawatch'* (RTÉ, 2012f) "radio essays" by public contributors.

The Council had no role in either the programme's assessment or shaping future plans. We learned that while programme ratings were very poor even for its traditionally-weak Saturday evening slot, radio management had adjudged the programme at least a partial success on the basis that it had generated a disproportionate amount of newspaper column inches based on the programme's headline-grabbing interviews with media insiders- a criterion of success indicative of a very different set of priorities from those motivating the original proposal.

Although disappointed at the poor scheduling and RTÉ's failure to consult, Council members expressed little interest in seeking to shape future series, a reticence reinforced both by the Chair who argued against the Council seeking involvement on the basis of it being an undue encroachment on journalistic autonomy, as well as by visiting RTÉ executives who cautioned against the expectation of receiving detailed responses by programme-makers to any ideas we may have.

The Media Show was renewed in 2013 and 2015 for a second and third series, and occupying similar, marginalised, weekend evening timeslots and media industry-centric formats. A sustained, contrived ambiguity over whether the programme was considered to constitute the Audience Council's allotted annual broadcasting time under law contributed to an inertia that saw the Council make no firm proposals for additional programming throughout the remainder of its term, in spite of its legally-enshrined entitlements.

8.2.3 Opening the floor up to the public

Again guided by explicit legislative provision, the Council facilitated two public events (in 2013 and 2014) during my tenure. The groundwork for a particular kind of public of event had already been laid prior to my arrival. The July 2012 communiqué (RTÉ Audience Council, 2012) explicitly linked the idea of a public event with the recommendation of the Horgan report arising from the Fr.

Reynolds libel (RTÉ, 2011b: 8) that RTÉ should organise a 'public expert conference', involving a 'lecture/seminar on a media-related topic' which would be co-organised by the Council and RTÉ.

Concerned that a format like this would, not unlike *The Media Show,* deliberately avoid cultivating a broad audience and restrict itself to media insiders, I advocated for the event to use an accessible venue, a participatory format and facilitate a broad thematic range driven by attendees. These suggestions were met with disinterest and resistance by colleagues who urged "realism", viewing strongly participatory formats as difficult to organise and not worth pursuing.

In any event, most of the decisions around the event were taken out of the hands of Council members altogether. A keynote speaker, the President and CEO of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in the United States, Paula Kerger, was selected and arranged without Council discussion. On the basis that these decisions should be left to the 'pros', we were additionally advised to leave all logistical matters- including the venue selection, format and theme- to RTÉ's communications apparatus.

The event's title (*'Public Service Broadcasting: Innovating for the Needs of Tomorrow's Audiences')* the selection of the venue (a lecture hall in UCD, a stone's throw from RTÉ's campus in the heart of affluent South Dublin) and the staid approach to event promotion were all decided by RTÉ Corporate Communications with no input solicited from the Audience Council. Each of these decisions served to imprint the event with the elite identity I had feared from the beginning. It was made clear to us that Kerger was the main draw and securing media interviews for the star speaker was seen as the corporate priority- the Audience Council involvement was a mere footnote.



Fig. 8-1 Audience Council event invite (2013)

The event boasted a modest audience of the well-informed and well-connected (including many from senior RTÉ management) who politely listened to a somewhat incongruous hour-long address (RTÉ, 2013d) on the American experience of public broadcasting. An energetic though brief Q&A session (appended to the format following objections to a sole focus on the guest lecture), focused attention on the domestic context of public broadcasting (RTÉ, 2013e). The event's Chair, the then Press Ombudsman John Horgan made the sharp criticism there was 'a touch of the 19th century' about the event's organisation and that the Audience Council should institute communication mechanisms that stretch 'participatory activity almost but not quite to the point of anarchy'.

However, despite my repetition of Horgan's critique at several future Council meetings, in the run up to the organisation of our second and final event a year later, opposition from other Council members again focused on the idea that the more open the format the bigger the risk of 'malcontents' and 'activists' seeking to dominate, signalling to me a regrettable internalisation of an institutional aversion to more expansive forms of public involvement.

Nonetheless, the event which took place in early 2014 and which focused on the

worthy topic of migrant representation and participation on and in RTÉ, some concessions to a more participative format were made. In an effort to reduce the formality of the previous event, there would be no lecture, and the whole event would comprise a discussion built around audience involvement. There would, however, still be a "top table" of invited speakers and the venue chosen, on the sole basis of expediency, was the RTÉ Radio Centre, again playing a formative role in the identity of likely attendees.

In practice, what was billed as a "public conversation" at first differed surprisingly little in format from the previous year's event, given that the panel of six- two from RTÉ, with the others representing different strands of Ireland's migrant communities- ended up speaking for nearly half the whole event before it was opened up to the floor. When it eventually did, however, the evening came to life, when the hundred or so members of the public in attendance (including a large migrant contingent) were able to speak. Their contributions offered frequently radical critiques of representational practices in RTÉ that went beyond the immediate topic at hand, querying not only what many felt was a failure of RTÉ to represent their lives but citing a broader invisibility of "othered" groups in general, including those with the "wrong" accents or postcodes.

The genteel complacency of the previous year's event had been leavened somewhat in favour of more frank and critical exchanges, but the subsequent Audience Council discussion following the event revealed that it was this very dimension that had perturbed a number of members. An alarmingly censorious mindset amongst a portion of the Council suggested an ambivalence at the value of facilitating discursive spaces for publics to freely talk about public service broadcasting.

Several felt that poor moderation of the event meant that RTÉ staff on the panel had unfairly become a lightning rod for criticism by audience contributors. Another even expressed a desire for the Audience Council to *publicly* distance itself from some of the more critical commentary directed at RTÉ simply because they did not agree with the critique. Others argued that the video of the event

should not be published online because of what one described as the 'grandstanding' tone of some of the audience contributions.

8.2.4 Climate change and the diminution of the public voice

Another episode which reflected the Council's marked reticence either to immerse itself in public engagements or to adopt a critical approach to intra-institutional practices was a series of interventions (principally made by the Audience Council but also involving the RTÉ Board) in attenuating in multiple ways a project undertaken by two Council members (including the author) in exploring RTÉ's performance and responsibilities in its reporting on the issue of climate change. The project was planned to involve both a review of RTÉ's coverage of climate change and a process of engagement with RTÉ decision-makers and external groups and individuals on how communication of the topics surrounding climate change may be improved. It was given the go-ahead by the Council in November 2012.

The first component of the project entailed a small-scale quantitative and qualitative analysis of climate change coverage of RTÉ News platforms over a period of several years, with the data gathering and analysis undertaken by this author. This was completed as planned, though its findings are beyond the scope of this chapter. The second component was envisaged by the project subcommittee to involve a process of dialogue between editorial figures in RTÉ and a combination of interested members of the public and experts on various dimensions of climate change. This proposal was vetoed by Council members in early 2014. In addition to offering the familiar justification of logistical challenges, this refusal to countenance a participatory process was expressly underpinned by the fear that directly mediating dialogue between RTÉ programme-makers and the public in this fashion would be met with resistance from RTÉ. Insofar as we had a role at all in soliciting direct public opinion, the dominant view was that we should restrict ourselves to ventriloquising it to the RTÉ Board.

In order to secure the support of the Council, we agreed to instead carry out an online survey, the results of which would be relayed to the Board. Potential respondents- comprising a targeted sample of individuals and groups outside RTÉ with an established interest in climate change issues, complemented by a snowball approach- were asked open-ended questions on their views on RTÉ's present and historic communication on climate change and for their suggestions as to how coverage of the issues may be improved.

Fearing that RTÉ may prevent the Council from publishing the project's outcomes on our website, I secured internal Council agreement that the already completed report arising from the analysis of RTÉ output on climate change (Cullinane and Watson, 2014) would be distributed to potential survey respondents, thus rendering less consequential any potential later directive to withhold publication. The manner in which the almost one hundred public responses the subcommittee received to its email account would be communicated to the Board was, however, the subject of extended contention within the Council.

For presentational reasons, the subcommittee made the decision to, in the separate portion of the report pertaining to the survey outcomes, precede the unabridged survey responses on each question with a brief synopsis of some prominent themes raised by respondents. Concerns were immediately raised by several Council members that because some of the responses made criticisms of named RTÉ staff, we should refrain from seeking to distribute the full survey responses within RTÉ, and that the brief synopses would suffice. Taken aback by the Council's readiness to effectively amputate the only component of the project that involved communication with the public on the mere suggestion that elements of its contents may be libellous, I persuaded the Council to accept in principle that the responses could be appropriately screened in advance to ensure that they did not raise legal difficulties.

Efforts to enlist the assistance of RTÉ's Audience Research unit and the broadcaster's legal staff for support in clearing the way to disseminate the survey responses were met first with trenchant opposition from the Chair (on the sole

basis that seeking to share survey responses with RTÉ was unnecessary and even counterproductive) and subsequently by a failure on the part of the two departments concerned to assist in the preparation of the research for internal distribution. In the case of the legal department, this was justified on the basis that it was not within their remit to offer assistance to the Audience Council.

In a final effort to secure agreement, the project subcommittee themselves manually anonymised all criticisms of named individuals. Wielding the censor's pen was not enough, however, and the rationale for withholding the responses from the Board shifted again. This time, the prevailing view was that survey responses should be excised from the project simply because they would not be read by Board members. When reminded of the commitment made to respondents that their views would be collated and sent to the Board, a compromise was proposed in which responses would not be automatically sent to the Board but that they and other senior executives may request access to them. Dissatisfied, I insisted that a vote take place on the matter- the first time a vote had ever been used to resolve a disagreement during my tenure- in which I was the sole vote in favour of internal distribution of the survey response. This was initially obscured by omission from the draft meeting communiqué and only reluctantly rectified following strenuous objection.

Following the submission of the Council's series of project reports- whose thematic areas included climate change, the criminal justice system, unemployment, and economic disadvantage- the institutional response was belated and delivered only in verbal form. This was partly attributable to the Council's decision, reflecting an extraordinary level of internalised deference, that formal, written responses to the projects by the Board would not be sought. This was ostensibly in the interests of maintaining "good relations" between Board and Council.

On each of the three occasions in the second half of 2014 where RTÉ personnel of varying seniority met with the Audience Council to discuss the projects, the emphasis was squarely put on the sensitising function of the reports for RTÉ

personnel. This was frequently described as "osmosis"- implying a diffuse process of gradual influence, albeit not one that would be measurable or accountable, because it did not involve explicit commitments to act on any particular recommendation, nor even imply their acceptance. On another occasion, it was made clear that because editorial units in RTÉ operate "independently", no cross-organisational approach could be taken to modify how climate change was covered by the broadcaster.

The reports would also be strictly contained within RTÉ, because the Board refused an explicit request to allow us to publish any of the reports. This was seemingly on the sole basis that the Audience Council's primary reporting relationship was with the Board, and the idea of seeking to make its work publicly available had the effect of making the Board 'nervous', as one senior RTÉ figure put it.

Subsequent events rather undercut the regular Board assurances that our work was highly valued. Verbal feedback delivered to a Council meeting at which I was not present from newsroom management expressing concern with the project, ostensibly regard to methodological issues, was not substantiated, nor even responded to by senior management by the time of thesis submission, despite sustained requests for clarification. Perhaps most seriously of all, however, was that in an outcome that vindicated Council members who doubted the interest of RTÉ personnel in reading public survey responses, not a single request to view the unabridged survey responses was ever received, meaning that the views of the 100 members of the public who took the considerable time to fill out the survey were never institutionally accessed.

What had started out as a project designed to stimulate meaningful critical engagement between RTÉ and sections of the public on the topic of the communication of climate change was thus subjected to a gradual, profound attrition of its original vision. With the assumed sensitivities of the Board and RTÉ management- foremost in the minds of Council members- reliably overriding any democratising instincts, the communicative scope of the project was continually

watered down. Through internal complicity and external contrivance, the project's path was ineluctably redirected to protect RTÉ from exposure to direct public communication both in-person and via written responses; and to prevent formal, publicly-disclosed lines of accountability being established between the Board, management, journalists, the Audience Council and the public.

8.2.5 Democratisation foreclosed

The nature of the Council's structural and ideological ghettoisation within the broadcaster's organisational hierarchy seemed to me central to its ongoing difficulties in asserting any measure of independence. Its status was originally outlined in the broadcaster's 2002 Annual Report by then chairman Patrick J Wright who said that the new Audience Council initiative would not occupy an independent position in the RTÉ governance structures but that it would be a mere 'advisory subcommittee of the Authority' (later, the RTÉ Board) (RTÉ, 2003: 3).

Despite the new broadcasting legislation in 2009 drawing a distinction between ordinary 'advisory committees' of the Board and the Audience Council structure (Broadcasting Act 2009, Sections 96 and 97) suggesting at least the possibility of the Council claiming for itself a unique position in the governance structure, the assumption that it was thoroughly and legitimately subordinate to the Board would in practice persist into the Council's statutory incarnation.

The matter of how the group understood our *representational* status would be critical in shaping the Council's view of how it should practically and ideologically orient itself to its parent organisation and the public at large. The prevailing view of the incumbent Chair was that simply by virtue of being selected to represent the public by RTÉ our job did not necessitate ongoing communication with that public any more than members of parliament had to engage with voters in between elections, and that as the public's legitimate representatives in RTÉ, our attention should instead be inexorably drawn to the Board. That ordinary Council members had no access to, nor ever received notification of any incoming

messages to our publicly available email address only enhanced the sense that we had no business in engaging with the public at large.

While content in a solely advisory role, some members frequently and openly questioned their own representative legitimacy, not least with respect to the demonstrably *ad hoc* nature of their appointment. This seemed to me to a healthy response, but its main consequence was to encourage a dynamic of uncertainty, purposelessness, submissiveness which dissuaded members from having the courage to see themselves as having the *locus standi* to assert a "public" rather than merely private voice around the committee table. This paralysis manifested itself in a sustained lack of participation on the part of some members in terms of absenteeism and non-participation in meetings, contributing to a high turnover of Council membership. RTÉ's consistent tardiness or even failure to replace departed members suggest that this was not seen as a problematic state of affairs.

