editorial

As a society, Ireland puts effort into remembering. Orchestrated campaigns have been launched for the "decade of commemorations," as we mark the centenary of the decisive events, from the 1913 Lock-out to the cessation of the Civil War in 1923, that established modern Ireland. Yet right in the middle of that period, in 2018, we reach the landmark ten years since the end of the Celtic Tiger.

As Ireland considers its distant past, its present reality is shaped by the decisions made in autumn 2008. Reflective pieces on this last decade of economic turmoil tend to take a financial bent and imagine a happy future where the Tiger roars again. It seems that no remembering of this last decade can be conducted which is not centred around analyses of GDP, GNP, and official statistics.

In this issue of *Working Notes*, we take up the task of remembering the last decade. Yet we have consciously stepped away from the econometric vocabulary which has become a sort of *lingua franca* for policy discussions. We have turned to geographers, environmental philosophers, scholars of media, and experts in Anglo-Irish literature, to recall the story of the last ten years from fresh perspectives, opening up vistas for reflection and opportunities for discernment which are obscured when we imagine that economic history is about the economy, not the people who constitute it.

Cian O'Callaghan takes us on a tour of our infamous ghost estates. Sadhbh O'Neill considers the missed opportunities of the last decade in terms of adapting to climate change. Henry Silke introduces us to the study of media framing which gives us a distinct angle on how we understand the years since 2008. And in an interview with Marie Mianowski, we look at how novels have tracked our collective interpretations of these difficult years.

In an important recent publication, the Vatican suggests that "the recent financial crisis might have provided the occasion to develop a new economy."[1] In Ireland, that opportunity has been missed. But as we reflect on the last decade, it is possible still to conceive of a future that escapes the dead-ends of the past.

1 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, 'Oeconomicae et Pecuniariae Quaestiones' (Vatican, 17 May 2018), §5. http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2018/05/17/180517a.html.

Crisis Ruins and their Resolution? Ireland's Property Bubble Ten Years On

Cian O'Callaghan

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WHAT YOUR SANDWICH SAYS ABOUT YOU

In a well-known advert for Bank of Ireland, a young man sits at his desk while his co-workers are seen leaving for lunch. "Tom is on a journey," we are told. "Every dull homemade ham *sanger* with just a tiny bit of mayo brings him closer to a deposit for his first house." Tom is depicted as hardworking and frugal, putting in place the necessary sacrifices now to secure his future home, in contrast to his co-workers' extravagance. Alone in the office, his sandwich bursts into song, the bread lip-syncing to Journey's "Don't Stop Believing." The advert ends with Tom browsing through property websites.

This advert responds to a new post-crisis economic reality, the parameters of which are in one sense strangely familiar. Banks have returned to a business model of pushing mortgages and stoking property market inflation. In recent years, we have seen the Government reintroduce measures to incentivise private market supply, such as a grant for first-time buyers, and the use of Public Private Partnerships to redevelop social housing estates, while vested interests have lobbied for the loosening of planning restrictions. Within the context of the scale of Ireland's still recent property bubble and banking collapse, the normative return of such marketing is itself noteworthy. But if we look closer we can also see the subtle changes in these discourses.

In a cross-country periodisation of housing systems, Manuel Aalbers suggests that important structural changes can be seen in economies since the post-crisis era.[1] While the aspiration towards homeownership remains, he argues increasing proportions of national populations have been excluded from accessing mortgage credit. This is due, on the one hand, to more stringent regulations on mortgage lending, and on the other hand, to a decrease in secure permanent employment, particularly for younger generations. As such, while banks may be back to lending for mortgages, the pool of eligible households has significantly diminished. In the Irish context, this has taken place against the backdrop of rapidly rising rental prices and an ever-expanding crisis of homelessness. The solution, it seems, is to normalise hitherto unprecedented levels of thrift in the service of continuing what is now a mostly unattainable ideal of homeownership.

"A talking homemade sandwich tells a man, I'm too bland… you deserve better..."

The flimsiness of this is thrown into relief in another recent advert for Subway sandwiches, which could be read as responding to the Bank of Ireland advert. Using analogous visual representations, a talking homemade sandwich tells a man "I'm too bland… you deserve better," while extolling other exciting lunch options. In a visible Eureka moment, the diner decides to put his future housing security in jeopardy to purchase a "Rotisserie-Style chicken" sandwich. This was Ireland in 2017, where owning a house could mean years of flavourless and nutrient-deficient sandwiches, and where the associated fall-off in consumer spending on lunches might cost you your minimum wage service-sector job resulting in your eviction into homelessness from an overpriced rental. It is, thus, in inane advertising about savings and sandwiches that we see crystallisation of the contradictions of Ireland ten years after the 2008 crash.

1 Manuel B. Aalbers, "The Great Moderation, the Great Excess and the Global Housing Crisis," *International Journal of Housing Policy* 15, no. 1 (2015): 43–60.

MOURNING AND MELANCHOLY

Within the context of manufactured amnesia, it is worth remembering how much of a shock the crash of the Celtic Tiger was in 2008. During the Celtic Tiger era, Ireland experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth coupled with dramatic cultural and social transformations. Export-led growth during the 1990s, supported by the influx of foreign-direct-investment, segued seamlessly into a property bubble driven by debt-based homeownership during the 2000s.[2] These transformations in the economy and in housing were underpinned by population increase, the arrival of new migrant communities[3] and the articulation of new cultural identities that moved away from "tradition" towards more cosmopolitan conceptions of Irishness.[4] This story is well documented. But it bears repeating that Ireland's transition through the Celtic Tiger was not only economic, but also deeply intertwined with social and cultural changes that saw the country emerge uneasily from the spectre of its post-colonial history.

...ruins signal paths not taken, alternative trajectories that could have been, and unresolved histories that have been repressed.

Writing during the latter part of the economic boom, David Lloyd discussed the role of commemoration during the Celtic Tiger by drawing on the distinction that Freud made between mourning and melancholia. Lloyd equates mourning with historicising the past in ways that seek a clear separation between "then" and "now," whereas melancholia thinks of history as an on-going story.[5] For Lloyd, official public culture during the Celtic Tiger period sought to draw a line under uncomfortable historic events like the Famine in order to mark Ireland's emergence onto the world economic stage. Underlying this official remembering seemed to be a sense that if only we could "get-over" the dark past, we could finally embrace a bright future. [6]

In Lloyd's analysis, the tendency towards mourning is only ever partial.[7] Lloyd uses the material and conceptual figure of ruins to suggest the ways in which unresolved histories and "recalcitrant" alternative trajectories are lurking just below the surface of clean narratives of progress. For Lloyd, ruins signal paths not taken, alternative trajectories that could have been, and unresolved histories that have been repressed.

Lloyd's analysis here was simultaneously timely and on the cusp of anachronism. From 2008, Ireland's economic boom collapsed along with the global financial system, resulting in a dramatic and severe housing and financial crisis and recession.[8] House prices fell by 57.4 percent in Dublin and 48.7 percent in the rest of the country,[9] while unemployment soared from a low of 4 percent in 2004 to a peak of more than 15 percent by 2011.[10] In late 2010, the Fianna Fáil government agreed to an €85 billion IMF–EU-ECB bailout programme, and successive governments responded with a series of harsh austerity budgets in the ensuing years. Moreover, the proliferating crisis served to undermine the vision of progress encapsulated by the Celtic Tiger. Having considered itself in the centre, Ireland now once again became an economy on Europe's periphery. The nation's post-colonial heritage no longer seemed so culturally distant.

2 Richard Waldron, "The 'Unrevealed Casualties' of the Irish Mortgage Crisis: Analysing the Broader Impacts of Mortgage Market Financialisation," *Geoforum* 69 (2016): 63–66.

3 Mary Gilmartin, "Immigration and Spatial Justice in Contemporary Ireland," in *Spatial Justice and the Irish Crisis*, ed. Gerry Kearns, David Meredith, and John Morrissey (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2014), 161–76.

4 Diane Negra, "Urban Space, Luxury Retailing and the New Irishness," *Cultural Studies* 24, no. 6 (2010): 836–53.

5 Melancholic history concerns "multiple temporalities that course through colonial spaces." David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008), 75.

6 "For many, the commemoration was seen as a means precisely to overcome certain 'melancholic' fixations and seemingly obsessive repetitions in Irish culture, from alcoholism and domestic violence to political violence itself. Constantly underlying this urgent discourse was not only the analogy between individual trauma and recovery and a socio-historical curing, but a distinctly developmental narrative: if we could leave our dead and their sufferings behind and overcome our melancholy, we could shake off at last the burden of the past and enter modernity as fully formed subjects." Lloyd, 31.

7 Historical action and reaction overlap so that there is never a clean break between eras; "modern forms and institutions always emerge in differential relation to their non-modern or recalcitrant counterparts." Lloyd, 4.

