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Neoliberalism, Irish polity, and the problem of the public sphere: 

A critical analysis of Irish Governmental discourse in the boom years (1997–2007)

by

Owen D. Mc Carney, BA Hons

A thesis submitted to
University College Dublin,
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the College of Arts and Celtic Studies.

Based on the research carried out in the
School of Irish, Celtic Studies, Irish Folklore, and Linguistics

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Head of School: Prof. Máire Ní Annracháin

PhD Supervisor: Prof. Bettina Migge
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* * *
Abstract

Drawing on theories of discourse and power (Foucault) and hegemony (Gramsci); my work starts from an appreciation of discourse (semiosis) as an element of social life dialectically related to other elements, simultaneously construing and being construed by reality. Unlike much theorising on discourse and power, the value-added component of this sociolinguistically-grounded, yet interdisciplinary work is its foregrounding of detailed interdiscursive and linguistic analysis of texts. Specifically, my research examines neoliberal ideation in Governmental discourse in Ireland across the lifetime of the two parliaments, preceding the economic crisis of 2008. Specifically, I address the semiosis of the emergent topics of immigration legislation reform, childcare policy development, and the fate of social policy within the national ‘Social Partnership’ programme. Using a critical approach to the analysis of discourse (CDA), my normative thesis is that neoliberalism’s non-majoritarian interests and its anti-democratic tendencies can be revealed in its prioritisation of proactive interventions in the public sphere (Arendt, Habermas), and that an analysis of discursive practices between civil society and state actors in this space can provide evidence of how this dynamic has happened in practice.

Adopting Bourdieu’s characterisation of neoliberal ideation as a macro-level socio-cultural nomos of late modernity, and employing Fairclough’s deductive, dialectical-relational approach to the analysis of discourse samples, my research adopts a qualitative examination of official, public documents (consultation papers, reports, speeches, etc.). The research undertakes a ‘strategic critique’ of the transposing of hegemonic, pro-market discourses, originating in the field of economics, onto the field of social policy. In order to ground this critique effectively however, this work is complemented by an ‘ideological critique’ of the historical emergence of neoliberal ideation in Irish polity in the mid-1980s. In sum, the analysis shows that the public space of citizen-state interaction has been; compromised through the non-dialogical structuring of the interface; undermined through the suppression of ‘participating’ civil society experts in favour of ‘official’ perspectives; and colonised through the recontextualisation of the discourses (and practices) of civil society agents by the now dominant discourses (and practices) of the market. Specifically, through official strategies of depoliticisation and legitimation, the arena of democratic interaction in the Irish Republic has proved to be a controlled space, emptied of dialogical potential, and one which ultimately has been co-opted by the state as a modality of the productive ideation of neoliberalism itself.

* * *

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Statement of original authorship

I hereby certify that this submission is my own work, that it was completed while I was registered as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and that I have not obtained a degree elsewhere based on any of the research presented here.

Signed: __________________________  Date: July 31st, 2015

______________________________________________________________

Owen D. Mc Carney

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I would also signal a particular note of appreciation for the late Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences for their material support in the early stages of this work. In the same vein, I also wish to thank the staff and offices of Dublin City Council’s Higher Education Department. Of course, I also thank my parents and siblings for their encouragement and material support, particularly in the latter stages of this work.

A heavily interdisciplinary work such as this is an onerous task for one individual, and I fear without the support of innumerable librarians and library staff, completing this task may have proved impossible, or at least my efforts would have produced as less valuable result. Specifically, I thank the institutions and staff of the James Joyce Library, UCD, the Berkeley, Lecky, and Ussher Libraries, Trinity College Dublin, and the O’Reilly Library, Dublin City University.

I also acknowledge the indirect support and unending encouragement received from my friends and former work colleagues from within the Irish NGO sector, as well as from the Continent (many of whom are now much further afield). Indeed, it is as a direct consequence of our many and varied discussions, arguments, and activities going back more than two decades, that I first identified the role of language use in the neoliberal malaise as a significant issue, and one particularly deserving of some cerebral attention. It seems I have ultimately managed to do something about this. Thank you.

* * *
Chapter One

Introduction

The almost universal embrace of the neoliberal project by the twentieth century’s end has not only coincided with the transfer of wealth into the hands of an ever-decreasing minority, but, according to Harvey (2005), has also seen a rise in inequality by many measures, a curtailing of public services, as well as an ever-increasing set of pressures on workers and citizens more generally. Moreover, despite its material consequences on the majority, this paradigm shift has occurred almost without any overt response, with the project – often captured by the benign term ‘globalisation’ – managing to assume the status of the natural order of things. Yet contrary to the classical liberal position of the shrinking of the state the contemporary experience has seen the nation state, through its ‘necessitarian’ relationship with the project (Bourdieu 1998b), become implicated in the advance of pro-market ideas and practices (Cerny 2008, Peck 2004). Ultimately, in the space of less than forty years neoliberalism has succeeded in attaining a dominant global position, or more accurately a hegemonic position in late modernity (Hall 2003). This observation is strengthened by the fact that neoliberalism has prevailed not simply by virtue of the status that its orthodoxy has acquired, but in being embraced and institutionalised by state and transnational structures alike, it has also facilitated an attack on democracy globally, and on those very processes and spaces most likely to check its advance.

The situation in contemporary Ireland mirrors this broader trend. Since the state’s open engagement with free-market ideas and actions in the 1980s, the ideological blueprint has been officially accepted as a sort of prescription for the ills of that period, promising recovery and growth into the future (Allen 2000). In the decades since then the normalisation of the remedy’s ingredients has happened not by forcibly silencing contrarian perspectives, but rather, by formally incorporating them into the process of convalescence and regeneration that followed (Kirby 2001, 2010). As elsewhere, this feat has naturally entrenched the neoliberal orthodoxy in Irish polity and simultaneously minimised the prospect of any challenge to its underlying tenets ever emerging, with all actors – including much of civil society – now complicit in this ideological fix. The way in which this has happened, how this settlement between the state and the citizenry has come about, is the focus of this work. More specifically, the research interest lies in the precise role of ideas and narratives of economic and social change in the period following the neoliberal turn, and at how language

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1 In this work references to ‘Ireland’ are at all times to the state of the ‘Republic of Ireland’ only.
or more precisely discourse, has been implicated in construing this new reality while itself being construed by this reality.

The thesis primarily uses a synchronic approach, looking at official discourse on a number of specific issues at a particular period of Irish economic development. I also however, employ a diachronic approach in the analysis of some data in specific areas where the voice and influence of autonomous expert bodies on official policy is considered as far back as the mid-1980s. Otherwise, I limit myself to the ten-year period 1997-2007. This timeframe is chosen for two reasons. Firstly, it sits within the period of economic growth unprecedented in the nation’s history that led to the coining of the phrase ‘The Celtic Tiger’, running through to the period just before the national and global banking crises, and the subsequent economic downturn from 2008 onwards. Secondly, in terms of making assumptions about policy development generally and in approaching policy documents in particular, logistically this period is practical since it covers the lifespan of two consecutive full-term parliaments. Specifically, these are the Fianna Fáil and Progressive Democrats coalition governments of 1997 to 2002 and 2002 to 2007, and overseen by one Taoiseach (Prime Minister), that is, Fianna Fáil party leader, Bertie Ahern.

In this first introductory chapter I begin with a presentation of the two key themes that run throughout this work. These are firstly, a critique of neoliberalism, incorporating a reflection on its central role in undermining democracy in the Republic of Ireland; and secondly, the role of semiosis and discursive practices in this process, and how a critical approach to textual analysis can reveal evidence of how this dynamic functioned in practice. This allows for a presentation of the focus of my work and an elaboration of the thesis aim, namely to undertake a critique of the state’s embrace of the neoliberal project through a focus on official discourse. I then introduce four specific objectives that require attention if the research question is to be responded to in an effective manner. Specifically, these objectives are; the construction of an interdisciplinary theorisation of neoliberalism that facilitates a semiotic critique; an approach to neoliberalism in Irish polity that draws on this theorisation and which points to appropriate topics for semiotic analysis; the operationalisation of a socio-cultural form of critical discourse analysis that sees discourse (or semiosis) as an element of social practice; and, a focus on the public sphere interaction between civil society and the Irish state on issues of policy development and implementation, from which my analysis draws in order to shed the necessary light on the research question.

I then follow what might be termed these ‘legacy issues’ with a brief contextualisation of my research question, seeking to interrogate the neoliberal state-discourse conjuncture, through an analysis of discourse practices within the public sphere in Ireland. Here I also
present a summary of the thesis findings. I continue with a brief reflection on the form of the explanatory approach adopted throughout this work, which essentially employs a dual pattern of inquiry composed of both theoretical and practical dimensions. On the one hand this model comprises an argumentative form of inquiry which incorporates the broad theoretical positions on which this work rests. The interest here is in the interrelationship between neoliberalism, discourse, democracy, and the public sphere, and in the precise ways in which these theoretical positions influence the methodological approach adopted in each analytical chapter. On the other hand, I also apply a descriptive pattern of inquiry in the analytical chapters. Although, in essentially being an exposition of discourse-analytical findings, this descriptive pattern of explanation could perhaps be more accurately labelled as an ‘analytical’ pattern of inquiry, being an analysis of discourse samples.

Both of these forms of inquiry – argumentative and analytical – combine to allow me to undertake effective ‘critical’ discourse analysis, but also to give context and content to my assumptions drawn from the analysis. This dual-level of inquiry is fundamentally interdisciplinary and can best be seen in the three analytical chapters that comprise the bulk of my novel contribution within the broader field. This combined pattern of inquiry also plays a significant part in facilitating the analyst’s ability to maintain the necessary reflexive space between the analytical and interpretative elements of critique. I then reflect briefly on both the methodology itself, including my understanding of discourse and of the analytical categories operationalised in this work, and on the sources of data, the text samples that are analysed. The chapter concludes with an overview of the content and objectives of each of the six subsequent chapters that form the body of this work, as well as a brief reflection on the elements that make up the thesis conclusion.

1.1 Thesis Themes and Focus

In this work there are essentially two permanently interrelated themes. The first theme is that the neoliberal project, having acquired a hegemonic status, actively degrades democracy and the democratic potential within its sphere of operation. By conscripting state structures and institutions to its market-logic, the project necessarily finds ways to limit and marginalise any critique of the overarching blueprint. Where obvious indexes of representational democracy (such as elections) do occur, no participant likely to win public support seriously challenges the neoliberal status quo, or is ever likely to point to neoliberalism’s shortcomings and negative consequences. Wherever neoliberalism has come to dictate policy, such as in the case of the Irish Republic, the free market ethos becomes embedded ever deeper in polity,
perpetually sowing the seeds of its continuation. A major consequence of this late-twentieth
century settlement is a general drive to socio-cultural cohesion and consensus through
processes of depoliticisation. In essentially drawing in the parameters of that which is
debateable, of that which remains to be argued over, the contention in this work is that these
moves facilitate a sort of official grip over activities within the public sphere. That this is
taking place is not particularly contentious however (see Bourdieu 1998a, Crossley 2004,
Goode 2005, Habermas 1975), and is therefore not the only topic of my research. My
primary interest rather, is in how this transformation is happening in practice.

Contemporary manifestations of the neoliberal project often appear muddled, with no
pure variant on display, with states and transnational bodies implicated in and intertwined
with policy development and delivery. A common feature therefore is that neoliberalism
generates a kind of crisis in national consciousnesses, where indigenous problems are
reconceived and new solutions to local grievances emerge. Everything is at once
depoliticised and reinterpreted in a conception born of the field of a reconfigured economics
and its prescriptive blueprint for maximising growth. In short, an effective state engagement
with neoliberalism is a new form of colonisation, and in being that which must be obeyed, a
new form of imperialism. A critical focus on neoliberalism is therefore interested in issues of
governmentality and managerialism, but also in its semiotic dimension, in discourse.
Moreover, the dialectical approach to semiosis adopted in this work seeks to forge a link to
the emergence of social practices (in their discursive form) and the particular ways in which
dominant ideas – as manifest in practices – go on to recontextualise the sets of practices in
other fields. That is, a Gramscian (1971) conception of hegemony can only take us so far in
attempting to unmask the vigour of the ideology, and the apparent impermeability of its logic.

At this point I should also like to make reference to a significant stylistic issue in this
work. One of the central, pervading criticisms of neoliberalism is that it is invariably reified
by its supporters. As with the related concept of ‘the market’ or ‘markets’, neoliberalism is
ascribed agency and given the power to do and to act in and of itself. And since this
reification is something that also takes place in relation to the various signifiers regularly
employed to mask neoliberalism, this is a point that will receive considerable attention in
Chapter Two. But I would like to make it clear here at the outset that where the author
appears to similarly attribute agency to neoliberalism (as in the previous paragraph), it is as a
form of shorthand only. Neoliberalism is a set of ideas, essentially a philosophy that
proposes a specific understanding of the material relationship between the private individual
and the public realm within the field of economic activity generally. All arguments,
prescriptions, and actions (including semiotic activity) that are executed in the name of
neoliberalism are carried out by those individuals and groups (public and private) who adopt and deploy the tenets of neoliberal ideation and the elements of its blueprint in action. ‘Neoliberalism’ itself cannot and does not ‘do’ anything, and where it appears in subject positions here the reader should be aware that this is the author’s fundamental position.

That discursive shifts brought about by the emergence and subsequent dominance of the new policy paradigm are imbued with symbolic capital is clearly evident. For example, narratives of progress and of opportunities, of growth through competition, of a need for ‘flexibility’, ‘transparency’ and ‘modernisation’ are not new (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2001). But what is at issue here – and what constitutes the second theme of this research as a work of discursive analysis – is the restructuring of relationships within the network of social practices that is taking place under neoliberalism, and specifically the role of semiosis in this dynamic. Incidentally, the term semiosis is used here at the outset in preference to ‘discourse’ or ‘language’ to cover all forms of meaning making. The broad objective is to investigate how semiosis figures in the hegemonic struggles around neoliberalism and its debilitating impact on civil society and the discursive spaces available to it. To put this another way, since the inculcation and enactment of the orthodoxy of neoliberalism is in large part a discourse-driven phenomenon, a critical approach to the analysis of semiosis can reveal much about how the process of the closing down of public spaces for forms of genuinely deliberative debate actually takes place. Significantly, although the role of semiosis (and/or discourse) in processes such as these has been recognised by social researchers for some time (Bourdieu 1991, 1997, Foucault 1989, and Laclau & Mouffe 1985), typically the semiosis itself has gone unexamined because the theories that articulate such positions do not have the methods to sufficiently equip researchers to take the next step (Fairclough 2003: 204). This research is therefore very much about taking that next analytical step.

In this case it is the Irish Republic (and specifically, state–civil society interactions) that provides the research focus of both my theoretical and my analytical topics. Since the rapid demise of the period of sustained economic growth witnessed in the pre-2008 era, particular policy failings or oversights, coupled with the impact of the overarching global financial environment have been suggested as the explanation of how things went so badly wrong. The contention here however, is that it is not the nature of economic policy per se (for example, issues such as ‘light touch’ regulation, cronyism, or short-term planning, etc.), to which we must look to identify the fundamentals of the national calamity (see Kirby 2002, O’Hearn 2000, and Ó Riain 2000). Rather, it is to the very set of ideas underlying Ireland’s policy trajectory since the late 1980s (which has resulted in the malaise of the economic sphere in the years after 2008, but also apparent in the social and cultural spheres in years
during the period of economic growth) that this work looks. In particular, the focus must to be on precisely how the operationalisation of the neoliberal blueprint has actively locked out spaces for alternative discourses, and therefore alternative social practices. In a specific focus on Ireland, I am therefore also adding content of a semiotic variety to the common assertions on neoliberalism being ‘differently interventionist’ (Peck 2004: 396). In contrast to the general critical perspective, I again stress that my task is to rigorously interrogate what the semiosis of that set of ideas contained in neoliberalism is doing. In the Irish case although the role of semiosis has been acknowledged (Murphy 2009, Smith 2005), with the possible exception of Phelan (2007b, 2007c), up to this point there has been very little in the way of detailed, structured, and sociolinguistically-oriented attempts to take on such a task that takes as its starting point samples of official government discourse.

1.2 Thesis Aim and Objectives

In a practical sense, formalising the research agenda requires an attempt to uncover the ways in which the neoliberal project’s emergence has discursively construed its own reality. Or rather, to address in a semiotically-oriented way the dynamic asserted by Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001: 4), namely, that neoliberalism brings into being the very realities it seeks to describe. Central among which in the Irish case is the legitimisation of ways of doing and being and the consequent delegitimisation of anything outside of this frame, thereby producing a suppression of counter-hegemonic discourses. Specifically, my interest is in the discursive ways in which the Irish state relates to civil society and the public sphere (that social space where topics of public interest and the public good are discussed in a participatory manner) during the period in question. And particularly so given its need to simultaneously affirm a neoliberal orthodoxy and manage and advance the neoliberal project. For a state to promote the pro-market policy and to ignore public spaces of counter argument is dangerous and runs counter to the professed common agenda of the post-1980s malaise and of the involution that was the new narrative of cooperation and prosperity. Yet to genuinely embrace conflict and dissent in a structured way, to welcome ‘real dialogue’ in an open conjuncture is also dangerous to the prevailing law or, in Bourdieu’s terminology, the nomos and its doxic assumptions (Bourdieu 1977, Chopra 2003). In practice, my interest is therefore in assessing the role of semiosis in supporting or eroding levels of ‘sincere engagement’, or more precisely, in the actual nature of the conjuncture of the public sphere and the Irish state.

The specific aim of my thesis is therefore to undertake a critique of the state’s embrace of neoliberal ideation through a focus on discursive shifts in social practices and
their impact upon the development of social policy. Inherent in my engagement with neoliberal discourse is a recognition of its interest in advancing the role of ‘the market’, reducing the state (its reach and its willingness to invest in a ‘social agenda’, etc.) and advancing notions of individual responsibility. This point is extended to include a questioning of decision-making processes (such as a curtailing of social programmes) and their democratic nature. This position is examined through a focus on ‘depoliticisation’, on the active pursuit of a consensus-generating ethos on policy topics, being a largely discursive manufacturing of a sort of national understanding of how everything (both economic and social) is to be viewed. More specifically, the interest lies in how this official objective of cohesion-management is operationalised in official interactions with the Irish public through formal engagement in the public sphere. The overarching aim with this research is therefore to carry out a semiotic critique which contributes to an assessment of the ways in which an official neoliberally-oriented policy position has been actively contributing to an erosion of conflictual debate (and of the potentialities for such debate) essential to a functioning democracy, through governmental and institutional framing and classification of debates in areas of social policy development, in order to prioritise pro-market and pro-competition imperatives.

In the critical paradigm semiosis and society are understood to partially constitute each other. So where the general aim is to show that which social theory contends is happening in the relationship between the neoliberal project and democracy is actually being accomplished in practice (through the dynamic role of semiosis, as an element of social practice), a response to this overarching aim implies a dialogue between critical socio-political narratives on the one hand, and critical approaches to the study of semiosis centrally involved in the neoliberal project on the other. This requires a structured and detailed analysis of discourse (as a mass-noun) at both the macro and micro-levels (being at both the level of count-noun ‘discourses’ and at the grammatical level). For the purposes of my work this broad task necessarily incorporates a number of more specific objectives that need to be addressed. That is, areas where work has to be done and tangible progress made in order for this research to be in a position to actively contribute to fulfilling its aims. I now turn to the thesis objectives.

The first objective is to contextualise the precise nature of the contemporary neoliberal project. Within this work is an understanding that neoliberalism is a set of processes with a prescriptive blueprint that has moved beyond a purely pro-market economic ethos. That is, that it possesses both material and ideational elements. A central focus of this work is to address the key issue of the project’s undemocratic nature and its facilitation of a
closing down of alternative voices that are not drawn from its market-based logic. In this work I attempt to take a position from which to formalise a semiotic approach to critique. That is to say, my aim is not to add to the current theories and observations on neoliberalism per se, but rather, to take as a starting point existing critical positions that I then seek to operationalise in a novel way. The precise aim therefore is to problematise neoliberalism, constructing it as an object of research, as both a philosophical programme and a practical project, in a way that affords an appropriately productive semiotic point of entry. This work moreover, must advance an approach that also illustrates why a semiotic critique of neoliberalism is a particularly valuable way of responding to my research question on neoliberalism’s anti-democratic nature.

Part of this new contribution to analysis is the issue of a particular focus on Ireland, as a case study in neoliberalism. This means that another objective of my work is to extend the theoretical understandings outlined to the Irish case in the period of recent economic growth, often captured in the term the ‘Celtic Tiger’. Covering the decade from 1997 onwards, my objective is to address the semiosis of a number of emerging social issues which involve dialogue between the state and civil society. Specifically, I am seeking out structured interactions designed to lead to policy development or implementation. In applying my general approach to neoliberalism and semiosis, achieving my objective therefore also requires a contextualisation of the issues under review as well as a further problematisation of each topic for analytical purposes as a way of justifying the identification of particular instances of interaction and the selection of specific texts for analysis. Part of this task involves trying to approach these three separate topics (immigration legislation, childcare policy development, and the Irish social partnership process) in such a way that the problematisation of each subsequent one draws on the way I have dealt with the previous one(s). In terms of the research question moreover, this also helps ensure that the analytical findings combine to produce a final picture that has more weight than the three separate sets of findings added together.

The third objective in this work is the precise formulation of a methodological approach to the analysis of discourse samples. Though this occupies the majority of my novel contribution in this work, by virtue of the interdisciplinary nature of my thesis, the analysis of semiosis demands the prior theorisations on neoliberalism and policy development in Ireland in order to have any coherence and to be of any use. Also, as there is no one method of doing critical discourse analysis, (even when situated within the socio-

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2 ‘The Celtic Tiger’ is not a phrase I use in this work as it is both scientifically ambiguous, relating to a variety of aspects of domestic economic performance, but also as it has been widely employed as a political and cultural signifier for the nation of the Republic of Ireland as a whole during the period being assessed.
cultural paradigm as this work is), the precise make-up of the methodological tool-box employed in each chapter is dictated by the particular way in which the state’s intervention in the public sphere is constructed in each of three general cases, and the way in which the precise issues to be addressed are then theorised in relation to my approach to neoliberalism. The overall aim here however is to outline an approach to semiosis that is socially situated, taking semiosis as a social practice amongst other social practices, as developed by Norman Fairclough and further elaborated in section 1.5, below.

The overall aim here however is to outline an approach to semiosis that is socially situated, taking semiosis as a social practice amongst other social practices, as developed by Norman Fairclough and further elaborated in section 1.5, below.

The final objective relates exclusively to the value-added content of my research, and to supporting the overarching research aim. In terms of the research question and the interrelationship between neoliberalism and the erosion of channels of accountability, of moves to depoliticise and to foment consensus at the expense of engendering genuine debate; the objective is to find a way to approach public sphere discourse in Ireland. Here civil society is understood as collections of actively engaged individuals, as well as organised grassroots and nationally organised community and voluntary groups on a number of social topics. In this regard, my interest in the public sphere is as a space of interaction which can act as a site from which appropriate samples of official discursive interaction with these actors can be drawn. The challenge is to do this in a cumulative way, essentially breaking down the primary aim into a number of methodological aims, by addressing the semiotic aspect of official interaction with civil society based on recent developments in Ireland’s political economy. In practice, this task is addressed in three discrete ways relating to the distinct approaches to the three topics chosen. Specifically, these are an assessment of public consultation on policy development (new immigration legislation), an investigation of an official embrace of civil society in the formulation of new policy (a national childcare policy); and, an interrogation of ideological obfuscation in corraling civil society into adjusting the public sphere itself in the image of the neoliberal project’s objectives and the consequent elision of the possibility for alternatives (the social capital debate).

1.3 Research Question and Summary of Findings

Based on the general hypothesis that neoliberalism brings about a weakening of democracy and democratic institutions in states were it has attained a level of hegemony, and that its effect on the public sphere can be approached through a critical assessment of semiosis as a way of evaluating the validity of such claims; my research question can be stated simply as; can a discourse-analytic approach to the Irish state’s semiotic interaction with the public sphere in the period under review provide evidence of how such an erosion of democratic
legitimacy has happened in practice in that period? And also, can such an undertaking contribute to an understanding of how ideologies become institutionally embedded over time, shaping practices within governance and social life more generally? Or conversely, I could capture the research question by stating that; where the research hypothesis presupposes neoliberalism’s anti-democratic tendencies in the Irish Republic in late modernity can be revealed in its attempt to co-opt the public sphere, then a suitably developed and rigorous critical analysis of samples of official discourse can reveal evidence of how this has happened in practice.

My research therefore is not primarily focused on advancing the powerful idea of the anti-democratic credentials of the neoliberal project in a theoretical sense, but rather, in contributing to the broad critique of neoliberalism by emphasising and demonstrating an understanding of the role of semiosis in this dynamic, through an examination of discourse-in-practice from the contemporary situation of the Republic of Ireland. That is, this work acts as a form of praxis, not so much adding to or filling a gap in the current theoretical literature, but in pushing forward along a path in a direction sign-posted heretofore by critical social researchers yet barely travelled. In short, this research seeks to execute a semiotically-orientated critique of neoliberal ideology in an Irish context and also to illustrate how such a task can be accomplished effectively. Moreover, my research suggests that it is in the area of the state’s relationship with non-aligned active citizens, community groups, and other non-governmental and voluntary organisations that the threat posed to neoliberalism by genuine democracy is most clearly apparent. It is therefore in attempting to assess the semiotic dimension of official neoliberal discourse that we can most clearly see how the state both construes the detail of the nomos and how and to what degree it essentially colonises the public sphere in the arena beyond the field of economic theory and practice that includes the social world and social policy more precisely.

Practically, in the case of Immigration I assess an official public consultation paper on legislation reform from a textual and interdiscursive perspective. In this analysis I identify this public discussion document as state intervention in a broader debate which operates primarily as a public relations document, limiting the scope of how immigration (and immigrants) are to be viewed, and of promoting an understanding of immigration as a key element of a national economic strategy that benefits ‘us’ all. The critique clearly demonstrates a depoliticising strategy with the discussion document seemingly designed to limit the parameters of debate rather than, as it purports, opening them up. In short, in this legislative reform process we see clear evidence of a problematic discursive interaction
between the state and civil society, and of a structurally compromised encounter, that is, of an essentially ‘fake’ public sphere.

With Childcare policy I analyse a Ministerial speech relating to a novel childcare policy initiative, highlighting its recontextualisation of pro-market imperatives and implicit moves to devolve responsibility for policy to parents and the public. I also address the work of the combined state and civil society childcare working group for discursive evidence of how its non-state membership’s preferred practices may have influenced the final national childcare strategy. The analysis of their experience however, shows that their views were ultimately sidelined by the official policy concerns and market imperatives of the state’s own experts throughout the process. That is, childcare was politicised in a particular way, mainly around ways to increase the entry of mothers into the workforce. In this case moreover, all conflictual debate was ultimately diluted by keeping it firmly within the working group structure, which at all times remained an ‘official’ process. This policy development process embodied many of the features of an effective public space, yet while acting as a genuine space of progressive interaction it simultaneously remained a state-controlled space, resulting in a kind of a ‘phantom’ public sphere.

In the case of social policy within the frame of the Social Partnership process I assess the degree to which the process itself may have been a major part of depoliticising debate. This necessitates constructing an approach to social partnership and its institutionalising dynamic, (based on some archaeological analysis of its origin in the 1980s), that sees its semiotic dimension as essentially a neoliberal ‘order of discourse’ in Ireland. The examination of the discursive aspect of partnership-related social policy (the issue of social capital) is undertaken as a form of a critique of the various official strategies employed to effect a desired change, itself contextualised within the ideological critique of the interrelationship between a dominant set of ideas and how such ideation came to attain power in the social partnership process generally. The analysis of the official texts on the ‘Active Citizenship’ initiative moreover, provides evidence of how the hegemonic set of ideas (circulated by state actors) came to be propagated in the practices of civil society actors themselves through their active participation in that public space where the fundamentals of the ideological fix might best have been challenged. As such, civil society interventions with the state as formalised in the social partnership process, demonstrate a compromised, co-opted, or even a hijacked public sphere.

Furthermore, based on the three areas of analysis combined we see the public sphere emerge not simply as a site of depoliticisation, of the operationalisation and management of a non-conflictual neoliberal socio-political agenda in its discursive form, but rather, as an
official focus for precisely such a project. Depoliticisation and an undermining of genuine democratic processes within the Irish Republic do not just affect the operations within the public sphere, rather, (and as per the case of social partnership in particular) we can see that that activity within that space has been identified and co-opted, or perhaps better, ‘infected’ by the state as an integral element of just such a process.