The necessity for reshaping the Council's functions, representative status and practical relationships with the broadcaster and the public seemed to me acute. Any notional revitalisation of our self-conception as a conduit for public sovereignty, would, however, have to occur in tandem with a strengthening of our own weak internal democracy. Over a series of meetings in early 2013, I proposed that we turn our focus towards developing permanent means of two-way communication with the public (insisting on a budget to do so) and enhancing our internal transparency and democratic credentials by opening up our meetings to public observers and democratising the means by which decisions are taken internally and the process by which new Council members are appointed. The unexpected resignation of the incumbent Chair not long after, coinciding with the unrelated departure of the Council's administrative support and Secretary- both RTE staff- provided an unexpected opportunity to seriously consider such an agenda, and with the agreement to set up a subcommittee to consider these issues, initially it seemed as if the opportunity may be seized.

Free for a moment of the stifling atmosphere of officious formality, the interregnum saw formerly silent Council members suddenly find their voice,

articulating various frustrations with the operation of the Council to date. It was a moment ripe for change, exemplified by the sudden concession of the granting of a budget (although the caveat that money would be made available for 'appropriate projects' made it clear that the purse-strings were not under our control), the group's agreements to seek participation in the process of selecting a new chairperson (rather than simply have one imposed from above) and to convene an externally-facilitated meeting to assist us in a dialogic process around how we wanted to proceed as a Council for the remainder of our term in office.

The first sign that this burgeoning process of self-examination and democratic renewal might yet be stillborn came with the sudden revelation that a new Chairperson had been appointed by the Board. In the light of our express desire to be involved in our own governance, the failure of the Board to even acknowledge this request felt like a new nadir. The identity of the new Chair- a public relations professional, senior staff member of a prestigious research institution, and an occasional presenter and contributor to RTÉ programmes- seemed to me motivated by the familiar strategy of deploying an "authoritative" individual who would suitably mediate the relationship between the Board and the Council in a way amenable to the Board's vision.

It soon became clear that the new appointee was likely to live up to this initial appraisal. Early acts of individually meeting Council members in the Chair's workplace and subsequent effort to veto the agreed panel for the forthcoming public event suggested a swift return to an executive style of governance. An explicitly espoused intent to quickly initiate a programme of activities for the remainder of our term seemed likely to derail the possibility of a reflective process enabling us to move beyond the customs and practices of the previous regime.

The organisation, process and outcome of the facilitated meeting, when it took place after the Council's summer recess, was an abject disappointment. Rather than an informal, deliberative process to encourage collective reflection and decision-making, the event reflected a range of conservative organisational

imperatives. It took place in the same venue as usual, around the same table, with the only differences being the presence of a facilitator and the benefit of one extra hour. Even the selection of the facilitator was problematic, as someone who was not fully independent, but closely associated with RTÉ and employed by them for other similar duties.

While the omens were not good, the first half of the meeting nonetheless contained a robust and well-facilitated discussion of a broad range of matters, both systemic and otherwise. With time running out, and Council members still outlining their views on the function and operations of the Council, the Chairman made a strong intervention to the effect that a concrete work plan needed to be established there and then. This plan, built almost solely around the Chair's idea of bringing specifically targeted groups into dialogue with RTÉ decision-makers, was not one I was opposed to in principle (even if it did embody a rather conservative conception of controlled participation), but this seemed to be at the expense of engaging in consideration of the structural matters identified above. The Chair's position that the Council would wait until the end of its term, *after* having accrued 'credibility' with the Board before seeking structural changes was one that was never formally adopted but, aided by the absence of a clear decision rule clarifying the criteria for agreements, it proved impossible to challenge what the Chairman had decided was an emergent 'consensus'.

The Chair's control of the agenda, accruing on the basis of the Standing Orders, was subsequently used to prevent any challenge to, or even clarification of the ambiguities of consensus decision-making, by arbitrarily refusing both my requests for a discussion at a subsequent meeting in which the Council would make a formal determination on when we planned to address "structural"' matters pertaining to the Council's internal operation, as well as a subsequent request for an agenda item in which we our decision-making procedures could be clarified.

Other unilateral efforts to control the flow of Council communications further undercut the possibilities of change.

An effort by the Chair- quickly dropped- was made to end the practice of open email communication between Council members including the Chair. Later, a final opportunity existed in early 2014 for the Audience Council to communicate with the relevant Minister under the legislatively-mandated annual report mechanism. When I reminded the Council that such a report would need to be submitted in the near future, we were informed that the report was already written. While eventually circulated within the group for comment, my insistence that the text should be collectively agreed rather than presented as a *fait accompli* was met with a stony silence.

In another demonstration of the way in which executive decisions were both made and passively legitimated by other members, the scheduling of the final legislatively mandated annual joint RTÉ Board-Audience Council meeting in 2014 to coincide with the final meeting of the extant RTÉ Board was undertaken without Council participation. Given that the manifest purpose of this meeting was to solicit feedback on our recently-completed projects and identify practical avenues of influence within RTÉ, the fact that the Board would be dissolved immediately following this meeting demonstrably undermined such a goal. It would also mean that the Council would not meet the incoming Board before our own dissolution, thus impeding the possibilities of pursuing an agenda of internal structural reform which would require the assent of the new Board. Efforts to secure a re-appraisal of the scheduling decision on the basis of a group consensus were simply refused by the Chair. My decision not to attend, explained in a note to the Board, did not elicit a response; nor did my subsequent resignation from a new subcommittee charged with making recommendations on structural matters generate internal concern. This latter action was taken following the Chair's decision to arbitrarily "appoint" (again acting outside their authority) another Council member- with no prior demonstrable interest in internal reform- to lead the effort.

The text that emerged from a subsequent process on internal "reform", which I did not endorse, focused almost exclusively on formalising, codifying and copper-

fastening the existing subordinate status of the Council's relationship with the Board. Each of the document's four recommendations called on RTÉ to devise new protocols and arrangements for governing the Council. Three of these were non-substantive in character, explicitly leaving it up to RTÉ to decide what was best for the Council. The one substantive recommendation called for an open public competition for Audience Council appointments and rolling appointments to ensure a balance between change and continuity of membership.

In its orientation toward legitimising pre-existing power relations, its de-emphasis of Audience Council participation in defining its own future, and its neoliberal language of 'best practice' (bewildering in the context of a paucity of comparable participatory structures from which to draw lessons from), the document represented a conservative and deferential conclusion to the Audience Council's term of office, offering a blank cheque to an institution that had for a decade successfully prevented the Council structure from developing an internal culture of autonomy and independent thinking.

The reward for both this deference and the longer-run reticence of the Council to assert an independent voice was for RTÉ to allow the Audience Council to fall into abeyance for half a year following the dissolution of our group at the end of our term at the end of 2014, and the decision to appoint a new Council (once again headed by a public relations professional) without any continuity with the previous Council membership, thus preventing the possibility of the transfer of experiences between Council memberships. It was a response that exposed the cynicism of both the broadcaster's insistence that it valued the Council's contributions as well as the Council's "strategy" of obsequiousness as a means of securing "credibility" that would result in concessions.

It is easy to locate much of the responsibility for the conservative orientation of the Audience Council in the Chairs that RTÉ had very deliberately appointed. The figures of the patrician and later the PR man represented different establishment ideologies about the proper place of the public and how a Council of the public should comport itself, but both were complementary in practice. Both men

assumed leadership roles commensurate with both the institutional hierarchy and their own position in the strata of society, and both could be fully trusted to manage the Audience Council. While the patrician used every rule in the (self-written) rulebook, the PR man knew that rules were but one means of exerting power, displaying deft interpersonal skills to control a room, placate a dissenting voice, and when all else failed, simply ignoring dissent- in the end, equally successful in helping to suppress radical impulses before they had a chance to sprout. Both had a gift with language, corralling together a "consensus" of a sort, and both expertly used the ambiguities of decision-making to their advantage. One was a paternalist with high ideals and the other was a pragmatist whose desire for expediency masked an absence of vision, but neither evinced a great concern with egalitarian decision-making. Both exerted control via a range of practices with the silent support of the RTÉ institutional apparatus which unquestioningly accepted the assumed authority of the Chair to unilaterally undertake a range of actions. These ranged from composing Ministerial reports and holding private, unminuted meetings with senior RTÉ staff on Council business to the more prosaic act of supervising the authoring and publication of communiqués on the Council website which were routinely and alarmingly airbrushed of contention, to the point where a whole series of significant decisions and actions remained off the public record.

Ultimately, however, the assumed patrimonial authority of the Chair was only possible with the complicity of ordinary members. Such an outcome was ensured mostly in advance, through a screening process that filtered out potentially unruly participants, with the well-intentioned impulses of those who remained diluted by the contrived ambiguities around the Council's legitimacy and functions which made compliance with the agendas of strong Chairpersons and the conservative, secretive and elitist practices of the administrative apparatus far easier than the exhausting prospect of going against the institutional grain.

8.3 Conclusion

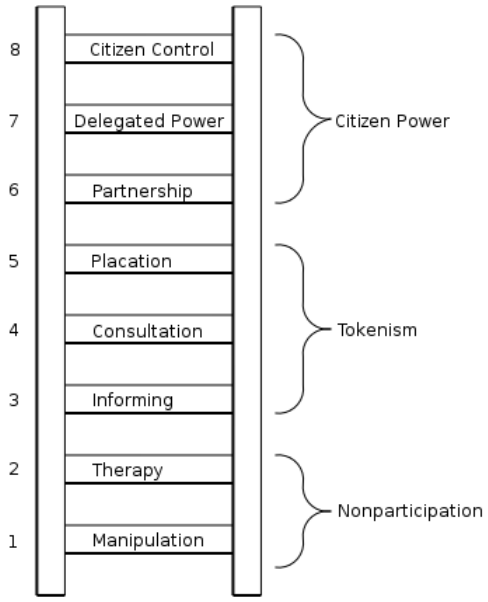


Fig. 8-2: Ladder of participation. Source: Arnstein (1969: 217)

In *'A Ladder of Citizen Participation'*, Arnstein (1969) presents a useful means of categorising mechanisms of citizen participation according to their power dynamics (Fig. 8-2). The 'ladder' referred to here consists of three main categories- *'non-participation', 'tokenism'* and *'citizen power'*- each of which contain a number of levels and which can be readily applied to assess the participative qualities of the Audience Council.

The foot of the ladder represents illusory modes of participation. *'Non-participation'*, characterised by 'manipulation' and 'therapy' is motivated by a desire on the part of power-holders to engineer consent by creating a 'public relations vehicle' (ibid: 218) that has, for the benefit of participants and critical onlookers alike, the appearance of participation but without the substance which might threaten existing power relations. In its more 'dishonest and arrogant' (ibid) form, 'therapeutic' modes of participation involve powerholders enlisting the participatory group in initiatives which aim at rehabilitating powerholders and directly serving their interests.

Arnstein provides the example of Citizen Advisory Committees ostensibly set up to give some members of the public a say in housing policy in U.S cities, arguing

that they reflected both a manipulative and therapeutic agenda insofar as 'it was the officials who educated, persuaded, and advised the citizens, not the reverse' (ibid: 218). The manipulative dimension was evident in the way that the functions of the committees were legitimised using terms like 'information-gathering', 'public relations' and 'support' (ibid).

The emphasis for much of the Audience Council's tenure on inviting RTÉ executives to meetings to be informed on their work constituted a form of "self-therapy", insofar as it sensitised the Council to the work of senior RTÉ management as described by management themselves. More generally, like in Arnstein's account of Citizen Advisory Committees, Council members were constantly exposed to the explanations and advice of institutional elites, not citizens. And like the CACs, while the Council's functions were carefully legitimated on a similar "advisory" basis, the Council was nonetheless cited by RTÉ as evidence of its openness to the public (indeed, justified on that basis prior to its establishment). The Audience Council's ultimate decision not to propose substantive self-reform but merely to hand the baton to RTÉ to reform it in any way the Board saw fit also represented an example of self-therapy. Furthermore, that some members repeatedly expressed a desire for RTÉ to better utilise the Council as a 'focus group' suggests a desire for self-instrumentalisation. The focus group format, described by Crouch (2000) as 'entirely in the control of its organisers' who 'select the participants, the issues, and the way in which they are to be discussed and the outcome analysed' may be seen as reflecting on the difficulties of asserting public agency in a time of post-democracy, wherein at least parts of the public are 'confused and passive in developing its own agenda'.

Arnstein's category of *'tokenism'* at the centre of the ladder incorporates a range of activities- 'informing', 'consultation' and 'placation'- that have as their defining characteristic the possibility of engagement with power-holders, but without the 'muscle' (ibid: 217) to follow through with change.

A great deal of the experience of the Audience Council fits into this middle tier. RTÉ's sharing of internal information on the organisation (on the basis of

confidentiality) and tendency to merely inform the Council of decisions taken on its behalf represent notable examples of the first tendency. Repeated failures to consult the Council both on internal Council matters as well as on broader organisational matters such as strategic reviews and other statutory reporting requirements led to some Council members questioning the organisation's commitment to even maintaining the facade of a tokenistic participative approach.

'Placation' was frequently deployed, notably in the commissioning of *The Media Show* and the belated decision to grant us a budget, but in both cases the limits of our ability to seek influence on the programme or develop a programme of activities independently of RTÉ were sharply constrained. Elsewhere, the accoutrements of power and influence, including the efficient reimbursement of travel expenses, secretarial support, annual meetings with the Board (peppered with effusive expressions of praise of the Council's work) and breakfast at a local five-star luxury hotel had placatory functions of a different kind.

The category of *'citizen power'* encompasses scenarios where the 'decision-making clout' (ibid) of citizens is far more substantive. At the lower level of this part of the ladder, 'partnership', citizens 'negotiate and engage in trade-offs' (ibid) with power holders. At the top of the ladder, the levels of 'delegated power' and 'citizen control' denote situations where the distinction between 'citizens' and 'powerholders' has blurred to the point that the citizens have become powerholders in their own right, and can assert decision-making authority in relation to substantive issues including the very structures in which they participate.

In the case of the Audience Council, measures of citizen power are embedded in a number of ways via the broadcasting legislation, which allows it to compel RTÉ to undertake a small number of specific activities. However, these are rather minor powers that do not threaten broader power relations, and whose discharge was in any event profoundly delimited by the cumulative effect of the manipulative and therapeutic tendencies described above.

Overall, the participative qualities of the Audience Council reflect the dominance of a combination of the non-participative and tokenistic levels in Arnstein's typology, where, in line with Pateman's (1970: 70) conception of 'partial' participation, most power rested firmly with the parent institution. The administration of regular doses of therapy via the deployment of various forms of soft and hard power meant that the opportunities which did exist for the Audience Council to prise open the door leading to citizen power were recoiled from rather than embraced. The Council's vague remit, voluntary status of participants, internal marginalisation and co-option into a compliant orientation toward the institutional order stunted its development and rendered it unable to mature into an autonomous yet semi-institutional source of public power.