8 Sean O'Riain, *The Rise and Fall of Ireland's Celtic Tiger: Liberalism, Boom and Bust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

9 Central Statistics Office, "Residential Property Price Index" (CSO, 2015), http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/rppi/residentialpropertypriceindexdecember2015/.

10 Rob Kitchin et al., "Placing Neoliberalism: The Rise and Fall of Ireland's Celtic Tiger," *Environment and Planning A* 44, no. 6 (2012): 1302–26.

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THE UNCANNY RUINS OF GHOST ESTATES

One of the most visible manifestations of Ireland's crisis was a landscape of ruination and dereliction left scattered across the country. This most prominently included "ghost estates" – abandoned or unfinished speculative residential developments – but also vacant commercial developments and vacant land. In 2010, the Housing Agency documented 2,846 unfinished estates, present in every local authority, of which only 429 still had active construction happening on them.[11] This was combined with significant levels of housing oversupply: the 2011 census reported that 230,086 units were vacant (excluding holiday homes) out of a total housing stock of 1,994,845.[12]

It is little wonder then that the "ghost estate" became the key symbol of the crisis. Their "discovery" following the crash offers a perfect encapsulation of Lloyd's arguments about the recalcitrance of ruins in post-colonial contexts. As a result of the global credit crunch, construction activity abruptly and cumulatively stopped. Housing estates under construction suddenly became "unfinished" and yet-to-be-occupied houses became "vacant." This shift in perception rendered that familiar figure of the Celtic Tiger – the housing estate – strange or, to draw on another Freudian concept, "uncanny." For Freud, "the uncanny derives from what was once familiar and then repressed."[13] It is the sensation of when something that was ordinary and familiar has suddenly become strange and unhomely. In political discourse, media debates and artistic representations, "ghost estates" became a mechanism to grapple with the collective cultural anxieties produced by the crash. These developments constituted a new type of ruin: "buildings that are being left to fall to pieces not because they themselves have lapsed into disuse, but because the speculative future that they as financial investments promised has lapsed into disuse."[14] They functioned both as ruins of the speculative property bubble and the material manifestation of the "ruined"

11 Housing Agency, "2010 National Housing Survey" (Housing Agency Ireland, 2010), http://www.housing.ie/Our-Services/Unfinished-Housing-Developments/2010-National-Housing-Survey.

12 Central Statistics Office, "Profile 4: A Roof Over Our Heads" (CSO, 2012), http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/census/documents/census2011profile4/Profile_4_The_Roof_over_our_Heads_Full_doc_sig_amended.pdf.

13 Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin, 2003), 153.

14 Rob Kitchin, Cian O'Callaghan, and Justin Gleeson, "The New Ruins of Ireland? Unfinished Estates in the Post-Celtic Tiger Era," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 3 (2014): 1071.

future of the Celtic Tiger narrative.

"Ghost estates" stood in for the more abstract banking crisis by offering a means to narrate Ireland's experience. They were a way to narrate the Irish version of the global financial crisis, through identifying the set of actors that contributed to the property bubble – bankers who over-lent, developers who over-built, households who over-borrowed and politicians and civil servants who under-regulated. More than just localising the global financial crisis, "ghost estates" took on a deeper cultural role in articulating the collapse of the Celtic Tiger developmental narrative. As Hell and Schönle suggest, "a ruin is a ruin precisely because it seems to have lost its function or meaning in the present,"[15] while Edensor notes that ruins have a "dis-ordering" effect on time and space.[16] "Ghost estates" provided material and symbolic sites to work through the collapse of personal and collective aspirations. The halted landscapes comprising the debris of abandoned projects gave expression to the severity of sudden collapse. But it was the lives of the residents themselves, represented as stunned spectators coming to terms with the aftermath of catastrophe from amidst the rubble that became the narrative vehicle to capture the sense of social and moral fragmentation underpinning the crash. The stark contrast between the lush advertisements on hoardings and the degraded physical conditions of estates became a metaphor for Ireland's shattered vision of the future. These individual stories were employed to give voice to the impacts of the crash and to articulate widespread social anxieties, while the sheer volume of "ghost estates" became a proxy means of quantifying the extent of the crisis.

The void opened by "ghost estates" also dis-ordered the configuration of recent and distant pasts. "Ghost estates" dis-ordered the Celtic Tiger developmental narrative by questioning the economic and cultural priorities that drove it. But in rewriting the Celtic Tiger period in order to make sense of the crisis, the recalcitrant, unresolved, histories of Ireland's colonisation and peripheralisation also returned. Permeating the "ghost estates" narrative were melancholic indices of shame and frustration concerning Ireland's perceived failure to live up to the promise of political and economic independence. At the core of the image of "ghost estates" as the ruins of the Celtic Tiger is the perception that the boom was always too good to be true, built on illusory foundations, and that the crash was inevitable because the economic miracle was but a mirage.

These dense cultural entanglements were expressed in post-crash art and literature. In Tana French's 2012 novel *Broken Harbour*, for example, the "ghost estate" functions as a setting and a metaphor for a murder narrative that maps onto the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger. The novel concerns a young family murdered in their house on an unfinished estate. The family themselves represent Celtic Tiger aspirations that curdled in the fallout of the crash. The "ghost estate" is used as a metaphor for all that is absent, both in life of the family and in our ability to register recognisable patterns and narrative structures in their demise. "Normally," suggests one of the detectives:

> I'd say let's talk to the families, the neighbours, the victims' friends, the people they work with, the lads down the pub where he drinks, the people who saw them last. But they were both out of work. There's no pub for him to go to. Nobody calls round, not even their families, not when it means coming all this way.[17]

As well as signifying absence, the empty properties on the "ghost estate" provide a vacuum that is filled with the presence of all kinds of elements that should be "out of place" in a housing estate, but that now invade it.

> Cigarette butts, cider cans, used condoms, broken earphones, ripped T-shirts, food packets, old shoes: every empty house had had something to offer, every empty house had been claimed or colonised by someone… The second the builders and developers and estate agents had moved out, other things had started moving in.[18]

Paradoxically, the strong role that "ghost estates" played in mediating understandings

15 Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, "Introduction," in *Ruins of Modernity*, ed. Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 6.

16 Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics and Materiality* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

17 Tana French, *Broken Harbour* (Dublin: Hachette Books, 2012), 82.

18 French, 122.

of the crisis also allowed them to be used as a vehicle to contain it. Ultimately the way in which the crisis was understood was through a narrative of "excess,"[19] most succinctly encapsulated by the late Brian Lenihan's infamous phrase "we all partied." This narrative suggested that the development priorities and policies underpinning the Celtic Tiger were fundamentally sound, but had gone "too far." In this regard, the final years of the bubble were isolated temporally and the "ghost estates" were isolated spatially as representing the point at which the boom became a bubble. The lesson from "ghost estates," therefore, became one that did not emphasise the underlying structural factors of the crisis but rather the more particular narratives of "greed" and "excess." If we could all just learn not to go "too far" again, nothing needed to change. The Celtic Tiger was dead, but we could carry on its path without changing direction. All that was left was to clean up the mess: to remove the scars on the landscape, to resolve the "ghost estates."

Policy interventions in unfinished estates have been minimal and light-touch. These include the establishment of the Social Housing Leasing Initiative in 2009, Site Resolution Plans including a safety fund of €5 million in 2011, and a Special Resolution Fund (c €13 million) in 2014 to target problems on the very worst estates. The level of intervention pales in comparison to the billions pumped into the banks. The State's response effectively demonstrates that the solution to "ghost estates" was left to the market.

In 2011, the State changed the official definition of an "unfinished estate" to include only those estates with outstanding construction work, as opposed to those with only vacant units. Following remedial works, which in different instances could include everything from demolition to simply erecting safety fences, estates were officially deemed to be "resolved." Meanwhile the highly uneven return of the property market began to shift the narrative from one of housing vacancy to housing scarcity as demand caught up with the oversupply of vacant units on "ghost estates" within the urban commuter zones. The list of "unfinished estates" shrank, and by 2017 Damien English, Minister for State for Housing and Urban Renewal, was able to make the claim that "the number of 'unfinished' developments has been reduced by over 85% from 2010 to today."[20] In the words of the Minister, policy had responded to "one of the last and most visible reminders of our property development and debt fuelled economic crash of 2008… [and resolved] them in the interests of residents and local communities… ." The "ghost estate" and the crisis it symbolised had been resolved and, consequently, could be mourned.

The truth is, these processes are a direct result of Government policies in response to the 2008 crisis.

Or so the new developmental narrative of "economic recovery" would have us believe. Lurking beneath the official story, however, is a more complex, melancholic, picture of the post-crisis era.