1.4 Thesis Model and Patterns of Inquiry

This thesis employs a sequencing of work that narrows down the theoretical issues that relate to the construction of the objects of research very early within the work. The approach to neoliberalism, semiosis, and public sphere discourse (essentially the literature review), for example, are all theorised within Chapter Two. The third chapter contextualises these issues in relation to Ireland and the specific nature of the topics under analysis from a historical perspective, and while Chapter Four incorporates some of these legacy issues, it primarily relates them to an exposition of my precise methodological approach. The bulk of the thesis however is devoted to the applied analytical work. These three chapters (Five, Six, and Seven) each have two distinct components, a framing element that situates my approach to the topic of each chapter in relation to my general approach to neoliberalism and semiosis (as laid out in chapters Two, Three, and Four), as well as the discourse-analytic component that follows from this theoretical approach. Also, the way in which the three analytical chapters are sequenced and structured as part of a whole, means that the ‘opening out’ work of the thesis, its connection with broader, higher order topics and theoretical implications, takes place cumulatively across these three chapters before the conclusion, as well as being reflected upon further in that final chapter.

In terms of patterns of explanation or inquiry, I am essentially combining an argumentative dimension with an analytical dimension. This twin approach to the work is tied to my thesis’s two key themes; the democratic-deficit at the heart of the neoliberal project and the examination of the central role of semiosis in this dynamic in Ireland. That is, both patterns of explanation inform the approach and are applied to each of the three chapters that deal with the analysis of discourse samples. As these two themes are interrelated, one pattern is not obviously hierarchically above the other. Without the theorisation of neoliberalism and the role of semiosis elaborated in this research (my argumentative approach), the analytical work would have no clear focus and would essentially take place in a vacuum. In such a scenario there would essentially be a lot of analytical data in search of a clear and productive method of assisting it respond to the research question. Yet without the
particular CDA methodology that prioritises the dialectical nature of semiotic practices as part of social practices – as applied separately in each analytical chapter – I would be unable to advance the more general, non-semiotic critiques of neoliberalism. In short, I would be unable to add the necessary content to theoretical contention that works undertaken within critical discourse analysis claim for themselves.

In terms of identifying a starting point for this work I would however point to the argumentative dimension as maintaining primacy. This is because this work is a deductive exercise (see Wodak and Meyer 2009: 19), meaning it is in the first instance informed by a theory (or theories), from which a hypothesis is developed, which is then tested through (discourse) analysis. Essentially, the macro-level socio-political ‘grand theories’ (as summarised in Chapter Four) which underpin the dialectical-relation approach to CDA that I adopt in this work, imply that this work cannot be inductive in nature. That is, and as implied, for example, in the formulation of the research question, it cannot proceed in the first instance from observations (or discourse-analytic findings) from which meso-level generalisations may later be drawn, which might ultimately contribute to the building of some currently unspecified theoretical position. On the contrary, though this is a work of qualitative social research, it proceeds in an explicitly scientific manner.3

In is through this combined pattern of inquiry moreover, that allows each topic of analysis to be approached, to be problematised in such a way as to afford a productive point of semiotic entry that relates to the broader thesis goals. In other words, it is the manner in which the object of research is constructed in each of the three analytical chapters (as influenced by the work of the preceding chapter(s)), that dictates how each discourse sample is to be analysed (what discourse samples are appropriate to examine and what combination of methodological elements are to be applied to such samples, etc). Without such a deductive, theory-based argumentative approach to analysis no one route to the analysis of discursive practices would be any more valid than any other route, raising the potential of describing the results of analysis for their own sake, with no orientation to any understanding of how the semiosis under review relates to the diminution of democracy within a neoliberal paradigm. Essentially, there would be no thesis. This observation therefore also underlines the significance of the breadth of interdisciplinarity that informs this work.

As such, it is the construction of the object of research – which follows from the problematisation of neoliberalism – for each of the topics examined which necessarily

3 In using the term ‘scientific’ I imply a link between data analysis, hypothesis examination, and theory-testing, underwritten by the permanent pursuit of objectivity. I do not seek to maintain however, that the grand theories that underpin critical social research (and this work); such as social constructionism, structuralism, or dialectical materialism (Marxism), are scientific theories in a positivistic sense (see Popper 2000). These positions are understood here to be explanatory theories that remain to be argued for and argued over.
illuminates the analytical route to be followed in each case. This explains why the formulation of an intellectual position in relation to each topic receives a good deal of space at the beginning of each of chapter Five, Six, and at two separate points in the chapter on social partnership in chapter Seven, mirroring the two separate analytical pieces of work undertaken there. In being argumentative, this positioning is necessarily transdisciplinary in origin, but as a thesis that relies on the critical analysis of discourse, these positions, and these interpretations, are not rigorously examined here, and given space constraints within this work, neither are their antitheses. As this work is embedded within a post-structuralist critical paradigm generally, and as a contribution to critical social research more specifically, other than being reviewed in the methodology chapter (as they relate to the origin of critical discourse analysis), the positions underlining my argumentation are largely considered to be exogenous to this work.

Significantly, this combined approach to intellectual inquiry is also a central part of being able to maintain the inherent and obligatory reflexive space that exists within the explanatory critique framework being employed in the analytical chapters. As elaborated in Chapter Four, the combination of a specific way of problematising a semiotic approach to a topic and the nature of the structure of the framework itself (the stages and steps that must be passed through in order for it to deliver what it is designed to do in an effective manner), ensures that the necessary space between (semiotic) analysis and (critical realist) social scientific interpretation of such analysis is guaranteed. Or, once operationalised properly, the parallel approach prevents the analyst from simply projecting her own ideological positions onto the text under analysis. This is because once the theoretically informed approach to the topic is formulated, there is only one way of ‘interpreting’ the analytical findings (as opposed to ‘understanding’ them, or ‘interpreting’ them in the absence of any theoretical problematising of the topic at hand). Interpretation follows analysis and informs explanation, but it is always predicated on the theorisation that prefaces the analysis of the object of inquiry. This also underlines the importance of the dialectical nature of operationalising both the argumentative and analytical patterns of inquiry for each topic of analysis.

1.5 Methodology and Data Sources:

Methodology

If we can say in a general sense from within the sociolinguistic perspective there exists an undeveloped potential for socially enriching the broad discipline, in the transdisciplinary nature of this work, the starting point is a recognition that by internalising the logic of what
we might call the grand narratives of social theory, critical approaches to discourse can operationalise such forms of theorisation through the analysis of semiosis. The word semiosis is used both as a catch-all for the different understandings of the term discourse applied in the social sciences and linguistics, and also in recognition that in the first instance, we are not just talking about spoken language or written text but all systems of meaning making. In a sociolinguistic sense discourse is simply ‘language in use’, but in terms of text production or interdiscursivity it can equate to meaning making as an element of social processes, that is, in an abstract sense, or as a ‘mass’ noun. Often however discourse implies the language associated with a particular social field or practice such as (a form of) political discourse, or public relations discourse (Fairclough 1992, 2003). More accurately, a discourse is seen as the combination of an area of knowledge and the particular way that knowledge is constituted, such as a management discourse on productivity or a market-oriented discourse on higher education. This is the concrete or ‘count’ noun meaning of discourse as in ‘a discourse of freedom’ or ‘the competing discourses of liberty’ etc., and is usually understood as being composed of content, a topic, and a particular subject matter.

What is usually missing in any theoretical specification of the social power of language however is that which shows in detail the ways in which language/discourse actually accomplishes in practice what the theories suggest. That is, how concrete discourses, as representations or classifications of reality, can be operationalised in three ways; being ‘enacted’ in new ways of (inter)acting in various genres; they may be ‘inculcated’ as new ways of being (or identities) in various styles; and may also be physically ‘materialised’, in new ways of organising space (in architecture, urban planning etc.), (Fairclough 2010). So there is a need to develop one theory in dialogue with others. This means that there is necessarily an inherent overlap between descriptions of theory and methodology. But in keeping with the aims of my thesis, the fundamental idea here is to show how one might work in a transdisciplinary way, rather than trying to present a finished re-theorisation. My methodology is essentially Faircloughian, that is, it is socio-culturally situated and is not primarily either a historical critical discourse analysis (Wodak and Meyer 2009) or a cognitive critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk 2009). In common with other critical approaches, this approach presupposes some positions with regard to semiosis generally; that language use is not characterised by free and equal parties; that a critical discourse analyst must go beyond texts to look at the social conditions of their production and interpretation; that semiosis is not separate from society, it is a social institution deeply implicated in culture and politics at every level, and; that semiosis plays a vital role in constituting people’s realities.
But Fairclough’s approach also advances a number of specific positions. Firstly, there is a differentiation of levels of social life, with social practice seen as mediating the relationship between abstract structures and concrete events and actions. Each level has a semiotic element or dimension: languages for the level of structures; orders of discourse (or the social structuring of semiotic difference) for the level of practices, and texts for the level of events and actions. Secondly, this approach to analysis is essentially a form of relational analysis. This covers relations between semiotic and non-semiotic elements (of social processes), relations between levels, especially between texts and orders of discourse, and relations within orders of discourse and within texts. Thirdly, relations are understood as being dialectical, that is, relations between elements which are different but not discrete, where one element can be ‘internalised’ in others. Fourthly, the methodology sees action, representation (or ‘construal’), and identification as three primary, simultaneous, and interconnected facets of social process and social interaction, and views genres, discourses, and voices respectively as the equivalent semiotic elements at the level of social practices.

Practically, and in terms of specific categories of analysis employed in this work, the application of this methodology comprises elements of both internal and external language analysis. That is, I deploy a combination of close linguistic analysis of texts, with a focus on issues of transitivity and modality in particular. Drawing on Halliday’s work on systemic functional linguistics, these relate respectively to the ideational metafunction of language (how experiences of the world are presented and communicated), and to the interpersonal metafunction (the ways in which individuals and groups maintain relations, interact with and influence each other). I also operationalise an interdiscursive analysis of semiotic practice, with a particular focus on genre (as a relatively stable set of conventions that are enacted in a socially ratified activity) and discourse (as the combination of an area of knowledge and the way in which that understanding is construed).

I also operationalise Fairclough’s elaboration of the concept of an ‘order of discourse’ (from Foucault but adapted by Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999) as the semiotic aspect of a social order, or the semiotic structuring of social difference, and Fairclough’s operationalisation of the four moments of a ‘dialectics of discourse’ (Harvey 1996), and the stages of emergence, hegemony, recontextualisation, and operationalisation. Added to this is Fairclough’s interdisciplinary extension of Bernstein’s concepts of ‘framing’ and ‘classification’ (Bernstein 1990, 1996), which contribute to critical assessments of samples of public sphere discourse in terms of their genres and discourses, respectively. In terms of examinations of depoliticisation strategies in particular, I also work with Van Leeuwen’s work on legitimation strategies, in particular on ‘authorisation’ (legitimation by reference to
the authority of tradition, custom, law or persons), and ‘rationalisation’ (legitimation by reference to the utility of institutionalised action) (Van Leeuwen 2007). Finally, I also employ Fairclough’s distinction between ‘strategic’ and ‘ideological’ critique (Fairclough 2005). Strategic critique is understood as an interrogation of strategies employed to effect a desired change and where ideological critique addresses the interrelationship between a dominant set of ideas and how that set comes to attain power.

At all times my work remains embedded within a realist and specifically a ‘critical realist’ ontology (Fairclough 2010: 164), which asserts that there is a real world that exists independently of our knowledge of it and of whether or how we represent it. This perspective necessarily rejects versions of discourse theory which collapse the distinction between reality and discourse, yet also asserts that the real world is socially-discursively constructed (see Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). The relationship between semiosis and extra-semiotic factors (social actors, social relations, practical contexts, etc.) is always one of dialectical internal relations, as the elements of social practice remain different but not discrete. A distinction is therefore drawn between construal (how things are construed or represented) and construction (the material effects of construals), where the move from the former to the latter is contingent on extra-semiotic as well as semiotic conditions. This critical-realist approach also underpins the methodological framework that I operationalise in my analysis of discourse samples. Drawing on Bhaskar’s work on critical realism (1986), the normative ‘explanatory critique’ framework covers a number of stages involved in conceiving of the topic of analysis in a particular way such that its interrogation allows for a semiotic point of entry. This framework will be elaborated in appropriate detail in Chapter Four and is operationalised in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

Data and Sources

In terms of my particular research aims, the sources of analysis necessarily share a number of features. Firstly, all texts are official governmental documents either directed at the public or otherwise publically accessible. In an attempt to exclude the possibility that the results analysed can be undermined by claims that I am merely addressing others’ versions of official texts, from the researcher’s perspective a minimum necessary step in attempting to access the genuine voice of government and the state is therefore to focus completely on ‘unmediated’ or unfiltered texts. Secondly, the texts addressed can also be seen as primary sources of official thinking and policy development. That is, they are not official pronouncements that relate to existing, more significant texts. This step is taken in an attempt to ensure that the texts under review can be assumed to have been worked on with
some planning, rigour, and structured by politicians, civil servants, and other official bodies to accomplish a particular task. As my duty in addressing the research problem is to be detailed, rigorous, and consistent, I have no interest in catching the government or institutions ‘off-guard’, I have no desire to draw conclusions through ‘door-stepping’ official voices, so to speak. This is not a work of investigative journalism or of forensic fault-finding for its own sake. Far from trying to eek out cracks in the public face of officialdom, I am at all times interested rather, in that which the state is happy to put in the public domain and for public consumption.

In taking this position moreover, I seek to invoke a central aspect of my methodological approach to addressing the research problem; namely, publically-oriented documents necessarily have a level of accessibility, an absence of jargon, or technical language, and eschew any programmatic or even stylistic elements that wilfully recycle ideas and arguments borrowed from any not-so-transparent sources. Of course, I say ‘wilfully’ since any collection of utterances, verbal and written, necessarily draws upon, and to a greater or lesser extent internalises other texts (and discourses), the unpicking of which is very much a part of my task in this work. This accessibility factor is significant too not just from the perspective of research access, but because a part of the work of the text, of what the content of any document is enacting and representing (as part of a network of social practices), can be illustrative of the broader issue under investigation. In other words, publishing publically accessible documents on any topic involves the author doing something different than would be the case with essentially internal texts. These texts have to do more things; to accomplish something extra in comparison to non-public documents – all the while prioritising clarity, brevity, and accuracy – and in attempting to execute their task, the particular choices made by the text’s author can be a significant semiotic point of entry for analysis.

Specifically, I analyse the Irish Government’s consultation paper on immigration legislation reform (2005); the social partnership-originating report of the Expert Working Group on Childcare’s policy document (1998) and a Government speech text at the launch of a new childcare funding policy (2006); and with regard to social partnership itself, I address the original NESC background documents to the first social partnership agreement (1986 & 1987) and two separate texts (a background document and a report) from the Taoiseach’s Active Citizenship ‘social capital’ initiative from 2007. The detail of these particular texts chosen for analysis is presented and justified in each analytical chapter. It should be clear that though there is a certain subjective element to the choice of topic for each analytical chapter, the emergence of particular social issues, their intrinsic and specific policy
dynamics, and the nature of their conjuncture with the public sphere in the period under analysis, in large part dictates the sorts of topics and texts appropriate for analysis.\(^4\)

### 1.6 Thesis Summary

The structure of the thesis reflects its two main themes, the aims, and the four specific objectives, as outlined. In investigating how the operationalisation of the set of ideas at the heart of that neoliberal blueprint eagerly taken up by successive governments in Ireland from the mid-1980s onwards actively locked out spaces for alternative discourses and the central role of semiosis in this dynamic, the aspiration remains political. Though the research is not proposed as a work of political economy, with its particular analytical focus and method, in adding to general critiques of the contemporary neoliberal project, it can be seen as a contribution towards a cultural political economy of contemporary social change in Ireland. Consequently, Chapter Two deals with neoliberalism. Situating its development in its historical post-Second World War context and in undertaking a form of literature review, I summarise its salient philosophical and programmatic features, and reflect on how it has successfully managed to become the dominant economic doctrine of the past thirty years. Situating my approach with the critical perspective, I construct neoliberalism as an economic project with material ramifications far beyond this field. I also reflect on how this dynamic relates to shifts in the networks of social practices producing new ways of acting, new construals of reality, and new identities. That is, how this embracing of neoliberalism relates to semiosis.

In formulating an approach to neoliberalism I have gone through a number of steps that at the outset are not clearly related. The first of these is a recognition that the real world conditions of political engagement with neoliberalism do not see a reduction in the size of the state but rather, the opposite. That where neoliberalism maintains a position of orthodoxy, it is essentially dependent on and bolstered by the nation state and state structures, eroding national sovereignty, and reducing states to an essentially apolitical, but a significant managerial role. An important aspect of this management of the neoliberal project is the depoliticisation and eradication of any heterodoxic approaches to the perceived naturalness of neoliberal dominance. This is reinforced by another feature of the literature review, that is, that the signifier ‘neoliberal’ or ‘neoliberalism’ is rarely if ever employed by governments

\(^4\) All analysed texts and significant related texts mentioned in the analytical chapters are presented digitally as PDF files on the CD-ROM attached to the hard copy of this thesis. See also appendices 1–4 for more information.
and official bodies that have embraced its ethos. Neoliberalism is not identified directly but somewhat tangentially through a range of other signifiers such as ‘globalisation’ or even simply as ‘change’. Such terms are themselves problematic since they are readily presented by officialdom as causes of change, as anthropomorphised entities, rather than as consequences of the actions of other forces.

This disidentification with the neoliberal label is important since it highlights the role of ideas and the value of semiosis and shifts in semiotic practices. In essence, the question of whether globalisation exists or is possessed of agency becomes irrelevant. Rather, the value of the idea that globalisation – or some other external actor – might be responsible for forcing the hand of sovereign governments, and transnational institutions in the decisions that they take and the choices they are making becomes much more important. Crucially, I present this link between ideational transformation and the material consequences that follow from ‘change’ or ‘modernity’ or ‘globalisation’ as the step that affords a semiotic point of entry into a critical engagement with neoliberalism. I develop this point by drawing on Bourdieu’s work on state theory to elaborate the notion of neoliberal discourse as essentially the contemporary orthodoxy of the economy-oriented, pro-market habitus, as that which delimits the realm of possible semiotic practice and therefore the world of possible social practice. Neoliberal discourse assumes a position as the law of the possible, a doxa (Bourdieu 1997, 1998a, 1998b). In essence, the contemporary state becomes central to a meta-paradigm, with government actively managing the value-system between networks of social practices.

In this approach the public sphere is not approached critically simply because it provides an opportunity to examine discursive interactions between civil society and the state, which it does, but because if this assessment of the functioning of power through semiotic practices is true, the public sphere becomes a central battleground in official moves to advance the national neoliberal nomos and of inculcating its doxic assumptions in the mind of citizens. The precise challenge in this work therefore becomes how to do this through a critical approach to semiosis that takes this broad perspective into account. This is the focus of Chapter Four, where I elaborate the various methods being employed in my critical discourse analysis and their corresponding theoretical basis.

But before moving onto these methodological issues, in Chapter Three I contextualise the general observations on neoliberalism and semiosis by bringing the discussion back to Ireland. I begin with a broad historical reflection on the state’s economic and political trajectory. I briefly highlight how the opening up of the national economy to international trade, which culminated in the neoliberal turn of the mid-1980s, can be identified in policy changes that emerged as early as the 1950s. Nevertheless, I maintain that what might appear
to have been a gradual and relatively smooth process resulting in a preference for market openness, privatisation of national assets, financial deregulation, and a diminishing welfare spend spread out over three decades actually only came about through a relatively brief moment of radical policy change bourn of economic recession and of social and industrial unease. Significantly for this work, these changes also incorporated new forms of thinking and acting that departed greatly from the preceding model. I then reflect separately on the three topics addressed in my analytical chapters that follow, by assessing the relevant historical, political, and social developments in each field of analysis in the period immediately preceding the publication of the texts being addressed and in relation to the broad neoliberal policy-paradigm shift that has taken place.

In addressing the semiotic aspect of immigration policy development and the legislative process, for example, I begin by summarising the relatively recent need to respond to increasing inward flows of non-nationals to Ireland, and the desire from some elements of the state that this flow be actively facilitated. I look at some of the ways this has been approached and how, in the years up to the legislative process being analysed in Chapter Five, the issue of national economic competitiveness emerged as the dominant element of official discourse on immigration. In terms of a historical overview of childcare and childcare provision in Ireland, the period up to the end of the millennium can generally be characterised by an absence of formal state-funded, or even state-regulated and managed childcare facilities, and rather, by informal familial arrangements undertaken by most parents in need of childcare. As with the immigration discourse, the official framing of the growing demand for structured and affordable official childcare programmes was very much tied to the issue of work, and an expanding need for flexible labour, specifically by the motivation to free up women (and therefore mothers) to fill emerging gaps in the expanding economy. In these discourses the equality agenda, where present, is forever construed in a secondary role, permanently in a dialectical relationship with the greater economic agenda on the one hand, and with the issues of child health and welfare on the other.

The concertation process that is Irish social partnership emerged as a formal macro-level collective bargaining process as part of the state’s neoliberal turn in 1987, which followed a sequence of earlier centralised wage-bargaining deals between government and trade unions. In the years since the first agreement new programmes have been drawn up every three years up until 2005 when the seventh successive deal was agreed for the ten year period up to 2016. Seen by many as a key factor in engendering Ireland’s economic growth from the mid-1990s up to the 2008, over time the programmes have expanded well beyond the original concerns of economic growth, fiscal policy management, and labour relations
issues, to incorporate social policy as well. As a tri-partite bargaining process originally involving government, industry, workers, and farmers (and since 1996 incorporating civil society bodies), the series of social partnership agreements have essentially operated as contractual templates for managing the economy in initially very difficult times. Given partnership’s reach, authority, and institutionalising potential however, critical reflections on the process also highlight its ideal (and ideological) role in fomenting consent around the parameters of the policy agenda and the ways in which progress is to be understood and evaluated.

In the fourth chapter I return to the origin and content of the critical discourse-analytical methodology adopted in this work (CDA). Embedded in the field of sociolinguistics and discourse analysis generally, I explain and offer a justification for the critical nature of my interdisciplinary method, stressing why it is an appropriate form of discourse analysis for the research undertaken in this work. I start by providing an account of the historical development of critical discourse analysis from within sociolinguistics, while also incorporating social-constructionist perspectives from beyond the field of linguistics that have influenced the discipline. I provide an overview of CDA, explaining some of the basic concepts central to its programme and highlighting the variety of approaches that exist within the field. The majority of the chapter however is devoted to an elaboration of Fairclough’s contemporary dialectical-relational approach to analysis. Central to this perspective is Foucault’s focus on the relationship between power and language and the concept of discourses as networks of social practices that are productive, simultaneously reflecting and exercising power relations through semiosis.

The account however stresses the need to transpose these theoretical perspectives to a close linguistic analysis of samples of text, incorporating a macro-level interdiscursive analysis combined with a micro-level analysis of text grammar. I therefore devote considerable space to Fairclough’s use of Bhaskar’s ‘explanatory critique’ framework employed in the analytical chapters, and in reflecting on the interdisciplinary nature of the methodology, I also offer a justification for employing this approach as well as highlighting how objectivity and reflexivity are essentially built into the operationalisation of the framework, thereby maintaining the distinction between processes of analysis and processes of interpretation. I also address Fairclough’s work on the dialectics of discourse, as well as his method for assessing public sphere dialogue drawn from Bernstein. The precise theorisation of each topic analysed largely dictates the choice of particular criteria for text selection and the discourse categories to be analysed, and though this dynamic is summarised
in Chapter Four, the actual justification for the analysis of particular texts and categories is explained within the individual data-analysis chapters that follow.

The subsequent chapter, Chapter Five, introduces a sequence of three data analysis chapters that look respectively at immigration legislation, childcare policy development, and the social partnership process. These chapters represent the core, value-added content of my research. In addressing the semiotic aspect of immigration policy development and the legislative process, the picture presented in Chapter Three helps to contextualise the significance of the proposed change to immigration legislation being proposed by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR) from 2001 onwards. This leads directly to the identification of its public discussion document (2005) as a central text in engendering public input in the development of this policy, and of framing of Government’s understanding of the topic (specifically, through the Minister and his Department). This informs the construction of my approach to immigration discourse as an object of research that sees the consultative process as an official exercise in depoliticising a potentially controversial issue. In prioritising an acceptance of the understanding of immigration in the contemporary interconnected world that the state wishes to deploy, I address the official consultation document as a mechanism for collecting and essentially suppressing and marginalising potentially ‘unhelpful’ contributions, and for disseminating discourse and consolidating practices that tie policy change to issues of national economic wellbeing.

The next chapter, the sixth, assesses the discourse of the emergence of a national childcare policy. The central focus for an analysis of childcare discourse centres on the 1998 report of the Expert Working Group (EWG) on childcare. This is composed of a broad coalition of actors and agencies, many of whose members are drawn from civil society organisations following the post-1996 expansion of the social partnership programme to include representatives from the community and voluntary sector. This government-initiated process produced a far-reaching report that set out a picture of the state-of-play with regard to formal childcare provision in the state, a rationale for future policy, and a set of best-practice recommendations. This blueprint covered both actions to make access to childcare easier and more affordable for parents, as well as steps designed to increase the number of formal childcare places available, including moves to develop a childcare sector within the economy. As an ostensibly non-governmental document, my semiotic analysis does not focus on this report exclusively, but I seek to address the operations of the EWG as a potential public sphere in itself. In drawing on Fairclough’s operationalisation of Bernstein’s concepts of ‘framing’ and ‘classification’ as they relate to open and balanced dialogical processes, as well as the analysis of its interdiscursive component, the analytical work on this text is therefore
not only central to the work of this chapter but to the analytical project of my thesis as a whole.

This analysis however, also follows a focus on a separate childcare text, where the latter is provided as a way to contextualise the ideation around the official state position on childcare and childcare provision, as implemented in the years after the completion of the EWG’s work. Specifically, this step involves the analysis of a speech from the Minister for Children (2006), with an examination of its representations of topics such as ‘parental choice’ and ‘partnership’ through its discursive structure, its forms of genre-mixing, and by way of a textual focus on issues of transitivity and modality. This analytical approach, in covering issues such as the institutionalisation of Irish social policy as an arm of economic policy, also links back to the immigration chapter’s findings, as well as providing a focus for the final analytical chapter. Specifically, the analysis of the cases of immigration and childcare demonstrate how market concerns such as ‘national competitiveness’ and levels of ‘labour market flexibility’ have come to dictate policy choices and in the case of childcare in particular, the role of the consensus-generating social partnership process has emerged as central to advancing such policy prioritisation.

The final data-analysis chapter, Chapter Seven, looks at the Irish social partnership process. As intimated through the findings of the discourse on childcare, this ‘partnership’ apparatus came to play a central role in the public management of the relationship between citizens and the Irish state in late modernity. In an investigation of the state-centred push for political consensus and the suppression of dissent that sees depoliticisation of topics manifest in the public sphere, a question central to the work within this chapter is whether the co-option of potentially conflictual voices through the partnership process is a consequence of official moves to suppress debate, or rather, part of an official strategy manifesting itself in a corrupt and asymmetric public sphere. The central role of the process in Ireland’s economic and social development from the 1980s to the 2000s therefore makes social partnership’s semiotic aspect a uniquely valuable object of analysis as a contribution to an understanding of the relationship between neoliberal ideology, government policy, democracy legitimacy, and the possibilities open to civil society to effect change through participation in a healthy public sphere. In recognition of social partnership’s institutionalising power, and in a departure from data analysed to-date, this chapter assesses discourse samples from the period before the 1997 start-date employed heretofore. In applying this more diachronic process, I advance a theorisation of social partnership as a form of radical policy paradigm change in Ireland in the mid-1980s and examine the emergence of specific ideological elements within the National Economic and Social Council’s (NESC) 1986 report, which have become
institutionalised in the social partnership documents and the resulting discourses and practices over time. This reveals the genesis of an Irish neoliberal social order manifest in an order of discourse which, it will be argued, is ostensibly social partnership’s semiotic dimension.

Working in the area of the dialectics of discourse (Fairclough 2001a, 2005), and as a form of ideological critique, I firstly follow the NESC ideation to see how that which has since become hegemonic has emerged historically, and also how such ideas and practices have then come to be recontextualised and ultimately operationalised in new representations, in new ways of acting, and in new ways of being (in new discourses, in new genres, and in new voices respectively) in the area of social policy in the mid-2000’s. In this synchronic task I focus specifically on the emergent issue of ‘social capital’, and its role in the broader policy area of community development and the ‘active citizenship’ initiative, led by the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern. This work is undertaken as a form of strategic critique, of the measures pursued by the government and the state to inculcate a form of neoliberal cultural governance through the partnership process on social policy in a specific case. This is designed to compliment the ideological critic of on the origin of neoliberal blueprint in the NESC texts, to assess to what degree these now hegemonic practices (through their discursive elements) have managed to colonise the field of social policy.