Treatment of the Council was entirely consistent with the minimalist character of modes of structural participation practiced elsewhere in the organisation and indicative of a pervasive desire to prevent lay influence from becoming established.

If, as Hartley (2002: 11) puts it, 'the audience is a construction motivated by the paradigm in which it is imagined', then the character of RTÉ's involvement of audiences suggests that rather than a material presence in the organisation and a partner in the project of public media, the public are instead principally conceived of principally as providing the institution with economic and legitimating *resources* accrued through rationalised systems of measurement.

PART III

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

Chapter 9: Public Service Broadcasting's Democratic Imaginary: A Reconstruction

Such responsible journalism rests on the belief that society will, through the institutions of Parliament, cure itself of ills which are brought to its attention.

(British Broadcasting Corporation, 1974)

9.1 Introduction

Part I of this dissertation explored aspects of the general normative character of (northwest European) public service broadcasting. Particular attention was paid to identifying, first, the powerfully formative nature of its relationships in the field of power dominated by the state and market, and second, the configurations of institutional legitimating ideologies and professional habitus that shape and set the parameters of PSB's discursive roles in the political public sphere.

Explorations of its historical imbrication in nation-building, linkages between development of political and media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) and association with normative press theories (Christians et al., 2009) helped identify public service broadcasting's normative framework- including in Ireland- as predominantly liberal in character and inflected with a communitarian strand of republicanism. This aligns with a contemporary strand of liberal functionalism that identifies a key role of public service broadcasting as engendering various forms of political, cultural and social integration (Curran, 2002: 134-6, Cardiff and Scannell, 1987, Carey, 1992).

It was concluded that the hegemonic tendencies inherent to the public service broadcasting project are subject to particularly intense activation in the Republic of Ireland. Here, a broadly conservative political culture, restrictive communicative opportunities and poorly developed critical political traditions have bequeathed to public service broadcasting a limited political and discursive opportunity structure that was likely to delimit its autonomous critical capacities.

The four chapters in Part II deployed a range of methodologies- ethnographic observation, interviews, textual analysis, and participant observation- in an empirical inquiry into how the political, economic and cultural forces bearing on public service broadcasting from without were mediated by institutional and professional cultures from within, shaping its hegemonic and counter-hegemonic tendencies and capacities.

This concluding chapter draws on the key findings from the foregoing analyses and reconnects them with the project's theoretical concerns. First, the empirical findings are interpreted in the service of offering a more precise delineation of the implicit and explicit normative models of democracy, democratic communication and publicity that characterise Irish public service broadcasting. Following this, the counter-hegemonic capacities of this democratic model are explored, with a particular focus on the specific circumstances of the contemporary crisis of democratic capitalism. Some concluding observations are made on the implications of this for public service broadcasting's adequacy as a venue of democratic communication and its future.

9.2 Locating Irish public service broadcasting's place in politics

9.2.1 Reconstructing Irish PSB's political role

Bringing empirical findings into dialogue with the implicit and explicit claims of normative democratic theory stimulates exploration of a broader range of questions, including how institutional and professional media practices and ideologies view the roles and capacities of citizens, the responsiveness of the political process, institutional accountability, and accounts of legitimacy, authority and modes of decision-making that prescribe how the public sphere should operate in 'actually existing democracies' (Ferree et al., 2002a: 289).

First, institutional and journalistic practices and perspectives about the proper *role of the public* in public broadcasting are explored, encompassing public

participation both *through* and *in* media, in the forms of on-air participative opportunities as well as around production and organisational decision-making (Carpentier, 2011: 67-8). This is followed by a broader discussion on the logics of representation underlying RTÉ's practices of *discursive inclusion* in broadcasting. Data shedding light on RTÉ's *role in the nation, state and understandings of crisis* is then critically engaged with, preceding some concluding comments on the overall democratic model suggested by the project's empirical findings.

9.2.2 Inclusion through participation

Data gathered from newsroom observations, staff interviews and participant-observation within the RTÉ Audience Council all pointed toward a normatively-legitimated marginalisation of the public from more direct forms of intervention in broadcasting matters.

While an abstract, 'imagined' public (Cottle, 2003: 11) enjoyed a high rhetorical status, and its assumed interests, mores and attention spans played a substantial role in orientating daily professional practice, they appeared in practical form mostly in terms of informal and semi-informal contacts between journalists and members of the public. The paucity of public opinion invoked during ethnographic observations of three months of editorial meetings suggested its practical marginalisation to daily newswork, while an entrenched aversion to public participation in broadcasting was expressed in interviews. This was justified on the basis of jaundiced and often paternalistic views of the assumed capacities and preferences of the audience. Circumscribed or no participation at all was broadly seen as a prerequisite for the healthy discharge of RTE's public functions, for which the preservation of journalistic autonomy was seen as crucial. Clear opportunities during 2012 for the organisation to facilitate public involvement in debate about public broadcasting passed without effort to do so (these included the commemorative programme for fifty years of Irish television as well as the fallout from the *Mission to Prey* affair). Being appropriately responsive to audiences was, generally, reframed in and confined to the technological terms of reacting nimbly to changing news consumption patterns.

More broadly, the analysis of historical and extant modes of structural participation in the broadcaster suggested that participative opportunities- including community-produced programming, programmes facilitating public comment on RTÉ, public gatherings, consultations, audience research, and modes of internal and regulatory accountability generally represent minimalist forms of inclusion. By and large, these have either been abandoned or are highly circumscribed or purely instrumental modes of participation that cede little or no power to individual or organised publics.

The extended analysis of the RTÉ Audience Council as the principal formalised means of structural intervention by the public in the broadcaster found an extension rather than a break with this weakly participative ethos. It was found that the Council, across its multiple incarnations, has been subjected on an ongoing basis to numerous modes of endogenous and exogenous disciplinary power that actively sought to neutralise its potential evolution into a more autonomous source of public power within the organisation. At its worst, its management corresponded to a manipulative mode of participation (Strauss, 1998: 18).

That the most securely institutionalised form of public opinion- audience research- involves, above all, the commodified measurement of audience viewing habits in the form of Nielsen rating units underlines the extent to which publics may intervene only as a depoliticised mass of consumers. Through such processes, audiences are instrumentalised as a resource for schedule calibration and the currency of advertising rather than as publics with whom public media has dialogic responsibilities.

In the same vein, a propensity to use mostly quantitative ratings data and measures of satisfaction and trust gathered from intermittent market research surveys (e.g. PwC, 2013: 49-50) as proxies for public approval and thus the key resource of ongoing institutional legitimacy is further indicative of an aversion to two-way communicative relationships with the public and indicative of a clear

desire to maintain "trust" as the basis of the relationship between public broadcasting and the public.

Such zealous institutional and professional boundary-management corresponds to liberal pessimism about the practicality of securing stronger forms of democratic consent of the governed. This is indicative both of the grip of neoliberal practices of corporate governance and restrictive conceptions of democracy, for whom corporate "transparency" and political and regulatory oversight- *not* public power-sharing- is sufficiently democratic. Like the liberal state, public service broadcasting elevates the public as its *sine qua non* but confines its input as much as possible.

A clear affinity may be identified here with *democratic elitism*, a Schumpeterian variation of liberal democratic theory that posits a 'pessimistic understanding of the political capacities of citizens' (O'Mahony, 2013: 121) and rejects popular sovereignty on the basis of their lack of interest and competence. This suggests a conception of the public denuded of publicity: a mass of private individuals who, on the basis of their limited deliberative and reasoning capacities, are seen as incapable of discharging what political philosopher John Rawls (1997) described as 'public reason' (see also O'Mahony, 2013: 49-70) a framework of deliberation about matters of public concern.

Conversely, by virtue of their assumed status as 'socially unattached intelligentsia' (Mannheim, 1936) and on the basis of a normative professional conception of trusteeship, journalists, seen as sitting above the fray of ideology and conflict, are qualified to disinterestedly manage the public sphere on behalf of the public.

9.2.3 Inclusion through representation

Newsroom observations from editorial meetings demonstrated how a singular focus on the national parliament as the locus of political activity clearly identified the formal political system and its accredited participants as the basis of RTÉ's

means of organising political representation in news and current affairs.

Much of the editorial frustration observed and reported by staff during the 2012 Fiscal Treaty referendum emanated from a view that a disservice was done to democracy by the assumption of a legal necessity to accord equal treatment to both sides. The resultant journalistic "agoraphobia" (Carpentier, 2007: 157) engendered by the expanded actor involvement provoked an enhanced desire to police debate both substantively and in terms of access. Interview data confirmed a broad consensus around a representational mode in which RTÉ's mediation of the political is essentially circumscribed by prior electoral outcomes.

This deference to the structuring role of formal politics in representational accreditation co-existed with a desire to play an (albeit circumscribed) autonomous agenda-setting role detached from the political core. This pointed to the existence of a secondary, more pluralistic set of journalistic representational logics that leavened the dominance of formal political actors with a 'relief mechanism' (O'Mahony, 2013: 127) in which organised social interests contributed to a broader 'pressure system' (Cobb and Elder, 1971: 896) acting on institutionalised politics.

Demonstrative of a liberal pluralist outlook, this secondary sphere of representation- occupied by pressure groups and lobbyists, unions, representative bodies, and campaigners- affords journalists and editors greater autonomy to selectively open the sluice gate (Peters, 1993, 2007) of media access, granting agenda-building power to a wider array of actors.

However, evidence that groups seeking to complement rather than supplant formal parliamentary politics are likely to find an easier path to media representation is suggested by interview data dismissing the legitimacy of contentious street politics on the basis of a lack of electoral mandate and their challenge to legitimate authority: an incompatibility with dominant principles of media inclusion that also mitigates against the representation of political outsiders in general on the basis of anxieties over representativeness,

newsworthiness and concerns over the practicalities of expanding access to less credentialed actors.

"Access" programming, with the *Liveline* radio phone-in programme the chief exemplar, suggests the existence of a tertiary mode of inclusion that accommodates public voices directly, and is demonstrative of a less elitist, highly controlled and more participatory and raucous type of discursive environment. Yet, that programming of this kind is both limited in volume and its agendas are in the main ghettoised from those considered the proper purview of programming under the rubric of News and Current Affairs suggests their subordinate and auxiliary status within RTÉ's broader political role.

This three-level representative model may be viewed as reflecting adherence to the variation of liberal democratic theory described by Ferree et al. (2002a: 290) as *representative liberalism*. A sub-set of liberal theory, closely related to democratic elitism, this posits the desirability of 'citizens to be passive, quiescent, and limited in their political participation in a well-functioning, party-led democracy' (ibid: 291).

With the public sphere geared towards 'strengthening a system of formal representation through political parties' (ibid: 290), the logic by which a standard of 'elite dominance' (ibid: 291) legitimises the status of formal political actors at the top of the representational hierarchy is clear. Just as they have won 'legitimate domination' (O'Mahony, 2013: 112) of the state and government on the basis of the 'open mandate' principle of liberal theory (Habermas, 1994: 8), governmental figures are also granted the right of representative domination in the public sphere.

With representative inclusion derived from electoral strength or organisational size, the public sphere 'legitimately excludes those ideas held by small minorities' (Ferree et al., 2002a: 293), with the onus placed on social interests to organise and put forward "legitimate" representatives.

Rather than active participants in deliberative processes, individual citizens are rather more minimally conceived as "undecided voters" who, after being assisted by the media's provision of information and facilitation of debate, discharge a 'solitary process of reflection, a kind of private deliberation' (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996: 37 in O'Mahony, 2013: 59) in the sanctity of the ballot box. In so doing, they delegate their authority to the victor(s), after which 'the public is by and large excluded from ongoing processes of justification' (O'Mahony, 2013: 65).

The 'dialogue of the informed' (Ferree et al., 2002a: 292) sought by adherents of representative liberalism and democratic elitism emphasises, alongside formal *status* as the basis of representation, the value of *expertise*- preferably the at least nominally disinterested kind. This criterion of discursive inclusion reflects a concern to 'guide officials toward more knowledgeable choices' (ibid: 293). With *efficacy* a key concern of representative liberalism, open-ended debate is seen as a threat to the ability of the political process to 'meet citizen needs effectively' (ibid: 294). The norm of *closure* (ibid), linked above all to parliamentary decision-making, accomplishes the curtailment of media discussion on issues, preceding the raising of new and different issues.

For Habermas (1994: 7), liberalism is far more concerned with the 'output of sensible and effective administrative accomplishments' than with the input of 'democratic self-determination of deliberating citizens' in processes of rational political will-formation. On this account, political efficacy is also threatened by too much public inclusion in public discourse, because it may complicate matters by 'politicizing and oversimplifying complex problems that require skilled leadership and technical expertise' (Ferree et al., 2002a: 292).

Like RTÉ's participative practices, the restricted representation model reflects a realist (O'Mahony, 2013: 113) strain of liberalism- a 'liberalism without illusions' (ibid: 114) that implicitly denies the possibility of strong consent of the governed. On this account, politics takes the form of competitive struggles between rival party groupings for power. For electorates, their voting choices reflect a kind of

democracy of the Schumpeterian 'consumer sovereignty' (ibid: 119) variety. The normative reach of public political communication is consequently diminished, confined to maintaining 'minimal and formal procedural rules that protect the integrity of politics as a competitive, electoral struggle' (ibid: 110). Such a 'disillusioned realism' (ibid: 121) ascribes a low standing to 'the idea and ideals of a communicative politics' (ibid: 118), dispenses entirely with a 'normative politics of popular sovereignty' (ibid: 126) and denies the public a normative significance beyond 'selecting and deselecting the rule of alternative coalitions of elites and supportive experts' (ibid: 121).

O'Mahony (2013: 127) adds that the 'relief mechanism' of 'pluralism as interest intermediation' captured in the secondary and tertiary modes of representation discussed above, allows 'for ongoing inputs from the private sphere and civil society' that mitigates against the formal political system's capacity to effect discursive closure. Although entailing a tacit, albeit partial recognition of the inadequacies of the problem-solving capacities of the political core, the delegitimisation of contentious extra-parliamentary political actors from this representative logic means that it may be seen as representing only a modest moderation of the representative model's overall elitist thrust, Indeed, such a moderation may even be functional for the reproduction of both media and political systems, insofar as it permits some opportunities for critical discourses to emerge from below that lend credence to liberal democracy's pluralistic self-image.