THE RUINATION LEFT BEHIND

From 2013, Ireland's property market has substantially recovered in specific parts of the country. In some areas, the problems of unfinished developments, housing vacancy and faltering levels of economic growth remains. "Ghost estates" may have changed for the better, became more safe, seen more residents moved in, been transferred out of the problematic list in county council offices. But there are still many estates that are left unfinished and houses that remain empty. Conversely, in the major cities, and Dublin in particular, a new type of housing crisis has emerged. This crisis centres on the private rental sector and burgeoning homelessness, as households face eviction due to rent increases. Rents have increased at a rate of 13.5 percent on an annual basis nationally, and rents in Dublin have risen by 15 percent per year (a

19 Cian O'Callaghan, Mark Boyle, and Rob Kitchin, "Post-Politics, Crisis, and Ireland's 'Ghost Estates,'" *Political Geography* 42 (2014): 121–33.

20 Housing Agency, "Resolving Unfinished Housing Developments: 2016 Annual Progress Report on Actions to Address Unfinished Housing Developments" (Housing Agency Ireland, 2017), http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/resolving_unfinished_housing_developments_-_2016_annual_progress_report.pdf.

65 percent increase from their lowest point in 2010).[21] These hikes, combined with the lack of new housing construction, the non-availability of mortgage credit, and a 90 percent collapse in social housing funding, has led to frequent evictions and a new crisis of family homelessness. The March Government figures put the number of homeless families at 1,720, with 3,646 dependants.[22]

The truth is, these processes are a direct result of Government policies in response to the 2008 crisis. Policies focused on bailing out financial institutions rather than households and, through the actions of NAMA, on opening up Irish real estate to a whole new set of financial speculators. Moreover, despite much hand-wringing about hard lessons and the catharsis provided by the crash, the ten years following did little to challenge the debt-based homeownership model that had driven the country into ruination. Policy pronouncements proclaim that "the 'ghost' estates of the past are largely gone, if not forgotten."[23] But it might be more accurate to say that they are largely forgotten, if not gone. Their cultural resonance has been overtaken, on the one hand by the return of speculative property development, tax incentives and the promotion of mortgage lending, and on the other hand by the emergence of a new crisis in housing and homelessness that, nevertheless, bears their structural and cultural imprint. As the official narrative of economic recovery is propagated by those in power, it is increasingly difficult to draw a veil of mourning over the crisis wreckage. We are still living amongst the ruins.

21 Daft.ie, "The Daft.ie Rental Price Report 2016" (Daft.ie, 2016), http://www.daft.ie/report/2016-q4-rental-daft-report.pdf.

22 Department of Housing, "Homeless Report March 2018" (Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government, 2018), http://www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/homeless_report_-_march_2018.pdf.

23 Housing Agency, "Resolving Unfinished Housing Developments: 2016 Annual Progress Report on Actions to Address Unfinished Housing Developments."

Ireland and Climate Change: Looking Back and Looking Ahead

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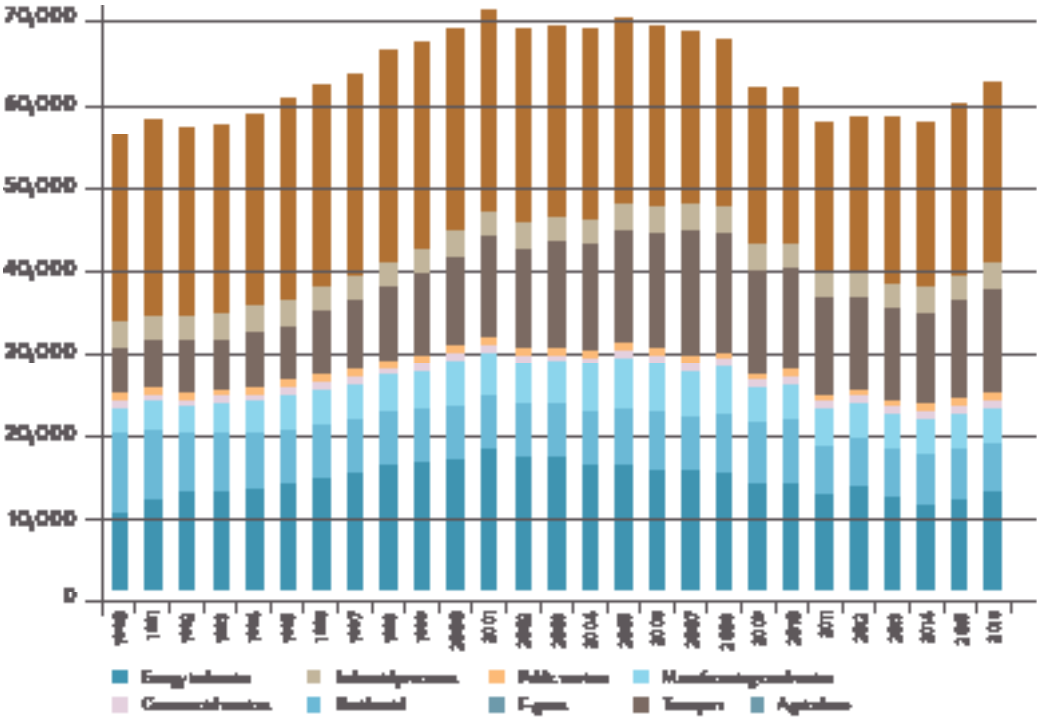
INTRODUCTION

Climate policy falls into that strange category of things government does not want to do, but must do. There are no (or few) votes in it. Doing it properly entails more effort and higher taxes. It involves uncertainty, complexity and a fractious mix of potential winners and losers. In the short term – which is the only temporal frame of reference available to political actors – it is not obvious what the rewards are, except perhaps the warm glow of civic virtue. For decision-makers, climate policy is viewed as a cost, a regulatory nuisance, an administrative burden with few effective change-agents making things happen on the ground. Talk of co-benefits such as cleaner air and healthier waterbodies count for little in this assessment. The "deep" Irish State is still hoping that magical thinking will part the clouds and deliver the ultimate techno-fix: altered strains of cow, citizen and machine will descend from the sky, and nothing else will need to change.

Over the years, apart from the criticisms of the environmental movement in Ireland, the various governments in office have had only to worry about costly litigation and EU fines.[1] The lack of salience of environmental issues among voters – even Green Party supporters – means that political parties are rarely inconvenienced by having to pretend that they care. Insofar as Ireland is "green," it is a brand, albeit one that needs protection as well as promotion by the State.[2] So far, climate change has appeared to be very remote from domestic politics.[3]

Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Sector, 1990-2016. (Source: Environmental Protection Agency, "Ireland's Final Greenhouse Gas Emissions 1990-2016" (Dublin: EPA, April 2018), 12)



1 Failure to meet 2020 targets under EU directives could result in fines and emissions credit purchases of up to €500m by 2020, and between €3bn and €6bn by 2030.

2 See for example, an Taisce's submission to An Bord Bia on the promotion of Origin Green, a branding exercise for Irish agricultural exports. While the organisation expressed its support for the initiative to move agriculture towards sustainable practices, they noted that "efforts to improve sustainability must focus on areas where Irish agriculture is currently having a negative impact on the environment rather than simply focusing on areas where we have a perceived market advantage." An Taisce, "An Taisce Review of Origin Green," An Taisce Submission (Dublin: An Taisce, 2016), http://www.antaisce.org/sites/antaisce.org/files/an_taisce_review_of_origin_green_2016.pdf.

3 Conor Little and Diarmuid Torney, "The Politics of Climate Change in Ireland: Symposium Introduction," *Irish Political Studies* 32, no. 2 (2017): 191–98.

DISCERNING THE PROBLEM

What explains Ireland's particularly poor performance in reducing greenhouse gas emissions? Conventional wisdom places the blame on poor policies, rather than poor politics. The National Climate Change Advisory Council for example noted in 2017 that, to date, policies have not been "cost effective," in that they misrepresent the "benefits" (presumably to the economy) of meeting EU targets. The Council's conclusions are noticeably apolitical, noting that "major new policies and measures, along with changes in current practices are required."[4] By contrast those countries that have been successful in driving emissions down and yet maintaining economic growth have been motivated by a broader set of concerns beyond economic efficiency and the threat of EU fines for non-compliance.[5]

Playing the exceptional card buys time while other countries provide climate leadership and policy innovations Ireland can follow at a lower cost later on.

The pity is, we nearly managed it. Only for the collapse of the deeply unpopular Fianna Fáil/Green Party government in 2011, Ireland might at least have had climate legislation with teeth. Under that proposed bill, the government would have to oversee annual emissions reductions of three percent. Bizarrely, Irish greenhouse gas emissions have begun to increase again in line with economic growth since 2011 – long before there was any hint of economic recovery for ordinary folk. This suggests that unlike more efficient economies in Europe, our emissions are more closely aligned with economic output regardless of how fairly this growth is distributed. And Ireland's economic output reflects, to a large degree, the particular politics and political priorities that have prevailed over the past decade.