This chapter therefore concludes as an interrogation of the ‘ideological obfuscation’ inherent in corraling civil society into a radically reoriented public sphere construed in the image of the neoliberal nomos, and the consequent elision of possibilities for the emergence of alternative discourses and practices. By moving outside the period of data analysis of Chapters Five and Six, and by undertaking an archaeology of the post-boom hegemonic practices, this chapter builds on the findings of the two previous chapters to consolidate an analysis of official semiotic practice. Here I demonstrate how the Irish state has advanced the undemocratic credentials of the contemporary political field, and the manner in which the project has restricted civil society’s role through proactive interference in the public sphere, precisely by identifying spaces of public debate as a focus for colonisation by depoliticised practices, through a partnership-focused order of discourse.

In the final chapter of the thesis, my conclusion, I return to the research question by bringing the disparate findings of the work together as a whole. In summarising the conclusions of each chapter in order, and in drawing on the analytical chapters in particular, I reflect on the two themes of the democratic deficit at the heart of neoliberalism and the role of semiosis in bringing this situation into being. I also conclude the work of the explanatory critique framework by undertaking its final third and fourth stages, linking the discourse
analytical findings of Chapters Five, Six and Seven with the framework’s broader social research concerns. In terms of the over-arching research question; to see to what extent evidence has been found to support the contention that the Irish state’s neoliberal-orientation has undermined dialogue and debate through adversely affecting the state of the public sphere, I reflect on what this work has actually achieved. Finally, I broaden out my work’s focus, connecting it with higher order, theoretical issues on which this work is constructed; such as issues of critiques of neoliberalism, Irish polity in the contemporary period, as well as to critical approaches to the analysis of semiosis, more generally. And in touching again on the contributions of Bourdieu, Foucault, and Gramsci, I point to some potentially fruitful future avenues of research, both within critical approaches to the analysis of discourse, but also within post-structuralist approaches to the study of society and to critiques of power, in a broader sense.

* * *
Chapter Two

Neoliberalism, Discourse, and the Question of the Public Sphere

In essence, neoliberalism is an economic philosophy that prioritises a free market for the exchange of goods and services, coupled with an absence of interference by the state. This utopian ideology, developed by a few economists and intellectuals after the Second World War, has however, never lived up to its goals. In fact, as the programme has gained traction it seems not only incapable of extricating global economic operations from the grip of the nation state, but on the contrary, it has come to increasingly depend upon the state and other transnational structures, expanding them to ever greater degrees. This anomaly demonstrates how much of the original neoliberal socio-economic theory is unrecognisable from the contemporary reality. In practice, neoliberalism seems to be full of contradictions, existing in a variety of forms that show no evidence of converging to a common blueprint, while apparently inflating the power of those very governance and management structures it proposes must disappear. Yet this once obscure set of ideas has over the past forty years, assumed an almost unshakable grip on the thinking and actions of governments, institutions, and policy makers worldwide, such that it has a bearing on almost all aspects of political and social life, far beyond the field of economic theory and practice.

The genesis of neoliberal theory is concentrated around a small group of intellectuals that gathered at the Swiss spa resort of Mont Pèlerin in 1947. The main thrust for the development of a contemporary neoliberal economic theory came from Friedrich von Hayek (1944, 1960). Following the totalitarian experiences of the preceding fifteen years in Europe, the new liberalists believed that the core enlightenment values of individual freedom, including freedom of thought and human dignity, were in peril, with Hayek going as far as to claim that ‘the central values of civilisation are in danger’ (Harvey 2005: 20). Particularly suspicious of collective models of society that were emerging from the east, the ‘neo’-liberals and their ideological supporters (such as the contemporary intellectuals Isaiah Berlin and Karl Popper), were particularly mistrustful of historiography, of theories of contemporary and future social needs based on conclusions drawn from historical precedent. In particular, this was a pointed rejection of classical Marxism’s perceived deterministic historicity, with its focus on the conflict of class forces and its anticipation of the inevitability of a collectivist future, of the dictatorship of the proletariat (see Hayek 1988). At Mont Pèlerin this extant tension was presented starkly as an antagonism of theories over morals. As well as fearing for the soul of the individual, and in drawing on the classical liberalism as advanced by Adam
Smith, this group was convinced that a decline in the merit of private property and a competitive market was a real threat to potential human existence.¹

The issue in this work is not to attempt to explain how such a once peripheral philosophical position driven by a market-oriented economic recipe became the pangloss of the contemporary period. This point has already received much attention from many scholars across a number of disciplines over many years – from Polanyi to Piketty.² In the context of the general research question of the extent to which collective discourse can determine the conditions of social life, the particular interest of this work is rather, the question of how democracy has fared in this transformative period and the role played by the semiotic aspect of neoliberalism in bringing this dynamic, this contemporary fix into being and overseeing its consolidation, and explicitly so in the case of the Irish Republic. Drawing on existing critiques of neoliberalism, I propose that the key to the rise of neoliberal hegemony lies in the fact that its strength always lay in its ‘ideological appeal’ rather than in its ‘analytical rigour’ (Clarke 2005: 58). As Hayek (1960) maintained, at its most basic, neoliberalism was a battle for ideas. The link between neoliberal ideation and its reality, I suggest, offers a productive route into a critical engagement with the phenomenon as a social research topic.

Specifically, as social practices imply social processes of cognition and representation, an engagement with ideation through a focus on the ideational functioning of discourse, (constituting systems of knowledge and belief) – what Foucault (1972 and 1984) calls ‘objects’ – supplemented with a focus on the interpersonal functioning, constituting social subjects (‘identities’ or ‘forms of self’), as well as social relations between subjects, can produce a critical analysis of the ideology of neoliberalism in practice. This understanding highlights how discourses (or samples of discourse in specific texts), negotiate the socio-cultural contradictions and differences which are thrown up in social situations. Text producers have nothing but the given conventions of language and of orders of discourse (the semiotic aspect of social ordering) as resources when dealing with the tensions created by the emergence of powerful and novel discourses, but they can use these resources in new ways, generating new configurations of genres and discourses. In this light, critical discourse analysis can add empirical evidence to a critique of neoliberalism and its anti-democratic nature.

¹ Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations is seen as the ideological blueprint for liberalism, but as Toporowski notes, Smith believed that to operate effectively, markets needed to be well-coordinated. That is, in the classical liberal view, markets were never assumed to have some intrinsic way of running smoothly or acting in a benign manner, (2005: 215). See also Polanyi for a general critique of the emerging ‘market society’ (1944).
² See Polanyi (1944) and Piketty (2014)
This however is not a simple or straightforward task, and much of this chapter is devoted to constructing neoliberalism as an object of research in such a manner that it affords a (critical) discourse analytic approach which is appropriate and applicable, qualitatively rigorous, usefully productive, but which is also accessible and transparent. This means that the problematisation of neoliberalism as a research topic is necessarily foregrounded by a deeper interrogation of neoliberalism itself, which draws on observations on its real world characteristics as per existing literature from a number of disciplines. From such work, we see, for example, a recognition of the fact that variation is a central feature of comparative analysis of empirically existing cases of neoliberalism. Added to this is the assertion that there is no trend towards convergence to any ideal neoliberalism model. I then connect these observations to the further realisation that neoliberalism, as an identifying label or signifier, is usually never explicitly invoked by those states and cooperating institutions that seem to advocate its prescriptive content. That is to say, neoliberalism is largely signified through processes of disidentification. This naturally leads to an examination of globalisation as one of the primary signifiers most regularly deployed in place of neoliberalism, and of what role it might be playing ideationally, in terms of both discursive practices and broader social practices. It is through this route that the centrality of semiosis in sustaining the neoliberal enterprise becomes starkly apparent. This section finishes with a reflection on some existing analytical work with a general CDA framework that has been carried out on signifiers of disidentification in the Irish case.

In section two I introduce the theoretical position that underlines the approach that I am using in my analytical work. Drawn from Pierre Bourdieu, and his conception of ‘neoliberalism as doxa’, I explain what this entails and how this detailed interrogation of neoliberalism – as it relates to his theory of the state – can benefit empirical approaches to the analysis of neoliberalism and its role in the undermining of democracy, through an analysis of appropriate samples of discourse. In underwriting the critical methodology, as outlined in the Chapter Four, I present this reading of Bourdieu’s contribution of neoliberalism as doxa, essentially as the prevailing social order, with its semiotic aspect acting as an order of discourse. That is, as a way of improving critical engagement with neoliberalism’s semiotic aspect from an interdisciplinary perspective, and also as an advance on existing ways of approaching critiques of neoliberal discourses. I follow this section with a return to the issue of constructing neoliberalism as an object of inquiry by advancing the notion of the public sphere, as it relates to the potential space of interaction between the state and civil society. I propose a focus on the public sphere and on public sphere dialogue as essentially an index of the relative health of the state of democracy in the Irish republic in a period of dramatic
political and social change. More explicitly, where the research question relates to democracy and neoliberalism’s deleterious effects upon it, I introduce a focus on the dialectical space of the public sphere as a productive locus of my analytical work.

The adoption of the public sphere as an arena of analysis follows similar work undertaken by Fairclough (2000, 2001b) as part of his critique of the New Labour project in the UK and Preoteasa (2002) on post-Communist Romania. This approach maintains that samples of official texts can be shown to discursively compromise public sphere debate; either by delimiting what is possible and admissible or otherwise reconfiguring the available discursive resources within any network of social practices with the hegemonic discourses from the field of liberal economics. In being understood as symptomatic of interventions in, and potentially a crisis of, the public sphere, such dynamics can be viewed as evidence of a curtailing of democracy. My approach to the public sphere is also advanced by insights from Habermas, and from Bourdieu in particular, and his concern for a focus on instances of ‘systematically distorted communication’. Significantly then, the public sphere is presented as a focus for analysis not simply because it provides an opportunity to identify discourse samples that can be evaluated for discursive evidence of shifting sets of practices. Rather, it is because in instances where the neoliberal order of discourse has managed to attain a level of hegemony, that sites of discursive interaction – such as the public sphere – will be implicated in this process, and therefore in subsequent processes of the operationalisation of the neoliberal social order in evermore domains through ongoing semiotic practices.

2.1 Engaging Neoliberalism and its Anomalies

Neoliberalism is an economic and political process that gives form and content to contemporary capitalism. At its most basic neoliberalism seeks to ‘subject every aspect of social life to the logic of the market, and to make everything into a commodity that can be privately owned and bought and sold for a profit’, (Harman 2008). In essence it is an economic philosophy that prioritises a free market for the exchange of goods and services, but significantly, and unlike the Keynesian managed model of capitalism, the philosophy also demands a total absence of interference by the state. Emerging as an ideological force in the post-war years of the mid-twentieth century, and drawing heavily from classical liberalism of the eighteenth century and Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* in particular, it can therefore be seen as ‘capitalism stripped of its Keynesian appendages, capitalism in its monopoly phase’, (Klein 2007: 253). Or, as Nef and Robles (2000: 32) put it, ‘In the post Cold War and largely unipolar world, neoliberalism has become entrenched as a global ideology [which] has
hegemonic strength among the core sectors within the Group of Seven countries [...] and is distinctively neoclassical, elitist, and monistic'. In historical processes of ‘social learning, and in drawing on Kuhn’s work on the emergence of fundamental paradigm shifts in scientific theory, in terms policy paradigms, Hall (1993) likens neoliberalism’s rise to prominence as just such a radical or ‘third order’ form of change.

The current brand of liberalism emerged rather slowly and in a haphazard fashion after the end of the Second World War, primarily in a theoretical form based on the writings of Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman. It was these post-War idealistic supporters of the classical liberal model that adopted the prefix ‘neo’ to acknowledge their debt to the laissez-faire practices advanced by the mercantile classes of two centuries earlier. As a perceived ‘self-directing automatic system’ the market was seen as the fundamental guarantor of liberty and parity (Hayek 1960). Also, in maintaining that there could never be any identifiable universal ‘common good’, but only an amalgamation of disparate and different interests, politicians could never be expected to respond to such a notion. The market rather, was viewed as the only true arbiter of taste and need, as the ‘only true voting machine’ (Curtis 2007). In such views it is clear that the ‘new liberalism’ was, from the outset, embedded in a holistic philosophy far beyond the field of economic theory and practice.

Yet despite its current stranglehold on contemporary economic policy, neoliberalism has only gained favour in the last forty years. What was once viewed as a marginal doctrine only gained traction following the perceived collapse of the Keynesian model after the oil-crisis of the early 1970s. Indeed, this fact is illustrated in the choice of title for Keith Joseph’s book of the mid-1970s, which sought to promote neoliberal ideas in the British Conservative Party and within British politics generally; namely, ‘Reversing the Trend’. As Peck points out, it was the ‘exhaustion of Keynesianism and developmental economics’ that left a space for neoliberalism (2004: 401). In reality it is thanks primarily to the British example of Margaret Thatcher’s post-1979 Conservative Party government, and the work of the Federal Reserve in Washington under Paul Volcker (appointed in the same year), that saw an end to the post-War Keynesian compromise of the ‘New Deal’, to be replaced by this new ‘liberalism’. This new set of ideas is characterised by Harvey as ‘the guiding principle of economic thought and management’, which moreover affirms that:

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3 As one of the few political advocates for neoliberalism of the time, founder of the Centre for Policy Studies, and ideological influence on that original small cohort of the British Conservative party that supported Margaret Thatcher in her bid for party leadership, Joseph’s 1975 work was a plea to his party and its supporters for action on a range of issues from a free-market perspective, such as the problem of trade unions, the limits of monetarism alone, and the economic benefits of inequality.
human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. (2005: 2)

A central point to make is that neoliberalism as a set of practices, a process, cannot be defined in purely theoretical terms. That is to say, it is not a model of production with a set of ever-present features (such as ‘feudalism’ or ‘capitalism’). Some features are concrete and measurable, such as the privatisation of goods and services, while others, such as the debasement of democracy and the financialisation of the economy, are more abstract. Though quite separate from ‘imperialism’ and (as will be seen) ‘globalisation’, neoliberalism is inseparable from both of these phenomena (see Saad-Filho and Johnston, 2005: 1-2).

According to Jessop (2000), the core tenets of the neoliberal blueprint are generally held to be:

- Economic disinvestments by the state
- A reinforcement of its police and penal components
- A deregulation of financial flows
- A relaxation of administration controls on the employment market
- A reduction of social protection
- The moralising celebration of individual responsibility

In his book *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962) however, Milton Friedman essentially reduces neoliberalism to just three basic imperatives, namely; deregulate, privatise, and cutback spending on social programmes. This prescription is underwritten by the assertions that the market delivers free choice and the most efficient use of resources, and that ‘free’ public services, from, for example, public libraries to higher education, are wasteful. The sensible option from this perspective rather, is to establish private property rights and instigate user fees (see Allen 2007: 37). Ultimately, according to Harvey; the purpose of neoliberalism is to ‘disembed’ capitalism from the existing pattern of ‘embedded liberalism’ (2005:11). That is, the network of prevailing social and political constraints that has built up in western democracies, whereby states actively intervene in industrial policy (such as collective wage-bargaining arrangements), resulting in a situation where all corporate activity is tied up in a web not of the business sector’s own making, but with which it is forced to engage.

Significantly, the broader project, where it can be seen to have active support, is underwritten by outwardly neutral and often transnational entities. That is, by groups who
remain unaccountable to any nation state, or group of states, but whom, since the end of the Second World War, have managed to gain ever greater influence over the global economy. Indeed, it is this very lack of institutional accountability to national governments that is a key feature of neoliberalism’s anti-democratic nature. This arrangement naturally undermines the democratic legitimacy of the choices made by national governments who have embraced the new pro-market blueprint. As per Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001), these include:

- The IMF, the World Bank, the OECD, the EU
- Conservative think-tanks, like the Manhattan Institute, and The Adam Smith Institute
- Philanthropic foundations, and
- Schools of power, such as the London School of Economics, and Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government

According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (ibid.), the pursuit of the neoliberal version of late capitalism also carries with it the unacknowledged adoption of certain central assumptions as a set of ‘logical necessities’ which effectively conceals the origin of a number of key ideas, such as:

- The efficiency of the (free) market
- The recognition of (cultural) identities (over, for example, class identities), and
- The reassertion of (individual) responsibility

This point is elaborated by Cerny in his focus on what he terms the ‘normative logic’ of neoliberalism (2008: 10-11). Firstly, there is neoliberalism’s impetus to establish institutions and practices that are market-based and market-led, often proposed as a way of ‘correcting’ the perceived historical interference of the state in distorting markets. Secondly, there is the need to ‘instil’ market behaviour in citizens as a way of eroding notions of dependency and of fostering notions of competitiveness, often seen in the deregulation of labour markets. And thirdly, where the best markets are understood to be composed of the greatest numbers of buyers and sellers, and with world markets being therefore seen as the ideal, or the most ‘efficient’, there is the requirement to dismantle barriers to international trade.

In practice, the utopian goal of unfettered capitalism is manifest in many variations, incorporating the state to a greater or lesser degree throughout the global economy (see Cerny et al 2005, and Peck 2004). Notwithstanding this picture, Cerny also distils four core dimensions of neoliberalism to be central to policy makers’ embrace of neoliberalism globally, which he contends can be empirically identified regardless of the form of actually
existing neoliberalism in any nation state. These components are presented as elements of a coherent package of reforms that are seen as necessary areas of focus in neoliberal policy terms. The first relates to the third ‘logical position’ above; namely the need to open borders and internationalise production as a response to the perceived debilitating effect of national barriers and protectionist practices on facilitating growth. Secondly, there is the embedding of financial orthodoxy as a move away from Keynesianism to a more open market approach to fiscal and monetary policy. The main issue here is the control of inflation, viewed as the single biggest cause of the economic stagnation endured by western economies during the 1970s. Financial orthodoxy also extends to the state itself where ministries and agencies are to be encouraged to view themselves along business lines, improving efficiencies and cutting out waste.

The third dimension Cerny identifies is the change in the character of state intervention in the domestic economy, expressed particularly clearly in the notion of light-touch, or ‘arms-length’ regulation (2008: 24). Here the duty of regulators is to steer and guide policy but not to directly interfere with market practices since the thesis claims that the truly free market will naturally reach a point of efficiency on its own. The final core dimension highlighted by Cerny is the reinventing of the notion of government itself, and relates to the increased interrelationship between government and public sector institutions on the one hand, and private sector institutions and agencies on the other. Central to this dynamic is a facilitation of processes designed to ‘maximise synergies’, of essentially merging novel forms of governance and management where private sector actors are given key roles in these emergent hybrid structures that allow them (with government approval) to manipulate and reframe processes along pro-market lines, thereby eroding accountable state structures in the organisation of public life.

This trend often materialises in the identification of ‘experts’, often employed by the state as ‘consultants’ to help facilitate these kinds of strategic processes. This leads to the permanent insertion of layers of managerial staff to oversee the emergent planning processes designed to consolidate such types of efficiency-oriented developments. This results in a kind of explosion of bureaucratic and managerial structures and agents, or as Cerny (2008: 28) contends, in the ‘semi-fragmentation of government into crosscutting and overlapping institutions and processes’, and is perhaps the single most significant element of ideologically embedding neoliberalism within both the economic and cultural life of the state.
2.1.1 The Nation State as manager: The deception at the heart of neoliberalism

In terms of both empirically describing neoliberalism in practice (as opposed to its theoretical ideal) and of approaching the issue from a critical perspective in relation to its implicit impact on transparent, democratic processes; there are two significant points to make. Firstly, as intimated, the literature clearly accepts that there is no one form of genuine neoliberalism, no one prescriptive blueprint that defines what counts as neoliberalism and neoliberal policy. As Peck suggests there are rather, neoliberal ‘cases’ as opposed to ‘models’ or even a model (2004: 393). And as Cerny declares ‘It is not only a contested concept in theoretical terms but also a highly internally differentiated concept, made up of a range of linked but discrete subcategories and dimensions’ (2008: 3). Yet a cursory reading of the literature of neoliberalism and nation states generally posits two poles of neoliberal experience.⁴

The first can be seen as the wholesale dismantling of state structures and concerns for workers’ rights and their replacement by open, market-friendly policies and programmes in one fell swoop, over a relatively short space of time. Examples of this approach can be seen both in the case of Chile after the 1973 coup d’état, and in Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003 under President George W. Bush. This blunt route is captured by Naomi Klein in the title of her 2007 book ‘The Shock Doctrine’ that looks at just such avowedly neoliberal adventures. On the other hand, and at the other end of the spectrum, there is what Peck terms a ‘softer’ more ‘muted’ and ‘consensual’ variety of neoliberalism, where forms of policymaking go hand-in-hand with existing structures, and ‘where neoliberal impulses coexist in a hybrid relationship with various forms of social democracy and residual welfare-statism’ (2004: 393).

Within these poles, variation abounds. For example, even after the rapid transformation of Chilean society following the violent overthrow of the Allende Government, neither the new economists and policy chiefs (many educated at the University of Chicago under Milton Friedman) nor the IMF, could persuade the Pinochet forces to privatise the lucrative copper industry, which remained nationalised (see Harvey 2005: 8). In Ireland the corporatist arrangement between government, business, and the trade unions known as social partnership, seen by many commentators as central to the positive

transformation of the national finances from the late 1980’s onwards, is presented as a particularly Irish version of neoliberalism, despite the fact that neoliberal theory would instinctively reject such anti-market rigidities.\(^5\) When we look at the workings of neoliberalism in practice then, we see that there is no convergence to a single model, and nor does it equate to the demise of the nation state. Moreover, given the trend to new forms of governance involving non-state actors and the rise in forms of light-touch regulatory procedures, Peck (2004: 394) asserts that neoliberalism does not even equate to a shrinking of the nation state. As some structure is required to manage these new market relationships, in practice, rather than heralding universal deregulation, neoliberalism actually sees new forms of regulation emerge, ensuring that the state becomes integral to the neoliberal project.

This is a significant point since it draws attention to the fact that as well as not being a wholly indigenous process neither is it a completely ‘external imposition’. All national variations on the neoliberal model are rather open to and the product of ‘institutional hybridities’, national ‘path specificities’, and processes of ‘uneven development’ (ibid. 395), such as with social partnership in the case of Ireland. In short, actually existing neoliberal cases are a merging of existing national specificities with levels of affinity to an overarching neoliberal ideal. It is precisely because of the level of regulatory procedures and state involvement that emerge in contemporary capitalism that Klein (2007: 15) proposes the term ‘corporatism’ as opposed to neoliberalism, (maintaining that liberalism, as Friedman understood it, hardly ever occurs). That is, the neoliberal reality sees an alliance between a few large corporations, powerful individuals, and a class of wealthy politicians where the demarcation between these groups often becomes blurred.

Barnett (2005: 9-11) goes further in suggesting that because of the divergence between a pure neoliberal philosophy and the reality of neoliberalism in practice, coupled with the level of variation between cases of actually existing neoliberalism, we can say that in a certain sense, there is no such thing as neoliberalism. Or we can take a slightly different perspective on the issue of the paradox and contradiction within the neoliberal philosophy from Turner and Yolcu (2014), who state:

Adam Smith argued that the free market, the truly free market is managed by the “hidden hand”, of supply and demand. We have no way of knowing whether this is true, because there has never been a free market; all markets are managed by governments to some extent […]. Neo-liberalism therefore substitutes the real managing hand for Smith’s metaphorical hand.

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But for the hegemony to be effective, the real intervening hand of neo-liberalism must remain hidden. (2014: xvii)

And;

Put crudely, at the heart of neo-liberalism is a lie, the lie that a free and self-managing market [...] is possible. (ibid.)

Moreover, and in adding some historical context to the reality of this inherent ‘impossibility’, the editors of Soundings point out:

That market forces are imposed on some but not others has been true since the colonial metropole’s ‘free-labour’ regimes were harnessed by the imperial system to the ‘forced-labour’ of plantation slavery. [...] Market forces are never universally imposed. There is no such thing as a fully marketised system. Capitalism relies on monopolies and ‘socialised’ risk, and on spheres that exist outside the logic of its operations [...] Free wage-labour has always been augmented by unfree forms of exploitation such as serfdom, slavery, bondage, indenture, peonage. These mark the limits of ‘the market’s’ generalisability. (Hall et al, 2013: 10)

These observations therefore not only point to the range and variety of what is happening in economic and strategic policy terms under the labels of neoliberalism and neoliberal policy, but crucially they also raise quite fundamental questions about what is happening in political terms; about who is informing the decision-making process, their level of accountability, and the issue of transparency.

2.1.2 Neoliberalism and the question of democracy

It follows from observations such as Cerny’s that neoliberalism can be seen ostensibly as a project to reconstruct the power of economic elites by essentially disenfranchising the nation state, or simply as Harvey puts it (2005: 15), as ‘a restoration of class power’. The more significant point here however, which is perhaps a logical consequence of Cerny’s final dimension of neoliberalism, is that in parallel with the process of the enfranchisement of private sector interests, there is a gradual but real redefinition of government itself that results from processes such as the ‘reinvention of governance’. Together with issues of light-touch regulation, the dissemination of a new financial orthodoxy, and prioritising the market over other concerns, is the debilitating diminution on the scope of government to actually govern. In this scenario, the scope of ‘governance’ available to governments can run to little more than ‘management’ of the economy in the interests of business and industry operating within the perceived global neoliberal model. That is to say, that governing, where it exists, is
primarily economy focussed and other areas of a state’s responsibilities, notably issues of social policy, are completely predicated on what the state can afford, that is, in Bourdieu’s term as ‘residual’ concerns. This naturally has a significant impact on notions of democracy, and of what a term like sovereignty itself can truly mean.

As the governments of democratic nation states operate within the contemporary neoliberal reality, by definition they profess a defence of national sovereignty and a promotion of democratic values. Yet, given such governing political parties do not stand for election primarily on their ‘management’ credentials, but on broader more holistic manifestos that seem to ignore the limits on their ability to freely govern – even in cases where they embrace the neoliberal reality – it is hard to see how they are not in fact engaging in a fraudulent exercise, a grand conceit, consciously or otherwise. As Mair points out, even the concept of ‘semi-sovereignty’ is rapidly becoming outdated. In terms of the practice of national governance, he adds that ‘what we see emerging is a notion of democracy that is being steadily stripped of its popular component—democracy without a demos’ (2006: 1), and where new and influential schools of ‘governance’ propose that ‘society is now sufficiently well organized through self-organizing networks that any attempts on the part of government to intervene will be ineffective and perhaps counterproductive’ (ibid.). In an extension of this point, Brown develops Foucault’s conception of the ‘birth of biopolitics’ to suggest that neoliberalism is fundamentally a danger to democracy in its programmatic hollowing out the modern subject through its evisceration of the democratic state.6

She posits that a characteristic of the neoliberal era is that Homo politicus has in fact been replaced by Homo oeconomicus, claiming that the very concept of citizenship itself has been shifted from issues of the public good to one where the individual is primarily to be viewed as an economic entity (2015: 9-11). She maintains moreover, that this simple idea has far reaching consequences for the idea of the collectivity, of the demos, where all fields of social practice are now to be understood as markets and where the citizen is foremost a market actor. Rhodes (1997, cited in Cerny 2008: 27) makes a similar point. In highlighting how the formal institutions of government and state are being wound down to be replaced by networks and processes of ‘governance’, incorporating unelected and therefore non-majoritarian and unaccountable private sector interests and high-wealth individuals, the deception is of a very significant order. As a minimum, the negative implications for the continued health of democracy at all levels of scale are severe.7 In this sense, as Saad-Filho & Johnston (2005: 5) claim, through the merging of official and corporate elites in the

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6 See Foucault’s published lectures on the Birth of Biopolitics (1979).
7 As Klein points out, these groups are variously known as ‘the oligarchs’ in Russia, ‘the princelings’ in China, ‘the piranhas’ in Chile’, and during the G.W. Bush administration, ‘the pioneers’ in the USA (2007: 15).
sidelining of open and accountable processes of governance, the neoliberal project can in fact be summarised as a ‘hegemonic system of enhanced exploitation of the majority’.

2.1.3 The disidentification with neoliberalism

A significant consequence of the deception at the heart of neoliberalism – of hiding the hand of the state and its supporters – is that governments therefore have to find ways of undertaking such a management role without either appearing to be pro-actively interfering in the market, or in some cases, even acknowledging their pro-market thesis at all. This raises the dynamic of an embrace of the project through forms of disidentification with neoliberalism. A second point to make regarding neoliberalism and its anti-democratic nature therefore, is that this paradox, added to the level of variation within cases of neoliberalism, affords governments and institutions the option of denying the neoliberal ethos of policy choices, leading to a rejection of the label by those state agencies and private actors responsible for promoting the neoliberal project. That is, a disidentification with neoliberalism is a feature of the discourse of proponents of neoliberalism. So for example, in the Irish case – as will be demonstrated in the texts analysed in this work – the terms ‘neoliberal’ or ‘neoliberalism’ never appear. What actually appears are references (directly or tangentially) to the ‘Celtic Tiger’ and notions of a dynamic national economy astride the world stage.