9.2.4 PSB, nation and state

Irish public service broadcasting's liberal moment may be captured in its restricted public participative opportunities, a representative model that allocates access to the political public sphere on the principal basis of electorally-achieved legitimacy, and whose overall journalistic mediation is governed by professional ideologies around objectivity, impartiality and balance.

Yet, the empirical findings suggest the co-existence of an expanded political role

that pushes beyond merely supporting the operation of representative democracy towards a higher-order orientation to the *national community*.

Findings in relation to the everyday journalistic and institutional navigation of political life (as well as in periods of crisis) suggest the existence of a liberalism inflected by *republican* logics, a political philosophy which above all, 'affirms, while liberalism denies, the notion of a statewide, substantive common interest or good' (Michelman, 1989: 445).

Newsroom observations suggest the existence of an institutionalised caution that is linked in part to a sense of responsibility accruing from its place in the state and dominance in the Irish political public sphere (F. Corcoran, 2004: 91). Observations suggest it is born in part of a natural deference to established state and cultural institutions and an awareness of the demographic and spatial breadth of audiences. It is exemplified in the aversion to giving offence to subsets of viewers, a marked desire to avoid journalistic prurience, and a heightened sensitivity to actual and hypothetical legal implications of journalistic work.

Analysis of historic editorial meeting minutes during the early years of the economic crisis revealed an acute senior editorial sensitisation to RTÉ's assumed responsibilities that demonstrate the extent of internal attunement to RTÉ's ability to harm or safeguard the national interest through its reportage. This concern for the stability of the state appeared to extend beyond mere concern for the consequences of attracting unwanted political scrutiny for errant or unduly critical reporting.

Interview data affirming the broadcaster's role in promoting public morale (albeit not at the expense of journalistic truth-telling) was further suggestive of the adoption of a role in supporting the national community through implicit and explicit support for national economic recovery strategies. Such an orientation is latent in a proliferation of "news features" and general "good news" stories and is more explicit in programming initiatives around tourism (exemplified by participation in 'The Gathering' tourism initiative in 2013), regional development

(e.g. the 'Local Heroes' project), entrepreneurship and a broader institutional alignment with national development policy, particularly in relation to science and technology (see Curran, 2011: 28, RTÉ, 2015b). This isomorphism with state policy suggests a ready acceptance of a role in promoting national economic recovery along the parameters established by the political core. This inevitably entails the interpellation of publics as national subjects, invited to enlist in particularistic projects of nation rebuilding.

Further evidence of an extra-liberal national communitarian tendency is provided by the range of integrative 'media events' (Dayan and Katz, 1992, Freedman, 2014) undertaken during the period of observation. Observations of varied, often extensive planning for a range of events- including the British Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the 50th Catholic Eucharistic Congress, and the visits of Burmese opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the Olympic torch to Ireland- represented discretionary or quasi-discretionary activities by the newsroom that reflected a clear desire to act as national integrator though the provision of coverage and even organisation of media events.

That there are occasions- principally, "events of state" (including the visits of foreign dignitaries, commemorations, sporting events and national festivals)- when the suspension of the ordinarily sacred rules of journalistic engagement is seen as appropriate, in favour of a broadcast journalism 'of record' (Golding, 1981: 71) is indicative of the limits of RTÉ's liberalism. On such occasions, the event's 'manifest' (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 47) meanings- as decreed by the principal organiser- are upheld, as the broadcaster 'only rarely intervenes with analysis and almost never with criticism' (ibid: 8). It is strongly suggestive of the institutional diffusion of a higher-order orientation to an imagined national community and unitary national identity with the state at its centre (Kelly and O'Connor, 1997: 13, Kelly and Rolston, 1995). An explicit affirmation of this may be seen in the broadcaster's current five-year strategy RTÉ (2013a: 87) and 2010 Public Service Statement (RTÉ, 2010: 4).

'[P]erformative rites' Elliot (1980) of this kind, described as 'ceremonial politics'

by Dayan and Katz (1992: viii) serve to express 'the yearning for togetherness', a direct antidote to the 'pluralism, argumentation, and the management of competing interests' (ibid) associated with parliamentary politics.

The extent to which such an integrative role is institutionally naturalised is indicated both by interview and observational data suggesting support and enthusiasm for these events and the fact that the planning and enactment of these events is a key competence and source of prestige of the newsroom as opposed to non-journalistic programming.

In a similar vein, the large organisational mobilisation that generated a media spectacle both before, during and after voting on the Fiscal Treaty referendum in 2012 demonstrated the institutional significance of these kind of 'sacerdotal' (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) events and associated 'media rituals' (Couldry, 2003) which attest to their symbolic significance in public service broadcasting's interpretation of its democratic mission.

That the logistics and content of these events are frequently co-operatively organised between RTÉ and agencies of the state demonstrates overlap between the logics of "public" and "state" broadcasting, and suggests that the imperative to valourise liberal representative democracy does not end with protecting the sanctity of the practices of representation but involves a deeper affinity with the machinery and ideologies of the state (Curran, 2002: 137).

9.2.5 Framing crisis

A marked paucity of collective post-hoc reflection on journalistic work was noted during ethnographic observations, suggesting the existence of a stock of shared and perhaps stable assumptions around the practices and norms by which journalism was undertaken. This was supported by interview data which revealed a limited set of critical editorial response to crisis, suggestive of the resistance of the journalistic habitus to modification on the basis of changing external conditions. This was justified partly on the implicit basis that pre-crisis

failures of political leadership and accredited expertise (particularly economic) to predict the crash abrogated any specific responsibility for journalistic learning from the crash, and further justified on the explicit basis that professional journalism in RTÉ had a limited role to play in systemic critique at any time.

Liberal and national communitarian logics may be seen to combine at a time of national economic and political crisis, suggestive of a PSB hegemonic "mission creep" from a mere culturally-focused identitarian nationalism and liberal valourisation of the formal political sphere to assisting in the stabilisation of the extant political-economic order. This is exemplified by how the reality of increased governmental surveillance on the newsroom during the height of the economic crisis was evidently internalised and rationalised not as unwanted external interference but as enhancing sensitisation to a particular, legitimate interpretation of RTÉ's national responsibilities preferable to the state.

Textual analyses of media frames evident in a range of episodes during the Euro debt crisis revealed crisis construals preferential to state crisis management in a range of ways, not least in the manner in which the "return of the political" in Greece and Italy was treated. This was exemplified by the abortive Greek referendum in 2011 on the country's second bailout agreement and by a series of eventful parliamentary elections in both countries, where analysis of news texts pointed to a weak journalistic valuation of substantive democratic legitimacy and a preference for the assumed efficacy of the technocratic advantage of "keeping politics out" of crisis management.

Framings of outcome evaluation positively assessed the cancellation of a referendum in Greece, hailed the subsequent resignations of two European prime ministers and heralded their technocratic replacements. They negatively framed the eventual subsequent electoral processes in both countries and expressed singular dismay at their ambiguous outcomes. This is suggestive of a journalistic susceptibility to the 'lure of technocracy' (Habermas, 2015) and aversion to democratic contestation of top-down crisis management agendas.

This impression was reinforced by the amplification of the voices of political and business elites critical of the incumbent Greek and Italian prime ministers. These, along with their electorates and left-wing oppositions, were pathologised and granted restrictive voice and interpretive agency. The tendency to act as a conduit for elite anxieties meant that other categories of potentially critical voices in Europe and Ireland were rendered invisible.

The preoccupation with "stability" (implicitly defined as coterminous with the smooth implementation of neoliberal and technocratic crisis management) extended to the manner in which the episodes of crisis were localised and made salient to Irish audiences. This manifested in linking Italian and Greek compliance with European crisis management with Ireland's national interests. The portrayal of "recovery" and "stability" as only possible within the confines of market-backed neoliberal crisis management regimes represented interpretations of crisis that colluded with the anti-democratic statecraft deployed against both countries.

The legitimisation of a headlong rush towards a post-democratic Europe aligns the news framings of the Euro crisis with a radicalised version of *political realism*, reflecting a pessimistic view of the possibilities of democratic solutions to structural political-economic problems. Its radicalism is exemplified by the manner in which the exigencies of crisis saw liberal democracy's sacerdotal treatment of sovereignty- popular sovereignty in elections and referenda, and national sovereignty exercised by governments- displaced by the realist legitimisation of market sovereignty and supranational domination and the coercive imposition of order. This ready alignment with Irish and European crisis management on the basis of national economic interest is demonstrative of the statism and nationalism to which Irish republicanism has been historically tied (Delanty, 2003: 38).

Interview data on another topic of crisis- climate change- suggested that its subordinate status and intermittent salience on RTÉ news agendas (Cullinane and Watson, 2014) was a function of a perceived lack of consonance with classic

news values, lack of relevance to Irish audiences (and journalists) and its "politicised" nature. This appears to render it an issue complex which many journalists neither wanted nor felt able to elevate on news agendas. This suggests a journalistic awareness that thematising a topic as an urgent "crisis" is predicated on extrinsic issue attributes.

Efforts on the part of the author to internally raise and challenge the marginalised status of climate change and cognate issues through the vehicle of the Audience Council was met by the broadcaster with obstruction, stonewalling and ambiguity (see Chapter 8). This provided clear evidence of the serious impediments faced by publics in engendering critical internal engagement with PSB practices, whether in the form of substantive dialogue or even provoking justifications- even where pursued through an institutionalised, statutory mechanism of public participation nominally designed for such purposes.

9.2.6 RTÉ's democratic composite

This interpretation of the project's empirical findings suggest a composite set of political roles played by public service broadcasting in Ireland. At once a tool of parliamentary democracy's self-valourisation, a discursive venue of the political public sphere, and a rallying point for a shared national identity, an overall conception of democracy and publicity broadly in line with elitist, restrictive versions of liberalism and suffused with a national communitarianism may be discerned.

In particular, the low valuation of popular sovereignty in favour of the legitimate dominance of responsible elites renders public service broadcasting's orientation toward (structural and discursive) public inclusion isomorphic with restrictive, classical conceptions of normative liberal democratic traditions that reflect a pessimism both about the desirability and capacity of citizens to play an expansive participatory role.

On the basis of the empirical findings, the public occupy may be seen to occupy a

dual normative status: on one hand, reflected in professional and institutional rhetoric as *raison d'etre* and *sine qua non* of public service broadcasting celebrating the public as owner, paymaster, audience and ultimate source of legitimacy; and on the other, discouraged or precluded from strong forms of inclusion on normative and pragmatic grounds, maintained through the erection of professional and institutional-bureaucratic barriers.

The normative affinity with representative liberalism (Ferree et al., 2002a) aligns with Scannell's (1989: 163-4) description of PSB's democratic orientation in which power accrues 'to the representatives, not those whom they represent'. Playing an 'impartial brokerage' role between competing (political) parties (Smith in Negrine, 1994: 104), the public sphere is imagined principally in terms of a 'support system for institutionalised politics' (Carpentier, 2011: 68). This corresponds to Benhabib's (1996: 75, cited in O'Mahony, 2013: 58) observation in relation to Rawlsian liberalism that the public sphere 'is not located *in civil society but in the state and its organizations*' (italics in original). This is demonstrative of how the PSB settlement with the state- the trade of autonomy for responsibility- dovetails with journalistic ideologies of inclusion.

RTÉ's liberalism may be seen to extend in some republican directions, evident in a Rawlsian social liberal/civic republican moment that 'emphasises national citizenship, attaches importance to a collective ethos that gives rise to a sense of justice, and is committed to a relatively strong version of social equality' (O'Mahony, 2013: 67). This is further exemplified by evidence of a dialogic orientation whose accredited participants extend some way beyond the strictures of formal political arenas and other validated sources of public reason. This, however, is ultimately subordinate to the closure and elitism of its dominant liberal moment, in addition to evincing what Habermas (1994: 4) calls a 'communitarian reading' associated with modern republicanism, entailing an 'ethical constriction of political discourse' on the basis of the assumed existence of the national community's shared, settled ethical consensus.

Liberalism, however, does not provide the resources necessary for the realisation

of the integrative role of the 'harmony model' (Butler, 1991: 100) of public service broadcasting, described by White (1996: 211) as its tendency to draw the public into 'a national political, economic and sociocultural 'superunity', in part through adopting the role of celebrant and guardian of cultural heritage and historical memory (see also Delanty, 2003: 28). Empirical evidence supports the existence of a substantive national integrative role that is politically as well as culturally focused. Just as Devereux (1996: 283) argued that the broadcaster's coverage of poverty tended to uphold and obscure asymmetric power relations, this project's frame analysis suggests how a national communitarian tendency elides thematisation of interest conflicts in part through the collapsing of government interest into Irish national interest.

This composite democratic model- in which the discursive moments of liberalism and republicanism are diminished- is congruent with the desires of a professionalised journalism under the influence of trustee and social responsibility normative models, for which an emphasis on popular sovereignty and political authority generated by communicatively-produced citizen power (Habermas, 1994: 2) is repugnant. It suggests a vision of the public sphere amenable to the state, characterised as it is by a preference for 'instrumental' rather than 'dialogical' political activity, in Habermas' (1994: 6) ideal-typical scheme, and 'strategic' rather than 'deliberative' in Michelman's (1989: 489).

It is a democratic orientation that conceptualises publicity and democracy in line with both Fraser's 'weak' rather than 'strong' publics (1990: 75), whose 'deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion-formation and does not also encompass decision-making', and Barber's (1984) conception of 'thin' rather than 'thick' democracy.

Insofar as such a democratic role is more concerned with national social integration and supporting procedurally-legitimated forms of political authority along the aggregative lines of liberal pluralism and secured by electoral processes rather than a strongly discursively justified social order, a clear compatibility and normative isomorphism may also be identified between RTE's *democratic* model

and Ireland's *cultural* model.

Under the influence of a communitarianism that 'reduces culture to an underlying consensus' (Delanty, 2003: 29) and which supports a restricted view of political conflict under representative liberalism, PSB is poorly placed to mitigate against the consensus pathologies present in Irish political culture discussed in Chapter 3. Indeed, it is a democratic orientation susceptible to going with the flow of elite consensus, exemplified over time both in its original role in nation-building and a contemporary role in nation re-building.

In the following section, the implications of this democratic model for RTE's relationship with hegemonic power- particularly that pertaining to the present crisis- is explored in greater depth.

9.3 Assessing RTE's counter-hegemonic capacities

How media institutions imagine and practice a democratic role inevitably shapes the character of their interventions in the terrain of politics, in turn affecting the type and extent of the public sphere's critical capacities.