At the very conference which negotiated the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, then Taoiseach Enda Kenny assured food industry stakeholders that climate policy would not prevent increased beef and dairy production.[6] Various special arrangements have been repeatedly negotiated to accommodate Ireland's "exceptional" circumstances, but what is really behind all of this is exceptional politics. The 2016 general election, for example, was fought on a range of topics that excluded environmental concerns, apart from the successful campaign from the Left to abolish water charges. Playing the exceptional card buys time while other countries provide climate leadership and policy innovations Ireland can follow at a lower cost later on. The problem is that exceptionalism shifts the baseline emissions upwards past the point of both ecological sustainability and a fair share of the atmospheric budget. At 13.5 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per capita each year, Ireland's emissions are much, much higher than the EU average of just over eight tonnes per capita. Even if it's true that Ireland is a special case within the EU, there is still an argument to be made on other grounds for reducing emissions to a sustainable level, and for doing our fair share of mitigation in solidarity with the global South. Under the most recent EU Effort-Sharing Regulation, Ireland negotiated a target based on a much less ambitious starting point, and with various loopholes and flexibilities attached.[7]

PARTS OF THE PROBLEM

The Irish economy is highly dependent on exports, largely of high-tech goods. We have the quintessential trickle-down economy. Multinationals generate wealth and jobs; taxes fund government spending and the social safety net. Contrary to popular belief Ireland is one of the world's biggest exporters of pharmaceuticals and software, not beef or other foodstuffs. Many of the larger manufacturing plants in these sectors fall under the European Emissions Trading

4 Climate Change Advisory Council, "Annual Report 2017" (Dublin: Climate Change Advisory Council, 2017), v, http://www.climatecouncil.ie/media/ClimateChangeAdvCouncil_AnnualReview2017FINAL.pdf.

5 Jan Burck, Fanziska Marten, and Christoph Bals, "The Climate Change Performance Index: Results 2017" (Berlin/Bonn/Brussels: Germanwatch and Climate Action Network Europe, 2016).

6 Little and Torney, "The Politics of Climate Change in Ireland: Symposium Introduction," 185.

7 Carbon Market Watch and Transport and Environment, "Effort Sharing Emissions Calculator," Effort Sharing Emissions Calculator, accessed May 21, 2018, http://effortsharing.org/ireland.

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Scheme and are highly responsive to energy and regulatory costs. The agri-food sector by contrast contributed about ten percent of Ireland's GDP in 2016, with beef exports worth approximately €2.38 billion – or barely two percent of Irish GDP.

Even within the "cost effectiveness" policy paradigm, it is astonishing that one third of our greenhouse gas emissions come from a marginally profitable sector when we are not even self-sufficient in food. The scrapping of milk quotas has opened up new markets for processed dairy ingredients, chiefly powdered milk, but at a cost to the Irish environment in terms of further risks to water quality and increasing greenhouse gas emissions. Nearly 140,000 small family farms are barely scraping by on the meagre incomes generated by farming.[8] Like the other forms of economic growth, the numbers are going in the right direction (up) but the environment and people's wellbeing are not.

The other sector which reports rising emissions is transport. And this is not just an urban issue anymore. At least towns and cities have footpaths, cyclists and buses. Reckless land-use planning policies under the guise of welfare capitalism have populated the countryside with commuters with few alternatives. The most recent census data demonstrates that the environment is bearing the brunt of the lack of affordable housing within reach of jobs and colleges.[9] Our politically-driven planning system and its failure to deliver compact urban development is driving people, literally, to drive, making the transition to low-carbon mobility all the more complex and expensive.[10]

SOURCES OF THE PROBLEM

But who's to blame? Isn't it the fault of voters? Political parties and institutions respond to aggregate preferences. So, if we wait long enough for preferences to emerge in favour of environmental protection and a sustainable low-growth regenerative economy, everything will work out in the end. In normal liberal

8 Central Statistics Office, "Farm Structure Survey 2013" (CSO, Dublin), http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-fss/farmstructuresurvey2013/.

9 The most recent Census figures show that more and more people are commuting longer distances to work as property prices push people out of the inner suburbs of Dublin and other large cities – see: Gráinne Ní Aodha, 'There's Been a 31% Increase in Work Commutes That Are over an Hour Long', *The Journal*, 31 August 2017, http://www.thejournal.ie/census-commuting-3574198-Aug2017/.

10 Menelaos Gkartzios and Michelle Norris, "'If You Build It, They Will Come': Governing Property-Led Rural Regeneration in Ireland," *Land Use Policy* 28, no. 3 (2011): 486–94.

democracies political parties overcome these collective action problems by placating special interests, and by introducing policies balancing various priorities.

But here's the rub: we have a highly regarded professional civil service, open political opportunity structures and accessible institutions with minimal corruption. On paper at least, we got through one of the most devastating economic shocks in history. But we have selfishness writ large in our system of decision-making, facilitated in no small way by our Single Transferable Vote and Proportional Representation electoral system. A welfare state yes, but one that robs citizens of their right to a well-planned environment under the defence of "localism," and which permits the affluent to relocate and rebuild on fresh pastures. Ireland is rapidly becoming divided into classes not of urban versus rural, or rich versus poor, but a society of individuals segregated by degrees of social exclusion and mobility. Our political system does not foster social solidarity. Why would it need to, when there is a niche candidate for every imaginable grievance, and no pressure on political parties to arrive at a consensus position to promote the common good?

To date there has been no consensus across parties that climate action needs to be placed at the heart of government policy.

Ours is a State which scatters the social cost of air, climate and water pollution perpetually into the long grass. A glance through the political parties' manifestos in 2016 reveals that most parties view climate change as a challenge best addressed with market and regulatory interventions.[11] There was little mention of the need to change mindsets, or the overall direction of government policy since, as the 2016 Labour Party manifesto expressed it, there is no need to choose between "what's best for the environment, and what's best for people in their day-to-day lives."[12] The narrative from Left to Right is one that views environmental policy as a series of tweaks or adjustments to business-as-usual.

Is Ireland really different in this respect to other EU or OECD countries? After all, Eurobarometer studies and the recent Citizens' Assembly conclusions have highlighted a growing awareness amongst Irish citizens of the need for action on climate change. Yet we are held back somehow from progress towards sustainability by our uniquely open electoral system which affords political opportunity structures for naysayers of all hues, and for which the only antidote is a high level of citizen education and a tolerance for caricature.

However, the fragmentation of the Irish political system belies a deeper convergence of opinion on what is *not* at stake. To date there has been no consensus across parties that climate action needs to be placed at the heart of government policy. Behind all the rhetoric of ecological modernisation, green growth on the right and, on the other hand, critiques of extractivism and exploitation on the Left, there lurks a strain of climate denialism among Irish politicians and voters that translates visibly into demands for expensive adaptation schemes to unwanted weather.

Confounding our difficulties is the perception that the costs of action are imagined to be too high, and that they require unsustainable government investments with low returns. This serves to perpetuate a lock-in of fossil fuel infrastructure from diesel buses to peat-fired power stations. While low-income households have few affordable options to move out of fuel poverty, the State is pandering to large energy consumers, some of whom are now embarking on data centres which will drive up the demand for electricity at a time when we should be using all additional renewable capacity to support the electrification of transport and heating. If the public can't see that a larger share of renewable energy means lower – not higher – energy prices, they have little to gain by supporting onshore wind or solar projects that frequently end up in protracted legal or planning battles. We have a building stock that requires radical and deep retrofits, and an energy system that requires transformation

11 Although one group, the Independent Alliance, which is now represented by two Ministers at cabinet level, did not mention climate change or the environment once in its pre-election commitments.

12 Labour Party Ireland, "Labour Party Manifesto 2016" (Dublin: Labour Party, 2016), 49, https://www.labour.ie/download/pdf/labour_manifesto_2016.pdf.

towards 100 percent renewables by 2050. The market will not deliver these changes, and nor can voters demand them if they are not even on offer by political parties, or if the problematisation focuses on an attitude of entitlement and quick fix.

Another problem is that while the Irish political system is notoriously "open," the policy community does not operate with the same degree of transparency and equality of access, especially at a local level. Closed policy networks operate to limit the framing of debate to a narrow set of issues and interests, and successfully intertwine the interests of the State with economic interests. This is a particularly troubling feature of agricultural policy. No matter how much environmental groups petition and contribute, participation in decision-making is highly restricted to the key economic and State actors. Compounding this notoriously closed way of doing policy is the fact that epistemic elites in the policy realm are almost exclusively educated in the discipline of economics, which leads to a very narrow framing of available policy choices. The Citizens' Assembly highlighted what never happens in practice: a broader societal dialogue with range of perspectives and inputs that frames the issue carefully and scientifically *before* interest groups start lobbying. What we get instead is a narrow focus on which policy is efficient versus those policies which are not, instead of questioning the place of econometric efficiency as the sole metric of value.