Sometimes the word ‘globalisation’ or references to ‘a globalised world’ or ‘the globalised economy’ appear, (as do references to Ireland’s uniqueness or mix of indigenous factors enabling it to succeed where it has). In the case of New Labour in the UK by contrast, a common signifier is that of the ‘Third Way’ and its associated discourse (see for example, Fairclough 2000 and Hall 2003). All of these terms are functioning – whether actively or passively – as a synonym for neoliberalism, at least when viewed from the critical perspective. Indeed Peck notes that the ‘orthodox’ view of the current world order labels the order ‘globalisation’, whereas it is the critical view that uses the label ‘neoliberal’ (2004:

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9 At the risk of being overly reductive of the depth and breadth of his contribution to the topic vis-à-vis the Irish case, this is a central element of Ó Riain’s thesis in particular. See for example, Ó Riain (2000) and Ó Riain and O’Connell (2000)

9 The term ‘Celtic Tiger’ as a signifier of the Republic of Ireland’s economic health, (or even just the nation’s health as a whole) seems to have first been employed by a contributor to a newsletter produced by the bank Morgan Stanley in 1994. See Kirby et al (2002: 17-18), Murphy (2000: 3), and O’Hearn (2000: 97).

10 As Kirby notes ‘The official Tiger narrative is typically structured around the following explanations of Irish success: consistent macro-economic management of the economy, investment in education, social partnership, EU structural funds combined with the fiscal discipline imposed by the Maastricht criteria and, of course, very high levels of inward US investment’ (2001: 2).
The significant question for any critical engagement with the discourse of neoliberalism and its democratic deficiencies is therefore firstly, whether terms such as globalisation can act as an appropriate synonym for neoliberalism, and secondly, and more significantly, if not, what then can be usefully deduced from this trend of disidentification, of redefining, of reclassifying neoliberalism?

2.1.4 The problem with *Globalisation*…

Borrowing from Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (2001) contribution on euphemised labels for features of the neoliberal project, in the ‘New Planetary Vulgate’, Phelan has made a useful contribution on this issue of a disidentification with neoliberalism in the Irish case (see Phelan 2007b and 2007c). Significantly, the central focus of his work is on discourse, and specifically on the role of discourse in processes of neoliberal assumptions and on disidentification through a set of parallel, euphemised signifiers. Before addressing the issue of neoliberalism and discourse more directly (including Phelan’s contribution), in attempting to respond to the question of what a disidentification with neoliberalism might reveal, and as a productive route to the construction of neoliberalism as an object of discourse analysis, I first want to challenge the position that the terms neoliberalism and globalisation are benignly interchangeable. My starting point draws on Hay (see Hay 2006, Hay and Watson 1999, and Hay and Marsh 2000) who attempts to focus on globalisation in as scientific a way as possible, to ensure that the term can have some ‘precision and utility’ in analytical terms.¹¹

Borrowing from Held *et al* (1999), Hay claims that;

> globalization is a process (or set of processes) that embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions, generating transcontinental or inter-regional flows and networks of activity, interaction and power, (Hay 2006: 3)

The merit of this definition is that it sees globalisation as something empirical that can be measured. Moreover, any process or set of processes under analysis must therefore be truly global or ‘globalising’. Also, by extension, if globalisation is something empirical its use can only ever be as a description and not as an explanation. In other words, within such a definition globalisation is seen as an outcome of a ‘causal process’ or a number of processes, and not as the agent or a causal process in its own right. Secondly, the issue of whether globalisation (as an outcome) can be said to be occurring in practice always remains a matter to be settled scientifically, not theoretically. Hay concludes this definition (2006: 4) by

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¹¹ See also Hay and Rosamond (2002) on the EU, and Hay and Smith (2005) on Ireland and the UK.
stressing that in not being a causal process, globalisation is not in any way an ‘entity’ possessed of agency, but is at best a tendency, and where this tendency holds sway it is an outcome, but still an outcome ‘to be explained’ and not the explanation itself.

The significance of this type of approach to globalisation – that it can be empirically tested – becomes all the more important when we see that, as Hay and others have shown, globalisation is in fact not happening, or not as a worldwide tendency. Drawing on the work of the ‘sceptical wave’, the idea of globalisation as myth has much to support it (see Smith 2005: 13-17). The sceptics note that the world economy was actually less open at the end of the twentieth century than it was before the First World War and in reality is far from global or truly integrated. It is rather, characterised by distinct blocks of regional integration such as North America, Europe, and the Far East, where the trade involving these regions is actually stronger within rather than amongst these blocs. Fixed capital such as plant and machinery means capital investment is often much less likely to relocate to sites of cheaper labour and taxes than the ‘globalists’ would argue, due to the high costs this would incur. Also, transnational companies (TNCs) are still predominantly national in terms of location of staff and site of operation. And the nation state is not in decline, with governments actually increasing in size and reach than at any time in the past. This final observation also gives support to Cerny’s contention that the reconfiguration of the nation state is a central feature of international neoliberalism.

In response to this view, Hay notes the dominant voices of authors like Anthony Giddens (1999) who move away from a purely economistic view of globalisation, seeing it instead as a complex process. That is, as a reclaiming of the concept of globalisation through a redefinition of the concept. This wave of advocates of globalisation see it as more than an issue of numbers and geography, but rather, as an ‘all-encompassing end-state’ that sees trade as qualitatively different (if not quantitatively greater) than the pre-First World War case. They point to TNCs adopting a ‘global rationale’ that reconfigures geography such that social space is no longer the same as territorial space. This is what is often termed


\[13\] Historian Eric Hobsbawm makes a similar point from a different perspective. In considering the question of nations and nationalism after the First World War, one of the key consequences of the consolidation of the bourgeois nation state in Europe after 1918 was the rise of the ‘national economy’ in a way that had not existed before the war, and by extension, the end of the open global market, replaced by a practice of domestic protectionist policies and tariffs. (1992: 131-2)

\[14\] In support of the sceptics view Smith (2005) and Kirby (2002) make the same point about Ireland being less global in terms of its trading partners now than it was a century ago as part of the British Empire. The modern reality, they contend, is characterised rather by a more targeting or focused international trading pattern and the reliance on inward investment from one state in particular, the USA.

\[15\] Included with Giddens in the elaboration of the concept of globalisation as complex set of processes, only partly economic in character, are authors such as Axford (1995), Dicken (2003), and Held et al (1999), (Smith 2005: 17)
globalisation’s ‘time-space compression’, where we all can enjoy ‘real-time’ experiences of different parts of the world, with the resultant weakening of national consciousness and a growth in individualism and flexibility that this implies (Allen 2007: 8). In a significant departure from both the first wave of globalists and the second wave of sceptics, this non-economistic approach to globalisation as a complex set of processes, proposes that globalisation cannot be viewed in purely structuralist terms, on what is happening, but rather, on the role of agents and their ideas. That is, on the ability of globalisation and ideas about globalisation to partly direct the process, such as moves to promote competition and to prioritise certain forms of governance and management.

Hay not only acknowledges this discursive element of globalisation but more importantly, its significance. That is, that the discourse of globalisation is derived from globalised neoliberalism, and is also part of the construction of (the idea of) globalisation itself. In fixing the definition of globalisation (borrowed from the sceptics) on an empirical footing, as the consequence of actions, Hay presents these views as a third wave (following the sceptics second wave but taking the perspective of Giddens on board), and sees globalisation as a tendency (see Hay and Marsh 2000). In this ‘contingent globalisation thesis’ Hay is critical of views that treat globalisation as a process without a subject, since it can only be a description and not an explanation. Where globalisation is not the cause but the consequence of decision and action, it can only ever be a tendency, materialised to a greater or lesser degree. With Rosamond (2002), Hay, like Giddens, stresses the significance of ideas, but unlike Giddens he separates the ideas of or about globalisation from the concept of an actually existing globalisation as an agentive force. He nevertheless recognises that ‘ideas’ of what globalisation is have great power in shaping and driving economic and political outcomes which have a kind of multiplier effect whereby understandings of actors’ reality can influence their future behaviour. In short, and in essentially paraphrasing Bourdieu and Wacquant, Hay concludes that globalisation can be appealed to by decision makers and influential groups who can then set out to produce the outcomes (economic and social) that they attribute to globalisation itself.

2.1.5 …And the discourse of the ‘Third Way’

For Hay it is this simple discursive manoeuvre, this ideational side-step that has influenced so much of contemporary international political economy, a feature of which is the elision of alternatives to the transnational neoliberal blueprint. Essentially discourses of globalisation as an agentive entity are powerful tools not only if they are perceived to be true, but more
significantly, if they are seen to be ‘useful’, that is, to have instrumental value (Hay and Rosamond 2002: 148). Fairclough contends that for example, New Labour’s use of the ‘Third Way’ discourse is also a disidentification with new forms of capitalism, and serves a similar function to the pervasive circulation of the term globalisation. Fairclough (2000 and 2006a) sees this Giddens-driven discourse as an extension of the ideational dimension of a globalisation discourse of a specific type. This discourse is composed of a particular set of representations of change, which as has been outlined, makes the question of whether globalisation actually exists unanswered in factual terms, but also Fairclough maintains, ostensibly an irrelevance in practical terms.

In terms of New Labour’s embrace of the Third Way political model, Fairclough maintains that not only is it a form of disidentification, that is, an ideological position presented as a non-ideological, or better, a post-ideological position. For Blair’s government the understanding of the term the ‘Third Way’ goes beyond old divisions and marries enterprise with social justice. That is, the choice in no longer one or the other since, via an alternative neoliberal route, we can now have both. In this perspective there is no anomaly, no tension, and no contradiction once we (the government) manage the state appropriately along this ‘third’ path. For Fairclough this also changes the nature of political parties and their relationship with the state since discursively the Third Way is a closure of political discourse, a ‘hybridisation’ of ‘left’ and ‘right’ discourses that simultaneously narrows the range of contemporary mainstream discourses. To quote Hall, however, the third way discourse merely allows for ‘a social-democratic route to neo-liberalism’ which ‘may turn out in the end to be what Lenin might have called "the best shell" for global capitalism’ (2003: 20).

The notion of globalisation as agentive process advanced by Giddens and his followers in the hands of New Labour, Fairclough adds, is simplified further in phrase like ‘the cascade of change’, in which change is represented as an unstructured list, as a ‘series of effects’ (2000: 12). As with the non-empirical approaches to assessing globalisation, in these ‘changes’ the processes and the agents are always absent. The effects of change such as the free movement of capital are themselves represented as processes, yet the agents of these processes, such as TNCs and unelected and unaccountable international financial institutions, are never referenced. In reflecting Hay’s multiplier idea of the discourse of globalisation, the result of the circulation of these representations of reality is an inculcation of the world that matches how those who desire the changes they are describing would in fact like the world to

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16 See Blair (1998), and Giddens (1994) and (1998).
17 Weltman for example, quotes Blair declaring in 1997 that we are all now in “the age not of dogma or stale ideology but practical change.” (2003: 352).
be. This not only delimits the possibility for alternative ways of configuring society and the economy, but prioritises a way that the world might be which allows the supporters of neoliberal globalisation to present this particular worldview as completely justified, seeming to be both rational and logical, as simple common sense.

In being advanced by people like Giddens, Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001: 4) maintain that the success of this new language is ‘a supreme intellectual accomplishment’ but they also identify the Third Way discourse as potentially more significant than signifiers like globalisation, since it conceals that something is indeed lost or erased in such a process of redefinition and reclassification. Assessing the Third Way credentials as presented by Giddens’ own web-page, they point to the necessary redefinition of the concept of inequality inherent in neoliberal globalised practices, noting that Giddens claims that ‘redefining inequality in relation to exclusion at both levels is consistent with a dynamic conception of inequality’. That is, that a primarily discursive shift is necessarily designed to bring about a shift in the metrics of, in this case, the social variable that is inequality, which therefore has a material impact on policies designed to tackle inequality. In other words, it is through ideational change manifest and circulated in new discourses, that is, interpersonally, that affords the project that scope to declare that historical contradictions can now be reconciled. As a simple fact-of-life the discourses of globalisation of and the Third Way work ideologically, and in this way semiosis has become central to neoliberalism’s hegemonic system.

2.2 Semiosis and Neoliberalism

2.2.1 The relevance of a focus on the semiotic aspect of neoliberalism

From the perspective of a critical approach to neoliberalism’s anti-democratic nature, there are two major issues that emerge from the above contributions of Bourdieu and Wacquant, Fairclough, and from Hay in particular. Firstly, by imbuing globalisation with agency and circulating ideas about it and how it impacts upon or limits the options available to decision-makers, it conceals the need for governing elites to explain the real reasons behind why particular decisions are being taken, by whom and in whose interests. This will always be helpful in a general sense when ‘difficult choices’ have to be taken, that is, decisions that will adversely affect the majority of a population. But secondly, and more importantly, it logically follows that as a focus of empirical study, if globalisation as a consequence of
action(s) does not exist, then the disidentification with neoliberalism that globalisation serves to conceal, means that the instrumental value of ideas, of discourses of globalisation, points to the need to address the value of these ideas through their semiotic practices. That is, any critical study of neoliberalism that seeks to be a contribution to a normative agenda requires a focus on neoliberalism’s semiotic aspect.

Hay and Smith in fact actively call for more studies of the discourse of neoliberalism and globalisation (Hay and Smith 2005) since most sociological or political science analysis avoids grappling with this issue head on. This is perhaps in part because although globalisation may be understood as a largely discursive concept (at least within the critical perspective), neoliberalism is not simply a discourse. Though neoliberalism may be partially understood and discussed as a fundamentally hegemonic programme with semiosis a significant part of the execution of the project, it is also, at its simplest, a contemporary form of governmentality. In other words, it also possesses a material dimension. Also, where a focus on neoliberal ideation and discourse is considered a valuable area of study, the concept of discourse employed is often under elaborated and poorly defined, and with the notable exception of Phelan above, generally fails to acknowledge the dialectical element of semiosis as an element of social practice intimately bound up with other elements of practices. In much of the critical focus on the discourse/neoliberalism conjuncture semiosis is therefore usually not approached from any genuinely interdisciplinary perspective. The result is that discourse, in its broadest sense, is invariably viewed as an entirely discrete entity, with its idealist and materialist dimensions remaining clearly demarcated.

Nevertheless, some interrogations of neoliberalism in practice point to the role of discourse in the implementation of neoliberal policy and in its effect on democracy. For example, in looking at post-apartheid South Africa and the issue of efforts to develop community employment initiatives, Miraftab (2004) reflects on the ‘symbolic capital’ of certain emergent signifiers in the process of a depoliticisation of concepts and the reinterpretation, the reclassification, of such concepts by government and the development sector in their own interests. In a similar way in the same country, Peet (2002) looks at the role of what he calls the academic-institutional-media complex in absorbing globally hegemonic discourses and then ‘translating’ elements of these discourses for local situations.

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18 For some exceptions see Blyth (2001), Phelan (2007c), Schmidt (2002), and Smith (2005).
19 For examples of unelaborated views on ‘discourse’ and the discourse of globalisation see Schmidt (2002), and Smith (2005).
20 Phelan (2007a) makes precisely this criticism in relation to Smith’s investigation of the discourse of globalisation in Ireland (2005).
21 Miraftab examines how the discourses of black empowerment and social capital have been used by the municipal government of Cape Town to present the voluntary collection of domestic refuse by the unemployed as a way of overcoming the market imperative of privatising waste collection services.
In these discursive translations local grievances are then ‘reimagined’, ostensibly colonised by a neoliberal framework, leading to ‘novel’, market-oriented solutions. Another valuable (and more classically Marxist) contribution to the general critique of language and neoliberalism from an applied linguistics perspective is provided by Holborow (2015). Harvey too acknowledges that neoliberalism has become hegemonic as a mode of discourse incorporated into the common sense way we view the world. As Phelan states (2007a: 5), Harvey’s account therefore recognizes ‘the constitutive role of discourse in the dynamic iteration of neoliberal hegemony’ and as such, situates itself in the general terrain of Fairclough’s critical realist understanding of discourse.

### 2.2.2 Existing critical approaches to the discourse of neoliberalism in Ireland

In this regard the objective of my research is both to respond (to a limited degree) to Peck’s request that if the term neoliberal is to mean anything scholars need to add content to the notion of neoliberal being ‘differently interventionist’ in different states. That is, to ‘track actual patterns of practices of neoliberal restructuring, and to make meaningful part-whole connections between localized and institutionally specific instances of reform and the wider discourses and ideologies of neoliberalism’ (2004: 396). This work must therefore contribute to an understanding of Irish political economy as evidence of the ‘discontinuous historical evolution’ of the neoliberal project. But more significantly the primary objective, the overarching aim with this work, must remain the deployment of a more rounded critical analytic approach to the discourse of neoliberalism in the Irish case, and particularly, as it relates to an erosion of democracy.

If we take Phelan’s work (2007c) as a starting point for a critical approach to discourse and neoliberalism in Ireland, we see that as well as employing a critical realist understanding of discourse and adopting aspects of Fairclough’s methodological approach – such as a focus on interdiscursivity – much of his work is based upon Bourdieu’s examination of neoliberalism and the discourse of neoliberalism. In the article on the ‘NewLiberalSpeak: Notes on a New Planetary Vulgate’ (2001: 4) Bourdieu and Wacquant foreground the role of discourse in projecting what they see as a US-led colonisation of the political and social world by a form of market-oriented cultural imperialism. Likewise, globalisation is understood as a ‘highly polysemic notion’, as an idea designed to ‘dress the

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22 See also Block et al (2012), and Holborow (1999).
effects of American Imperialism in the trappings of cultural ecumenism and economic fatalism, to make the transnational relation of economic power appear like a natural necessity’. That is, as Fairclough contends, the neoliberal project is largely ‘discourse-driven’ (2001: 6), with semiosis playing an ever greater role in social and economic transformations than in the past. In mirroring Hay’s observations on the strength of the idea of neoliberalism as an agentive globalisation, Bourdieu and Wacquant, as above, can be seen in effect to preempt Hay’s conclusion in declaring that the discourse ‘though founded on belief mimics science superimposing the appearance of reason […] on the social fantasies of the dominant, endowed with the performative power to bring into being the very realities it claims to describe’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2001: 3). In analytical terms, this new lingua franca rests upon a series of oppositions and equivalences which support and reinforce each other to explain contemporary transformations central to the neoliberal project. The authors propose the notion of two parallel sets of signifiers to capture the trend of a disidentification with neoliberalism, with one set market-related and one essentially Keynesian, with the latter deployed, they contend, as a way for the project to more easily advance and consolidate its ideological assumptions (2001: 4). So, for example, they contrast, neoliberal ‘freedom’ with Keynesian ‘constraint’; ‘flexibility’ is presented as a contrast to ‘rigidity’; ‘growth’ with ‘stasis’; ‘diversity’ with ‘uniformity’; and, the ‘democratic’ signifier is proposed as a contrast to signifiers such as ‘authoritarian’ or ‘totalitarian’.

In relation to an examination of textual features, Bourdieu and Wacquant underline the benefit of focusing on neoliberal signifiers as disidentifiers stressing the need to be open to contrary vocabulary and definitions, to other representations and to other discourses. This empirical approach is extended by Phelan’s representation of the relationship between these hegemonically chained signifiers of a neoliberal identity, and its simultaneous articulation of an oppositional Keynesian/quasi-socialist identity (2007b). Following Laclau (1996), Phelan suggests in this framework that ‘freedom’ can be understood as the ‘empty signifier’ of neoliberal discourse. It assumes a quasi-universalising function in the hegemonic chaining of signifying associations between the different neoliberal elements such as economic freedom, in contrast to Keynesian political freedom, or ‘market’ in relation to ‘state’, or ‘individual’ in relation to ‘collective’ etc. Phelan contends that this is a useful way of representing a neoliberal political identity in its most transparently antagonistic and ideological form.

Constructing an analysis of neoliberal hegemony in such stark terms however, can produce some obvious limits. Another kind of neoliberal discourse, for example, will seek to de-emphasise and dilute these proto-typically neoliberal distinctions. This is what Phelan
calls ‘euphemised neoliberalism’ (from Bourdieu and Wacquant 2001) and can be understood as a rejection of the antagonistic identity and posture articulated by ‘transparent neoliberalism’. The relationship between the two kinds of neoliberal discourse, euphemised and transparent, can also be mapped in accordance with the set of heuristic distinctions (2007c: 34). For example, where a euphemised neoliberal discourse talks of ‘post-ideology’, a transparent neoliberal discourse would have to concede it is talking about ‘ideology’; in the former discourse ‘pragmatic’ might equate to ‘pro-market’ in the latter discourse; and the term ‘partnership’ to ‘anti-statist’ or to ‘anti-regulatory’, or perhaps even to ‘formalised asymmetrical bargaining arrangement’, etc. Seeking to identify neoliberalism via a set of binary opposites can therefore be a useful tool in highlighting instances of its textual and discoursal operationalisation. Indeed Phelan employs a similar model in his assessment of the representation of the stock-market flotation of Telecom Eireann in 1999 and its representation in the broadsheet media (see Phelan 2007c).

By creating an index of euphemised signifiers and evaluating each newspaper editorial on the flotation issue accordingly, Phelan assesses the level of buy-in to the neoliberal ethos in which the stock flotation is promoted. This, he contends, can be seen not as the pushing of a neoliberal ideology, but rather, as in other national cases (such as those assessed by Miraftab and Peet), a call to something else, to modernity, to alternative forms of governance and management, and even to democracy, and as potentially empowering of both citizens and business.\(^2^3\) That is, a move to neoliberalism by a disidentification. So in the same way that neoliberalism as an ideology, as a political and economic project, can be invoked through disidentification (as Hay has shown with globalisation and as Fairclough has examined in the discourse of the Third Way); Bourdieu and Wacquant’s contentions on the New Planetary Vulgate, as operationalised by Phelan, also show how the mix of neoliberal prescriptions and policy objectives can emerge, be circulated and gain a level of hegemony – as ways of being, as ways of representing, and as ways of acting, that is, as identities, discourses, and genres – through processes of discursive disidentification.

Yet even Phelan’s work, however well grounded and illustrative of underlying neoliberal assumptions, is somewhat limited to a focus on vocabulary and unanalysed assumption. Ideation as an area requiring of investigation is proposed, yet there is no focus on the ideational (language) function – the construction of systems of knowledge and belief and the formation of identities based on such systems – by way of an examination of clause grammar. Furthermore, reflections on developments such as the emergence of novel hegemonic discourses and their ability to recontextualise the existing orders of discourse of

\(^2^3\) See in particular Evans (2005), McVeigh (2005), and Steinmo (2005).
new fields (for example, the ability of the imperatives of an economic discourse to successfully colonising the field of social policy) remain unattainable. Therefore, as useful as Bourdieu and Wacquant’s contribution (and Phelan’s application of it) may be, if we are to embrace an understanding of the socially constitutive and constituting nature of discourse, we need to move beyond these limited types of approaches.

In this regard I propose that a more fruitful path to a critical analysis of the discourse of neoliberalism can be found through Bourdieu’s broader observations on neoliberalism as they are both relevant not only to this central point, but to my general objective of interrogating neoliberalism’s anti-democratic nature through an analysis of official texts. That is, Bourdieu’s work, though not designed to facilitate a linguistic analysis of the discourse of neoliberalism itself (Phelan’s work notwithstanding), as an exposition of the central role of discourse in facilitating the neoliberal nomos, provides a way of addressing the discourse of neoliberalism as essentially an order of discourse. I contend that this engagement with Bourdieu’s theoretical position advances a more nuanced but ultimately more fruitful assessment of the relationship between power, neoliberalism, and discourse, which, when coupled with Fairclough’s theoretical and methodological frameworks for analysis, produces a more analytically rigorous approach to an engagement with the analysis of the discourse of neoliberalism. I therefore wish to conclude this section on neoliberalism and discourse with deeper engagement with Bourdieu’s ideas on neoliberalism and the state.

### 2.2.3 Bourdieu, neoliberalism as doxa, and the construction of the object of research

Investigating the value of Bourdieu’s work for the purposes of critical discourse analysis involves reflecting on Bourdieu’s view of neoliberalism itself, his theory of the state, and also employs categories from his general theory of practice (1977). This exposition of his view of neoliberalism and its set of ideas as a doxa – where doxa is understood as an unquestionable orthodoxy that operates as if it were objective truth – an unchallengeable view of our modern age, therefore requires an engagement with all of these areas (see Bourdieu 1998a and 1998b, and also Chopra 2003). Firstly therefore, I want to summarise Bourdieu’s conception of neoliberalism, which can be seen as capturing both the philosophical notion of personal freedom from the state and state intervention, and freedom for the market to operate as its intrinsic mechanisms dictate, being Adam Smith’s concept of

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24 See Chopra (2003) for an overview of the interrelationship between neoliberalism and Bourdieu’s theory of the state.
the ‘invisible hand’. He sees this as encapsulating the philosophical justification within neoliberalism for the prevalence of all things economic over all things social, where that which cannot be reduced to and represented by a variable in the economic equation is ‘abandoned to sociologists as a kind of reject’ (Bourdieu 1998a: 31).

For Bourdieu neoliberalism claims for itself the status of objective scientific truth, a political agenda predicated on a certain vision of the social world, one which legitimises a certain scientific view of that world and deems as illegitimate opposing views (1998b: 94). In this sense the neoliberal project can be seen as totalitarian since it has a direct bearing on notions of ‘truth’ and the ‘possible’. The notion of neoliberalism as totalitarian is in keeping with Bourdieu’s concept of neoliberalism as doxa, where doxic, being a set of ‘assumptions and pre-reflexive corporeal dispositions’ (Crossley 2004: 100). More specifically, and in terms of the features of his ‘field theory’, where there is always a potential range of practices and dispositions within any one habitus, of what is thinkable and acceptable within that habitus; for Bourdieu the doxa as a ‘field mechanism’ is what sets the limit to the possibilities allowed by the perceptual framework of that habitus. Or as Deer puts it, doxa is ‘the misrecognition of forms of social arbitrariness that engenders the unformulated, non-discursive, but internalised and practical recognition of that same social arbitrariness’ (2008: 119-20).

Bourdieu maintains that this neoliberal doxa has been steadily prepared and implemented by a number of partisan groups and centrally involves the colonisation of language and semiosis. For Bourdieu, neoliberalism has in fact become an all-pervasive paradigm and method for shaping habitus-producing structures, and significantly, the state is the agency that grants this paradigm its pervasiveness and legitimacy. That is, not only may the state feature in particular empirical cases of neoliberalism, but in this conceptualisation, it furthermore proves to be central to the neoliberal project. In such a reading of neoliberalism, which concurs with Cerny’s (2008) observations on neoliberalism facilitating a reinvention of governance, or Peck’s (2004) notion of the burgeoning managerial state, the issue ceases to be whether there is one true neoliberal philosophy and method, but to recognise a priori the integral nature and role of the nation state in the neoliberal project.

Given the significance of Bourdieu’s assertions in framing the approach to an analysis of official discourse on neoliberalism, it is helpful to summarise some of Bourdieu’s terms

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25 This is not an insignificant point, not merely because of the implications for critique, but in respect of neoliberalism’s own philosophical development by the Mont Pèlerin group and their overriding opposition to the rise of perceived ‘socialist’ or ‘collectivist’ totalitarianisms.

26 For an accessible overview of concepts and of the relationship between field mechanisms, field theory, and Bourdieu’s theory of practice, see Grenfell (2008).
and to clarify their interrelatedness. The *habitus* is understood as an explanation of the functioning of social practice at the micro-level. That is, as a relationship between the type of external environment shared by group members and the set of common practices of those that inhabit that social space. In this sense a habitus can be seen as the basis for the enactment of a worldview through practices within a generally homogenous group (Bourdieu 1977: 72).

For Bourdieu *practice* covers those embodied activities and competencies that are ‘learned’ and carried out by individuals in a social space.

These practices are not learned in a conscious way but rather, acquired and incorporated through integration into and acclimatisation to a particular type of environment. The inculcation of a set of group-space specific practices can be understood as inclinations towards certain responses or tendencies for one choice over another. Where a collection of individuals can be viewed as being predisposed to engage in certain practices over others, the habitus can be seen as a system of *dispositions* that endure across space and time. It should be clear that within any one habitus there is always a range of practices and dispositions available to the group members, a repertoire of possibilities of what is thinkable and acceptable. Within this framework however it is always a doxa that sets the limit to the range of potentialities allowed through the perceptual framework of a habitus.

In extending the micro-level social space of a habitus, Bourdieu uses the concept of the *field* to explain the functioning and composition of social space across society, that is, across heterogeneous realms. Social space is conceived of being made up of separate but overlapping fields corresponding to different spheres of activity, (such as the economic, the political, the legal, the cultural, etc.). This relates to what Fairclough calls networks of social practice, where one such practice is semiosis. A field can therefore be viewed as an embodiment of the valuation and exchange of – and the struggle over – resources of the field between the different inhabitants and groups within a society. At the level of the field the doxa is constituted as the nomos. The nomos is the irreducible, foundational, and fundamental law that structures a field, essentially a social order, with its own order of discourse. In terms of the valuation and exchange of forms of capital with a field it is the nomos that regulates the system of value, and more broadly, even the very stakes by which capital can be defined (*ibid*., 96).