Recognising that the stability of a hegemonic order is sustained less by the quality of its justifications or ability to secure value consensus and more by the efficacious shutting out of alternatives 'at the very point where oppositional attitudes could be translated into political action' (Thompson, 1984: 63, see also Bauman, 2001: 11), the question of the extent to which the practices of Irish public media facilitate the gestation and airing of pluralistic, counter-hegemonic discourses is of central importance to the research question.

This is explored below firstly with reference to the pluralistic affordances and constraints of RTÉ's democratic model and secondly how these hegemonic and counter-hegemonic tendencies are reshaped by occasions of crisis, particularly its contemporary instantiations.

The implications of the political opportunity structure associated with elitist, procedurally-focused models of democracy and publicity can be explored with reference to their impact on the discursive opportunity structure, implications for processes of social learning, and how political legitimacy is measured and evaluated.

9.3.1 Liberal democracy, neoliberalism and pluralism

It has already been demonstrated that RTÉ's democratic model promotes a variegated responsiveness to agendas emanating from different social spheres and institutional arenas. This has major implications for agenda-building processes, both in terms of issue thematisation and actor representation. It is argued here that this embeds restrictions on pluralism that circumscribe the possibilities of agenda-building from below.

The moderate pluralism called for by RTÉ's model of communicative democracy places a strong emphasis on representational mechanisms- whether in or outside of the formal political sphere- as an adequate means of ensuring that 'no significant strand of thought is ignored or under-represented' (RTE, 2012c: 5). However, in granting the status of "full" political actor only to accredited participants in the formal machinery of democracy, public broadcasting is tethered to the outputs and logics- including opportunity structures and systemic biases- of the domestic political system.

It may be demonstrated that this generates a powerful incumbency bias. Cobb and Elder (1971: 902) observe that '[s]ince the existing bias of a political system both reflects and legitimizes the prevailing balance of power among organized groups, it follows that the range and type of issues and alternatives considered will represent the interests and most salient concerns of previously legitimized political forces'. A lag built into representative systems means that 'old issues will always tend to command the most prominent positions in formal political deliberations' (ibid). This inertia makes it 'extremely difficult to change the prevailing bias that determines which issues and alternatives are viewed as

legitimate concerns of the polity' (ibid).

In a context where political parties have grown increasingly aloof from public involvement and demands (Mair, 2013: 76), increasing the extent to which an increasingly autonomous formal political sphere exerts power by organising 'some issues… into politics while others are organised out' (Schattschneider, 1960: 71), the inaccuracy of the assumption built into PSB's democratic model that the outputs of the formal political sphere represent the organised expression of popular political will exposes the inadequacy of its procedural basis of legitimation.

An outcome of this is that neither formal political nor media agendas 'accurately reflect the basic conflicts throughout society' (Cobb and Elder, 1971: 897). It promotes what Gamson (1968: 18) describes as a system of 'stable unrepresentation' in which 'the normal operation of the political system serves to amplify the power of those groups who already possess it'. Institutional agendas are thus poorly attuned to respond to 'new demands, particularly those of disadvantaged or deprived groups' (Cobb and Elder, 1971: 910).

Public media's auxiliary tiers of representation, while facilitating representation from outside the political core, only partially mitigates this incumbency bias. Owing in part to its bureaucratic affinity, journalism displays an enhanced sensitivity to groups tethered to systemic logics- 'power-regulated' (*vermachtete*) actors (Ferree et al., 2002a: 300), characterised by 'formal bureaucratic relations of hierarchy'. For Habermas (in Ferree et al., 2002a: 300-1) a devaluation of autonomous (*autochtone*) actors closer to the 'life-world of citizens' involves a significant loss to the public sphere's pluralistic and critical capacities (Habermas, 1996: 485). This is so not least in light of Skocpol's (2003) account of diminished popular involvement not just in political parties but in other formally representative civic organisations.

Members of the public- occupying the lowest tier of the representative model- are generally excluded on both the normative grounds of their lack of standing and

thus irrelevance to political programming, and on the practical grounds of the difficulties in accommodating large numbers of participants in mediated broadcast discourse. Consequently, the public is consigned for the most part to de-politicised roles in news and current affairs programming (Lewis, Inthorn and Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005: 84) or ghettoised within the adjunct sub-public sphere of access programming.

The alignment of the discursive opportunity structure with the political opportunity structure means that public media's practices of inclusion poorly mitigates against the political system's systemic biases. By attributing a low epistemic value to non-institutional and subaltern voices, the possibilities of agenda-building from below are attenuated.

They are reduced further still by how public service broadcasting's democratic model embeds restrictive potentialities for major innovations in collective or social learning on a structural and systemic level (Eder, 1996, O'Mahony, 2010, Miller, 2002). Social learning theory recognises the significance of processes of supra-individual- even societal- levels of learning that shape social change, and concerns 'the exploration of existing and new standards of learning of social responsibility among groups, organisations and communities in conditions which are new, unexpected, uncertain and hard to predict' (Wildemeersch and Jansen, 1997).

RTÉ's commitment to an elite public sphere whose moral-ethical centre of gravity is constrained by prior electoral outcomes rather than discursively-generated on an ongoing basis, in addition to its legitimate dominance by representatives of the formal political sphere and accredited sources of public reason implies a particular relationship to social change. This has been identified by Cobb and Elder (1971: 912) as characterised by a tentative, piecemeal 'politics of accommodation' that 'permits incremental response to new demands and slow but ordered social change'. They charge elite democratic theories with saying 'little about the prospects for major social innovation within a democratic framework' (ibid: 913).

RTÉ's structural insulation from the public, professional norms of impartiality, technological constraints of one-to-many broadcasting and a weakly discursive model of public communication all reduce the opportunities for learning to proceed on a bottom-up basis.

Geared towards maintaining system stability, the inertia and time lag implied in learning process and responses to demands makes the extant political-economic order more static and resistant to change. By granting incumbent powers, 'as primary definers' (Hall et al., 1978: 58) the power to shape the opportunity structure in ways that privilege its interests- including by pre-emptively neutralising and canalising potential opposition (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970: 44 in Cobb and Elder, 1971: 904)- we may also identify this democratic model as entailing a conservative thrust that promotes the blocking of learning opportunities generated by times of crisis.

It may be further argued that liberalism's ambiguous commitment to pluralism and political contestation renders it (and media ideologies and practices that follow its logics) susceptible to a normative hollowing-out under conditions of neoliberal hegemony. For Brown (2015: 205) this is rooted in liberal democracy's long-established contradictions: while rhetorically foregrounding universalist ideals of 'personhood, freedom and equality', it has nonetheless been 'saturated with capitalist powers and values', working to secure the 'power and privileges of the socially dominant' and 'consecrating [...] 'private property and capital rights'.

Liberalism's desire for a consensual 'politics without adversary' (Mouffe, 2005: 54), or as Laclau (2005: 48) puts it, a scenario in which 'politics is replaced by administration and the traces of social division disappear'- in effect, a politics without politics- finds a close stablemate in neoliberal reason. Its anti-political desire, for Brown (2015: 68) aims to 'replace the atomization and individual of classical liberalism' with 'political integration and consensus'. This is undertaken through the 'pursuit of the disenchantment of politics by economics' Davies

(2014: 19), with 'democratic political principles of justice' (Brown, 2015: 42) transposed 'into an economic idiom' in a manner whose hostility to politics radically recasts their meaning.

For Brown (2015: 9), neoliberalisation's effects on the radical components of the liberal democratic imaginary are grave. The process fundamentally 'assaults the principles, practices, cultures, subjects, and institutions of democracy understood as rule by the people'. With publicity already restricted under democratic elitism, neoliberalism challenges the 'very idea of a public, including citizenship beyond membership' (ibid: 39), and whose 'de-democratising' (Brown, 2006: 703) tendencies include the devaluation of public autonomy and the depoliticisation of social problems.

Under neoliberalisation, post-democratic regressions where 'the energy and innovative drive pass away from the democratic arena and into small circles of a politico-economic elite' (Crouch, 2013) may be reconceptualised as a radicalised expression of liberalism's extant anti-political drive. The extant technocratic affinity of liberalism is suggested by Zakaria (2007: 20-1) who notes that 'constitutional liberalism'- the 'Western model' of governance- has always been 'best symbolized not by the mass plebiscite but the impartial judge'. Liberalism's political aversions and susceptibility to neoliberal incorporation may be seen to amplified by the Irish cultural model, whose conservative and authoritarian tendencies represent propitious territory for such a process.

9.3.2 Legitimacy and legitimation crisis

For those who 'are often unable to convert their demands for change into important political issues' (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970: 105), the latent legitimation crisis of contemporary democratic politics may manifest as and contribute to the anomic behaviours of 'despair, frustration, and anger' (Cobb and Elder, 1971: 913, see also Streeck, 2011: 27). Because liberal democracy's criteria for political legitimacy are premised on the procedural terms of open-ended mandates accruing from governing majorities won at intermittent elections, such

symptoms may not however engender ameliorative political change even if broadly diffused among the populace.

Indeed, under the influence of a democratic elitism primarily concerned with 'stable' and 'effective' government (Cobb and Elder, 1971: 894) symptoms of a germinating latent legitimacy crisis may be interpreted in the obverse. Indicators of anomie such as low electoral turnouts may be interpreted as evidence of general satisfaction rather than as a withdrawal of legitimacy, while more "active" signs like organised responses to social conflicts including "old" and "new" social movements may be seen as illegitimate 'disruptive influences' (ibid: 899) which threaten the efficacy of governance or even liberal democracy itself.

For elite democratic theory, a notional contemporary "crisis of democracy" is more likely to be located in the 'excess of democracy' identified by the Trilateral Commission (Crozier, Huntingdon and Watanuki, 1975: 113) which has engendered 'an overload of demands on government, exceeding its capacity to respond' (ibid: 8) (see also O'Mahony, 2013: 124, Luhmann, 2000). This view holds that well-functioning democracy relies on maintaining a safe distance from the vagaries of public demands, and that strictly representative systems of government with weak participative mechanisms and slack modes of public responsiveness are more conducive to system stability (see also Fukuyama, 2014: 26). Such justifications may be seen for the same reasons as holding an appeal to professionalised media institutions- particularly PSB institutions- keen to fend off calls for greater participation from below.

9.3.3 Populist challenges to liberal democracy

Liberal democracy's non-discursive criteria of political legitimacy are thus poorly attuned toward the recognition of threats to its legitimacy arising from within its borders. Yet, political activity in the form of the *populist* mode of political identification represents such a challenge to the legitimacy of liberal democracy in its depoliticised, technocratic register.

Despite representing a form of political activity whose content potentially offers a powerful source of critique necessary for democratic renewal, here too, liberal democracy and institutions of the public sphere parasitic on its representative, participatory and cultural logics tend towards self-immunisation to the learning possibilities contained therein.

The relevance of this to the contemporary crisis of representation is established by the resonances of Laclau's (2005: 38) description of populism's ideal germinating ground as situations 'in which a plurality of unsatisfied demands and an increasing inability of the institutional system to absorb them differentially coexist'. For Panizza (2005: 12) it is linked to an 'exhaustion of political traditions and the discrediting of political parties'- in short, wherever there is a 'perception of betrayal of the democratic promise' (Fieschi, 2012).

Populist discourses of the left or right may be prompted by a broad range of perceived democratic pathologies (Cuperus, in Titley, 2014: 12, see also Hayward, 1996; Canovan, 1999, Lasch, 1995) and 'operate within a social space in which people have grievances, desires, needs and wants that have not yet been constituted as political demands' (Panizza, 2005: 10).

At the heart of populism's challenge to liberal democracy is an '*anti-institutional* character', which implies a profound 'short circuit in the relation between demands put to the "system" and the ability of the latter to meet them' (Laclau, 2005: 38, italics in original). Linked to this, by foregrounding 'the sovereignty of the people and its inevitable corollary, the conflict between the powerful and the powerless', (Panizza. 2005: 4) populism shatters the mode of 'authorisation' by which the representative may speak for the represented (Arditi, 2005: 83).

By directly challenging 'liberalism's illusion of pluralism without antagonism' (Panizza, 2005: 28), populism represents a direct threat to public service broadcasting's consensual, integrative mission. Whereas PSB tends to conceal social conflict through the unifying power of a shared symbolic affinity with the nation (Hall, 1977, in Curran, 2002: 138), populism prevents any such

'reconciliation of the community' (Arditi, 2005: 93).

Recalling Arendt's distinction (1970: 52) that '[l]egitimacy, when challenged, bases itself on an appeal to the past, while justification relates to an end that lies in the future', populism's abrogation of liberalism's 'table manners' (Arditi, 2005: 90) by advancing a forward-looking conception of legitimacy based on ethicised criteria of justification presents a profound challenge to liberal democracy's model of authority. It interrupts the closure of liberal democracy 'as a gentrified or domesticated political order by overlooking standing procedures, institutional relations, comforting rituals' (ibid)- particularly threatening to public service broadcasting, perhaps the acme of the gentrified public sphere (Negt and Kluge, 1993: 96).

The elitist component to the public broadcasting democratic model and conception of publicity is rooted in 'often mutually contradictory visions of the people' (Panizza, 2005: 16) as simultaneously endowed with democratic rights, yet given to dangerous and irrational passions (ibid). This renders it hostile to the populist desire for the realisation of popular sovereignty.

Populism's thematisation of social fissures and demands for a new regime of justification beyond representation or expertise threatens the consensual ground required for professional precepts of objectivity and balance to retain their plausibility. Consequently, it brings into question the ability of media professionals to retain their authority as legitimate mediators of and gatekeepers of access to the public sphere. To accede to populist demands portends the irrelevance of responsible elites (including media elites); all the easier to erect a *cordon sanitaire* (Mouffe, 2005: 59) around all forms of populism, ignoring or corralling it into respectable modes.

The demands of nascent or established radical oppositional voices and movements are therefore less likely to be seen as signs of democratic vitality than as inchoate *ressentiment*, demagoguery, or even sources of subversion. In this way, the opportunity presented by crises of representation to provoke 'the

emergence of modes of identification that seek to bridge the gap between representatives and the represented in the name of the people' (Panizza, 2005: 14) is arrested.

9.3.4 Political/economic crises and RTÉ's political role

At times of political and/or economic crisis, incumbent powers are likely to continue to benefit from their structural advantages in the public sphere: enjoying representative dominance and power of discursive closure in the public sphere, and benefiting from the weak normative basis limiting the capacity of journalism to subject state crisis responses to substantively enhanced standards of justification.