THE TIME FOR RESPONSIBILITY AND SOLIDARITY

Philosophically speaking, we have yet to witness postmaterialist values forcing a wave of green political demands in Ireland in contrast to other European countries.[13] It is possible that such undercurrents of social change are not taking off because people feel economically insecure, in large part due to the dysfunctional economy of work and housing that is robbing generations of young people of a stake in society. Perhaps it's because Irish politics is quite peculiar in that there is little evidence of ideological cleavage dividing the main parties.

From an ecological perspective, that is no justification for delay. We have already as a species crossed planetary boundaries, and Ireland is doing more than its fair share of warming the planet. The fragile atmosphere and ecosystems upon which we depend for survival are increasingly polluted and deteriorating. Our weather and climate systems will throw up new challenges to our societal resilience, and even if Ireland's share of the cumulative emissions is still small, we have a lot of work to do to shift towards a low-carbon economy.

... an ecological concept of citizenship would ask not what our community can do for us, but what we can do for an expanded concept of community.

Our political representatives need to move from rhetoric of entitlement and compensation to a narrative of responsibility and solidarity. Responsibility means facing the challenge of undoing our dependence on fossil fuels and bringing Ireland's per capita emissions down to zero over the coming decades. This formidable trajectory is a necessity if we are to hold warming below 2°C. And solidarity means doing this work together, sharing burdens fairly and squarely and not leaving anyone behind. This is not a simple task. It requires a politics that is not available on the "market," and of course it carries the risk of the worst that localism and populism can throw up. Instead, an ecological concept of citizenship would ask not what our community can do for us, but what we can do for an *expanded* concept of community, one which is responsive to the needs and rights of non-citizens, future citizens and even nature itself. The task of building a green or ecological State is that of ultimately ensuring that "the demands of the human economy do not outstrip the regenerative capacities of the eco-systems upon which that economy depends."[14]

13 Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles Among Western Publics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977). Though there is evidence that there is a change of attitudes regarding the role of the State in regulating morality issues.

14 John Barry, "Towards a Green Republicanism: Constitutionalism, Political Economy, and the Green State," *The Good Society* 17, no. 2 (2008): 3–11.

How feasible this is at present is another question entirely. Robert Goodin, a "realist" green scholar notes that wherever green demands are presented as "all-or-nothing" demands, economic imperatives will win out in a liberal democracy.[15] Therefore to gain any traction at all, any political solutions to our ongoing predicament must be able to embrace ecological communication, an ability to perceive changes in the State of the environment and respond appropriately.[16] This capacity to give "negative feedback" is the capacity to generate corrective movement when a natural system's equilibrium is disturbed. For this, an engaged and informed media is a necessity. In addition, political solutions must coordinate effectively across different problems (so that solving a problem in one place does not simply create greater problems elsewhere) and be robust, flexible and resilient. These features are not commonplace in Irish policy and politics, and yet these are precisely the features we need to develop in our political institutions and our democracy. There is no political alternative to the ecological State, if a State is to retain its notions of legitimacy and responsibility at a time of ecological crisis.

Whether it is politically convenient or not, we are facing an unprecedented environmental crisis. Ireland is not immune to changes in the global climate and ocean currents, and we are only adding to our vulnerability by relying on imported fossil energy and on over-taxing our land and water bodies in order to sustain our present ways of living and working. The aftermath of the 2008 crash opened up a period where imaginative approaches to tackling this crisis seemed possible. That opportunity was missed. What we now need is to translate the challenges we face into a set of political demands that find their expression in all corners of the public sphere, from the media, to civil society organisations, local communities and all other stakeholders. As President Michael D. Higgins expresses it:

> The challenges of living in this age of the Anthropocene cannot be met by our continuing in the grip of old and tired orthodoxies, or by our being constrained by an economic philosophy which would separate our engagement and activity in economic life from our culture and society or from the natural world. We shall need new ideas, and we must advocate and fight for them intellectually and practically, invoking the enduring human values of compassion, solidarity and friendship, that are capable of addressing those inequalities of wealth, power and income which so often lie at the heart of the dysfunctional relationship between economic activity and the ecosystem.[17]

Facing this challenge does not require a new committee, tribunal or convention. It requires a concerted commitment by existing political actors – political parties, policy experts and civil servants – to reconceptualise what is in Ireland's "interests" in light of the unassailable scientific evidence already in the public domain. There may not be a neat win-win solution: some irresponsible investments and decisions may result in stranded assets, reversals or even economic losses. But we are not immune from responsibility. Future generations of Irish citizens will suffer from today's business-as-usual policies. If we cannot undo the cascade of irresponsibility and greed that led to the banking crisis, we can at least learn from it by choosing not to repeat it.

15 Robert E. Goodin, *Green Political Theory* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2013).

16 John S. Dryzek, "Political and Ecological Communication," in *Debating the Earth: The Environmental Politics Reader*, ed. John S. Dryzek (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 584–97.

17 Michael D. Higgins, "Desertification - Ireland's Role in This Global Challenge" (Áras an Uachtaráin, March 26, 2018), http://www.president.ie/en/media-library/speeches/desertification-irelands-role-in-this-global-challange.

Framing the Tiger's Death: How the Media Shaped the Lost Economic Decade

Henry Silke

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Ten years on from the property and banking crash many of the same issues still set the news agenda. Property continues to make the headlines. We are currently in one of the worst housing crises in the history of the state, fuelled by ever growing rental inflation where landlords, despite recent reforms, can seemingly still raise prices and evict, while tenants have little serious recourse. A lost generation, too young during the period of cheap credit pre-crash, and getting older while paying exorbitant rents, have little chance of ever qualifying for a mortgage in the current inflationary climate. In the absence of fixity of tenure, this leaves them without hope for a secure home. Public housing remains, despite numerous promises, something from the history books rather than a serious option for most working people. Cost-rental models remain hypothetical.

We seem destined to be trapped in a constant cycle of housing crises. Pre-crash there was not enough housing. We inflated a bubble and built too much housing, much of it in the "wrong" places. We went from a period where houses cost too much, to a period when housing that cost too little (for developers to turn a profit) and have now cycled back again so that house prices are ramping up to Celtic Tiger levels, with all the inherent dangers therein. All the while, affordable housing is out of reach of ordinary people, and those who can reach are often stretched to the limit. Meanwhile, growing thousands face the trials of homelessness every day.

Are these cycles inevitable? Was it always thus? Why aren't we talking about alternatives to the rollercoaster of the market? And where does the media fit into the conversation?

TRUST IN THE MEDIA?

There is evidence of a global crisis in trust in the media. This is a problem native to Ireland also. According to the 2017 Eurobarometer poll only 50% of Irish people asked tended to trust the print media, while 45% tended not to trust it. Remarkably, this is an improving trend, the first time since 2004 that more people have trusted the print media than not trusted it. (Radio, conversely is trusted by 71% of the population.)[1] While there has been a lot of noise around the issue of so called fake news especially on social media, I would argue there are deeper material issues underlying the lack of public trust, not least the perceived media biases in some of the key questions facing Ireland in the last ten years.

The lived reality of many people is not being matched by what they are reading in papers, and unlike previous decades, access to alternative sources of information is easy and free. Another key cause of the lack of trust is the deepening concentration of media companies and their connections to elites. For example, the links between Independent News and Media (INM) and Siteserv were not lost on anti-water charge protesters. For many, INM's hyperbolic coverage of the meter protests was a reflection of this conflict of interest.

At a time when journalism should be trying to win back the trust of its readership it has sometimes dug a deeper hole by blaming social media, fake news and even Russian State interference for the loss of trust, rather than engaging in a thorough reflection on why the Fourth Estate is losing credibility.

AGENDA SETTING AND FRAMING

While the media is facing a credibility crisis it is still constituted by a powerful complex of institutions. As media scholar Bernard Cohen put it, "The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*."[2] In other words, the media still play a key role in setting agendas, and beyond this the media can act to "frame" an issue.

News is often thought to be objective and value-free. This is rarely, if ever, the case. Most news reporting is value-laden in both production and content. News is not an exact representation of reality, but rather a

1 Stephen Quinlan, "Public Opinion in the European Union: Ireland Autumn 2017," National Report, Standard Eurobarometer 88 (Brussels: European Commission, 2017), 14, https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/sites/ireland/files/eb88_nat_ie_en.pdf.

2 Bernard Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1963), 13. Emphasis added.

reconstruction from various angles of a small section of reality. This is not to say journalists lie or consciously distort the truth, but that as journalists cover particular stories, using particular sources, from a particular news angle, they are depicting a construction of reality through a necessarily selective process. Journalists are also constrained by work practices, resources and their relationship to managers and/or shareholders.