Though impacting the field, the nomos does not have to explain or justify itself and likewise, the field has no mechanism for questioning the nomos. Crucially for Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the nomos, again, as in the case of hegemony, of taken-for-granted common sense assumptions, it is not transcendental or some abstract logic, but remains an arbitrary, historically-shaped view that reflects the interests of those groups that hold
dominant positions (possess the most capital) in the field. In this way the content of the nomos of a field, its thesis, is therefore never formally presented (and defended) as a thesis and as such, it can never be challenged on terms that are not of its own making. To put this in Bourdieu’s words, in being outside the realm of the thinkable the nomos has no antithesis (ibid. 97). In Bourdieu’s terminology neoliberalism as the nomos can only be challenged on criteria allowable within the nomos itself. Conflict within any filed in therefore being fundamentally about the right to define the nomos, is essentially an issue of semiotic practices. Any participation by actors in the field is therefore a reaffirmation of the rules of the game, which gives recognition to and further strengthens the doxa and, by extension, the nomos of the field.

In contemporary societies the state can be seen as the agent that influences relationships between fields, as well as the valuations of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) within fields. Through policy setting measures the state can actively set the exchange rate between fields thereby indirectly adjusting the nomos of any given field. Consequently, in any society at a particular conjuncture of its history, particular forms of capital may be more advantageous than others. Thus, as well as both the struggle within a society for possession of (volumes of) capital, coupled with the struggle over what may be valued as capital (via the field’s nomos), a third site of struggle emerges. That is, the attempt to control the relative advantage of one form of capital in relation to other forms of capital. To put it another way, the transfer of effective capital from one field to another can be facilitated through the reclassification of capital within a field through changes to the field’s nomos. A force that can effect change over these latter two sites of struggle and impact upon the nomos of a field and/or exert control over the respective valuations of different forms of capital, can therefore directly influence the relations between the relatively autonomous fields in the broader arena of social space. For Bourdieu the contemporary state – where it embraces a neoliberal ethos – is precisely such a force.

2.2.4 The neoliberal nomos, semiosis, and the role of the state

In applying these conceptions of field and nomos, Bourdieu presents neoliberalism as a kind of meta-paradigm, as a value-system between fields. In this way the state ‘can neither be reduced to an objective force over and above those that it governs, nor can it be understood simply as the collective embodiment of all those who fall under its purview’, (Chopra 2003: 429). It is conceived rather, as a culmination of a process of the concentration of different types of capital, with all fields historically shaped through the shared relationship of state and
people (Bourdieu 1998b: 41). Where a particular state invokes a neoliberal paradigm any pre-existing nomos, in part structured by the state, produces a neoliberal nomos within each field.

Whether by accident or design such an invocation ensures the adoption of a neoliberal paradigm for what might be termed meta-capital itself, (covering all forms of capital). The state can therefore be described as the combined outcome of a shared history between the state – including the structures or government – and the people, and the struggle over the capital in different fields. This subjective form of the state has two significant implications; firstly, people are disposed towards the state (in the same way that individuals are disposed within a habitus to recognise the rules of the game) and more or less readily accept that the rules are set by the state in the form of its government. And secondly, in this way they affirm the nomos and so the wishes of the state become akin to dispositions within a habitus, so that what is presented as normal and/or necessary is then accepted as normal and/or necessary.

This idea is captured in Bourdieu’s concept of the Minds of State (Bourdieu 1998b: 52), capturing the duality of the contemporary state as both existing outside of its citizenry whilst being composed of its citizenry. Secondly; the state’s ‘common historical transcendental’ (1998b: 54), the conventional narrative of a nation’s formation and history, can be viewed as a common language, extending the notion of a shared journey and tradition, which may also include notions of how the state seeks to protect and care for the welfare of its citizens. This is why the issue of a disidentification with neoliberalism and the use of signifiers of neoliberalism in its place, such as the newly globalised world we all inhabit, or a ‘Third Way’ version of politics, become so important. Their use, the presentation of the idea and its dissemination, can be seen as a process of effectively embedding neoliberalism in the national narrative of a state, in its common historical transcendental through ideational processes. Moreover, the detail of the emerging narratives, if successfully inculcated, can also shape, as Bourdieu says, ‘the universe of possible discourse’ so that these narratives (and their neoliberal underpinning) come to ‘petrify the social limits of the possible’ (see Chopra 2003). The process of raising neoliberal ideas to the level of the nomos of a field, and in this case of the nomos of the economic field, and colonising the nomos of other fields moreover, is therefore largely accomplished through semiosis.

In this way moreover, Bourdieu’s theory of the contemporary state and neoliberalism, and the elevation of the latter to a universal and all encompassing truth has, at the level of semiosis, much in common with Fairclough’s exposition of a dialectics of discourse (2001a). This is particularly so in relation to the four moments of a dialectics of discourse. These moments cover the ways in which novel discourses are created or ‘emerge’, which may be
historical and cultural as well as economic, which then become doxic, or an unchallengeable truth such that they achieve a state of ‘hegemony’, which then allows them to be ‘recontextualised’, effectively to become doxic across heterogeneous realms. In practice, this can take the form of an economic orthodoxy coming to act as the nomos of non-economic fields such as education, the arts, and science, etc. This process then leaves these discourses free to be ‘operationalised’ and propagated by the state with the aid of supportive bodies and institutions in any or all policy areas, thereby reinforcing the nomos. The linking of a meta-paradigm of neoliberalism to the operation of meta-capital can be seen as a desire for the establishing of a neoliberal nomos, and in a concrete way, as an attempt to erase history, the history of the state, prior to its embrace of a neoliberal nomos.

Bourdieu conceptualises this reconfiguring or ‘rescaling’ (see Jessop 2000) as an ‘involution’, a general regression to an earlier phase of history, but a strategy generally presented as a revolution. This strategy usually foregrounds progress, reason, and science (commonly extended to included economics) as the pillars of the involution’s legitimacy. The doxa of neoliberalism is further enforced externally by the transnational networks of globalised capitalism to render ineffective all those collective institutions capable of standing up to the reality of the nomos. Internally, the doxa is buttressed at another level by the neoliberal state with neoliberalism – operationalised as the nomos of all fields – acting as the doxa of the national habitus. Thus, just as at the ‘micro-level’ of the field, at the macro-level of the nation state, neoliberalism works by quietly engendering a forgetting of history, and by ensuring that the new worldview is accepted uncontroversially by the public, partly by virtue of the pre-existing historical relationship between the state and its citizenry, (see Chopra 2003: 429-32).

In this way neoliberalism easily becomes a totalising entity, a ubiquitous hegemonic system and as will be seen in the next chapter, these final observations are particularly relevant to the experience of the Irish state. It is Bourdieu’s position moreover, that remains at the heart of the theory-based methodological approach to the analysis of samples of official semiosis employed in this work and detailed in Chapter Four. In advance of both of these broader tasks I now want to bring this chapter to a close by moving on from a general assessment of neoliberalism and its discourse-related theoretical considerations, to begin the process of contextualising my work in advance of the next chapter by adding a final component to the construction of my object of research; that of public sphere and public sphere discourse.
2.3 Neoliberalism, Democracy, and the Public Sphere

I wish to conclude this chapter by taking up the central concern of the neoliberal project that informs the semiotic analysis undertaken in this research. As a manifestation of the undemocratic nature of the neoliberal project generally, but specifically in the case of the Irish Republic, I want to contextualise my approach to the issue of neoliberalism’s democratic limitations through a focus on the public sphere. A focus on the public sphere is presented in this work as a way of assessing to what degree notions of citizenship – through civil society activism – and therefore democracy itself, have been undermined by the neoliberal project through its adoption by and its effects on the state, such that the arena of civil society interaction that should provide for a genuine public sphere of rational debate is rendered corrupt. Before elaborating on the relevance of public sphere dialogue for my work however, it is important at the outset to both briefly clarify the term, and in an attempt to avoid any confusion or ambiguity, the relationship of this term to that of civil society itself and to the state, given their interconnected nature.

2.3.1 Terminology

The concept of a public sphere can be traced back to classical Greek philosophy with its fundamental distinction between home life, business affairs and the private realm on one hand, and politics, civil engagement, and the public realm on the other. For Jürgen Habermas (see Buchanan 2010) the public sphere is any realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed. The public sphere comes into existence whenever a forum is created in which citizens can express their opinions on topics of public interest that relates to the public good, and crucially, where such opinions are subject to rational, critical debate on the one hand, and where such debates are participatory and as inclusive as possible, on the other. The public sphere therefore necessarily involves theorising on the nature of democracy and democratic rule, evaluating the meaning of politics, and demanding the state always be expected to justify, and be held accountable for its actions (Calhoun 2002).

A significant point to make here for the perspective of my work is that as the public sphere involves civil society and the state in dialogue, essentially the sphere, as an arena of social interaction, always exists in a technical sense, at least in a relatively stable society. That is, whether it is deemed to be ‘healthy’, at one end of a continuum, or in a state of ‘crisis’ at the other, or somewhere in between, is firstly a question of the degree to which
both state and social actors are free and willing to occupy the public space for the purposes of critical, reasoned, and open discussion. It is only then where both parties satisfy this condition that the issue of the relative robustness of the public sphere, of issues of any underlying impediments to its functioning, comes under scrutiny. For example, though we could view the mass media (newspapers, television, and the internet) as overlapping in some sense with the public sphere, since serious questions remain regarding access for alternative and/or minority voices, coupled with the fact that much of what the media is interested in trading in cannot be considered to be an issue of ‘the public good’, we could say that mass media fails the first test of the public sphere. The examples I deal with on the other hand, are selected on the basis that the first condition can be generally held to exist, and it is therefore on the second condition, the relative health of the space, that my critical approach to the discourse of the public sphere is concerned. Although it is not with this question however, that my interest ends.

As with the public sphere, the concept of civil society also relates to public life, in contrast to private or home life. But unlike the public sphere, which presupposes interaction with the state, civil society is that non-governmental dimension of the organisation of the state, which stands as a corollary to political society, that potentially coercive and bureaucratic dimension of the state (Buchanan 2010). It is seen as being manifest through public participation in voluntary associations such as trade unions, professional associations, workers’ cooperatives, mutual aid societies, various community and voluntary groups, other formally constituted non-governmental societies or associations, and even the mass media (Scott and Marshall 2009: 72). Civil society is also seen as embracing the notion of social movements, and the dynamic side of citizenship, demanding of rights and the upholding of obligations in keeping with the notion of the public good.

The distinction between civil society and the public sphere is important for my work because it supports my empirical interest in the space of dialogue and the dialogue itself, in contrast to any attempt at an appraisal of the form and content of civil society agency, of its intervention into the public space of the topics I am analysing. Also, and in noting Gramscian’s critique of civil society (Buttigieg 1995), that the division between political society and civil society is an artificial separation since the state includes both a coercive and a consensual apparatus, which supports the view of civil society as ‘a bastion of class hegemony’; the concept of civil society does nevertheless open up a broad area of theorising related to culture and ideology which has contributed to critical theory’s grounding of a discursive public sphere in civil society (Calhoun 2002). I make this point since much of the conclusions drawn from my analysis of neoliberal discourse could productively feed into Gramsci’s
reflections on civil society and hegemony, whilst overlapping with Bourdieu’s conception of neoliberalism as a universalising law, a contemporary social order with its own order of discourse.

Finally, in terms of the concept of the state we can say that it is a distinctive set of institutions that has the authority to make the rules that govern a society. In Max Weber’s phrase it has a ‘monopoly on the use of legitimate violence’ (Scott and Marshall 2009). It includes parliament, the police, and armed forces, the judiciary, the civil service, and the bureaucracy. Significantly, as a complex of various shifting institutions however, it is not a single entity, not an identifiable thing, and as such, it is not possessed of agency, it does not and cannot ‘do’ anything, which usually results in the state being identified by the various institutions of which it is composed (see Jessop 2008). This is significant for an engagement with neoliberalism’s democratic credentials since it raises the fundamental issue of the autonomy of the state. Moreover, it also means that conflict over policy and resources permanently exists within the state, ensuring that it can be difficult to identify the state’s interests, its actors, and also its boundaries. Given the new relationships that emerge as a consequence of the opening up of aspects of policy and programmes to the market under neoliberalism, this becomes a particularly significant issue.

In the Irish case for example, social partnership – as an opening up to civil society by executive and legislative elements of the state – can be seen as both a method and a site of conflict (and of controlling conflict), as well as the blurring of the state’s borders. As both Gramsci and Althusser question the distinction between the state and civil society, seeing the former integrated within the latter, social partnership can be seen as an ‘ideological state apparatus’ (Althusser 2001). By affording civil society groupings institutional roles within the state, social partnership could be seen as acting as a means of engendering consensus for measures not in civil society’s own interest. This is a point I will return to in the analytical chapter on social partnership, but I now want to explain my approach to the public sphere as a site of extra-institutional engagement and dialogue, with its bearing on issues of the public good and democratic legitimacy, as it relates to my research objectives of discursively critiquing neoliberalism’s role in undermining such notions of legitimacy.

2.3.2 Contextualising the public sphere for this work

In addressing neoliberalism and the Irish state in the recent past, an assumption must be that if the formal adoption of a neoliberal economic policy and of a neoliberal ethos beyond this domain more generally has indeed been a broadly open and democratic process, then
evidence of inclusive and deliberative discursive processes should be visible in situations where the state and the civil society have interacted. This should be especially so moreover, in areas of policy formation where civil society has been invited or encouraged to participate in such consultative processes, and that documentary evidence of such deliberations should testify to such inclusive collaborative procedures. This position stands moreover, regardless of what shape final policy takes. That is, even in areas where civil society actors believe their views have been ignored, a democratic process should be visible in the semiotic interaction between the state and its citizens in the record of this interaction, and in the various relations that take place in and between the networks of social practice(s) under review. That is, in the styles, the discourse, and the genres exhibited in the relevant texts. In approaching official, publically accessible government texts as a way of establishing the level of the state’s neoliberal orientation, I am therefore using the prism of the Irish state’s participation in the public sphere as a method of assessing the truth of my thesis.

It could be argued that evidence of consultative engagement on policy formation between the state and civil society is surely evidence of more democracy, or of a desire for more dialogue, not less. Indeed as Fairclough (2000) has noted with New Labour, the trend of publishing consultative documents before new policy has been agreed, is often presented by officialdom as just this, as more transparency and greater inclusivity. But it should be obvious that this is only ever guaranteed in situations where there is no power asymmetry, and the absence of such asymmetry is not usually a feature foregrounded in the publicity material of such official dialogical processes. Where the form and content of the message lies firmly within the hands of government and other participating or implicated structures, and where by proposing dialogue, the state is always in a proactive position with the public only ever able to react, ensures that there is always a requirement for critical social scientists to pay close attention to what is actually taking place in such interactive situations. And this is the focus of my interest in the public sphere in this work. That is, in what Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999: 64) call ‘real dialogue’, where the veracity of debate requires symmetry between participants in terms of their capacity to contribute, and also freedom for those who wish to contribute to make such interventions, added to the expectation that a new shared voice will emerge through such an experience which is expected to lead to action.

It should be clear from the outset however, that this work is not an interrogation of the Irish Republic’s public sphere itself, either theoretically in a general sense or empirically in relation to any particular configuration of the space at any one point in time. As such, I am taking a naturally simplified reading of the concept. That is, as my focus is on the state’s role in curtailing the democratic process by way of a critique of its semiotic practices through the
active control of public debate, my interest is primarily on the state’s actions when it engages with groups and individuals in the public sphere, and not on the civil society contribution to the public sphere. In other words, I am not primarily concerned here with evaluations of how precisely any interaction between civil society and the formal structures of the state can be evaluated as a healthy public sphere from the perspective of the levels of inclusivity manifest in any given representation of civil society, or of how effectively it has facilitated full and open participation.

I should also stress that as this work is not a diachronic study, I do not seek to contextualise the public sphere and public sphere interventions in the Irish Republic in any historical way. One obvious consequence of my synchronic approach to the study of neoliberal discourse in Ireland, and of my thesis in a general sense, is therefore that I make no assumptions or judgements as to the health and dynamism of the public sphere in Ireland in the period before 1997, nor in the period after 2007. As the central component of the construction of my object of research, of assessing the manner and the degree to which (to use Bourdieu’s terms) a neoliberal doxa has colonised the nomos of discrete social fields and has altered the valuation of capital within these fields in a particular manner; my singular aim with regard to the public sphere is to view it as a site for operationalising my methodological approach, the critique of official semiosis at a site of official praxis. There remains however, a need to return to the theoretical relevance of a focus on the public sphere, of what it is and what it means for the purposes of my research in a general sense, and how the questions it raises relate to the broader issues of dialogue, democracy, and of course semiosis.

2.3.3 The origin and relevance of the concept of the public sphere

The contemporary understanding of the public sphere (öffentlichkeit) comes from Jürgen Habermas, and in particular his genealogical interrogation of the concept in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* ([1962] 1989) and it is from this general perspective that my observations emanate. In addressing the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere (as well as those of public opinion, and the public use of reason) he has set the agenda for contemporary investigations of these concepts (see Roberts and Crossley 2004, and Goode 2005). Poised between the state and civil society the bourgeois public sphere; comprises a realm of social institutions in which private individuals assemble for the free, equal interchange of reasonable discourse, thus welding themselves into a relatively cohesive body whose deliberations may assume the force of a powerful political force. (Habermas [1962]1989, cited in Eagleton 1984: 9)
In the Habermasian sense the public sphere emerged as a result of a number of social changes in parts of Western Europe (the UK, France, and Germany) in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which, for a short period, gave rise to a novel and effective public sphere, such that in a relatively short period of time social conditions facilitated a situation in which large numbers of middle class men came together as private individuals to engage in reasoned argument over key issues of mutual interest and concern, that is, public issues.

This dynamic created a space in which both new ideas and the practices and discipline of rational public debate were cultivated. Moreover, this emergent zone of mediation between the state and the private individual shaped and was itself shaped by the emergence of a philosophical concept and consciousness of ‘publics’ itself. The fundamental notion of the public sphere is that reason should supersede social power, privilege, and tradition, and also that consensus should be central to debate, with issues of class suspended so that discourse becomes a political force. And, as Roberts and Crossley (2004: 4) contend, these spheres were therefore significant in both promoting rational thought and also, as a result of their membership and consensual nature, they were powerful and had to be listened to. Indeed Hohendahl (1982), (cited in Eagleton 1984: 10) maintains that the contemporary understanding of the term ‘criticism’ – in its professional sense – could only have emerged out of the public sphere since it is through such interaction that critical reflection loses its private character. However, conditions effectively served to undermine this public space almost from the moment it had come into being, such that the contemporary public sphere, in the words of Roberts and Crossley (2004: 3) is beset with contradictions and conflicting tendencies and characteristics, where the ideas and theorisation of the public sphere (in political theory and philosophy) remain intact, but the reality is a pale imitation of these ideals.

For Habermas (1991) the demise of the public sphere can be captured in four key factors. Firstly, the sharp delineation between the state and society, which was a prerequisite to the formation of the public sphere, has, if not disappeared altogether, at least become less visible in contemporary democracies. Through the collection of taxes and the provision of services, the state is tied up with peoples’ lives in a way that could not have been imagined when the bourgeois public sphere first emerged, with most people readily seeing themselves as part of the state and the state as a representation of them and their wishes and expectations. Secondly, the professionalisation of (party-)politics has meant that the private individual is further removed from rational engagement with the state. Moreover, the rise in professional bodies and interest groups that interact with the state on a regular basis have effectively replaced the role of active the citizen.
A third factor contributing to the demise of the public sphere is a shift in the meaning of ‘public opinion’. Assisted by professional social scientists, public opinion is increasingly synonymous with the results of polling surveys and ‘focus group’ research, which politicians use and seek to manipulate for their own ends (Roberts and Crossley 2004: 4-6). For Habermas these surveys are problematic because they are both artificial and tend to prioritise the loudest voice rather than the majoritarian voice. Finally, Habermas notes that as the mass media began to establish itself as a viable economic market, it was both hijacked for the purpose of selling goods, through advertising, and simultaneously became a considerable saleable commodity in its own right. This has meant that public communication has been moderated by the demands of big business and it has led to a regressive ‘dumbing down’ of the level of public debate, with editors being attracted towards the ‘lowest common denominator’ in an effort to maximise market share.

These trends nevertheless leave a gap ripe for imminent critique with modern democracies falling short of adequacy, even when measured against the yardstick of their own ideals and values. However, Habermas also notes that in parallel with these trends the general situation is further complicated by the complexity of modern societies, with their ever increasing degrees of specialisation and differentiation. In the contemporary picture there is often no perceived need on the part of citizens for one dominant ideology as there is no longer one coherent overview, be it religious or political, and therefore no unifying narrative as no one can be expected to conceptualise the totality. This leaves citizens ‘culturally impoverished’ (ibid. 8). The legitimation of ruling elites can be offset in such a situation but only insofar as citizens remain uninterested in political life, what Habermas calls the evolution of ‘civil privatism’, a contemporary disposition Habermas develops in *Legitimation Crisis* (1975). But the prevailing conditions outlined are far from being secure, as demonstrated by the rise of new social movements, a point Habermas picks up in the final chapters of *Theory of Communicative Action* (1991).

The separation of the economic and political systems from the communicatively rational sphere of everyday existence, or ‘lifeworld’ as Habermas calls it, is responsible for the ever-diminishing power of emancipatory reasoning to produce positive change. Moreover, he sees these economic and political systems as expanding back into the communicatively rational sphere in a manner which is corrosive of that sphere, where the possibility of communicative engagement and reasoning is being replaced by administrative procedures and economic transactions; that is, by a process of bureaucratisation and commodification. The arena of rational thought and engagement is rather, being colonised by processes of management and of economics, which, for Habermas, brings with it a range of
pathological consequences, social and psychological, which he sees as having created a crucial fault line of society. It is the recognition of this fault line that he maintains has given rise to the new social movements of recent decades and the pursuit of a potentially rational reconstruction of society and a project of emancipation, thereby revitalising the public sphere that processes such as neoliberal ideation seek to shrink.

2.3.4 Bourdieu and the public sphere

Though Bourdieu does not talk about the public sphere in any explicit sense in his works, there is a clear overlap between Habermas’s concern with colonisation of rational communication and Bourdieu’s thesis of the neoliberal nomos of the economic field evolving and expanding to contaminate the nomos of other fields. Bourdieu goes further though in viewing each field as a pre-existing arena of ‘systematically distorted communication’ (see Crossley 2004). That is, where Habermas fails to consider how the concept of ‘distorted communication’ might be implemented in empirical analyses of actually existing publics, Bourdieu believes that this is precisely where empirical analysis must focus, allowing us to put the pieces of actually existing communication back together in its ‘contaminated form’ (Crossley 2004: 88-89). Bourdieu conceives of his project as ‘science’, of interrogating that which exists in ways conducive to human emancipation. In the same way, that science historically challenges conventional wisdom and power structures, for Bourdieu this implies that sociology must continue that project, and his sociological analysis seeks to mirror the epistemological model of psychoanalysis using the key concepts of habitus, field, and doxa to generate sociologically recast versions of key psychoanalytic concepts. In this way, Bourdieu formulates a powerful critique of the place of systematic distortions in public discourse.

Significantly, for the purposes of discourse analysis, Bourdieu also differs from Habermas in his understanding of ‘rational communication’. One of the key distinctions for Bourdieu is that he understands rationality to be a property and an effect of human interaction, as opposed to a property of isolated individuals, or as a sort of ‘transcendental ego’. Rationality manifests as a pattern of communication in interaction and is an effect of the discipline imposed by interaction. That is, Bourdieu is working with a dialectical understanding of reason and logic, which is both historically contingent and socially constituted (and constituting). This means that where individuals manifest this rationality in their own private deliberations it is because those deliberations are fashioned as a consequence of public interactions, the thinking subject being formed through an internalisation of interaction patterns and social relations. This social constructionist position
moreover is also compatible with Foucault’s understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge and the productive nature of discourse and also with Fairclough’s dialectical-relation approach to the analysis of discourse. Moreover, this point is also endorsed by Bourdieu’s further observations on communicative rationality.

Where Habermas seeks to ground the concept of rationality transcendentally, by way of an investigation of the ‘universal pragmatics’ of the ‘ideal speech situation’, for example, Bourdieu in contrast, sees such transcendental arguments as resting upon a misrecognition of institutions and sentiments which are, in fact, historical and social in origin. For Bourdieu, such arguments involve a forgetting or repression of history. To paraphrase Crossley (2004: 91), Habermas succumbs to scholasticism and makes the same mistake as Saussure and Chomsky whose models are likewise, abstractions which dehistoricise and decontextualise their object. The ideals, norms, and rules of rational communicative engagement do not issue forth from invariate structures of communicative pragmatics any more than from transcendental ego or the heavens; they emerge out of the dynamics and interactions of human history (ibid.). For example, different scientific communities have emerged with their own respective ideals and norms regarding evidence and evaluation, their own ‘rules of engagement’, and these ideals and norms contrast with those that have developed in the literary and artistic fields. The rationality of fields presupposes their relative autonomy, so, for example, the scientific field must enjoy sufficient autonomy from other fields, such as the economic, if the rationality of the field is not to be jeopardised.

For Bourdieu the scientific field comes closest to the realisation of his ideal. By contrast, for example, in the political field the number and spread of individuals involved in any political community poses immense obstacles to effective rational deliberation, and quite unlike the situation found in, for example, very small and highly specialised scientific communities. This implies that representative democracy rather than direct democracy triumphs. Secondly, political debate is prone to the obstacles posed by deep-rooted dispositions, such as nationalism, which consistently resist the force of good argument. These two points emanate from and simultaneously reflect the tenets of a social constructionist perspective on society and semiosis, upon which critical discourse analysis itself rests. This means that from an analytical perspective, Bourdieu’s observations of the public sphere are more applicable to any investigation of its contamination or colonisation, that is, of a problem deserving of examination, than are those of Habermas. For Bourdieu, autonomy is a key precondition for the rationality of fields; as such fields become distorted when their relative autonomy is undermined by, for example, the economic interest in the
fields of the arts, culture, and the media, or as in this work, in the area of national social policy.

Bourdieu’s notion of habitus also explains both how agents such as educators, administrators, and journalists pre-reflexively adapt to their new situations, actively distorting their own discourses and rational forms without being fully aware of doing so. This distorted communication, in turn, attains a more durable and institutionalised presence in the field, thereby rendering communicative distortion ‘unconscious’, further moulding and conditioning practices and dispositions with the field. Since rational communication is not asocial, but exists in the material world, attempts at such communication, at supporting a healthy public sphere, will always be subject to the real world contaminants of discourse such as power, ideological constraint, and strategic action. Rather, that proceeding on the basis that there exists some uncontaminated form of rational communication, as Crossley summarises (2004: 110), Bourdieu therefore advises us to seek out those social conditions that enable, encourage, and constrain interlocutors to engage rationally with one another. So rather than devising ways of minimising the impact of the social environment upon debating citizens we should be looking for the best ways of securing such an input. This is precisely the objective in this work; influencing the analytical focus, the sites of analysis, and ultimately the selection of texts for analysis.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have approached the phenomenon of neoliberalism from a critical perspective, as a global hegemonic project, a political as well as an economic regimen, which has concentrated wealth in ever-fewer hands, has exacerbated social problems, and has greatly contributed to the despoiling of the planet. I have also seen how, in contrast to its stated ideal, the national experience of neoliberalism does not see the eradication of the state, but rather, an increased role for managing and monitoring those new areas of social life where the market has taken up a formal role. It is also a noticeable feature of neoliberalism in practice that states and institutions embracing the pro-market philosophy rarely, if ever, signify their agenda through the labels ‘neoliberal’ or ‘neoliberalism’, preferring perhaps to conceal the origin and the authoritative force of their actions, and instead attributing agency to vague pseudo-entities such as ‘globalisation’, or the ‘modern world’ or this ‘new reality’, or simply just to agentive ‘change’. In the Irish case for example, it is very often the descriptive label of the Celtic Tiger signifier which has come to express the impact of
precisely these ‘new external realities’ on Ireland and how the state has reoriented itself to respond to these imaginaries.

Yet incongruously, this term has also emerged as a relatively undefined but sufficient explanatory label for Ireland’s economic, political, and social trajectory, thereby concealing any need to question what choices are being taken, and by whom. Such trends that elide references to agency force critical social researchers to play close attention to the role of ideas in any broad engagement with the dogma, and hence to a focus on neoliberalism’s semiotic dimension. Consequently, I have highlighted work in this area, particularly in the Irish case but also noted the limitations of what has essentially been a focus of the vocabulary of neoliberalism and global capitalism, and on the emergence of new ‘buzzwords’, to use Fairclough’s phrase, or the ‘New Planetary Vulgate’, as elaborated by Bourdieu and Wacquant. Though these approaches relate to the formations of new identities, new representations of phenomena, and new ways of acting and interacting (that is, the new semiosis manifests itself in new styles, discourses, and genres), they do not provide a qualitatively rigorous way of assessing the dynamic impact of the semiosis of neoliberalism in undermining democracy.