Factors relating to the entrenched genres, formats and routines of news production, the technical constraints of a one-way broadcasting model, limited practical capacities for radically-expanded actor involvement and the tyranny of programme schedules all restrain PSB's ability to respond to crisis in innovative, discursively expansive ways.

Indeed, there are political-economic and technical-professional reasons to see that occasions of crisis may, depending on their complexion, afford incumbent powers *enhanced* opportunities for navigating the crisis on preferential discursive terms. The expansion of political surveillance, as in recent years (McGee and Kelly, 2015, Corcoran, 2008), with its concomitant background threat of governmental retribution (National Treasury Management Agency, 2014: 164) in case of perceived transgressions against its interests may be assumed to increase pressure on the broadcaster to hold the line on existing thematisation and representational models and mitigate against occasions of crisis engendering significant changes in media practices.

Furthermore, owing to Irish PSB's dependence on advertising income, any crisis entailing a decline in economic activity is likely to result in an adverse effect on the broadcaster's finances, reducing its capacity for investment, future planning,

inhibiting the likelihood of structural or programming innovations, and in cases of sharp or prolonged economic downturn, filtering down in the form of cutbacks in pay, staff levels and internal journalistic resources.

9.3.5 Crisis in neoliberalism

Given the status of the regional and domestic manifestations of the North Atlantic Financial Crisis as representing a crisis *in neoliberalism* itself, the question of public service broadcasting's critical potentialities is more acute still. This is all the more pressing a question in Ireland given that the Irish instantiation of crisis entailed a crisis not only in its developmental model but in its principal political rationality (Brown, 2015: 30).

It is argued here that a further set of systemic logics have come into play that amplify the general protective role played by public broadcasting toward the extant political-economic configuration and its dominant ideologies, which collectively serve to prevent a crisis *in* neoliberalism becoming thematised as a crisis *of* neoliberalism. This is attributable to a range of factors both endogenous to public service broadcasting and exogenously arising from the interaction between crisis logics and the field of power to which PSB is subject.

In assessing the counter-hegemonic capacity of public service broadcasting's response to contemporary crisis, the question of its ability to *repoliticise* crisis construals and crisis responses is particularly crucial. This is related to how the present crisis is bound up in a phase of capitalist development whose enhanced opacity and complexity occludes the play of interests involved and whose transnational battlefields are becoming 'ever more remote from popular politics' (Streeck, 2011: 27). This means that whether the 'fundamental contradiction between the interests of capital markets and those of voters' (Streeck, 2012: 63) is made manifest to publics- a prerequisite for counter-mobilisations- depends in part on their mediated journalistic representation. The likelihood of such contradictions being crystallised is mitigated against by how neoliberalism's crisis accelerates its debasement of the liberal political imagination, with knock-

on effects for public service broadcasting.

While liberalism needs politics (which are 'functional for the system' (Cobb and Elder, 1971: 895), neoliberalism merely requires rules- specifically, a 'rule-bound economic policy, with protection of markets and property rights constitutionally enshrined against discretionary political interference' (Streeck, 2011: 7). The need for rules and aversion to politics is radicalised by its post-2008 'contingent' (Davies, 2014) or 'zombie' (Peck, 2010) phase in which financialised capitalism has required increasingly authoritarian state interventions in order to survive.

Having long colluded in ideological 'dissimulation' (Thompson, 1990: 290) by obscuring and denying asymmetrical power relations and interest conflicts, the strong activation of the liberal fear of ungovernability arising from the exigencies of crisis was always likely to ensure that public service broadcasting would not stand in the way of the establishment of a state of exception that paved the way for the post-2008 neoliberal entrenchment.

A poor capacity to politicise neoliberal crisis responses may also be linked to an institutional affinity with neoliberal political rationality, crystallised both in the dual public/private funding model embedded at the broadcaster's inception and its subsequent subjection to and internalisation of private sector management techniques and governance philosophies. These material aspects of PSB's political economy help promote an institutional 'mission drift' (Brown, 2015: 139) conducive to neoliberalisation. By reframing 'the opposition or tension between government and the private sector (sovereign and market relations) with collaboration and complementarity' (ibid: 126), an ideological atmosphere friendly to neoliberal radicalisation is promoted.

This institutional affinity with neoliberalism finds further expression in its philosophy of publicity which conceives of its public principally in terms of silent audiences, economic units for advertising and scheduling purposes deprived of voice. Where a voice is given, as in the Audience Council structure, it is one thoroughly enculturated into neoliberal governmentality. The final act of the

Council of which I was part was the submission of a "best practices" advisory document that, far from seeking to assert an independent public voice, instead retreated to an explicit invitation to further instrumentalisation by its corporate parent (see Brown, 2015: 139 on the language of "best practices" as part of the *lingua franca* of neoliberal governance). This is exemplary of the outcome of such a denuded conception of publicity and indicative of the extent of the atrophy of democratic imagination encouraged by the institutional context.

9.3.6 The political system and PSB's national role

RTÉ's capacity and inclination to repoliticise neoliberal crisis management is also limited by the contingent political dynamics of crisis responses and the broadcaster's national functions.

Scannell (1990: 24) points out that historically, 'governments claim the right to define the national interest and expect the broadcasters, particularly in a crisis, to uphold their definition of it'. This is likely to be all the more effective in Ireland given both the long-run conservative domination of parliament, and the fact that both coalition governments in place since 2008 (involving five parties of the Irish political mainstream) committed from an early stage to a generally consensual strategy of crisis management based around a negotiated compliance with capital and recuperating Ireland within its existing niche in the world economic system (see Chapter 1).

The possibilities of re-politicisation were further mitigated by the restrictive discursive opportunities afforded by a parliamentary state of exception as various momentous decisions were taken outside the normal timeframes and procedures of debate and enacted with great rapidity, behind closed doors or in the dead of night- sometimes all at once. Although the timing and content of emergency actions was frequently and demonstrably attuned to the daily plebiscites of the stock and bond markets (Burns, 1999: 172), the model of democracy embedded in Irish PSB as observed in RTÉ by Golding and Elliott (1979: 197) promoted the thematic elision of the neoliberal capture of the state

and the exertion of power from exogenous, undemocratic sources (Honneth, 2014: 326)- to say nothing of enhanced governmental surveillance on broadcasting at such occasions.

A governmental invocation of a national existential crisis further discouraged the repoliticisation of crisis management. This was manifested most strongly in an all-embracing call to arms of the self-styled 'Government of National Recovery' (Department of the Taoiseach, 2011) of Fine Gael and Labour in 2011. Its espoused project of nation rebuilding that was ostensibly modernising, integrative, consensual and compassionate could hardly have been better attuned to resonate with public broadcasting's institutional and professional ideologies. This inevitably not only activated the system-protective tendency embedded in RTÉ's sub-constitutional role as an authoritative, integrative national voice, and all but forced it to expand this role into complicity with crisis management.

These tendencies promote the effacement of crisis management as contingent choices that are politically and ideologically saturated. They are conducive to the legitimisation of governmental strategies to establish Ireland as a 'special case' nation deserving of clemency from creditors on the basis of its submission to capital and supranational institutions, while tending to discourage thematisation of the many negative domestic and transnational externalities of such crisis management (Dardot and Laval, 2013: 13) and the possibilities of solidaristic transnational alliances (most obviously, with other peripheral European nations) that challenged Europe's accelerating post-democratic trajectory.

The logic in Reith's formulation in relation to Britain's General Strike of 1926 (quoted in Briggs, 1961: 365) that 'since the B.B.C was a national institution, and since the Government in this crisis were acting for the people […] the B.B.C was for the Government in the crisis too' crystallises too how Irish public service broadcasting's place in the state shapes its understanding of authority, legitimacy and responsibility in ways that delimits its critical capacities.

9.3.7 Journalistic vulnerabilities to neoliberal crisis construals and responses

A number of tendencies may be identified in the dominant demographic make-up of the journalistic cohort and its political preferences- as well as normative orientations of the professional journalistic habitus- that are activated by crisis in ways that promote alignment with neoliberal rationality and crisis management.

Just as the public service broadcasting institution of which they are part has much to lose from either thorough-going economic collapse or a crisis response that entailed a confrontation with capital, so too do a journalistic cohort dominated by the middle classes (M. Corcoran, 2004: 30). Whilst repugnant to journalism's social liberal moment and paraideological attachment to 'altruistic democracy and responsible capitalism' (Gans, 1979: xviii) acceptance of Ireland's crisis management trajectory- protective as it was of class privilege- was always likely, in part on the grounds of class membership.

This acquiescence is further aided by the incorporation of social democratic parties in Ireland and elsewhere into the neoliberal consensus. This is highly consequential given their status as the closest political carriers of the values institutionalised in professional journalistic paraideology (M. Corcoran, 2004: 30-7). The contemporary social democratic repudiation of radical, populist logics in favour of realignment 'more or less exclusively with the middle classes' (Mouffe, 2005: 55) and its somewhat reluctant embrace of neoliberal logics of crisis management as a merely pragmatic and modernising response to changing economic realities means that journalism's adaptation to what Tariq Ali (2015) calls the 'extreme centre' is hastened.

Journalistic susceptibility to naturalise neoliberal logics may be related to their form as well as their substance. By presenting itself as a '*general pragmatics*', or '*reason* itself' (Dardot and Laval, 2013: 191, italics in original), neoliberalism masks itself as the only possible adaptation to modernity, standing above the fray of competing political ideologies- a tendency that further facilitates its

embedding as common sense. As an instrumental rationality *par excellence* (Brown, 2015: 119), neoliberalism may be viewed as a natural partner to liberal journalism's professional norms. Its broad political diffusion, its aversion to questions of justice and substantive political conflict and its emphasis on technicised evaluative criteria make it well-suited to unproblematic incorporation into the dominant journalistic habitus.

Indeed, its weakness for technocracy may even be seen to leave journalism under its influence positively disposed to the encroachment of external budgetary supervision. The intervention of the EU, ECB and IMF in the form of the 2010 bailout agreement, promised an end to economic management engendered by the 'corrupt democratic opportunism' (Streeck, 2011: 10) of Irish "civil war" politics, and whose neoliberal economics would be 'non-political by definition' (ibid). For the liberal journalistic habitus, perhaps, better the Troika than the populist or the clientelist.

9.4 Overall conclusions

This discussion on the implications for pluralism of Irish public service broadcasting's conceptions of democracy and publicity has explored its inherent hegemonic and counter-hegemonic tendencies and potentialities and how these are reshaped under conditions of neoliberal hegemony and the contemporary crisis of democratic capitalism.

In the first instance, it is concluded that a democratic model dominated by elitist conceptions of democracy does not provide public service broadcasting with strong normative and legitimating resources for promoting the development of a radically pluralist public sphere. Normatively tethered to the outputs of formal political processes and its systemic biases, its bourgeois liberal institutional and professional habitus is oriented to misrecognise, sublimate and canalise anomic and populist modes of dissent arising from the disappointments of liberal democracy in general and with regard to the contemporary latent legitimation crisis in particular.

The pluralist potential of Irish public service broadcasting is further limited by the domestic cultural context, in which the already anaemic pluralist affordances of the Irish public sphere are attenuated by the consensus pathologies of Irish political culture (see Chapter 3). Spurred by the broad diffusion of neoliberal political rationality and a strong official ideology of nationalism and communitarianism, this reflects the contemporary dominance of a cultural model which exerts an anti-political force in the public sphere and political life. This hastens 'the de-moralized and de-ethicized goals of the techno-conservative functionalization of all contexts of life' (O'Mahony, 2014: 252).

The weak counter-hegemonic capacities associated with public service broadcasting are compounded at times of political and economic crisis and accentuated by a crisis in neoliberalism represented by the contemporary crisis of democratic capitalism. A susceptibility to internalise, legitimise and naturalise neoliberal crisis construals and crisis responses is promoted by, *inter alia,* the already weak democratic commitments of the liberal imagination, whose idea of democracy as popular sovereignty is emaciated by a broadly diffused neoliberalisation, and institutional political-economic constraints which, strongly activated by crisis, promote an internalised neoliberal alignment. It is strengthened further still by statist and cultural identitarian affinities, which shackle it to essentialised, state-defined conceptions of "national interest" and support for its developmental projects, including recovery imaginaries, and sealed by a range of demographic and professional journalistic affinities with neoliberal rationality.

All of this meant that while neoliberal hegemony was threatened by the necessity to "re-enchant" economics with politics in the form of massive sovereign interventions into the market economy (Davies, 2014), this was not enough to catalyse a normative reverse thrust strong enough to propel public service broadcasting's emergence from beneath the shadow of its systemic biases (Cobb and Elder, 1971: 911).

Notionally, the global, regional and domestic instantiations and reverberations of the North Atlantic Financial Crisis prised open space for 'determined strategic interventions to significantly redirect the course of events' (Jessop, 2002: 92). While, as more than a falsifiable economic doctrine, the neoliberal rationality undergirding this phase of capitalist crisis was not likely to abolish itself at the moment of grand failure on its own terms, hegemonic economic imaginaries nonetheless required urgent repair if they were to remain intact and inform the basis of crisis responses. Because this repair would have to at least secure the compliance, if not the outright support of publics, the public sphere would be a key battleground for competing crisis construals.

This chapter has marshalled evidence from the dissertation as a whole to argue that the contemporary crisis of democratic capitalism has provoked from Irish public service broadcasting a response that tends to support that very repair. It has done so by, on one hand, heightening public service broadcasting's natural political agoraphobia and exacerbating its technocratic weakness. This reduced the space for political contestation and moral-ethical critique of crisis responses at the very moment when it was most necessary for counter-hegemonic collective learning. On the other, it has pressed public service broadcasting into applying 'therapy' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) to a weakened hegemonic structure, communicatively legitimating a state of exception and encouraging self-enlistment into providing support for a programme of crisis management aimed at retasking the state (Peck, 2010, Mirowski, 2013) in support of saving and recuperating Irish capitalism.

A key outcome of the current conjuncture has been what Colin Crouch (2011) describes as neoliberalism's 'strange non-death', indeed the retrenchment of 'resilient neoliberalism' (Schmidt and Thatcher, 2013) and a radicalisation of its de-democratising tendencies (Mirowski, 2013). For its contribution to maintaining the 'political manageability' (Streeck, 2011: 24) of democratic capitalism's contemporary crisis and retarding the development of a legitimation crisis, public service broadcasting must bear some of the responsibility for helping prevent the emergence of a 'double movement' (Polanyi, 1957) against

the liberation of the market from society.