We see this clearly in war reporting. While British and American media will focus on pro-government bombings in Syria, and sympathetically cover the civilian devastation, they tend not to cover the civilian deaths in Iraq or Afghanistan in the same manner. In a mirrored fashion, Russian TV may play down civilian deaths in Syria, while focusing on Iraq. The coverage of the bombings of Aleppo in Syria alongside Mosul in Iraq were a case in point. In Western media Aleppo "fell," while Mosul was "liberated." In Aleppo the anti-government forces were described as rebels in Western media, and sometimes as moderates, while in Russian media they were described as terrorists. In Mosul, similar forces were described as terrorists in Western media and civilian casualties were the "human shields" of the terrorists, rather than the targets of government forces. Issues are invariably framed. By taking a position, media organisations are not lying, but the perspective they are bound to take emphasises certain facts and narratives, while downplaying others. As the philosopher Thomas Nagel has taught us, there is no view from nowhere.[3] This is why Aleppo filled our screens and broke our hearts, while the similar onslaught in Mosul made little or no impact.

When we read about "agenda setting" or "gatekeeping," what is being discussed is the method by which a newspaper or broadcaster decides what to cover or not cover. Scholars also use the concept of "framing" to describe the overarching angle of how the various stories are treated once they are covered. Framing, like agenda setting, is an inherently ideological act (whether consciously or not). The frame of a story (or group of stories) will influence how that story is investigated and reported, who the journalist chooses to speak to, what questions he or she asks and how information is interpreted and reported.

By taking a position, media organisations are not lying, but the perspective they are bound to take emphasises certain facts and narratives, while downplaying others.

Various issues can influence how frames are created; not least overarching ideologies in societies or what is often considered common sense. Issues such as the race, class and gender of journalists, editors, owners and audiences can influence the framing. Religion, or lack thereof is commonly assumed. The production of news or how news is constructed is also of importance. Newsmakers often depend on institutional sources such as police, courts and politicians to supply stories. Such sources both influence agenda and how a story is defined. In the case of economics, research has shown that journalists are overly dependent on sources with vested interests (i.e. banking) and economists from a narrow school of thought.[4]

FRAMING HOUSING

The framing of homelessness is a case in point. Much of the coverage of homelessness has been in the charity frame, where homelessness is presented as something that happens to other people. In that frame, the way to deal with homelessness is to support charities to "save" the homeless people. This often gives echoes with historic ideas of the deserving and undeserving poor.[5]

What is rarely mentioned is that people are homeless because they have been evicted, often illegally, or because rent was raised to an unsustainable level. Voices of landlords and landlord representatives get far more air time than tenants, and the power differences

3 Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

4 Ciarán Michael Casey, "Averting Crisis? Commentary from the International Institutions on the Irish Property Sector in the Years Before the Crash," *The Economic and Social Review* 45, no. 4 (2014): 537–57.

5 Heather E. Bullock, Karen Fraser Wyche, and Wendy R. Williams, 'Media Images of the Poor', *Journal of Social Issues* 57, no. 2 (2001): 229–46.

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between landlord and tenant are rarely, if ever, discussed.

Thus, the standard narrative is often framed like this:

> Across the housing crisis, the overarching frame has been that property is first and foremost a *commodity* that can only be supplied and funded by market forces. Therefore, the only way to supply housing is by clearing the way for developers by cutting *red tape* (regulation). Likewise, private developers should be *incentivised* to build (by lowering taxes). Moreover, only private developers can build housing and only private banks can supply mortgages.
>
> In a similar vein, only private landlords can *supply* rental housing. Landlords don't increase the rent, the *market* does, and therefore landlords don't evict people, tenants are unfortunately *priced out* of the market. Again, landlords should be incentivised via tax cuts and the loosening of regulations to give people the *choice* to live in substandard accommodation. Rent control will *distort the market* and therefore should not be introduced. Such proposals would be an attack on the *rights* of landlords, whose property rights trumps the rights of tenants to security.
>
> The property market crashed in 2007/2008 because people *wanted* to have expensive houses and mortgages that they couldn't afford, nobody forced anyone to buy a house. People *partied* and became *uncompetitive* because salaries were too high. The banks were led by *bad apples* and the *regulator was asleep*. The system is not under question, because there is only one system and there was only ever one system. The system is reality.

All of the above are assumptions rather than facts. Yet by repetition, they have become common sense and serve as the parameters of policy discussion around the crisis.

Private supply of housing and mortgages is not the only solution. In fact, up to the mid-1980s councils and building societies supplied the majority of mortgages and councils supplied housing to rent, with full fixture of tenure and rent control.[6] The insistence that social housing should only be supplied to the most marginal in society is also an illusion. There is no reason that public housing could not be made available to the "squeezed middle" and also no reason that it cannot be self-funding. If some of the money being used to subsidise private landlords via the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and other programmes was invested into public housing, we would make a tangible step towards finally getting out of the crisis and giving young people some hope for security.

6 This and related topics were extensively explored in Working Notes 80. Consider: Margaret Burns et al., "Rebuilding Ireland: A Flawed Philosophy - Analysis of the Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness," *Working Notes* 80, no. 1 (2017): 3–20.

The media framing of housing and economics is based upon power structures in Irish society. Property and finance sources are most likely to be quoted, as they have the resources to employ public relations staff and consultancies. The connection between newspapers and advertisers (especially with the property sections) cannot be forgotten. And journalists often have long-standing connections with sources in industry. Most fundamentally, this entire framing fits with current orthodox neoliberal economic thinking, which maintains only self-regulating private markets can offer sustainable solutions

EVER-PRESENT NEOLIBERALISM

The discussion of much of the political problems around economics stems from a commitment to a certain understanding of economic orthodoxy. Since the 2008 crash, journalism, like politics, remains wedded to an unquestioning belief in markets replicating what can be described as a neoliberal ideology.[7]

Neoliberalism is the political ideology which at its core maintains that markets, if left alone, will be self-regulating and that markets are the best (and for some, the only) method of providing societal needs. The goal is not just the liberalisation of the markets for our telephone lines, but the marketisation of goods that were previously thought essential to human flourishing, such as housing and healthcare. This is a more extreme ideology than other capitalist economic theories, which more directly acknowledge the role of the State. While the ideology may idealistically present the State as the problem, it is in fact one of the more authoritarian economic ideologies when put into practice. The State is displaced in rhetoric, but is prominent in practice, as we saw after the crash in Ireland, where market actors such as the financial institutions were protected from suffering the consequences of their own exuberance. The private risk was borne publicly as the State stepped in to clean up the mess made by deregulated banks.

Problematic self-interest runs right through this system as the ideology provides a justification for attacking regulations in industry, cutting taxes (if not avoiding them altogether), and privatising State enterprises. It is of no surprise that this is a key elite ideology, and is backed by numerous, very well-funded international think-tanks. Since the early seventies, the ideology has become hegemonic in much of the world. However, the lived reality of the crash and its aftermath negated many of the assumptions of the movement. Markets are not self-regulating. Such a belief is now exposed as utterly utopian. It ignores power differences in economic actors. The question arises: Why, then, does neoliberalism persist?

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

One of the interesting aspects of orthodox economic theory is that it has almost nothing to say about financial crises. They are imagined as effectively impossible, once markets are left to themselves.[8] This was reflected in the pre-crisis coverage in 2007 where we can recall most newspapers predicted a "soft landing" in the markets. As long as the government refrained from "interfering" (i.e. regulating), everything would be fine. When the evidence of a crash was building we were ordered to don the "green jersey" and not to "talk down the market."[9]

We are still picking up the pieces of the unregulated banking sector, land sales, and housing. The lack of enforcement of standards around house building has led to misery for the people who have been left with substandard and often dangerous housing, such as at Priory Hall.

There is little evidence that economic journalism since the crash has attempted to consider other ways of looking at how economics works. Marxist scholars have

7 There have been increasing calls for economic pluralism in university departments. For an introduction to that conversation, consider the International Student Initiative for Pluralism in Economics: http://www.isipe.net.

8 Consider: David Colander et al., 'The Financial Crisis and the Systemic Failure of Academic Economics', Kiel Working Paper 1489 (Kiel: Kiel Institute for the World Economy, 2009). Or, if a briefer treatment is to be preferred: Paul Krugman, 'How Did Economists Get It So Wrong?', *New York Times*, 6 September 2009.

9 This line of analysis was ubiquitous, but Donovan and Murphy cover it well: Donal Donovan and Antoin E. Murphy, *The Fall of the Celtic Tiger: Ireland and the Euro Debt Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 186.

examined market cycles and developed several crisis theories to try to explain why crashes happen, but they are rarely consulted (my own interest lies in the role of communications and the media in this). Neo-Keynesian scholars study the fallibilities of unfettered markets and consider counter-cyclical policies to combat it, but attention is directed elsewhere. I cannot think of many articles post-crash where any of these ideas were considered in the mainstream Irish press.

In fact, the media's immediate response to the crash was to double down on orthodox economics. Ironically, one of the biggest financial crashes in economic history, which was brought about by the deregulation of banking and housing (alongside the abandonment of public housing) was blamed on what was termed the "public sector." The "solution" to the crash was to cut mid-to-low-ranking public sector salaries and public spending in services such as health care. This great ideological moment paved the way for massive salary cuts, across all sectors, and huge cutbacks. In the moment of neoliberalism's discrediting, a deeper commitment to neoliberal austerity was embraced.