In an attempt to construct my object of research I have turned to Bourdieu and his theorisation of neoliberalism as doxa, which, drawing on his theory of the state and concepts from his general theory of practice, I present as a more fruitful way on contextualising official discourse. Moreover, in overlapping with Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, of the exercise of power through consensual means, and also with Fairclough’s adaption of Harvey’s concept of a dialectics of discourse; I present this formulation as a sound theoretically basis for the application of a set of methodological approaches that all take as their starting point the constitutive nature of semiosis, and sit within a critical realist paradigm. In an empirical sense, in terms of approaching the focus of study, actual instantiations of Irish governmental discourse, I have also added a further aspect to the construction of the research object by highlighting the role of the public sphere, that social space where the state and civil society can interact through rational debate. By focusing on particular examples of the experience of public sphere dialogue in the contemporary period, we are therefore afforded access to clear instances of what Bourdieu calls ‘systematically distorted communication’, an interrogation of which I see as a central requirement of any worthwhile attempt to access appropriate, relevant, and useful samples of official semiosis.

Support for the significance of such distortion for analytical purposes can be found in summarising Fairclough’s position on this matter. Fairclough (1995a) argues that a relatively homogenous discourse, or specifically a homogenous text as a discourse sample, is usually
semantically and formally consistent; whereas a heterogeneous text in contrast, may be the opposite. That is, where the relations between the text producer and the audience are constructed in diverse and contradictory ways, the text can be realised in inconsistent and clashing modalities. In short, heterogeneity of texts codes social tensions and contradictions through ‘ambivalence’ and ‘dysfluency’ and such ruptures are potentially more productive in analytical terms than texts that are completely homogenous. As texts imply social spaces where the constitution of objects takes place via the ideational function of language, and the constitution of social subjects and social relations occurs between subjects through interpersonal functioning; in seeing the public sphere as just such a space – as a social arena for the interplay of heterogeneous discourses – identifies its semiotic dimension as a potentially valuable site of analysis.

Moreover, in my analysis I see the site of the public sphere as a modality for the engendering of official consensus, of culturally as well as politically embedding social practices consistent with a new social order. That is, I approach public sphere discourse not merely as a potentially productive site for accessing official praxis, but also as a key methodology for the deploying of a neoliberal order of discourse by government, other state institutions, and non-state actors. The challenge which occupies the following two chapters is therefore two-fold; to contextualise these concepts, developments, and ideas in the Irish case – to bring neoliberalism home – so to speak; and to develop and explain a theoretically-grounded methodological framework and a set of analytical tools for approaching appropriate text samples, that takes the theoretical positions outlined here on board and operationalises them in an effective manner. In advance of undertaking such analytical work however, I will first proceed by advancing the ideas elaborated here – and in particular Bourdieu’s views on neoliberalism’s colonisation of fields as a kind of re-, or better, over-writing of national history by looking at developments in the Irish Republic from the foundation of the state through to late modernity. In particular, in Chapter Three I address the neoliberal turn in Ireland, specifically examining the topics of immigration, childcare, and social partnership, contextualising them in advance of adopting an analytical approach to the discourse of these issues in the period under analysis, in the later chapters.

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Chapter Three

Ireland, the Neoliberal Turn and Social Policy:

Contextualising an Approach to Discourse Analysis

The period of analysis for this research, as noted, was chosen primarily as it is relatively contemporaneous to the analysis itself. Obviously a ten-year period of Irish political governance covering two full-term parliaments and bookended by two general elections is fortuitous in this regard. But what is more significant in terms of the historical picture of Irish polity more generally and the critical nature of the research enterprise of this work is that the starting point, 1997, falls within a period of unprecedented national economic growth. This point has been acknowledged not only formally in economic and political spheres, but also culturally, as reflected in the currency of the term the ‘Celtic Tiger’. Just as significantly moreover, my cut-off point, 2007, comes just before the compounding of a global economic crisis with an Irish banking collapse which led to an unprecedented reflection of the political choices and decision-making processes underlining that very period of growth. Indeed, in the general election campaign of April-May 2007, though imminent, the tremors of the impending financial collapse were barely acknowledged.

What this scenario affords I would argue is a research potential more productive and illustrative of social change (and its respective changed practices and discourses) than would be the case at a more apparently politically and economically chaotic point in Ireland’s history. That is to say, a similar research endeavour as undertaken here, taken across the period of economic collapse, for example from 2005 to 2015, would obviously provide evidence of changed discourses, discursive strategies, and social practices, but with the backdrop of such profound political-soul searching, economic-backpedalling, and the wave of spending cuts imposed under the label of ‘austerity’ that this precipitated, it would perhaps be more difficult to assess what I have tried to assess in this work; namely, the Irish state’s self-professed desire to embrace the neoliberal project and its adverse affects on the health of Irish democracy of such a decision. The same, I argue, could likewise be said of research covering the period of economic stagnation such as that experienced, for example, from the late seventies to the late 1980s – a situation which in part facilitated the wholesale engagement with the neoliberal path. Obviously, other than my desire to undertake contemporary analysis I can take no credit for this ‘happy accident’ of the period chosen for analysis, but whether I have succeeded in taking appropriate advantage of this state of affairs is for the reader to judge.
What I can do however, is to lay the groundwork for my discourse-analytic approach to an examination of the state’s interventions in the social policy arena through particular public sphere interactions. That is, the purpose of this chapter is to provide context in relation to the period in question. As a work of discourse analysis and not of political economy, I naturally have limited space to fulfil this task, but in this chapter I try to summarise both Irish political history, and in particular the orientation to neoliberalism in the 1980s, as a general background to my later detailed engagement with the topics of immigration and childcare legislative reform, and the social partnership process. I therefore follow the overview of Irish political economy since the founding of the state with a more contemporary reflection on these three issues from which the analytical approach to the relevant texts follows, as presented in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

The first section of this chapter brings Ireland into the picture, explicitly addressing its economic development from an historical perspective. This summary of the political economy of the Republic is primarily presented as contextual background for the experience of the state’s embrace of the neoliberal project beginning in the mid-1980’s. Drawing on a number of disciplines, sources, and perspectives, I try to provide an understanding of the background to the cleavage with the past that occurred after the 1987 general election, and which was consolidated in the first social partnership programme signed in the same year. In Foucault’s terminology this engagement with social partnership in particular, is partly a work of archaeology; an excavation of a particular history of the present period, to facilitate a keener understanding of the nature and consequences of the official orientation to a neoliberal path in contemporary Ireland, including the elements of its contingent nature. This task also foregrounds the only truly historical analysis that I undertake in my three discourse-analytic chapters.

In advance of engaging in any analysis of the semiosis of the three topics however, the balance of this chapter provides a historical and political context for the areas of immigration, childcare, and social partnership respectively. Consequently, in the second section I take a brief look at the background to the recent history of immigration in Ireland. In particular, I examine how, in the contemporary period, immigration and immigration legislation reform have come to be intertwined with ideas and discourses of the economic health of the nation, and less so with traditional state discourses of security and control on one hand, or of the more liberally-minded discourses of civil and political rights of the individual, family, and community on the other. Specifically, I focus on strategies designed to entice both recent Irish émigrés to return to Ireland as well as non-nationals to move there,
and reflect on at the harsh economic reality of the employment landscape such people found after they arrived to make Ireland their home.

In terms of the issue of childcare provision, in the third section of this chapter I continue with an overview of the background to the emergence of a national childcare debate in the Irish Republic and the relationship between the representative discourses (advanced through the social partnership process) and changing patterns of female labour-market participation and gender equality, more broadly. In the period before that covered by my analytical work, we initially see a state of play almost bereft of any official reflection on the state-provision of support for childcare, let alone concerted action. However, and as with the observations of immigration legislation, I highlight the ways in which Irish governments have identified the control of the labour supply as one of a limited number of mechanisms available in maintaining economic competitiveness and growth, and how the issue of facilitating the entry of more women workers into the workforce therefore emerged as a key route to fulfilling this overarching goal. Notably, we also see how in tandem with ideas of the benefits of childcare provision informed by professional bodies such as the ESRI and FÁS, in the years up to the establishing of the Expert Working Group on childcare in 1997, the historical social issues relating to childcare, such as, advancing gender equality, and enhancing early childhood education and welfare, that the state itself has formally acknowledged going back as far as 1980, receded in significance, being overtaken by this novel emergent economic discourse of childcare.

Drawing on the observations of the review of childcare in Irish polity in particular, in the chapter’s final section I provide a background to social partnership in Ireland. I examine the concept of partnership from its theoretical perspective as a macro-level concertation process between a state and major indigenous actors. I also reflect on the perceived non-neoliberal nature of such historical arrangements internationally. I then bring the focus back to the Irish Republic, looking at the emergence of social partnership in 1987, as a new and expanded version of existing ‘pay deals’ that were a feature of Irish industrial life in the period before the first official agreement. With a focus on organised labour’s experience of social partnership in particular, I address some critical perspectives on the process, in particular, the way in which union leadership essentially undermined their primary role by taking the side of the state in consistently promoting subsequent partnership deals in an uncritical manner. I also highlight the growing level of inequality that has run in parallel with the lifespan on social partnership in Ireland, and conclude with a focus on how social policy in particular has fared under these consecutive agreements and how, in practice, civil society has been effectively silenced by either accepting a service-provision role within
social partnership, or has been ostracised wherever it has demanded greater deliberation over policy implementation or has challenged the prevailing neoliberal orthodoxy of the partnership process itself.

3.1 Ireland’s Neoliberal Adventure

3.1.1 The consensus of the miracle of recent Irish growth – The Celtic Tiger

Most contemporary descriptions of the growth experienced during the years of the so-called Celtic Tiger, and on national economic policy in general, downplay the impact of neoliberalism. The Irish example rather, is presented as neither a completely neoliberal nor a completely statist programme, (see Barry 1999, MacSharry and White 2000, Nolan et al 2000, Ó Riain 2000, and Sweeney 1998). In making this case, the intervention of the state in areas such as tax reduction, and the agreement of workers with a broad set of policy choices evidenced in the social partnership process, is offered as proof of specifically un-neoliberal practices. The reality such authors conventionally argue, is rather, to be found in the hard lessons learned through Ireland’s economic history, the need to open up indigenous markets, to look to exports, and to attract foreign investment. There is no ‘inexorable convergence’ towards a dominant model, but due to Ireland’s small size and therefore the need to embrace ‘flexibility’, the country has managed to get better, to get fitter, at finding its place on the world stage and at successfully integrating into the world economy.

The consistent element that is added to this analysis is the presence of globalisation. Yet this globalisation remains undefined, and in keeping with Hay’s critique of Giden’s position of ‘globalisation as a complex process’ in Chapter Two above, in the Irish case globalisation (or more specifically, globalised neoliberal ideation) is proposed simply as an inevitable external reality. More specifically, it is proposed as having facilitated the attraction of overseas investment into Ireland and influenced the willingness of Trans-National Corporations (TNCs) to locate in Ireland, despite the absence of any significant natural resources or any historically large manufacturing base. The role of the EU in the international arena is also seen as a significant factor, as is the liberalisation of international markets generally. Yet it is the examples of intervention by the state and social partnership process in particular (see O’Donnell 1999, and O’Donnell and O’Reardon 2000), which are generally held up as evidence that Ireland is not following some kind of externally imposed
neoliberal path, but a contemporary ‘mixed economy’. These accounts contend that in essence Ireland can be viewed as an example of classic ‘third way’ success. Common as this type of analysis is, it overlooks some key elements of the full picture (see Allen 2007, Kirby 2002, O’Hearn 2000, and Phelan 2007b). In contrast therefore, the critical perspective argues that Ireland’s oft-labelled ‘pragmatic’ approach to theoretical imperatives (in contrast to a purely ideological one) (see Ó Riain 2000, and Ó Riain and O’Connell 2000, in particular), is not a new route, but rather, an actual reconfiguration of state and capital that allows neoliberalism to freely engage with an impact upon the social domain.

As Cerny (2008), Peck (2004) and others have illustrated in the previous chapter, factual interrogation of examples of neoliberalism in practice, from the Chilean blueprint to Thatcher and Reagan’s inflation controlling preoccupation with monetarism, all rely on the state to facilitate neoliberalism’s main goal of market openness through privatisation and deregulation, and an overarching desire to protect the indigenous financial system at all costs. That neoliberalism in practice can today be identified by the absence of state intervention denies its own history, and, at best, is a purely theoretical view. Secondly, ‘globalisation’ as a system of borderless capitalism is not some neutral mechanism that facilitates the exchange of goods and services. In its current configuration this system has been appropriated by the neoliberal project (by consistent and coherent sets of choices and actions) to facilitate that project’s own ends. As in other cases, such as Blair’s discourse of agentive change as expressed in a phrase like ‘the cascade of change’ (Fairclough 2000 and 2001), much of this view of a non-ideological but rather, a pragmatic approach to a reconfiguration of the state, is grounded in this very official appeal to outside forces and the ‘inexorable logic’ to which ‘we’ must respond. In the Irish case the signification of the identifier the Celtic Tiger, with its unanalysed folk-meaning of a strident nation, can be seen as important in this regard, as essentially part of Bourdieu’s indigenous neoliberal nomos-setting ‘involution’.

For example, we read that globalisation ‘requires the Irish economy to perform to the highest standards’ (Government of Ireland 1997: 67), and that it is ‘driving moves towards regulatory reform’ (Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Employment 1998: 21), and from the National Competitiveness Council (1998: 1), we read that ‘Globalisation will determine policy choices’, (cited in Hay and Smith 2005: 136-7). Yet as Hay and Watson illuminate, this Giddens’ worldview produces ‘a political logic of no alternative’. That is to say, that neoliberal globalisation presents a scenario in which there are ‘no opt-outs’ (1999: 421). This of course has the consequence of necessarily ruling out any debate as to the true essence of

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1 I explore the non-market orientated views of concertation processes such as Irish Social Partnership in section 3.4 of this chapter.
globalisation, such as whether the world is actually any more globalised than heretofore. It also conceals what the discourse of globalisation is doing – how the national nomos comes to be defined – and why therefore it may be so valued by governments and business interests alike. When the consequences of the actions of the Irish state are discussed they are therefore presented as the inevitable response to globalisation, or other external imperatives to which decision makers can only react, that is, through a disidentification with neoliberalism and its policy prescriptions. This pattern can also be seen as a direct result of the wider re-structuring of the state in response to the needs of the nation’s corporate and business elites. I will return to these points below, but firstly I want to briefly reflect on the development of economic policy since the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1921 up to the century’s end, to highlight the particularly radical nature of the involution of the mid-1980s that defines Irish political economy of the period under review in this work.

3.1.2 From hardy nationalism to hyper-globalism: The turn to neoliberalism

The sociological and political literature generally concurs that since its foundation, the Irish state can be seen to have passed through three main phases in its relationship to neoliberalism, (see for example, Allen 2007, Bradley 1994, Brunt 1998, Ó Gráda 1997, O’Malley 1992, and Smith 2005). The first phase, sometimes referred to as ‘economic nationalism’, was a primarily populist project to build up native capital and covers the period 1932 to 1959. Following its election in 1932, Fianna Fáil set about establishing protectionist policies and actively facilitating the development of indigenous companies such as Jefferson-Smurfit and Cement Roadstone. Smith (2005: 101) stresses however that even before the Fianna Fáil Government its Cumann na nGaedheal predecessor had also stepped in when necessary with infrastructural development. The most notable being the rural electrification programme, and the setting up of semi-state bodies like The Electricity Supply Board in 1927, followed by bodies such as the Turf Board (Bord Na Mona) and the Agricultural Credit Corporation. That is, even at this early sate, the fledgling independent state was not unplanned.

The Fianna Fáil party however made sizeable gains during this period through its active support of the farming bloc. The national discourse was very much one of small farmers, hardy independence, Catholic social values, and suspicion of landlords. In cities a

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2 Cumann na nGaedheal was the forerunner to the current Fine Gael party.
nationalist discourse was employed effectively to split the labour movement, presenting progressive social reforms as inherently ‘left-wing’ and as British imports (Allen 2007: 60). Together with moves to implement social welfare improvements and house-building programmes (Smith 2005: 102), the party ultimately managed to successfully draw the trade unions closer to Fianna Fáil. The Department of Finance remained central to all planning and the Church remained a close, if external, agency that continued to enjoy unfettered contact with ministers and politicians of all persuasions. Notably, and in contrast to other European states (as a consequence of its policy of non-alignment), Irish economic policy remained generally unchanged during and immediately after the Second World War.

After the war, 1948 saw the setting up of a trade agreement with the UK, with Ireland also becoming a founder member of the Organisation of European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) and the Council of Europe. Ireland also took almost £150 million in Marshall Aid, the first time the state had taken money in this way (Hickman 1999: 4). In this decade public expenditure also rose above 25% of GNP for the first time (Ó Gráda 1997: 72). The Central Bank was established in 1943, and in 1946 the Labour Court was set up by Fianna Fáil Minister Seán Lemass as a pillar of free collective bargaining, reflecting the party’s deep-seated desire for a genuine form of corporatism. Yet despite these various developments, and primarily in an attempt to ensure that indigenous companies could survive, Ireland remained broadly protectionist for another decade. But with social expenditure falling back in the period 1951-59 (O’Connell and Rottman 1992: 233), the laissez-faire tendency was still prevalent even if certain trends were decidedly interventionist. For example, the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) was established in 1950, and the Irish Export Board the following year. Ireland joined the IMF and the World Bank in 1957 (Smith 2005: 104), and had already attempted to break the link with Sterling in 1955, and then again in 1956.

There was a perceptible shift by 1958 when a new corporatist project emerged, specifically designed to integrate indigenous and foreign capital. Characterised by an openness to inward investment, and largely instigated by Fianna Fáil’s new leader and Taoiseach Seán Lemass, protectionist tariffs were jettisoned and laws designed to safeguard home industry were repealed (Allen 2007: 60). That year also saw the publication of a White Paper entitled ‘Programme for Economic Expansion’ (Smith 2005: 105). It was from this point forwards that the Irish State actively sought to attract foreign investment, seeking out niche markets wherever it could. For example, a tax-free export-processing zone was established at Shannon airport specifically to attract US capital (Allen 2007: 60, Ó Gráda 1997: 144). The state however, did not drop its support for native capital, but rather, tried to integrate the interests and requirements of home grown enterprise with those of foreign
capital. There is no evidence of any overt plan to become a neo-colony of the US by the Irish elite, but there was a hope and a belief that foreign participation in the national economy would add a new dynamism to indigenous industries that would benefit the nation as a whole. It was also in this atmosphere that Ireland’s first application to join the EEC was lodged in 1961. Likewise, the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Area was established in 1965 which, when followed by two unilateral reductions in manufacturing tariffs, was the main step in preparing the way for the nation’s actual membership of the EEC in January 1973.

The impetus for openness came from a more independently minded state bureaucracy that set about restructuring the state itself to suit the demands of capital (as expressed in the GATT rounds, the IMF, and the World Bank). The profile of the IDA was also raised, handing out grants, and acting as a strong voice for the needs of overseas capital (MacSharry and White 2000: 191-2). Along with this programme of ‘corporate welfare’, Fianna Fáil also began a process of shedding its image of hardy frugality and began to offer an informal route to patronage for those well placed to avail of their national network. This shift would of course prove to have major repercussions for the party, the political class generally, and the whole nation in the decades that followed. The IDA was strengthened with the Industrial Development Act of 1969, providing it with full autonomy as a separate state agency. Though the 1958 programme for Economic Expansion was never an actual policy plan, GNP rose by 4% in the five-year period 1958-63. A second programme designed to cover the period 1964-67 was later abandoned as it was destined to fail to meet its targets, nevertheless a third programme was drawn up for the period 1969-72 (Ó Gráda 1997: 73-9).

With an increase in the number of public and civil servants, there was greater desire to formalise neo-corporatism at home and to centralise collective (wage) bargaining. Yet for all the gradual shifts to openness and the international market, protectionism still held sway in many non-export sectors throughout the 1960s. Likewise, auxiliary, *laissez-faire* tendencies were still evident nationally in areas such as housing and education. The next decade saw a consolidation of this pattern of policy development. With membership of the EEC Ireland was however, required to abolish all trade tariffs by 1978, and to join the common agricultural policy with immediate effect. For its part the IDA concentrated on attracting companies with labour-intensive industries to raise employment levels, yet these jobs provided mainly unskilled positions (Ó Gráda 1994: 117). As Sweeney (1999: 231) describes it, this was more of a passive ‘open hand’ appeal to foreign investment than a more proactive, and directed ‘pointing hand’ policy.

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3 See Byrne, E.A. (2012) for a detailed historical account of the relationship between political parties (and *Fianna Fáil* in particular) and business since the State’s foundation, and the consequences for the State and the health of Ireland’s democracy.
Reflecting Lemass’s belief of two decades earlier, that there remained a benefit to the nation from centralised bargaining, emerging tensions between the mass of workers and the business elite were softened through a series of formalised neo-corporatist programmes, something akin to early forms of social partnership. Following the recommendation of the Commission of Industrial Organisation, collective deals labelled ‘National Understandings’ between workers, the state, and business and industry began in the 1960s. A series of such agreements throughout the 1970s helped to co-opt union leaders to the side of the government and big business (see Allen 2007: 61). These agreements of the mid-1970s were eventually superseded in 1979 by an overarching policy of ‘National Understanding’ based on a proposal from the National Industrial and Social Council (the forerunner to the National Economic and Social Council, NESC). Nevertheless, as with the economic programmes of the mid-1960s, subsequent national plans were often abandoned, or as with the 1977-80 plan, they failed to meet their targets (Bradley 1994: 146, Ó Gráda 1997: 78).

In the 1980s the IDA shifted its focus to the most technologically advanced indigenous industries in an attempt to maximise gains for the economy as a whole. This move both influenced and was reciprocally supported by the 1984 White Paper on industrial policy, seeking to promote indigenous industry (O’Malley 1992: 43). In a blow to its attempts to attract foreign direct investment however, the government, under pressure from the European Commission, was forced to raise its level of corporation tax from 0 to 10% in 1987, (Brunt 1988: 31-2, MacSharry and White 2000: 206-28). In parallel with these developments, the national debt simultaneously soared to 61.5% of GNP. In response, the government introduced a series of deflationary measures in 1983 with increased direct taxation, a reduction in public spending, and a policy of not replacing civil servants (with the notable exception of the Department of Social Welfare, where recruitment necessarily increased to cope with the rise in the numbers of the nationally unemployed).4

All of these official steps and their consequences, taken in the first half of the 1980s, can be seen now as elements of a transitional phase leading to the potential for full embrace of a neoliberal programme. Moreover, with the collapse in 1981 of the second version of a National Understanding initiative of 1980, the decade appeared to have also signalled an end to collective bargaining and the Irish engagement with neo-corporatist arrangements. The extreme state of the national finances however, coupled with the external environment of the global economic downturn of the early 1980s, ensured that after the 1987 general election, the opportunity to consolidate the state’s neoliberal objectives goal presented itself. In essence, everything was back on the table. Following the return of Fianna Fáil to power in

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4 In 1984 the author was one such new recruit.
this election, at a time of a chronic balance of payments deficit, a more extensive form of
national understanding, or ‘partnership’, was in fact aggressively pursued by successive
governments, which lasted well into the new millennium. This heralded the third phase of
economic development in Ireland; the neoliberal turn.

As a distributive and developmental state, characterised in large measure by its neo-
corporatist social partnership process (see Nolan et al 2000: 2, Ó Riain and O’Connell 2000:
334), Ireland could be said to be moving in the opposite direction to neoliberalism, (Sweeney
2007b) believe that Ireland has very much joined the neoliberal revolution. In fact, Kirby
goes as far as to claim that the current dynamic is a distinctive Irish neoliberalism,
characterised by Cerny’s competition state, where social policy is subordinated to the needs
of the market ( Kirby 2002: 143-4, 160). Moreover, the consensus seems to be that the most
significant among the mechanisms of the state the mid-1980s has been the social partnership
agreement. Contested and controversial, in so far as it has aligned the state with the over-
arching goal of maximising national competitiveness, this process remained a central pillar of
macro-economic policy since its inception in 1987, and through its subsequent agreements.
Macro-political bargaining seems on the surface at least to be indicative of a statist-shift.
Liberals are generally seen to be against such processes, yet others have argued that macro-
political bargaining in the Irish case cannot be seen as statist.

Teague (1995: 263), for example, asserts that social partnership is not a true form of
‘social corporatism’ in that it is very weakly composed and as it arose in response to an
economics of crisis, rather than as any true reflection on a genuine desire for national wealth
redistribution. To this Allen adds that Ireland has the worst record on earnings distribution in
the developed world, meaning that in reality, and as facilitated through social partnership,
redistribution is happening in favour of the wealthy (2000: 76). Taylor (2002: 28-51) and
Kirby (2002: 135-8) do not go quite so far, but claim that Irish neo-corporatism is
increasingly geared towards market forces, rather than social needs, thereby supporting the
conception of Ireland as a competition state. As the social partnership process provides the
analytical focus of my penultimate chapter, it is assessed in further detail, and in a more
structured way, in section 3.4 of this chapter. I now however, want to conclude this section on
Ireland’s neoliberal turn with a summary critique of the contemporary condition.
3.1.3 A critical appraisal of the contemporary neoliberal reality

The assessment of Ireland’s engagement with neoliberalism’s programme ultimately depends upon the position (philosophical and ideological) one starts from. For some, the heavy role of the state, coupled with social partnership’s neo-corporatist arrangement, almost by definition, means the state has not adopted a neoliberal path. Yet to critics, the content of structural shifts such as macro-level bargaining arrangements and the increased layers of management and administration involved at a local as well as a national level, are typical of neoliberalism in practice.  

In Smith’s investigation of whether Ireland can be seen to be a ‘showcase for globalisation’ on the international stage (2005: 2-3) – like Hay above – she naturally runs into the problem of globalisation itself. If it is to be defined as something measurable, can it be even said to be happening in Ireland? As with the empirical approach informed by Held et al (1999), she notes that Ireland was in fact less globalised in 1999 at the supposed height of the economic boom than it was in 1980 (2005: 147-50). Moreover, echoing Hay, she concurs that though the question of whether Ireland has been impacted by the global nature of the financialised market economy remains unanswered, the idea of globalisation affecting Ireland seems to be more important politically and discursively than the material reality of globalisation itself.

Following this shift to a focus on the semiosis of globalisation unfortunately means that Smith seems less interested in assessing globalisation’s neoliberal credentials. Kirby on the other hand gives a succinct but rather damning assessment of Ireland’s experience with neoliberal globalisation, including its prevailing ideas (see Kirby 2002 and Jacobson et al 2006). Specifically, he points to three difficulties that spring from the Irish experience with neoliberalism (and the internationalisation of financial flows) that challenge the more benign readings of its influence on the Irish state, which will be further addressed below. These ‘difficulties’ are firstly, the assertion that the economy has been transformed into a high-tech, high-growth economy. This critique rests on two premises; that the Irish manufacturing sector that expanded so rapidly since the late 1980s was actually dominated by foreign transnational companies to a degree ‘that is quite unique by OECD experience’ (Bradley 2000: 13); and also, that the indigenous success where it exists, is concentrated in a small number of firms and sectors, coupled with the fact that by the beginning of the century it was

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5 That is, where what develops in reality, both nationally and internationally, never equates to a purely theoretical neoliberal prescription of the withdrawal of the state, and the rise of Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ of a self-correcting, yet benign market.
simply too soon to be able to assess whether such developments truly offered sufficient reasons to confidently forecast continued growth and success.

The second problem is that Ireland’s economic success story goes hand-in-hand with glaring social failures that a restructuring of the state necessarily entails and, by extension, whether the experience overall can therefore be characterised as a developmental success, or merely a case of an economic boom. With conventional readings of the Celtic Tiger success, Kirby maintains that the ‘ambiguity’ surrounding the growing social polarisation between those who have benefited from economic growth and those who have not, consistently fails to be adequately addressed, or even acknowledged by political parties, mainstream theorists, and other commentators (Kirby 2002: 5, see also Millar 2008). He also points to the fact that during the 1990s, and unlike the situation in most European states, the ratio of social security spending to GDP fell markedly in Ireland. And finally, Kirby also challenges the assertion that the Irish case shows how economic latecomers can successfully adjust to the challenges of globalisation in a way that maximises the benefits for their society. This view, he maintains, rests on an inadequate understanding of globalisation, and its impact upon national states and societies (Kirby 2002: 3). In mirroring the general contentions of Cerny (2008) and Munck (2005), Kirby contends that the claims about how Ireland demonstrates how best to adjust to the vagaries of globalisation as a normative force, all fail to adequately grasp that in the operational dynamic of contemporary neoliberalism, what we are seeing in Ireland is ‘not so much a retreat of the state as the restructuring of the state into a subordinate relationship with global forces’ (2002: 6).