The character of public service broadcasting's responses to and interventions in crisis are attributable to a range of endogenous and exogenous factors. These include the strength of the systemic logics and powers to which institutional public service broadcasting is constitutionally and normatively subject; an endogenous institutional and professional journalistic susceptibility to the lure of neoliberal reason's technocratic promise and to the state's justification narratives around crisis construal and responses; a generalised antipathy to contentious politics and a weakly discursive conception of political legitimacy; and the structural and normative marginalisation of the public within the public service broadcasting project as a whole, from which it inures itself to sources of democratic dynamism, critique and renewal.

These conclusions allow for the argument to be made that Irish public service broadcasting's political role is signally ill-suited to critically responding to the crisis of democratic capitalism and the attendant political project of neoliberal de-democratisation.

Nancy Fraser's (2014b) reading of Habermas' *Legitimation Crisis* (1976) suggests that for the contemporary rationality crisis of financialised, globalised capitalism to develop into a legitimation crisis provoking a structural transformation of social organisation leading to democratisation engendering democratisation, certain enabling conditions in the type of subjectivities cultivated in public culture must exist.

These include the capacity for subjects to conceive of themselves as a public for whom their collective subjection to globalised financial capitalism can become an 'object of common concern and public scrutiny'; and ability to identify and resist ideological projects inimical to democratisation. Also essential is the cultivation of a democratic imagination that exceeds the boundaries of the nation state and the ability to collectively insist on the imperatives of building 'democratically accountable public power' rather than resigning themselves to civic privatism

and weary self-subjection to the vicissitudes of arbitrary power.

This thesis has suggested that by virtue of its collusion in the maintenance of repressive hegemonies, promotion of dissimulation of the causal agents and beneficiaries of crisis, along with the encouragement of an anhedonic submission to 'capitalist realism' (Fisher, 2009), public service broadcasting works against the cultivation of such democratic subjectivities. It may even be viewed as contributing to the 'refeudalisation' (Habermas, 1989: 236) of the public sphere, in which 'leaders and parties routinely seek the acclamatory assent of a depoliticized population' (Thompson, 1990: 113 in Livingstone and Lunt, 2002: 19).

Lacking the normative resources to expose the arrangements to which publics are collectively subject to strong standards of justification, its counter-hegemonic prefigurative capacity is sharply delimited. Without such prefiguration, and because ultimately, its elitist and technocratic affinity outweighs its commitment to a justified democratic order, it is bereft of responses to the crisis of political representation and the crisis of democratic capitalism, and cannot perform the role of 'democratic dam against the colonizing encroachment of system imperatives on areas of the lifeworld' (Habermas, 1992: 444).

The sharp limits on public service broadcasting's response to the crisis of democratic capitalism are partly attributable to a key constitutional feature: its strong tendency for publics to be seen to 'correlate with modern territorial states and national imaginaries' (Fraser, 2007: 10). While RTÉ (in common with other public service broadcasters under competitive pressures) increasingly looks outside of national borders for new audiences and revenue streams, its enduring ties to the nation state and national community as the locus of its normative imagination and solidaristic obligations tethers it to a register of 'ethno-nationalism' (Appadurai, 2006: 4) that leaves it poorly positioned to respond to the contemporary 'post-Westphalian' (Fraser, 2007) political-economic order.

In the context of democracy's failure to keep 'pace with capitalism's race to the

global' (Crouch, 2000: 20), the territorially-restricted basis of PSB's national frame of address and recognition is highly consequential. It serves both to constrain the cosmopolitan imagination necessary for meaningful, sustained ethical engagement with any number of inter-related crises of a global character (whether poverty, inequality, climate change, large migratory flows, and other economic, social and democratic pathologies generated by capitalist and/or imperialist logics) and as such is incompatible with any notional project of building transnational public power capable of challenging conditions of post-democracy.

Viewing public service broadcasting's democratic pathologies as part of the communicative wing of the broader crisis of democratic capitalism demands an attendant shift in how alternatives to its present constitution and political roles and functions are conceived.

Responding to the scale of the disjuncture in representative democratic systems hastened and deepened by the crisis of democratic capitalism requires recognition of what Fenton and Titley (2015: 2) argue are the inadequacies of media-centric remedial responses to democratic pathologies that prescribe, for example, 'more plurality, less concentration, better representation' but are inattentive to the contemporary diminution of democratic agency (Gilbert, 2013) likely to render such solutions politically inefficacious.

Critical democratic theories of the public sphere may be usefully to deployed to formulate an approach that is more responsive to the exigencies of the present moment. Nancy Fraser's (2007: 20) identification of the *normative legitimacy* and *political efficacy* of public opinion as foundational conceptual components of a democratic public sphere is demonstrative of such an approach that goes beyond media-centric foci and that fruitfully emphasises the public sphere's two major ideal-typical functions as *both* a 'space for the communicative generation of public opinion' and 'as a vehicle for marshaling public opinion as a political force' (ibid: 8).

This thesis has shown how public service broadcasting's institutional and professional complexes, dominant normative model of democracy and place in the field of power sharply attenuate its capacity to promote the realisation of either function. Yet if the project of realising a substantively democratic public sphere that can act as a countervailing force to the de-democratising tendencies of neoliberalised political and economic systems is to be taken seriously, then a new mission for public media is required at the heart of which is the pursuit of the democratisation of the public sphere both *in* and *through* the media (Wasko and Mosco, 1992: 7).

Detailed discussion of this is well beyond the scope of these concluding comments, but such a project would aim toward the generation of autonomous, non-repressive public opinion and the catalysing of democratic futures.

A 'post-bourgeois' (Fraser, 1990: 58) democratic and democratising rearticulation of the public sphere along these lines must be predicated on normative and practical innovations that promise a radicalisation of the criteria of normative legitimacy around the key conditions of *inclusiveness* and *participation* in the public sphere, and supported by transformations in the normative democratic model at the core of public media's political role and democratic imagination. This will require a decisive rupture with both the 'established political mythology' (Burns, 1999: 180) of elite liberal democracy, the 'Westphalian political imaginary' (Fraser, 2007: 8) in which it is embedded, as well as major normative, practical and technical innovations in, *inter alia*, organisational form, mission, ethos, structure, ownership, funding and technological models as well as in professional roles, norms and participative practices.

Such thoroughgoing transformations appear distant from the short to medium term institutional agenda for pursuing public service broadcasting reform in Ireland, which is focused in the main on more prosaic matters of its own survival, including the seeking of greater funding security (RTÉ, 2015d) and the consolidation of its competitive position in the Irish media market (RTÉ, 2013a).

Such a restricted agenda broadly reflects the priorities and relative stability of public service broadcasting's *modus vivendi* in the field of power and suggests that the prospects are weak for an endogenously-sponsored project of transformation of public media's place in the public sphere along the general lines proposed above.

Where public service broadcasters speaks of hitting a 'legitimacy barrier' (F. Corcoran, 2004: 34, see also Hujanen, 2000: 76) threatening the sustainability of public funding if its audience shares fall beneath a certain threshold, a time of fomenting fissures in the legitimation of political authority and growing 'crisis of relevance' (Cobb and Elder, 1971: 898) of elitist liberal democracy heralds an altogether different threat to PSB's legitimation, related to its material and normative location in the field of power.

An institutionalised complacency about the quality and health of its public legitimacy- exemplified by the incumbent RTÉ Director General's view that the present constitution of public service broadcasting in Ireland is 'not some accident of history…but it is clearly the sovereign will of the Irish people' (Curran, 2011) may represent a more serious threat to its reproduction.

This danger is closely related to public service broadcasting's structural and normative marginalisation of its public. Denying it the right to communicate on the basis of collective shared ownership of the airwaves has the character of an auto-immune disorder, in which the body misrecognises and damages its own healthy tissues. Its persistence may yet engender the return of the repressed in the form of the excluded *demo*s.

The "safety valve" of a readily-evaded license fee (RTÉ, 2015c: 9), lack of media 'accountability activists' (Blumler, 1992: 220) of either a liberal or critical kind and paucity of experiences of radically democratic media from which to draw have to date helped prevent Irish public service broadcasting from becoming a sustained target of mass dissent. However, if and when either the latent legitimation crisis which it has helped arrest takes hold, or an emboldened

neoliberalism pursues the destruction of its institutional shell in the interests of the greater liberation of capital, Irish public service broadcasting may find itself, like the everyman in Niemoller's poem, unable to muster public support for its salvation.

Public service broadcasting's trade of relative autonomy for "responsibility" may yet leave it with neither.

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Appendix 5-1: Research information sheet



ucc
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland



IRCHSS

Research Information Sheet

This research is being carried out by ***Mark Cullinane*** *BSocSc, PhD candidate (Social Science) within the School of Sociology and Philosophy, University College Cork under the supervision of* ***Dr. Ciaran McCullagh****, Senior Lecturer in Sociology in UCC and President of the Sociological Association of Ireland. This project is funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences under the Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme 2011-12.*

Introduction to Project

This is no ordinary time: a series of complex economic, political, social and environmental crises abound, both at home and abroad. At its heart, this project is about exploring the role played by RTÉ News in Irish public life in influencing public understandings of these present challenges. Yet there is no simple consensus about the nature of these crises: indeed, the very basis of social reality has become highly contested, with various explanations, diagnoses and proposed solutions being offered by various competing groups. RTÉ, as Ireland's Public Service Broadcaster, is uniquely charged with producing news and current affairs coverage that must simultaneously serve a broad public whilst also adhering to legal obligations for impartiality and objectivity in news coverage.

The challenge is clear: In this time of profound crisis, how do journalists working within the public service broadcasting framework produce news that captures the complexity (and uncertainty) of the many significant changes taking place in Ireland and the world, all the while remaining within the strictures of (a) their professional journalistic norms, (b) news programme formats, and (c) the institutional and legal context of RTÉ? The complexities and tensions of this task must be navigated by RTÉ journalists every day.

The news and the public discourse it facilitates has long been identified as crucial to a functioning democracy. Yet most scholarly work on news has been focused only on examining the news broadcasts themselves, only occasionally involving the journalists which produce them, or indeed the audiences who watch and listen to them. This project seeks to remedy this by making central the perspectives of the journalists themselves. It is my personal hope that this work will contribute to a deepening of the relationship between RTÉ and its public by helping make sense of the many pressures, challenges and obligations- of a professional, legal and personal nature- associated with the task of producing public service broadcast news.

Methodology

My research methodology aims to holistically explore the dynamics of the whole 'circuit of mass communication', involving the triad of (a) *news producers and the production context of news*, (b) *the news itself*, and (c) *the news audiences.* It is towards the first two elements which my research period in RTÉ is oriented. From mid-April I will be on-site in RTÉ for a period of some weeks, during which I will take on the role of a *non-participant observer.* I hope to witness the entire production cycle of news within the RTÉ newsroom, and with the express permission of individual journalists, I hope to shadow them- as unobtrusively and sensitively as possible- in order to understand the various decisions and choices that

they bring to bear on their work as a news item goes from an initial source to a final broadcast package. Beyond mere observation, and again depending on the willingness of staff to get involved, I hope to interview reporters, editors, production staff and management on a variety of topics, ranging from their understanding of public service broadcasting, their own professional roles, and the challenges of balancing various competing interests in the production of news content- whilst preserving the privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of RTÉ staff as outlined below.

My central research method of *ethnography* is about understanding the world of a particular place or institution according to those involved. The 'expert' in this instance is not the researcher but those who work in RTÉ and thus understand it best. The key reason for my presence in RTÉ is simply to gain as rich and detailed a picture of the newsroom environment as possible, in an attempt to do justice to the complexity of their practices. Yet, it is important to note that ethnography does not purport to offer 'the last word' on its subject matter: this work is inevitably one of interpretation, and its final outcome depends on many contingent factors, not least of which are the particular events which take place during my stay and the unique personalities and experiences of those with whom I speak. It therefore aims to offer a (partial) snapshot in time of an organisation in the midst of its work.

Following my time on-site in RTÉ, I will also be separately undertaking content analysis of news broadcasts, and engaging with RTÉ news audiences in the context of focus groups and individual discussions. It is anticipated that the completed project will be submitted in September 2014. In recognition of RTÉ's generosity in permitting me access to the organisation for this research, I am committed to offering to present my findings to interested RTÉ staff in a format preferable to them prior to my thesis' submission.

Respecting Privacy and Anonymity

As a work of sociology, this project is about exploring the social forces that impinge upon the professional lives of journalists and RTÉ staff. Therefore, although it is keenly interested in the *individual,* it is not necessary that individuals be *identified.* Indeed, no individuals will be named in any publications arising from this research unless permission is explicitly given. However, given the various sensitivities associated with doing research in an institutional setting like RTÉ where private information may be accessible to the researcher, and the fact that many of the individuals observed and spoken with may be frequently in the public eye, it is necessary to ensure that mutually acceptable measures are taken to ensure that privacy and anonymity (for both active participants and those who choose not to take part) are appropriately maintained. I have set out these procedures in more detail in a separate ethics document which I will make freely available. This document outlines the institutional and professional ethical framework by which I am bound, and details the measures I will take to ensure that any potential disruption caused by my presence is minimised, and that all data gathered is collected, stored and managed responsibly, safely and in line with best research practice.

Further Information and Contact Details

I understand that not all staff will want to get involved in this project. However I am keen to ensure that the information I provide is sufficient to allow potential participants to make an informed decision. Before, during and after my research period in RTÉ I will make myself available to speak with any member of staff regarding the project. All correspondence will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

E-mail: xxxxxxxxx	***Postal address:*** xxx
Telephone: xxxxxxx	xxx

Appendix 6-1: Interview schedule (sample)

Because interview discussion themes evolved significantly over the course of the ethnographic period and varied considerably according to the length of time available for interview, as well as incorporating bespoke questions designed for distinct professional roles and specialisms, this indicative, non-exhaustive sample interview schedule reflects a broad composite of questions used as topical starting points in interviews. The questions listed below are broadly thematically focused around the areas of journalistic understandings of crisis, professional responses to crisis, the adequacy of existing professional norms and practices in the light of crisis, how RTÉ's place in the state and political and economic fields shape the discharge of professional norms and practices, and existing and desired relationships with publics.