Here the media, by and large, played its classical role of protecting elite interests and reflected a hegemonic power that was quite remarkable. Unions were often on the back foot, and working people were often left arguing about who should bear the cuts (amongst working people), rather than questioning the nature of the crisis itself. What could be termed the ideological campaign or the "private sector/public sector" debate in the early part of the crisis laid the political groundwork for the austerity regime that followed.

POLITICAL PLURALISM AND IDEOLOGY IN FLUX

Irish journalism has remained quite homogeneous when it comes to politics. Key political correspondents are wedded to what is called "the centre." Terms such as Right, Left and Centre are always historically and geographically dependent. What an *Irish Times* political correspondent might term Centrism, when seen from the viewpoint of a tenant facing a massive rent hike and/or eviction, may appear far from moderate.

Ralph Miliband, writing in the late nineteen sixties, discussed the idea of political objectivity in the mass media as something that only exists within strict political parameters.[10] If a political actor steps outside such parameters, all bets are off. This, for example, leads to someone like Jeremy Corbyn being depicted as an "extremist" and Tony Blair as a "centrist," even though it was Blair as Prime Minister who supported the Iraq invasions, leading to the deaths of hundreds of thousands. In this Orwellian world, up is down, and black is white.

The media often tend to concentrate on the so called "horse race" element of elections – who is winning who is losing – rather than policy, unless of course someone questions economic orthodoxy. Such a figure will be chastised as "economically illiterate."

Ideologies are not fixed and are constantly changing. We are living through a huge period of social change on issues of gender and identity. Identities that were once even illegal, can now be celebrated. The changing social conditions of women has led to a vibrant and strong feminist movement. However, class remains a key blind-spot and especially issues of class-based power. While the journalistic corps can be quite liberal on some social issues, such as some LBGTI and reproductive rights, when it comes to class, and less fashionable causes such as traveller rights, progressive politics are quickly forgotten and much of the old prejudices remain. This is a problem particular encountered on radio, both local and national. The coverage of strikes and sometimes protests are a case in point. If we recall some of the classist reportage during the Luas strikes alongside the hyperbolic anti-working-class coverage of the water charge protests, we can see that the underlying regressive framing persists.

It is critical to remember that advancement on many of these social liberal issues may come at little cost to the State or economic powers, but class issues and questions around ownership

10 Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1969).

entail economic cost. That is not to say that social issues are not important. They are life-changing for large sections of the population, in some cases the majority of society. Rather, it is to be clear that such social issues can be co-opted over time into existing structures. As Angela Nagle has recently reminded us, classes on "allyship" are freely offered to staff at the European headquarters of various Silicon Valley giants in Dublin, but these same corporations are utterly opposed to collective bargaining.[11] In this context, attention is often focused around the gender and race of people in boardrooms rather than questioning the power of the boardroom itself. Agenda-setting and framing influence what is considered important.

For many people, much of the ideology of neoliberal economics was negated by the lived reality of the crash and the ensuing austerity. While there has been some reflection of this in politics, the media is by and large still lagging behind. Some business and political journalists are a little more critical than before 2007, however most media are still seemingly wedded to an outdated economic theory and issues of class and power.

All this holds while the future for those without access to mortgages looks bleak. We may be reaching another key point in the crisis where lived reality is not matched by media accounts and most likely journalism, unless it changes, will continue to lose its power, credibility, and indeed sales. Reform, with such a concentrated and elite-centred media, seems unlikely.

If we are to be optimistic, as we have seen the growth of social movements, we might also see the growth of housing and other class-based movements. It is not hard to imagine a crossover of activists from social issues moving to housing and class. If you marched for marriage equality and/or reproduction rights, why not march to protect your right to a home? Indeed, in class-based movements there is potential to draw in people from more socially conservative backgrounds, as was the case with the Irish Water Movement.

If this were to emerge, there will likely be much less support from the political centre, nevermind "allyship" from multi-nationals. And there probably won't be public relations consultants or flash design. The media is likely to take a far more hostile position compared to current social issues. The class revolution, as Gill Scott Heron sang, "will not be televised."[12] And more akin to the water charges campaign the opposition will be vicious, not just from large landlords, but also small landlords with one or two rentals, who make up sizeable voting block.

Nonetheless, there is an inherent contradiction between a lack of secure and affordable housing and social peace. "Family values" and "personal autonomy" meet in the living room! Regardless of how framing may be polarised, there remain goods we can discover in common. The provision of these basic necessities of human life is central to a just society, regardless of the flank from which you approach your politics. This is a message that media may struggle with: If there is a to be genuine movement towards equality, this cannot be divorced from economics and class.

A viral tweet captures the situation facing many today: https://twitter.com/27khv/status/992491289596911617?lang=en.

11 Conall Carlos Monaghan, 'In Conversation with Angela Nagle', *Trinity News*, 8 April 2018, http://trinitynews.ie/in-conversation-with-angela-nagle/. Angela Nagle has written a provocative book on the connection between internet cultures and political discourse and is one of the most interesting Irish intellectuals to emerge in the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger: Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2017).

12 Gil Scott Heron, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, 7 inch single, Pieces of a Man (New York City: Flying Dutchman Productions, 1971), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnJFhuOWgXg.

Writing the Stories of the Celtic Tiger

AN INTERVIEW WITH LITERATURE SCHOLAR MARIE MIANOWSKI

Economic analysis has no monopoly on how to examine economic history. The death of the Celtic Tiger is a phenomenon that can be represented in graphs, in tables, in charts, and also in prose. Irish novelists have taken to the page to account for what life was like on this island during the Celtic Tiger and after 2008, and their work is too often overlooked in policy discussions. A de-facto assumption may be at play that what cannot be counted cannot be considered. Such strident empiricism would be hard to defend philosophically or politically, but a culture persists which holds that the policy expert might consider the Arts in her spare time, but for research, a certain understanding of Science prevails.

When we remember the role that literature has played throughout modern Irish history, any omission of writers from our group of interlocutors would be tragic. Marie Mianowski is Professor of Literature at Grenoble Alpes University. She studies Irish literature and has written extensively on the reflection of the Celtic Tiger era and its aftermath in the contemporary novel. Her book *Post Celtic Tiger Landscapes in Irish Fiction* was published by Routledge in 2016.[1] I interviewed her about that book and more broadly about how the novel can be a window through which we consider the impact of the economic crash and subsequent recovery on Irish society.

Kevin Hargaden (KH): **You begin your book – *Post Celtic Tiger Landscapes in Irish Fiction* – with the claim that "literature is one place where the question of Irish identity for the future can begin to be imagined." Can you elaborate on how that might be the case?**

Marie Mianowski (MM): *I mean that the question of Irish identity for the future can be imagined in other art forms also, as well as in society at large, in the workplace, with friends, within families. But literature is one of those places where imagination can take shape into characters' lives, projects and ideas, and in turn give shape to a possible future. Some of the works of fiction mentioned in my monograph also show how difficult it is to imagine a future that would escape a cycle of doom and gloom. Most novels inscribe the recent events in Irish society and economy as part of a wider cycle, as if history kept haunting the present and the future. I have devoted a whole section to Colum McCann's fiction because, although Irish-born, McCann is now often defined as a transnational writer. Maybe it is the transcultural nature of his writing which makes him create such a sense of optimism in his fiction and make empathy the central ethos of his writing.*

The sentence you mentioned at the beginning of my book is also a reference to Jeff Malpas' definitions of place, which I quote extensively. Jeff Malpas is a philosopher who has written about what it means to think topographically. His thinking is grounded on phenomenology. Jeff Malpas claims that, better than either philosophy or even geography, literature can describe and speak about place, because literature can reveal the fundamental foundation of space and place. My own claim is that contemporary Irish fiction reveals multiple aspects of Irish identity through the representations of place, space and landscape.

1 Marie Mianowski, *Post Celtic Tiger Landscapes in Irish Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016).

KH: **You claim that "Irish fiction reflects the rapid changes of society and Irishness" – can that be inverted so that Irish society and Irishness are shaped by fiction?**

MM: *It is always possible to play on words and there would be some truth, of course, in saying that some aspects of Irish society and Irishness and some parts of Irish society are defined by fiction and poetry – James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, ancient poets and today's poets. But what I meant was much more down to earth. Irish fiction today depicts immigrants from Eastern Europe and from Africa. It addresses issues of homelessness, single mothers, drugs, abortion… Irish fiction was traditionally also about exile and emigration, joblessness. It is anchored in life.*

What I mean is that fiction addressing the Celtic Tiger issue and the post-Celtic Tiger moment was slow to come, but it did come. And while Irish society was still struggling (is still struggling) to understand how the Celtic Tiger and the crisis that followed came about and what lessons can be drawn from its causes and effects, fiction may have something to tell us about phenomena that run deep in Irish society, in Irish culture, mythology, folklore. It can expose relationships to the spiritual world – and not only to religion. It can expose its relationships to power – and not only to money. It can expose its relationships to the "other" – and not only the British, or the uncanny – but to "others" from other parts of the world.