In adding content to Kirby’s claims, O’Hearn maintains that precisely because of the specifics of the various corporatist arrangements adopted since the late 1980s in particular, the Irish reality became one of rapidly rising profit-shares (of national income) with wage and consumption shares simultaneously falling. This is significant since it is a situation that has never previously occurred in the lifetime of the Irish state. The winners, O’Hearn (2000: 78) makes clear, were business and industry and their related investors, that is, the capitalist class. Individual incomes became more unequal, with consumption falling from 80% of GDP in the mid-1980s to a figure of 68% a decade later. Unlike the pattern in classic developmental models, this fall was not shored up by investment, as this figure also fell. Significantly, the rise in profits (and GNP) was also outside of the direct control of the state, with growth tied to rises in export surpluses and the repatriated profits of TNCs. Or simply put, profits could more easily be made in Ireland than heretofore, but those profits could be (and were) more easily removed from the state.
In terms of employment, job growth and security, and unlike the South-East Asian examples of truly developmental states (like the ‘Asian Tigers’ of Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, or Taiwan), the specificity of the Irish case, O’Hearn continues, was not the attraction of low wages and related labour costs (they often amounted to no more than 2% of a TNC’s expenditure), but low taxes. Real employment growth was actually concentrated in routine, low-pay services (accounting for 102% of total employment expansion in Ireland in the 1990s). Of these jobs, a massive 70% went to women. The proportion of part-time and contract work was also high by comparative standards, rising by a figure of 10.2% annually for the years from 1990 to 1995 (ibid. 79). A material consequence of the Irish state’s professed desire to enhance worker flexibility meant that by the end of the decade almost one quarter of all employment in the state was ‘atypical’, being neither full-time work or having any real job security. These criteria were particularly prevalent in the retail and TNC sectors.

With regard to the operations of the TNCs in particular, O’Hearn claims that they ‘cherry picked’ only those aspects of flexibilisation that suited them, such as the absence of permanent contracts, and the use of increased numbers of ‘buffer’ workers for certain tasks not directly employed by the TNCs, (see also Jacobson 1996). Furthermore, the template of playing tax rate reductions off against wage rises that so attracted the TNCs later became enshrined in the various social partnership arrangements, eventually facilitating an ever greater increase in worker flexibility (O’Hearn 2000: 83-84). From the late 1980s onwards this model therefore became ‘socially embedded’ in creating a better physical and human infrastructure for the operations of TNCs. In one manner of responding to Smith’s question of whether the Irish Republic can be viewed as an exemplar of globalisation, O’Hearn at least suggests that by the mid-1990s the Irish labour force was certainly ‘more flexible’ than that found in all the core regions of the European Union.

In assessing whether Ireland since the mid-1980s can or cannot be defined as a neoliberal state, O’Hearn (2000: 87-9) challenges the notion that it can be seen as a developmental state, that is, as a state in a sense catching up with other advanced economies after being held back for decades. At best he proposes the notion of a ‘flexible’ developmental state, but in operating ostensibly as a ‘midwife’ to foreign capital, and in actively regulating public sector wage demands (through social partnership), whilst deregulated the private sector to facilitate investment activity, he concludes that it is certainly flexible in a strategically neoliberal orientation, as opposed to a statist one. That is, in reflecting Munck’s assertion that in neoliberalism, the political arena is restructured and the function of the state is reorganised to fit the demands of the neoliberal project (2005: 63), this
overview would suggest that, in essence, the Irish state clearly seems to have embraced its position as a market player, rather than a referee. I now want to move on from this general assessment of the Irish political economy and its neoliberal dimension and return to the issue of contextualising my research in a more acute manner. Specifically, I wish to add content to the contextualisation of the topics that form the basis of my work’s discourse-analytical research; namely immigration legislation reform, childcare policy development and implementation, and social partnership’s impact on political ideation, civil society, and on the social agenda of the Irish Republic.

3.2 Immigration & The Irish Republic: An Overview

3.2.1 The contemporary picture

Unusually for the majority of Western European nations, Ireland’s history can be characterised as one of constant emigration. With a population roughly double that of the current Republic, the island of Ireland’s eight million inhabitants of the 1840s was decimated by a mixture of famine, disease, and the prolonged siphoning off of the young for the chance of a more prosperous future initially in the new world of North America, and in the twentieth century, in the UK and elsewhere. Even in the recent past this has remained the pattern with, for example, over seventy thousand leaving in the twelve month period April 1988 to March 1989 (ICI 2003: 3). Characterised by significant economic growth, the period from the mid-1990s severely challenged this trend however, seeing roughly matching of levels of emigration and immigration by mid-1995, with immigration going on to far exceed emigration for the next decade (CSO, cited in ICI 2003: 4). The relationship between employment opportunities and the interrelated mechanisms adopted by successive governments to keep wages low and increase labour-market flexibility, have largely facilitated industrial expansion in the ‘Celtic Tiger’ period, and are central features of the explanation of these figures. That is to say, the immigrants who had been a feature of Ireland for the preceding decades, such as post-graduate students, academics, skilled workers, partners of Irish citizens, etc. continued to come, but it was changes within the domestic economy that fundamentally altered the nature of immigration and the typical immigrant profile during the period in question.

Despite the fact that ‘emigration swept social problems aside whilst ideologies of faith and fatherland swept them under the carpet’ (Fanning 2007: 1), a radical change in the social
make-up of Ireland brought about by the rapid rise in levels of immigration has not, as yet, sufficiently focused the resources of the state on such deep-rooted issues. Rather, the focus seems to be primarily targeted at the economic welfare of the state and specifically, in strengthening Ireland’s perceived ‘competitive advantage’ over other states. Consequently, a reasonable hypothesis for contemporary Irish Governmental discourse on immigration during the 1990s and into the first years of the new millennium is that it has been unashamedly labour-market driven (see Allen 2000 and 2007a, 2007b, O’Hearn 2000). This essentially economistic approach to and representation of immigration is the case moreover, whether the focus is on enticing relatively recent Irish émigrés to return or on attracting ‘new’ foreign migrants to Ireland. Wherever a rights-based or social citizenship approach to immigration does feature, the discourse is relegated below the broader market discourse and the blunter discourses of security and control.

To illustrate this point I will summarise this market-oriented nature of immigration policy by looking at two separate but related areas of official policy, namely that of attracting skilled Irish exiles back to Ireland through the ‘Jobs Ireland’ campaign, and that of the starkly neoliberal approach to the broader policy of facilitating the needs of an emerging corporate agenda through heavy government intervention in the targeting of particular types of new immigrants. These two projects of essentially ‘cherry-picking’ those individuals and groups deemed most useful to the nation’s economy run in tandem and form the outline of an immigration policy where other discourses – and other sets of social practices – have to struggle to gain visibility, semiotic expression, and practical support. The analysis of the Department of Justice, Equality, and Law Reform’s public discussion document of 2005, which forms the basis of this chapter’s linguistic analysis, will show that such discourses where present, must negotiate an uneasy relationship with the labour market discourses on international capital and national labour-markets, and where other discourses are visible, they are not those of citizenship and human rights, but those of social order, security, and control.

### 3.2.2 A focus on skilled Irish émigrés

In the years preceding the unprecedented growth in the economy of the Irish Republic no one was unaware that emigration had increased dramatically throughout the 1980s. For many of those leaving in this period – a large number of whom were third-level graduates – relocating abroad was understood as the best option for work and career. The official position on this trend was to see it simply as a form of ‘economic voluntarism’ (see MacLaughlin 2000). In a very Adam Smithian sense, such emigrants were to be viewed as making the best of
themselves, of being ‘utility maximising individuals’, a narrative that therefore presented the 
flow of labour as a straightforward individual choice, and in being divorced from the realities 
of social life in Ireland, as a ‘sanitised’ choice too (ibid. 320). But it is exactly this type of 
promotion of emigration, as sensible and logical, of what intelligent individuals should do, 
that the institutions of the state sought to tackle, once the Irish economy started to improve in 
the mid-1990s.

As Hayward and Howard (2007) explain however, it was precisely these high-calibre 
graduates that successive governments began to focus on. Recent, well-educated emigrants 
in particular were now to be viewed as Ireland’s ‘strategic reserve’ (ibid. 47) and an elaborate 
set of policies were developed to try to encourage them to return to Ireland. As far back as 
1989 FÁS, the national employment authority, began funding the International Network for 
Ireland, which established a high-skills’ pool based overseas to link graduates with particular 
positions in Ireland. In 1996 Forbairt (the precursor to the Enterprise Authority), also set up 
a programme to actively entice emigrants back to Ireland. Within a few years however, the 
problem was simply one of numbers, with a lack of labour supply in almost all emerging 
sectors of the Irish economy. Consequently, in 1998 FÁS launched a new initiative, which 
included the launch of an interactive website based on Enterprise Ireland’s ‘Opportunity 
Ireland’ site specifically aimed at attracting IT professionals, and the ‘Jobs Ireland’ series of 
travelling recruitment fairs, targeting a range of international cities in Europe, North 
America, Asia, and, Australia.

In the same way as attracting foreign direct investment was seen as a key element of 
the state’s economic programme, so too returning skilled émigrés were seen as providing 
Ireland with a competitive advantage over its neighbours. Even after the initial focus on the 
IT and construction sectors waned by 2001 the campaign shifted gear to the retail and health 
sectors. Being largely seen as having fulfilled its goals by 2002, the ‘Jobs Ireland’ campaign 
was wound down. Nevertheless, during its lifespan media outlets were heavily targeted with 
the Irish Post newspaper, for example, the main mouthpiece for the Irish community in the 
UK, being funded through the campaign to both sell the message of Irish jobs, to facilitate job 
finding, and to relay personal testimonies of happy and successful returnees to its readers 
(ibid. 50). Another significant current throughout all the advertising used in the ‘Jobs 
Ireland’ campaign was the sense that the return would be a permanent one. Since most 
historical surveys of Irish economic migrants had shown their initial emigration as temporary, 
at least ideally, the various initiatives sought to provide the Irish target audience with the 
opportunity to actually make this a reality, and bring their exile to an end (ibid. 55). Indeed,
‘Back for Good’ was a slogan used by the Construction Industry Federation campaign that ran from 1997 to 1999.

In terms of discourses of emigration, immigration, and the state, the anomaly that Hayward and Howard point to through all of these campaigns is the emergence of a shift from seeing a move to Ireland being in the worker’s interest to one in the interest of the country (ibid. 57). The recruitment drive was generally presented as a way to try to ensure Ireland’s economic survival, as an active way of sustaining the ‘Celtic Tiger’ boom and fending off long-term threats to the economy as a whole. In a few short years the Irish state had therefore shifted its position from presenting emigration from Ireland as a reasoned and sensible choice for people seeking to make the best for themselves, to one of pleading with these same people (and their offspring) to move back to Ireland as some kind of national duty. That is, this is a new discourse to add to the variety of competing discourses developed over the previous century (Mac Laughlin 2000). More fundamentally, the formulation of the ‘Jobs Ireland’ and related campaigns can be seen as evidence of how Government wanted to control the extent and the nature of the social change that would follow, which also meant controlling the ideas and narratives – the semiosis – about social change and immigration’s part in such a dynamic. As the case of calling out to recent Irish emigrants demonstrates, the Government’s response to the challenge of immigration generally can be seen to be centred on the endeavour to juggle national ideals and economic pragmatism, a response also pursued in relation to attempts to attract non-nationals to Ireland.

3.2.3 Neoliberalism and Irish immigration

In contemporary manifestation of neoliberal ideology, far from shrinking, the neoliberal state often creates new levels of management to ensure that the market is facilitated in its operations (see Cerny, 2008 and Munck 2005). Or, as Bourdieu (1998a) claims, the state is actually central to the functioning of neoliberalism in practice. This apparent anomaly can be seen clearly in the case of Immigration and Ireland. As Allen (2007b: 85) contends, when it comes to the issue of removing impediments to the functioning of the market, in the case of immigration in Ireland, ‘Soviet-style planning has become the reverse side of the market freedom demanded by business’. For Allen, the Irish state understands that in operating within a particular model of global economics, the eradication of regulatory frameworks to facilitate business generally and to attract foreign multinationals in particular is a fundamental priority.
Yet the flip-side of this ‘freedom’ is worker flexibility, which, for the majority, actively transmutes into pressure, stress, and control from above. And where management of this labour market affects all workers, the principal target remains migrant labour. The perceived shortage of labour by the late 1990s ensured that for the first in Irish history in 1999 asylum seekers were allowed to take up employment work before 1999, at least for a period. After 1999 a formal work-permit system for non-nationals (but not open to asylum seekers) was developed in an attempt to fill the gaps in the workforce. Once the majority of the indigenous unemployed, returned émigrés, and female workers new to the jobs market had taken up employment, the number of work permits issued jumped by 700% in the four years to 2003 (Ruhs 2005: 15). The scheme however, was designed along the ‘guest-worker’ system adopted by other European countries and as with these historical schemes, the work-permit was issued to the employer not to the employee, thereby tying the worker to a particular job and perpetuating the power imbalances and potential abuse that follow from such a relationship.

The increase in foreign labour can possibly best be seen in the statistics on recruitment agencies. Where there were 272 such offices in 1997, by 1999 there were 447 (Allen 2007b: 86-87). That is, recruitment had become an industry in itself. At this time Ireland also had the highest percentage of workers employed on temporary agency contracts, with a figure of some 5.2% of the working population, in contrast to an EU average was just 2.2% (Conroy and Pierce 2002: 16). Moreover, the measures in place to deal with any abuse of migrant labour were grossly insufficient in scope and in enforcement, with the rate of inspections naturally falling as the industrial base expanded and the number of employees increased. When employers were prosecuted the fines were so low as to make abiding by the laws unnecessary, and given the broader labour force picture, as Allen argues, the Government had no real incentive to prosecute. This was despite the high percentage of successful claims that migrants managed to bring to the labour relations court, i.e. 80-85% in the period 2002-2003 (Allen 2007b: 88). The general laissez-faire attitude of the authorities to abuse can possibly best be illustrated in the high-profile case brought against the GAMA Corporation for abuse of Turkish construction workers, paid as low as €2.20 per hour when the industry minimum was €12.95.6

Following EU enlargement in 2004 moreover, the Government sought to directly intervene in the Irish labour market in a way unseen in the state’s history. The Employment Permits Act of 2003 created a whole new category of foreign workers who did not need work permits to work in Ireland. This group was composed primarily of EU nationals (including

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those of the nine new accession states). In an attempt to facilitate the growing and more complex needs of indigenous and foreign businesses, the Government wanted to develop a policy dictated as much as possible by employers. As part of the Partnership 2000 social partnership programme (1997-2000), the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs (EGFSN) was established to bring together representatives from corporate interests whose goal, together with government, was to maintain a competitive national advantage by keeping wages across all sectors of the economy as low as possible. With the then Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Mary Harney TD (Progressive Democrats) declaring the EGFSN as ‘the central resource for advising on skills needs’ (DETE 2001), the underlying logic fed the group’s objectives of how, when, and where to adjust particular sections of the labour market supply.

The construction boom, for example, as per the GAMA case, was largely facilitated by the suppression of wage costs through the active control of the supply of workers from Eastern Europe, who though skilled, were willing to work for less than the indigenous labour force, thereby limiting the overall cost to the sector. This wage discrepancy between Irish and Eastern European workers was even more dramatic in the unskilled sector, which, post-2004, consisted of a potential pool of some 25 million workers to which the rest of the EU (with the exception of the United Kingdom and Sweden), was closed. Not only did the retail, hospitality, and service sectors make the most of this dynamic, but this new reality was actually used to close off the work-permit system for non-EU workers. The Green Card system remained in operation for skilled workers coming from outside the EU, but many preconditions remained ensuring that employers’ flexibility was preserved and the employees’ options limited (Allen 2007b: 95). As a result of the subsequent Employment Permits Act (2006), for example, the automatic right of migrants on Green Cards to apply for Irish citizenship after a certain period of time was removed.

In the case of the Irish labour market it can clearly be shown that the dictum of no state intervention in the market is only preserved when it suits the economy. As soon as it appears that some formal intervention can aid economic development, the Irish Government, primarily through DETE, the EGFSG, and investments in FÁS in this case, has been more than happy to manipulate the labour market. Moreover, although much of the labour market discourse and texts of the social partnership agreements emphasised inclusion and anti-racism, the employment laws were structured in a way that ensured that new frontiers of potential exploitation opened up even where the relevant Acts seemed to liberalise labour migration. Discrimination, often racist, work-place abuse, and insecurity have in practice, emerged as a material reality for many immigrants and effective responses from the state to
these issues seem to be proofed primarily in relation to their possible deleterious effects on the domestic economy. In Chapter Five I will approach the official discourse of immigration in more detail to see how these market-oriented priorities come to be circulated and gain acceptance at a particular point in the legislative process of a change in immigration policy summarised above. In particular, I want to look at the semiotic dimension of a public consultation document on the reform of immigration legislation to see how ideas about the liberalisation of entry controls are discursively construed and represented in relation to the broader interests, imperatives, and practices of the state.

3.3 The Background to Childcare in the Irish Republic

In the sociological literature when references to formal childcare provision in the Irish Republic do appear, they are appended to more primary issues. Childcare is therefore framed tangentially in relation to issues of gender equality, changing gender demographics, changes in female fertility rates, heightened female career aspirations, the ‘feminisation’ of certain professions, the changing nature of the labour market more generally, and the valorisation of caring work in a domestic or familial setting (Ruane 1999). Discussions on advancing affordable and accessible childcare however never seem to be the focus of these debates. The reality of Irish social history seems to suggest therefore that state intervention in matters of family and home can only be justified by a more pressing common danger. In contemporary discourse this threat manifests itself as a shortage in the supply of labour and its potential to undermine the national economy, which therefore becomes a central focus of the discourse-analytical work on childcare in Chapter Six. Here however, I want to concentrate on the historical situation in relation to childcare provision in the Irish Republic up to 2000, and more specifically, on the situation of female labour market participation and the emergence of a national discourse on childcare provision before 1999. It is this background that feeds directly into the Government’s ‘Expert Working Group on Childcare’ and their report published in that year, on what was the state’s first formal attempt to devise a national strategy on childcare provision.
3.3.1 Female labour market participation and the push for gender equality in Irish society before 2000

It was not until as recently as 1970 that the state began to directly address the issue of gender equality (and the reality of inequality) with the ‘Commission on the Status of Women’. Formal bars to women’s full participation in Irish life became a focus of contention and emergent protest leading to a number of significant gains over the next decade, culminating in the right to paid maternity leave in 1981 (Fahey et al. 2000: 244). A tangible consequence of these and other developments saw a decline in fertility rates which freed up more women to participate in the labour market, dovetailing with an increasing demand for female labour.

By the 1960s Irish fertility figures began to converge with the European average, a process that was completed by the 1990s (when figures were about half the 1970s level). Alongside this general fall in the fertility rate the significant fact to note however, was the increase in births outside of marriage. The period 1980 to 1996 saw a five-fold increase of such births from a figure of 5% to 25% of all births. This rapid-rise in fertility rates outside marriage led to a set of new constraints on female labour market participation. Indeed, the theory that equates economic development with greater labour market participation by women sits uneasily with the actual developments in the Irish situation in the two decades up to the end of the millennium.

By 1983, for example, Ireland showed the lowest rates of formal female labour force participation of the then EU-10. Yet only fifteen years later these rates were higher than those in the relatively large economies of Spain and Italy. These figures however, hide the considerable gap between the labour market participation of parental females (married and unmarried) as compared to women who have no children. As anticipated in Human Capital theory (Fahey et al. 2000: 257), increased levels of female education are also a consistent factor behind increased levels of female participation in the workforce. Higher levels of education lead to smaller families due to the high capital costs of taking time out to have children. To some degree developments in Ireland have been consistent with this pattern. In short, it is not simply a matter of supply factors alone that influence participation rates. We need to look too at the broader trends within the indigenous labour market to get a more complete picture.

These trends include the aforementioned long-standing disincentives to the participation of married women in the workforce, the high taxation that applied to a working spouse, plus the similar barriers that applied to women whose spouse was dependent on social welfare. Thus actual female participation in the labour market, though in part related
to lowering fertility rates, was as much to do with labour market dynamics and significantly, to women’s parental as opposed to marital status, and, by extension, the peculiar nature of the ‘welfare regime’ in Ireland (ibid. 258). This picture, moreover, also showed signs of structural and institutional inequality. Gender differentials in pay were a reality. So too was occupational segregation, with most female workers concentrated into a relatively small number of occupations.

Part-time employment too, though the choice of some women, remained predominantly a female arena with 25% of all female workers working part-time, compared to only 5% of men. These issues remained significant ones for real gender equality since the social and political advances made in the three decades since the 1980s were actually reinforcing these patterns. Gender segregation, lower pay, limited access to full-time employment, and the losing out of promotion and other non-financial benefits usually closed off to part-time workers, did little to challenge inequality in a domestic setting. The stark historical choice of marriage and a life-time of childrearing on the one hand, or remaining single and entering the labour market on the other, may have gone but despite education and a changing, more flexible labour market, equality is in some ways just as far away as ever.

3.3.2 Gender equality and the emergent childcare debate: the Expert Working Group, 1997-1999

By the late 1990s childcare and childcare provision was pushed to the centre of the national planning agenda by the report of the Expert Working Group (EWG). The work of the group (composed of stakeholders from business, women’s groups, and trade unionists amongst others), was designed to challenge the critical view of Ireland’s progress in the area of childcare provision, as represented by an EU report on Ireland’s National Action Plan on employment (Murphy-Lawless 2000: 89). Drawn up in 1997-1998 and published the following year, this report stated that strategies for the mainstreaming of gender equality remained ‘rather limited, being confined to the early planning stages only’. Indeed, it was only via a concerted level of pressure exercised by the National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCI), coupled with the Government’s recognition of the link between the EU report’s conclusions and their potential impact on the continued receipt of structural funds, which led the government to set up the EWG in 1997 (NWCI/Isis 1998). A central argument from the NWCI was that apart from providing genuine opportunities for women to access the job

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market, childcare, if prioritised and implemented effectively, should be seen as a key investment in child development and social cohesion that would offset future social spending needs in other areas. Investing in childcare, the NWCI argued, needed to be understood as an investment that benefits society as a whole.

In convening the EWG the state sought to produce an up-to-date, objective review of the economic, legal, and social aspects of current and future childcare needs. Ultimately it was asked to deliver recommendations for an integrated national approach for delivery of childcare by the end of 1998, that is, a first ever national childcare strategy. Against this backdrop at the time of publishing Ireland was declared by the OECD to be the 11th wealthiest country in the world, having created more jobs in the three years to 2000 than it had in the previous thirty years. There were record numbers of women in the workforce with a figure of 39.2% of women between the ages of 15-65 active in the labour market, up from 25.7% in 1971. The country was also experiencing the lowest fertility rates in the state’s history dropping from a figure of 2.96 births per woman in the early 1980s to 1.92 in 1997 (Murphy-Lawless 2000: 90). Yet, as noted by Fahey et al (2000: 258), the feminisation of the Irish republic’s labour market was characterised by a disproportionate level of part-time work, less-skilled and low-paid employment than by expanding career options for Irish women as a whole.

Changing forms of family life have also affected women’s ability to participate fully in a period of economic growth. Single parenthood had risen from a figure of 2.7% in 1971 to over 25% by the year 2000. Marital breakdown had increased by a figure of 135% in the ten years from 1986 to 1996 (Murphy-Lawless 2000: 91). Since single mothers face particular hardship, the lack of affordable childcare and the reality of part-time, low-paid work consistently acted as disincentives to labour market participation. It is clear that for this group in particular, overcoming the barriers that an absence of childcare presents was particularly significant. Tellingly it is in this area, lone-parents at the risk of poverty, that the only formal pre-EWG report childcare schemes were aimed, when in 1991, an EU-funded pilot scheme was introduced with the New Opportunities for Women, or the ‘NOW’ programme. With the exception of these programmes (which quickly became oversubscribed) the childcare model in Ireland at the end of the millennium could be characterised as a model of ‘maximum private responsibility’ (Murphy-Lawless 2000: 92).

Individual families and single parents had to find and pay for childcare themselves in whatever way they could find to make it work – and obviously many could not. Ruane (1999), for example, estimated that the actual cost of childcare for the first nine years of a
child’s life in 1999 amounted to IR£26,240 (approx. €33,000).\(^8\) With only the most vulnerable being provided formal state aid within the limited parameters of a skills’ retraining initiative, for the majority of parents, informal family arrangements continued to plug the gap that resulted from the lack of a cohesive childcare policy. During the years of Irish economic growth however, such arrangements came under severe strain. Childminders too worked in an unregulated system without any formal training, meaning that they also operated without social security benefits and social protection. Conversely, there was no standardised national accreditation system for childminders and childminding, leaving mothers and families vulnerable to poor service and even the possibility of child abuse. Formal childcare facilities at work were virtually non-existent with no real incentives for employers to develop them. Yet simultaneously social surveys of the time consistently show a demand for affordable childcare with an ESRI report of 1998 showing that demand far outstripped supply. Many social commentators, trade unions, employers, and activist groups had in effect been arguing for a shift to an ethos of ‘maximum public responsibility’.\(^9\)

As something that can be addressed, it has been the ‘supply side’ dynamic that has consistently occupied the mind of government and civil servants in particular.\(^10\) Even as recently as 2007 a joint FÁS and ESRI report pays a lot of attention to female employment trends and projections. The section on employment forecasts for the years up to 2012, for example, states: ‘these aggregate numbers hide strong differences in the occupations filled by men and women’, (Executive Summary page xiii). It continues, ‘a much higher proportion of women work in professional and associate professional occupations’. In keeping with Fahey et al (2000), the projections envisage a situation where more that 55% of the workforce is expected to be composed of women in the areas of Business and Law, Health and Education, and Caring and other Health Associate Professions (2007: xv). The lessons of this analysis and these forecasts are that in order to reach its potential the Irish economy must facilitate the entry into and maintenance of such workers in the labour market.

These observations from the FÁS/ESRI report also dovetail with the hypothesis presented in other debates as, for example, represented by the ESG’s report; ‘Ahead of the Curve – Ireland’s place in the global economy’, from 2004. In stressing the benefits of immigration in the executive summary, that report also points to returning emigrants and increased female participation as the three elements of a demographic trend which ‘ensured

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\(^10\) In terms of childcare provision, supply-side measures relate to enhancing the numbers of available childcare places, whereas demand-side measures focus on facilitating parents’ access to childcare places.
that labour supply did not limit growth potential’ (ESG 2004: 7). Perhaps as a way of strengthening the push for reform of the immigration and labour permit laws in its second chapter ‘The Case for Change’, the report claims that since about 2003, of the above areas ‘all but the last of these sources are diminishing’, (ibid. 24). It was in this environment that the government established the EWG with the request that it look specifically at the issues of supply, cost, and quality of childcare, and to produce a first national childcare strategy for 2000 to 2006.

Figures from the OECD however, show that by 2005, Ireland – with a figure of 44.9% compared to an OECD average of 70.6% – had the lowest labour market participation rates of sole parents of any of the thirty countries surveyed (OECD 2007). For much of the intervening period since the EWG’s report the issue of sustaining the Celtic Tiger, and the moves to eradicate labour shortages in all sectors seems to have preoccupied many, yet the EWG’s core issue of ensuring that parents have access to high-quality, affordable, and safe childcare, goes unacknowledged, being lost within wider political debates. And it is this precise issue of the ways in which this dynamic takes place that is the focus of the analytical chapter on childcare. Specifically, the research interest is in the discursive ways in which a particular orientation is given to the EWG member’s desires for a future national childcare policy, by officialdom, as part of the ongoing ‘partnership’ process in the years after 1999, which ultimately lends support to a prioritisation of childcare initiatives not of the EWG members’ choosing.

3.4 Institutional Transformation: Social Partnership in Ireland

3.4.1 Social Partnership: A conceptual perspective

Social partnership as a concept can be seen as a model of negotiated economic and social governance. As a process that blurs the distinctions between public and private, between national and local, and between representative and participative democracy, the Irish version is viewed as one of the most significant developments in public policy in the EU and is widely credited at home as underpinning a sustained period of much-needed economic recovery and growth, (see Baccaro and Simoni 2004, Kirby 2002, MacSharry and White 2000, O’Donnell 1999, 2008, and Sweeney 1999). The basis of social partnership is a search for agreement on policy objectives between sectoral interests – specifically, the government, business and industry, trade unions, and farming organisations. The ideological weight given
to social partnership as a key to the preservation of the ‘national economy’ at all costs has also been responsible for seeing the process receive strong cross-party political support since its inception. This has resulted in social partnership being elevated to a kind shared political ideology (Walsh *et al* 1998, cited in Kirby 2002: 40), or, according to Allen (2000: 35), as something akin to ‘republicanism or Catholicism’. The visible expression of social partnership is a series of triennial national agreements starting with the *Programme for National Recovery* (PNR) in 1987. Each agreement presents the consensus reached on a number of issues, based upon a strategy report from the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) circulated in advance of the drawing up of each partnership agreement to direct each set of partnership negotiations.