Journalism and the crisis

-Regarding the various complex crises currently playing themselves out at home and abroad- be they economic, political, social, or environmental- do you as a journalist feel equipped to make sense of them for yourself, let alone be able to communicate them succinctly and sensibly to your audiences?

-In the context of a draining of authority of many sources of power in Irish society, do you think that journalism, within RTÉ or without, is similarly facing a crisis of authority?

-Do you believe that RTÉ News is doing a good job in its coverage of these crises, and what does it mean to be doing a good job in this context?

-Have recent crises engendered changes in journalistic practices, including for example the sources of expertise represented in programmes?

-What impact if any have recent resource cuts had on RTÉ's journalism?

Politics, journalistic norms and social change

-In the context of these crises, do you feel that the parameters of debate as reflected in news programming are broad enough? In particular, do you feel that there are enough dissenting voices getting on air?

-Do you believe that extra-parliamentary forms of politics are taken seriously enough by RTÉ?

-What do you feel is, or should be, RTÉ's role towards the dominant social, political and economic orthodoxies of the day? Does RTÉ and its journalism have a brief to reflect society or to change it?

-Is there a place for campaigning journalism? If so, on what kind of issues might a journalist here be able to campaign on?

-Objectivity, impartiality, and balance are inscribed in law governing RTÉ News & Current Affairs output. Are these necessary principles for good journalism in a democratic society or do they constrain your work?

Audiences

-The BBC has several initiatives in its news division, for example *The Editors'* online blog and the *Newswatch* TV programme, which give viewers a chance to engage with programme and decision-makers on coverage and which give editors an opportunity to explain their work. Do you believe that the RTÉ newsroom's existing formal and informal structures for communicating with the public are sufficient and appropriate?

-The project of public service broadcasting since its inception has been linked to linear radio and television services broadcast to mass audiences. In the context of a proliferation of new media technologies, should public service media seek to transplant its existing ethos and practices into an online context, or is a broader transformation required in terms of genres, formats and participative opportunities for audiences?

-RTÉ since its foundation has been suffused with both public service and commercial imperatives. On the one hand, the authors of *Sit Down and Be Counted* criticised this arrangement because of what they viewed as the negative impacts of advertising on audiences and its effects on the kinds of programming produced. On the other hand, there is the argument articulated by the RTÉ Director General Noel Curran in 2011 when he said that not only is a fully taxpayer funded unfeasible, it is actually undesirable because the present model promotes a 'good tension' between the need to remain close to audiences and fulfilling broader societal goals. Where do you stand on the desirability of the current funding model and its impacts?

Formats and media responsibility

-The formats of news bulletins, for example, are not significantly different from commercial alternatives. Are these formats sufficient for fulfilling public service broadcasting's goals?

-I'd like to ask you something about the responsibilities of news as you see them. Journalists tell me that on any given day, they simply follow the news agenda- what is happening at home and abroad- and that they have a strong sense of what is "news-y" and what isn't. There are many issues, like climate change at a global level, or, for example, economic inequalities or the condition of child protection services at a national level which do not merit news attention, according to the established rules of what makes the news, unless there is an appropriate news "peg" on which to hang a report. In the case of climate change, because it is something whose worst effects are still years or even decades off, some of the main "pegs" to go on are intermittent political negotiations or new scientific data. Given evidence that the willingness of publics to demand political action may be linked with an issue's media salience, and research showing steep declines in the media salience of climate change in recent years, this may suggest a case where news values may be inhibiting both the development of popular will and consequently, political action. With this in mind, I'd like to ask you whether you believe RTÉ news has broader responsibilities to elevate issues beyond the reach of existing news values.

Appendix 7-1: Methodological notes

Sample construction

- When searching the *6-1 News and Primetime* programme archives and RTÉ News online search engine for coverage of the events recorded in the timelines, programmes on the day of the event and at least two days before and after were checked. Excluding these buffer periods, the time periods in question encompassed the period 31/10/2011 to 16/11/2011 for sub-topics 1a and 1b and the period 11/4/2012 to 20/6/2012 for sub-topic 2a and 6/12/2012 to 27/4/2013 for sub-topic 2b.

- In the interests of identifying a sample of coverage manageable for analysis that was also most relevant to the topics identified, only stories that were explicitly linked to the country and topic at hand recognisable through the title and/or description of the story were included in the sample. This meant that items which focused on general "euro crisis" stories not specifically and explicitly pertaining to Italy or Greece in its metadata were excluded.

- The RTÉ News online search engine was searched separately using the terms 'Italy' and 'Greece' and 'Italian' and 'Greek' in order to capture items that used either formulation over the time period in question.

- Duplicate or near-identical segments, reused in multiple news programmes, were discounted from the sample.

- The sample initially comprised 157 items. One of these, a *Frontline* programme discussion from November 2011 [EC45], was unavailable for analysis as it was later removed from the RTÉ online archive. It was therefore removed from the sample.

- One item [EC76] from November 14th 2011, which pertained directly to both Greece and Italy, was included in the Italian list because the bulk of the story was about Italy. http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1114/3109475-greek-opposition-leader-opposed-to-further-austerity/

Appendix 7-2: Textual corpus

(1a) Greece		
EC27	Effects of Greek announcement felt across Europe	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1101/3097601-effects-of-greek-announcement-felt-across-europe/
EC25	Rita O'Reilly examines recent developments in Greece and asks if a referendum could be the tipping point that plunges Europe back into recession	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1103/3099971-prime-time/
EC13	Greek government to hold bail-out referendum	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/3110/3096539-greek-government-to-hold-bail-out-referendum/
EC14	60% of Greeks do not support bail-out	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1031/3096718-nine-news-60-of-greeks-do-not-support-bail-out/
EC1	Greek PM's announcement a surprise: Wall St Journal's Matina Stevis	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1101/3096908-greek-pms-announcement-a-surprise-wall-st-journals-matina-stevis/
EC2	Markets decline on Greek bailout referendum plans	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1101/3097129-one-news-markets-decline-on-greek-bailout-referendum-plans/
EC3	Markets plummet on Greek referendum announcement	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1101/3097589-six-one-news-markets-plummet-on-greek-referendum-announcement/
EC4	Greek Cabinet to hold emergency talks	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1101/3097599-six-one-news-greek-cabinet-to-hold-emergency-talks/
EC5	Emma McNamara says markets react negatively to Greek announcement	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1101/3096965-emma-mcnamara-says-markets-react-negatively-to-greek-announcement/
EC6	Papandreou referendum a personal decision: Greek newspaper editor Nikos Kostandara	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/0111/3097158-papandreou-referendum-a-personal-decision-greek-newspaper-editor-nikos-kostandara/
EC7	Greek political crisis creates world market jitters	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/0111/3097771-greek-political-crisis-creates-world-market-jitters/
EC8	Controversial Greek referendum to go ahead	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/0111/3097677-controversial-greek-referendum-to-go-ahead/
EC9	Much uncertainty around Greek referendum: David Murphy	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2012/1211/3097165-much-uncertainty-around-greek-referendum-david-murphy/
EC10	Greek referendum decision a 'surprise': Minister for European Affairs Lucinda Creighton	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2012/1211/3097296-greek-referendum-decision-a-surprise-minister-for-european-affairs-lucinda-creighton/
EC11	Markets react negatively to Greek announcement	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2012/1211/3097759-markets-react-negatively-to-greek-announcement/
EC12	Pressure mounts on Greek PM	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1101/3097652-pressure-mounts-on-greek-pm/

EC15	Greece reacts to referendum call: GRN's Maria Kagkellidou	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1101/media-3096858.html
EC16	People in Greece react to referendum announcement	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1101/media-3097141.html
EC17	Greece is paralysed: Athens Chamber of Commerce's Constantine Michalos	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/0211/media-3097965.html
EC18	Greece coping with capitalist crisis: Greek Communist Party's Kostas Papadakis	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1102/media-3097997.html
EC19	Paul Cunningham reports on Greece's referendum cabinet meeting	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1102/3097959-morning-ireland-paul-cunningham-reports-on-greeces-referendum-cabinet-meeting/
EC28	Pressure mounts on Greece after referendum decision	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1102/3098752-pressure-mounts-on-greece-after-referendum-decision/
EC29	Merkel, Sarkozy set for showdown with Greek PM	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1102/3098818-merkel-sarkozy-set-for-showdown-with-greek-pm/
EC26	Prime Time looks at the latest on the chaotic situation in Greece	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1103/3099971-prime-time/
EC31	Greeks debate crucial confidence motion	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1104/3100889-greeks-debate-crucial-confidence-/
EC30	Tension in Athens over political crisis	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1104/3100887-tension-in-athens-over-political-crisis/
EC32	Confidence vote will not end Greek instability	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1104/3100974-confidence-vote-will-not-end-greek-instability/
EC33	Greek president to hold talks with main party leaders	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1106/3101943-greek-president-to-hold-talks-with-main-party-leaders/
EC34	Speculation mounts over new head of Greek govt	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1107/3102855-speculation-mounts-over-new-head-of-greek-govt/
EC35	Greece public still awaits details of new govt	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1109/3105279-greece-public-still-awaits-details-of-new-govt/
EC20	George Papandreou stands down as Greek PM	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1109/media-3105502.html
EC21	Greek interim government to be sworn in tomorrow	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1110/media-3105881.html
EC22	Political, economic uncertainty continues in Greece	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1109/media-3104773.html
EC36	Warnings over potential of a second European recession	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1110/3106403-warnings-over-potential-of-a-second-european-recession/

EC37	Greek national unity government sworn in	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1111/3107694-greek-national-unity-government-sworn-in/
EC23	New Greek cabinet yet to be announced	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1111/media-3107110.html
EC24	Sean Whelan discusses the new governments in Greece & Italy	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1411/media-3109473.html
EC38	Efforts continue to contain eurozone debt crisis	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1114/3109886-efforts-continue-to-contain-eurozone-debt-crisis/
(1b) Italy		
EC39	Paul Cunningham reports that Italy's PM is under pressure to resign	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1107/media-3102267.html
EC40	Italian debt costs soar amid uncertainty	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1107/media-3102446.html
EC41	Italian uncertainty drives borrowing costs higher	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1107/media-3103213.html
EC42	Spotlight on Italy as borrowing costs surge	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/0711/media-3102950.html
EC43	Technical government for Italy?	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1107/media-3103025.html
EC44	Italian economy in difficulty: BGC Partners' Louise Cooper	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1107/media-3102532.html
EC61	Italian bond yields soar to record high	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1107/3102547-italian-bond-yields-soar-to-record-high/
EC62	Italian crisis more severe crisis for eurozone	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1107/3102865-italian-crisis-more-severe-crisis-for-eurozone/
EC63	Berlusconi may only have hours left as leader	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1107/3102875-berlusconi-may-only-have-hours-left-as-leader/
EC64	Berlusconi's political future in balance	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1108/3104183-berlusconis-political-future-in-balance/
EC65	Markets await outcome of Italian uncertainty	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1108/3104187-markets-await-outcome-of-italian-uncertainty/
EC66	Doubts remain over details of Berlusconi's planned resignation	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1109/3105255-doubts-remain-over-details-of-berlusconis-planned-resignation/
EC67	Sean Whelan & David Murphy discuss Italy's economic problems	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1109/3105281-sean-whelan-david-murphy-discuss-italys-economic-problems/
EC68	Italian yields soar on back of market uncertainty	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1109/3105313-italian-yields-soar-on-back-of-market-uncertainty/

EC60	Berlusconi to bow out of Italian politics	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1108/3104367-berlusconi-to-bow-out-of-italian-politics/
EC46	Bond markets continuing to punish Italy	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1109/media-3104775.html
EC47	Slight glimmer of hope comes from Italy	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1109/media-3105500.html
EC48	Berlusconi a big part of Italy's problems: Italian Democratic Party MP Sandro Gozi	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1109/media-3104522.html
EC49	Italy's borrowing costs rise above 7%	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1109/media-3104763.html
EC50	Berlusconi dominated Italian politics since 1993	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1108/media-3104321.html
EC51	Possibility of early Italian elections	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1108/media-3104323.html
EC52	Cabinet change may bring little relief to Italy: Corriere della Sera's Beppe Severgnini	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1114/media-3109139.html
EC53	Tough task ahead for Italy's PM: Former EU Commissioner David Byrne	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1114/media-3109089.html
EC54	Debate on Italian austerity measures	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1112/media-3108145.html
EC55	New Italian government faces testing times: Senator Lucio Malan & Journalist Gianni Riotta	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1113/media-3108637.html
EC56	Mario Monti asked to form Italian government	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2012/1211/media-3108767.html
EC57	Mario Monti leads new Italian govt: Democratic MP Sandro Gozi	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1114/3109097-morning-ireland-mario-monti-leads-new-italian-govt-democratic-mp-sandro-gozi/
EC69	Italian parliament approves austerity measures	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1112/3108275-italian-parliament-approves-austerity-measures/
EC70	Berlusconi due to tender resignation	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1112/3108295-berlusconi-due-to-tender-resignation/
EC71	'Political revolution' overwhelms Berlusconi	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1112/3108312-political-revolution-overwhelms-berlusconi/
EC72	Former EU commissioner Monti to head Italian govt	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1113/3108762-former-eu-commissioner-monti-to-head-italian-govt/
EC73	Italy's cost of borrowing climbs above 7%	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1115/3111007-italys-cost-of-borrowing-climbs-above-7/
EC58	Italy's cost of borrowing rises again	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1511/media-3110571.html

EC59	Italy will be stronger with new government: German MP Michael Fuchs	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1116/media-3111652.html
EC74	Italian prime minister Monti sworn in	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1116/3112039-italian-prime-minister-monti-sworn-in/
EC75	Sean Whelan discusses the new governments in Greece & Italy	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2011/1411/media-3109473.html
EC76	Greek opposition leader opposed to further austerity	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2011/1114/3109475-greek-opposition-leader-opposed-to-further-austerity/
(2a) Greece		
EC77	Greece sets 6 May as date for election - Journalist Matina Stevis	http://www.rte.ie/news/av/2012/0412/media-3254569.html
EC78	Election time in Greece - Journalist Achilleas Topas	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2012/0504/3276629-election-time-in-greece-journalist-achilleas-topas/
EC79	Uncertainty ahead of Greek elections	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2012/0504/3277558-uncertainty-ahead-of-greek-elections/
EC80	Greek leaders appeal to voters ahead of general election	http://www.rte.ie/news/player/2012/0505/3277847-greek-leaders-appeal-to-voters-ahead-of-general-election/
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