KH: **I love your description of the characters in the first part of Anne Enright's** *The Forgotten Waltz*,[2] **that they "are embarked in a race against themselves, in which all boundaries tend to disappear from sight." That novel brings the larger unfolding macroeconomic reality into dialogue with the characters' fragile domestic lives. Is** *Forgotten Waltz* **an example of how the novel can explore the "in-between space" of real lived lives in a way that is often impossible with the regular tools of social analysis?**

MM: *Yes, I am absolutely convinced that fiction – novels, but also shorter fiction, and poems too – are worth studying specifically because they give the reader access to what we can call the ontological nature of place, they reveal something fundamental about being in a place.*[3] *But what you say is also right: fiction, prose or poetry give access to the in-between nature of real-lived lives, to the complexity of being-in-the-world at any moment in the history of humanity. Literature gives access to that without the mediation of any critical tools of analysis or any intermediary discourse. I don't mean to say that theoretical tools are not useful or necessary to understand and read literature critically – whether philosophical, sociological, anthropological, or geographical. They are not only useful but necessary to contextualise and understand the contexts of events and of the emergence of certain types of discourse. But when one reads literature there is also an emotional, empathic understanding of what the characters experience and of what language creates poetically, which gives the readers access to the complexity, not only of living in a specific society, but also of imagined societies, and potentially, of future possibilities.*

KH: **The "ontological nature of place" is a challenging concept, but I understand that fiction can expose the settings and relationships that give structure to our lives. Can you unpack that idea of the "in-between space" some more?**

MM: *The notion of "in-betweenness" is difficult to develop in a few words as the "in-between space" refers to different things depending on the novel studied and the context. In McCann's fiction it refers first to the rift between the emigrant's homeland and his destination in a foreign land. It is the space in between the two twin towers materialised by a rope on which a tightrope walker is walking in Let the Great World Spin.*[4] *But it is also an internal in-between space, a way of being into*

2 Anne Enright, *The Forgotten Waltz* (Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart, 2011).

3 For those interested further in this idea of ontology of place, the work of Jeff Malpas is essential: Jeff Malpas, "Putting Space in Place: Philosophical Topography and Relational Geography," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 30, no. 2 (April 2012): 226–42, https://doi.org/10.1068/d20810; Jeff Malpas, "Place and the Problem of Landscape," in *The Place of Landscape*, ed. Jeff Malpas (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 3–26; Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

4 For those interested further in this idea of ontology of place, the work of Jeff Malpas is essential: Jeff Malpas, "Putting Space in Place: Philosophical Topography and Relational Geography," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 30, no. 2 (April 2012): 226–42, https://doi.org/10.1068/d20810;

the world, in between life and death. Place as in-betweenness is also a form of what Malpas calls "emergence," at once bounded and dynamic, the locus where metamorphosis and regeneration can take place through the characters' modes of perception. In this in-between space, time still goes on and characters change, while relationships to place and between the characters are regenerated.

But, really, this "in-between space" is not a general concept, it is first descriptive and then it can be understood in the context of the works of fiction studied and analysed as a means to represent a more abstract and complex place where characters reveal the fragile balance of life and the challenge of keeping that balance.

KH: **Since the "official" account of contemporary Irish identity likes to foreground the way in which our economy is built around technology, what is the significance of Enright emphasising the "shattered galaxy" that the web often represents?**

MM: *Again, I don't think it should be understood only metaphorically. First and foremost Enright's fiction in this novel describes real life: the internet has actually modified the way and the places where people work, play and interact with each other, communicate with each other or escape each other's attention, cheat on one another. What fiction can reveal to readers, in ways they are not necessarily aware of, is the extent to which the internet has modified people's relationships to time and space, being and place. So in Forgotten Waltz I think the use of technology can be read at different levels as a key factor in transforming the economy and society, but also people's relationships to place, to reality and to one another. Anne Enright questions those various transformations but I don't think technology is a metaphor. What is certain is that, through fiction, readers have access, at once, to all the levels in which technology has transformed life. And this makes for a transforming reading experience too.*

KH: **Donal Ryan's *The Spinning Heart*[5] interrogates how "a community can be shaken at its roots because it has lost most of its former references." Can you elaborate on how fiction can help us relate the easily accounted-for economic decline with the apparently much more nebulous harm that follows for communities?**

MM: *It is not easy to do but it is something that Donal Ryan's novel achieves remarkably well in giving voice to members of a community in 21 chapters, each narrated by a different character. In many ways, in this novel, place and landscape represent a suspended moment of crisis between the spectre of a repetitive past and a ghost-like future. But the representations of place and landscape are also symptomatic of the difficulty in imagining the future, never mind to start building it. In this novel the post-Celtic Tiger period is presented as a suspended historical moment, in-between two historical eras.*

Ryan's narrative displays the crumbling of a community, as all the usual and reliable boundaries and landmarks have failed its members. The symbolic parricide is symptomatic of a community who wants to forget the past. And yet the contribution from the dead father, Frank, at the end of the novel means that his voice cannot be extinguished even after he has passed and his son has pissed on the embers of his house's remains. The past ought to be considered and taken into account to build the future. As in Enright's novel with Evie's illness and her awkward status in the narrative, the abducted child of Ryan's novel – Réaltin's child – embodies the confiscated future of Ireland and questions Ireland's capacity to seize the moment, acknowledge new definitions of place and construct its future.

KH: ***The Spinning Heart* was one of the landmark novels touching on the Celtic Tiger's "construction and destruction." What can we learn from the possibility of the novel to inform our social understanding?**

Jeff Malpas, "Place and the Problem of Landscape," in *The Place of Landscape*, ed. Jeff Malpas (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 3–26; Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

5 Donal Ryan, *The Spinning Heart* (Dublin: Doubleday Ireland, 2012).

Novels may inform our social understanding but they should not be read like guidebooks.

MM: *Bobby Mahon's destiny reveals the difficulty facing a community trying to come to terms with its past and for its members to look together towards the future. Bobby embodies the scapegoat around which the community gathers as the Celtic Tiger's sandy foundations crumble, while at the same time the foundations on which the community stood have been shaken (religion, social landmarks) without having found any stable replacement. The community dreads the nightmarish repetition of history without being able to hold on to new strongholds and build a future for all.*

But I don't think novels should be read as social tools to inform the public's social understanding. Otherwise I'm afraid fiction loses its freedom, and it is that freedom which makes a work of art, sometimes, for certain people, and at certain times, a life changer. Novels may inform our social understanding but they should not be read like guidebooks. In fact, and first of all, they should be read. And are they actually read?

KH: **One of the novels you discuss at length, Claire Kilroy's *The Devil I Know*[6] deals with explicit theological themes. What does contemporary Irish writing reveal about the place of Christianity in Irish society?**

MM: *It is a complex question and one on which I have only worked a little on in studying novels and poems related to the scandal of the Magdalene Laundries. But religion, and spiritual life in general, are a research topic I wish to work on in the coming months and years – and not only Christianity but other religions as well, especially in the context of immigration and emigration.*

KH: **You suggest the Celtic Tiger has emerged as a sort of mythic chapter in Irish memory. Myth is usually generative of new potentialities. Talk to me more about literature and myth in this context.**

MM: *In a book I edited a few years ago[7] I first used the word "myth" in relation to landscape following the writing of Ashis Nandys. "Myth" does not denote a mystified realm of irrational superstition but "as a form of thinking that remains interpretively open to both the past and the present."[8] With this definition in mind, I mean that the Celtic Tiger is connected to other chapters of Irish history and that in the greedy manner in which land was bought, houses were built, riches were consumed, there was an echo – easily heard in many works of fiction today – of the Irish Famine, of evictions, of generations of exiles, as well as the notion that the situation is too good to last and that one day or another emigration will start again, evictions and so on.*

I don't mean to say what is represented in fiction is true and that it will happen. But it represents elements and currents that run deep down in contemporary Irish fiction and relates it to works and beliefs of the past. The question is: what can readers in Ireland hear in today's fiction and how will it help them imagine and build their future?

KH: **Finally Marie, if you could recommend three novels related to the crash, what would they be?**

MM: *The Spinning Heart by Donal Ryan, The Devil I Know by Claire Kilroy and Mike McCormack's Solar Bones[9] (which is not included in my monograph because it had not yet been published when my monograph went to press).*

6 Claire Kilroy, *The Devil I Know* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012).

7 Marie Mianowski (ed.), *Irish Contemporary Landscape in Literature and the Arts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

8 Quoted in David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008), 4.

9 Mike McCormack, *Solar Bones* (Dublin: Tramp Press, 2016).