With the emergence of a dominant, interconnected global capitalism, where the market is seen as the new principle of social organisation, a fundamental shift is observed in the state’s role. As Adshead *et al* (2008: 16) point out, from once being viewed as the traditional bulwark to ‘control and temper the activities of markets’ we now see the state as one that ‘seeks to facilitate the competitive operation of markets’. The neoliberal, free-market consensus of a reduced government and a diminishing responsibility for the social agenda generally can be seen as clear evidence of the effectiveness of this approach. Latterly however, the degree of state non-intervention in economic affairs has come under criticism with observers contending that, on the contrary, the state needs to be built up, strengthened in some areas, with the state needing to more actively position itself as ‘manager’ of the interface between its national interests and global neoliberalism (*ibid.*). As Peck (2004: 394) notes ‘contrary to its discursive self-representation, neoliberalism cannot be reduced to a simple process of replacing states with markets because, in practice, 'privatized' or 'deregulated' markets still have to be managed and policed. This strong ideological prejudice against the traditional state can be seen as a paradigm-shift. Or what Adshead *et al* (2008: 19) call a ‘postmodernist managerial revolution’ with the emphasis moving to the economy, to issues of efficiency and effectiveness, and to the growth of new public management, and target-focused, indicator-led policy making.

In practice, this dynamic claims to speak on behalf of customers and taxpayers and has led to a hollowing-out of the state, with a myriad of agencies, autonomous bodies, and actors, with little coordination and coherence between them, fulfilling the former duties of the state. In the Irish case the overlapping of the individual remits of national, regional, and local boards and pacts (Kirby 2002: 41-2) can be seen as a tangible example of this development, with Government slowly being replaced by a series of policy networks. Significantly, as a political structure, or a ‘mechanism for reaching a national agreement between the Irish
government and the social partners’ (Cantillon et al cited in Ó Broin 2009: 117), the Irish social partnership structure can be seen to be central to this public managerialist dynamic. More fundamentally however, partnership in Ireland also sits within the broader international pattern of social concertation procedures discussed in state, political, and public policy discourse (Taylor 2002, O’Donnell 2008). Such concertation processes have been viewed historically as evidence of ‘neo-corporatism’, as measures opposing more laissez-faire arrangements. The main criticism of the neo-corporatist approach is that the centralised nature of the process is seen to impose further rigidities in the economic system. In this regard macro-bargaining structures have long been viewed as the antithesis of good neoliberal practice. In this light, the concertation arrangements, as found in the Irish social partnership have more recently been viewed elsewhere as anachronistic.

The advocates of neoliberalism point to three central flaws with concertation arrangements. The first rigidity relates to the notion of manufactured obligations, which, short of amassing shareholder profit, managers in business and industry generally reject. Secondly, neoliberalism has a dispute with the evolution and the extension of the concept of citizenship. The continual increase in citizenship rights and the expansion of entitlements is seen as increasing wage rigidity and inducing a culture of dependence. Thirdly, that macro-political bargaining is only ever a tool of demand-side change (wage rates, employment conditions, etc.), or as O’Donnell says, of ‘distributional policy’ (2008: 79). It is therefore viewed as ill-suited to respond to the issues of restructuring supply-side issues (for example, labour flexibility, productivity incentivisation, redeployment, etc.). Others would contend however that the neoliberal critique of macro-political bargaining is inaccurate or anachronistic in itself through contention that centralised concertation can only be equated with economic demand-side management issues and the related embellishment of a welfare state.

Particularly in the Irish case for example, Taylor (2002: 37) contends that the rigidities, so feared by business and industry, are not a ubiquitous feature of macro-political bargaining. O’Donnell also maintains that unlike the historical neo-corporatist arrangements developed in other western democracies, in Ireland the development of social partnership has to a very large degree also been about the building of a public system, what he terms ‘building the ship at sea’, (2008: 88). This is evidenced by the massive amount of infrastructural spending that took place between 1997 and 2007. In this light, demand-side only views of Irish macro-political bargaining as being confined to the labour and capital pivot can therefore be seen as short-sighted and incomplete. O’Donnell (2008: 87), for example, suggests therefore that both free-market critics of demand-side measures and their
implementation, and civil society actors and their supply-side concerns on social exclusion and poverty, can all point to government as the reason for limited or insufficient change. Conversely, where ‘rigidities’ emerge through neo-corporatist arrangements they can also be placed on the operations of organised labour just as much as on business. Ultimately, it is the nature of the ideas at the heart of the settlement that is social partnership which have dictated how or whether the burden has been shared and which sectors of society have been asked to make the bigger sacrifices.

3.4.2 The emergence of social partnership in Ireland

As a consequence of systematic industrial unrest in the 1960s and 1970s the Commission on Industrial Organisation, through the government think tank the National Industry and Economic Council (the body that would later become NESC), established a ‘National Employer Labour Conference’. It was from this conference that the first national wage agreements of the 1970s emerged (Craig 2002: 26). One consequence of the agreement was that the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) attained a position from which it could impose sanctions on rank and file members that were deemed to be acting beyond the bounds of this national agreement. These wage agreements soon became part of the political and industrial landscape, with nine agreements running from the early 1970s up to 1981 (ibid.). In 1979 and 1980 the agreements were elaborated and renamed ‘National Understandings’ and now also included issues of employment and social welfare policy. Despite more than a decade of national deals however, the perception of a lack of any meaningful progress within the trade union movement meant that by 1979 Ireland was top of the league of western democracies in days lost to industrial action (see Hardiman 1988).

The period prior to the new agreement, scheduled for 1987, was characterised by rising unemployment, accelerating from a figure of 7.3% in 1980 to 17% by 1986. With emigration endemic, trade union membership also fell from 55.3% of the national workforce in 1980 to 42.4% in 1988. Irish wage costs rose by a figure of only 7% compared to a figure of 37% in competitor countries (Craig 2002: 29). The Fianna Fáil Government had also instigated a public sector pay freeze in 1982, and in the same year the new Fine Gael/Labour coalition Government put no public service pay increases in its first budget. After a national one-day strike in 1985, ICTU continued to threaten further action for a time, but in being unable to find a way to translate worker anger into tangible gains for its members, the congress became more favourably disposed to the potential afforded by a multi-participant bargaining arrangement.
In a climate of national crisis the coalition Government fell in 1987, yet after the general election Fianna Fáil, under the leadership of Charles Haughey, failed to amass an overall majority. The new Minister for Finance, Ray MacSharry however, quickly identified the trade union leadership as a key element in finding a way out of the crisis, given what was to be their central role in selling the scheduled spending cuts to their members (MacSharry and White 2000). He perceived that a consensus could be built with the social partners, and drawing on the tone of the NESC report (Strategy for Development 1986-90: Growth, Employment and Fiscal Balance), he felt he could convince ICTU of the benefits of the idea of social partnership. ICTU quickly signed up to the NESC report, with the only concession being a Government agreement to return to centralised, national bargaining. These negotiations ultimately led directly to the ‘Programme for National Recovery 1987-90’ (PNR), the first in a sequence of unbroken national partnership agreements leading up to the current Towards 2016 partnership process. (See Figure 6.1 below for an overview of all the partnership agreements and the NESC strategy reports on which they have been based). MacSharry was happy to later declare that the trade union leadership had provided ‘the critical lead’ in these negotiations (Craig 2002: 32). This however, was only the start of the settlement; getting partnership to function effectively was still a major challenge to the state.

*Figure 6.1 Social Partnership agreements and their related NESC Strategy Reports.*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Partnership agreement *</th>
<th>NESC Strategy Report</th>
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3.4.3 A critical view of social partnership:

Business Unionism

The agreement of trade union leadership in curtailing wage demands was identified at an early stage as a key element of social partnership. Support for the PNR was also presented, particularly by Minister MacSharry and Fianna Fáil, as a way of avoiding a return to the jungle, as a way of protecting the most vulnerable, lowest-paid workers in society (Allen 2000: 113). This had the result of presenting opponents of the deal open to claims of a disregard for their colleagues working in less-profitable sectors and in poorer conditions, and by extension, as plainly selfish (ibid.). This was however, primarily a Government narrative adopted by union leadership, where through a consensus approach, major advances in economic management and performance would be possible with the historically divisive labour-related issue of strikes (and days lost to strikes) having being excised from political debate. As O’Donnell (2008: 82) points out, with social partnership, the Irish Government’s main argument was to present itself as rejecting the overtly neoliberal approach to the welfare state, such as that pursued by successive Conservative governments in the UK during this period. This enabled the government to point to some evidence of ‘social solidarity’ and to more effectively sell the notion that partnership breeds partnership. In contrast, Murphy (cited in Ó Broin 2009: 121), maintains that ‘social partnership is the vehicle through which a global policy regime of neoliberalism has been inserted into the Irish political psyche and discourse’.

The concession to the PNR however, meant ICTU had in effect exchanged a prioritisation of the interests of workers for the nation’s interests, essentially for the welfare of the national economy, thereby making clear to their members and the public that there was no alternative. Moreover, despite the fact that the 1990 ICTU special delegate conference sought to influence not only the PNR by the subsequent deal being discussed at the time, the congress never acknowledged any debate on future agreements. This fundamental shift in the focus of ICTU influenced partnership discussions and agreements up to the present. In what is referred to a ‘business unionism’ (Allen 2000: 117), from 1987 onwards, the union bureaucracy has primarily been concerned with the economic competitiveness of the state in a natural alliance, not with its members, but with government, business, and industry. Nevertheless, workers have tried periodically to voice their displeasure with the partnership agenda. In 1996 for example, there were different responses to Partnership2000 (P2000) emanating from individual unions due to the divergent interests of the rank and file membership on the one hand, and of the union bureaucracy on the other. In SIPTU, for
example, 42% of members voted against P2000 and almost half voted against the subsequent agreement the *Partnership for Prosperity and Fairness*, in 1999. Nevertheless, the union bureaucracy continued to present the P2000 agreement as a move towards cooperation. In fact P2000 was presented as a radical break from the past with its involvement of representatives of the community and voluntary sector in the discussions. But this approach just highlighted the position of the trade union leadership more generally, and their role in the ideological victory for the concept of the ‘national’ economy.

In this way, business unionism and the lack of any organised critical questioning of social partnership has therefore significantly contributed to the normalisation of social partnership in Ireland, both politically and culturally. In reflection Murphy’s observation on the link between partnership and neoliberalism above, and in supporting Hall’s contention that neoliberalism (or monetarism more explicitly) has acted as an all encompassing form of radical or ‘third order’ policy paradigm shift (1993: 283-87), in these observations it is clear that it is the social partnership project that has largely brought such a shift to fruition. In essence, and taking in Blyth’s contribution to ideational and structural change (2001: 4-5); we can see how, through the active participation of the social partners and the trade union leaders in particular, partnership’s institutionalising dynamic has seen the process act as the ‘cognitive lock’ on possible thought and action. Essentially, social partnership has fixed both the inevitability of the neoliberal orthodoxy being prioritised, as well as the parameters of the policy tools available in both the minds and actions of all participating actors. This precise issue of social partnership and its role in creating such a ‘cognitive lock’ will feature explicitly in the theorisation of an approach to the analysis of the semiosis of social partnership in Chapter Seven.

**The increase in inequality during the life of social partnership**

According to Allen, the reality of the ‘New Public Management’ language in Ireland alluded to by Adshead *et al* (2008) above, had, by 1997, resulted in Irish labour market patterns mirroring those in the USA (Allen 2000: 75). Social partnership was supposed to provide protection for the least well paid, but in reality wages stagnated or fell in real terms. The percentage of workers earning only two-thirds the median wage at the end of the 1990s, for example, was 23%, which was one of the highest figures of all the OECD member states. Conversely, managerial wages grew between 3½ to 5 times those of the lowest 10% of paid workers, which is one of the largest growth rates in the industrialised world (*ibid.* 76). Millar makes a similar point on the growth of inequality during the lifetime of social partnership. In reflecting on Ireland’s position in the OECD report ‘Growth with Poverty, 1990-2001’, she
notes that social spending as a percentage of GNP fell from a figure of 12.3% in 1992 to 7.8% in 2000 (or from 10.9% to 6.6% of GDP) (2008: 101), a situation which she adds, as with the case in the USA, has gone virtually unnoticed in political discourse.

Likewise, in raising the prospect of the trade union movement withdrawing from the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness deal in 2001, the President of ICTU, Inez McCormack, lambasted the inherent inequality being underwritten by social partnership in an Irish Times article.\footnote{“It’s Time to show our Solidarity with Equality. The Social Partners Meet Today to Review the PPF. The Prosperity is Obvious but is the Programme Delivering Fairness? No, Says Inez McCormack.” \textit{The Irish Times}: 18. Jan 25 2001.} In labelling the unions’ support of partnership as ‘solidarity without equality’, and, in a reference to the absence of the voice(s) of the poor linked to genuine participation in the process, she likened what ICTU saw as ‘budgetary betrayal’ with ‘justice denied’. This sentiment is reflected in the figures on the decline in the share of the national economy (as represented by GDP) going to workers and the poor. When social partnership began the EU-15 average for the period 1980-1990 was 71.8%, with the Irish figure being 71.2%. In the period 2001-2007 however, the EU figure fell to 67.3% but the figure in Ireland had tumbled to just 54.3% (Allen 2007: 9). Social partnership was (and is) presented as a response to a crisis, but also as a mechanism for managing change in a globalised world. But this has meant a response in which everything has been subordinated to the joint-objective of job market and national economic amelioration, and consequently, as part of this arrangement ‘business and industry was given what it asked for’ (Jacobson \textit{et al} 2006: 33). This has meant that partnership has overseen a shift in governance towards a permanent subordination of social policy to free-market economic policy.

Politicians use the language of social solidarity to put a gloss on the reality of their actions and inaction. Behind this rhetoric however, Ireland came second only to the USA in having the most unequal society of western democracies in UN Human Development report 2004, (Allen 2007: 82). Nevertheless, in 2005 the ICTU President, David Begg, signalled his intention to use the latest talks (on \textit{Towards 2016}) to move the social agenda forward, and to talk about raising tax rates, specifically on corporate profits, a move which could have been seen to break the existing consensus (Jacobson \textit{et al} 2006: 194). This move by ICTU could be interpreted as a response to the more general disillusionment experienced by many in civil society, and the community and voluntary sector in particular, at the perception that they have lost a lot of their critical capacity since entering partnership talks in 1996 (for P2000). In fact, a number of actors within the ‘social pillar’ of community and voluntary groups, namely the Community Workers’ Cooperative, the National Women’s Council of Ireland, the Simon Community, and the National Traveller Movement withdrew from the Sustaining Progress
partnership process in 2003 frustrated by the limited remit of the social inclusion programme that was open to debate, (Connolly 2008: 29), with some of these groups having their core state-funding cut as a result. I want to conclude this section on social partnership by extending the impact of the process on social policy more generally.

As Jacobsen *et al* (2006) point out, there has always been limited potential for civil society to effect change through radical action and challenge any new policy direction. That a tension will exist between state structures, including Government, and such actors is not unusual, but it is the particular way in which a neoliberal state tries to coerce and structure civil society in its own image, as a ‘handmaiden of the state’ (Kirby 2010: 2) that I wish to address here. As noted, over the life of social partnership the state has actively chosen to give prominence to the community and voluntary sector (key civil society actors in Ireland). This dynamic was initially seen, or at least projected officially, as being a new form of participative democracy, presenting the potential for a broad-based deliberative democracy with opportunities to directly influence policy. As has been noted however, most critical commentators see these efforts as having failed (Connolly 2008, Harvey 2009, Meade 2005, Millar 2008, Murphy 2009, and Ó Broin 2009). The only visible result is often the expansion of new working groups (such as the Expert Working Group on childcare) but few tangible progressive policy initiatives ever emerge. Kirby (2010: 15), for example, contends that these developments show the Irish state’s desire, particularly since 2002, to actively seek to make civil society subservient to the state, restricting its ability to critique policy and lobby for change, and ultimately to confine itself to acting in its new ‘service-delivery’ role.

Kirby summarises this trend of civil society co-option by the state through the social partnership process, in four dimensions. Firstly, there is the controlling relationship, which has been advanced through the rolling out of this very service-provision role of community and voluntary sector organisations. This has meant that in receiving state funding for the delivery of services, organisations were forbidden from criticising government and government policy. As Harvey notes:

> Organisations working in diverse areas […] were told that if they took money from government, which most do, they may not criticise. […] not only is criticism impermissible, but voluntary and community organisations may not even try to ‘persuade’ people. (2009: 31)

This has also resulted in community work becoming more precarious and dependent on the whim of the state for those organisations choosing to enter the partnership programme. Secondly, funding regimes became more disciplined and politicised, with increases in state funding over recent decades having resulted in organisations taking on more staff and investing in larger premises, purchasing more equipment, etc., leaving them susceptible to
fluctuations in funding policy and to cutbacks in particular. This dynamic alone has had negative knock-on consequences for democratic participation, fundamentally challenging the meaning of ‘partnership’ itself. Thirdly, there has been a prioritisation of the service-provision model itself, which has necessitated a move away from a concern with redistributive justice and progressive change, towards the provision of services on behalf of or in partnership with the government. This carries with it a reinvention of the sector as consumerist welfare provider, with the citizen recast as client, and reinforcing the more socially conservative ideas of the self-reliant citizen that underpin such a redefinition.

Much of this central funding moreover has been redirected from capacity building initiatives and redirected towards service interventions. This means that advancing social inclusion has more or less disappeared from the culture and ethos of many participating statutory bodies (Murphy 2009: 40). Kirby’s final point is what he terms the state’s ‘blinkered and obfuscating ideology’. Essentially a neoliberal reading of citizenship is promoted everywhere, which conceals the real reasons, the material, macro-level conditions, that are to be found at the root of why people and communities find themselves in positions of poverty and exclusion in the first place. Ultimately, problems become individualised, hiding their cause and making politics a matter of the uninterrupted continuation of the play of market forces and individual agency within such a space. The result is a discussion on a set of symptoms only, but with no reflection on their potential causes and hence on the nature of truly effective remedies.

What emerges therefore is a social policy that deals with problems it can never hope to understand or resolve, with much of the day-to-day activity of civil society reduced to no more than measuring progress towards agreed ‘targets’. This is not just disingenuous but pernicious. In the final analysis, social partnership has managed to tame those very representative voices within civil society that might have been best placed to challenge its neoliberal ethos. As Kirby concludes:

Twenty years of social partnership, therefore, have shown its success not in facilitating the emergence of an activist civil society able to move policy towards the achievements of its goals, but rather, the taming of civil society and the severe restriction of its sphere and influence. (2010: 17)

These observations may fit perfectly well into the operational elements of the underlying ideology, but they reveal social partnership to be not just a poor substitute for a healthy public sphere, but as a set of policy prescriptions actively compromising, and infecting such a space. In Chapter Seven I will develop this general position by theorising social partnership in an interdisciplinary way by first assessing its origins in the mid-1980s as well as also
addressing its discursive strategies for such a ‘taming of civil society’ as Kirby contends, through a focus on a particular aspect of social policy.

**Conclusion**

The observations on the arc of Irish political and economic development and, in particular, on the issues of immigration and childcare policy, and the social partnership process are necessarily brief and partial. There remains always the option to approach them from other perspectives or to take on and elaborate related issues and even to challenge the prioritisation of issues and to therefore downplay the content and findings that I have set forth here. As fundamentally a work of linguistic inquiry as opposed to one of politics, history, or economics however, this will always be the case for whatever is ultimately presented as a summary of these broad topics and their dynamics. What is clear in the picture outlined here though is that a certain political manoeuvring, a realignment or a recalibration of what talking about subjects like immigration or childcare actually means, has taken place in the period under review, and that the social partnership process has itself been implicated in this development. And moreover, that the wholesale political and economic reorientation towards a neoliberal economic ideal that originated in the 1980s, which social partnership reflects, has come to dominate the form and content of the discourses and practices inherent in political debate on these issues.

In short, it is not particularly controversial to claim that the manoeuvring that sees immigration shift quickly and radically into a discourse and set of practices related to national economic competitiveness, and that finds the historical childcare discourses of advanced gender equality more or less ignored until the topic is likewise overtaken by such an economic perspective, is a new development in Irish political and cultural life. Moreover, the nature of the partnership process has by the dawn of the period under review, become so entrenched in political and cultural life of the Irish Republic that its role, and particularly its public sphere role, in linking social policy to a set of economic metrics and policy prescriptions, has become almost invisible. Indeed, this work will essentially demonstrate how the degree to which social partnership’s fundamental assumptions and its ideological orientation have remained open to discussion and critique in the period under analysis, is inversely proportional to its pervasiveness and its power.

Ultimately, and in relation to the aims of this work as a whole, and notwithstanding the limited review of these topics, the historical contexts reviewed here clearly provide an amount of evidence to both encourage and support a more detailed investigation of the nature
of this work’s research agenda; namely, the relationship between these transformations in Irish political and cultural life and role of semiosis. Before I approach each of the three topics in sequence however, I first want to proceed by detailing the methodological approach that will be applied to each of Chapters Five, Six, and Seven; its origin, its normative basis, its content, and specifically its operationalisation of theory and method in tandem. The challenge which emerges therefore is to develop, explain, and justify a specific methodological framework and set of tools for analysing appropriate text samples from a critical perspective, which, when taken together with the theoretical positions outlined in Chapter Two and the contextual findings from this chapter, allows for an effective response to the work’s overall research question on neoliberalism’s negative impact on democracy in a detailed and transparent manner. This is the focus of the next chapter.

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Chapter Four

CDA: A Theory-based Approach to Methodology

As a consequence of an approach to semiosis that sees its social function as central to its material form, the specific methodological approach to a critical engagement with official discourse samples that I am using is necessarily composed of more than a set of methods. My methodology actually incorporates three separate elements: a theoretical framework, a methodological framework, and a set of methods or tools for the actual analysis of discourse. Since these three elements are connected, with each informing the structure and content of the subsequent component of the methodology, I devote considerable space in this chapter to elaborating each part of my approach. Although the theoretical ‘framework’ or basis of the broad thesis is not restated in each of the three analytical chapters that follow, it is covered in some detail here because so much space is given to both the methodological framework and the operationalisation of methods in the analytical chapters.

As a fundamental concern of my methodological approach to semiosis relates to the issue of critique and what it means to be ‘critical’, before detailing the content of the methodology further, I want to briefly explain how the relationship between semiosis and critique impacts upon my method, and how my position in relation to analysis is to be understood. My theoretical framework rests on a post-Marxist position on the socially constructed nature of the world and of the role of semiosis in this construction. It is the significance of the role of semiosis in social constructionism, in large part influenced by the contribution of Michel Foucault and his critique of the permanence of knowledge, which informs my work (see Foucault 1972). Foucault’s work shows the central role of discourse in contributing to and upholding the historically contingent and unanalysed origin and assumptions within sets of ideas and related social practices, and their role in the maintenance of regimes of knowledge and power structures. Unlike much contemporary social science that emanates from a social constructionist position however, my approach is not strictly post-structuralist in its truest sense. That is, my work remains fundamentally within a historical-materialist frame with the traditional Marxist recognition of the dialecticism of productive forces. My alignment with social constructionism rather, emanates from the perceived weakness with classical Marxism’s overly economistic and objective nature, and its rejection of the study of language as part of a general rejection of idealism and the discipline’s perceived subjectivism.
Classical Marxism’s aversion to idealism is obviously a problem for historical-materialist approaches to the study of language in use and discourse-related critiques of power. Once Marx rejects Hegel’s dialecticism of ideas in favour of a material dialecticism, it seems the basic philosophy leaves no space for an engagement with semiosis, where any engagement with language is viewed as a fruitless sojourn into the realm of ideas, or as a ‘descent into discourse’ (Ives 2005: 455). When the post-Marxists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) attempted to rescue the concept of hegemony from its perceived essentialist roots with their ‘discourse theory’ in the mid-nineteen eighties, this is exactly the criticism that they received. The trajectory outlined in discourse theory has in fact been seen by adherents to classical Marxism as a move away from reality itself. Though I understand but do not accept this traditional position, the significant point to note is that this work also rejects the notion that all social practices can be reduced to discourse or discursive practices, central to discourse theory.

Rather, and specifically in relation to hegemony (and its interplay with regimes of knowledge and power structures), it seems that a historically materialist philosophy can only ever advance if it finds a way to embrace the study of discourse and its critique. Naturally this broad topic is not the object of this piece of work, but it is within this arena of political and philosophical inquiry that my work and specifically, the theoretical framework and my method of study, is positioned. Significantly, in terms of this chapter’s function as a whole, it is also as a consequence of the question being addressed here – official strategies to curtail democracy in advancing the neoliberal project – that one, and only one, approach to critical discourse analysis (that of Norman Fairclough) shows itself appropriate for my engagement with the analysis of semiosis. And it is because of the link between the actual analysis of texts undertaken in my work and the broader question of potential (non post-Marxist) advances to a Marxist encounter with idealism through discourse that I want to develop the general point a little further before returning to the methodological issues subsequent to my theoretical framework.

If we take the issue of hegemony and return to the work of Antonio Gramsci, responsible for advancing the sense in which the term is generally understood today; we can see in his writings on language how, contrary to the Marxist current of his time, he saw language as central to historical-materialism. Lo Piparo (1979) and Ives (2004 and 2005) moreover, maintain that his adoption of the term ‘hegemony’ essentially emerged out of his university studies in linguistics. In fact, Gramsci advanced the centrality of the material

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1 Antonio Gramsci was a student of Linguistics at the University of Turin and was engaged in the post-Saussurian debates on structuralism where he developed his interest in the language question in Italy and in language and hegemony. (See Ives 1997, 2004 and 2005).
nature of language and language use in the repeated ways he addressed the contemporary ‘questione della lingua’, the problem of the low number of citizens that spoke official ‘Italian’ in the interbellum period, and the difficulties this raised for effective unification, and therefore for social and economic progress. In particular, through his dialectical analysis of vernaculars and the official prescriptivism of a ‘normative grammar’, he argues that language and language in use is central to issues of control and coercion, which leads to his treaty on a normative grammar and consent. All of these observations seem to have received little interest (certainly outside of Italy) since his writings on linguistics have largely been ignored. And, as in Ives’s (2005) assessment of Laclau and Mouffe’s reading of Gramsci, where they have been addressed, they have been either misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Again, I stress that I can do no more than raise the prospect of a genuine and rigorous historical-materialist engagement with discourse here and am aware that in doing so I am alluding to questions and challenges that I do not have the space to properly address here. The point I am making however, is that as a contribution to critical social research, all critical analysis of discourse has the potential to reveal and challenge unequal power structures – indeed Gramsci made this very point over seventy years ago (Ives 1997: 99) – but I believe that unlike purely post-structuralist approaches to discourse, only a historical-materialist based approach, such as Fairclough’s dialectical-relational approach, provides a feasible route to both connecting with and advancing the relatively limited pool of post-Gramscian writings on language and hegemony, and to advancing a genuinely ethical hegemony. In this light I see the operationalisation of Fairclough’s methodologies as a form of praxis (in the Gramscian/Marxian sense) as a goal-directed activity that emanates from a theoretical perspective, but seeks to make real the tenets of such theory through the very act of doing, in this case, of carrying out a critical analysis of discourse. This is this author’s way or restating Fairclough’s (2003: 204) fundamental contention that critical discourse analysis should demonstrate how that which social theorists say is happening in the world is actually being accomplished in practice, through semiotic means.

It is therefore upon Fairclough’s contemporary approach to critical discourse analysis that both my methodological framework, (the ‘explanatory critique’ framework) and the set of analytical methods (being a combination of textual/linguistic and interdiscursive analyses) have been drawn. After these ontological and epistemological questions, the purpose of this chapter is therefore to explain what I understand by notions of ‘critical’ in relation to critical approaches to the analysis of discourse. Responding to the author’s own background in linguistics, this requires a reflection on the cleavage within the subject between competing definitions of the notion of discourse itself, a further dichotomy within the functionalist
paradigm between critical approaches to discourse and more descriptive concerns within sociolinguistics generally, followed by a third division within CDA itself between Fairclough’s approach and other approaches to power and discourse. I also reflect on the significant extra-linguistic influence on critical discourse analysis from the field of social constructionism, and the requirement that a set of methods of analysis needs to be embedded in an ostensibly non-linguistic theoretical framework. However, the majority of this chapter (sections two to four inclusive) look exclusively at the field of critical discourse analysis itself.

Specifically, I look at the contemporary approaches and their communalities and what specifically is meant by discourse within the discipline. I then move to the work of Norman Fairclough and trace the development of his approach to CDA, from his identification of the significance of the role of orders of discourse and his initial focus on ideology and social change, to his more contemporary dialectical version with its interest in discourse as an element of social practice. I continue with a detailed explanation of his original analytical framework with its combination of the (linguistic) description of a text, an interpretation of the text in relation to the discourse practice of which the discourse sample is used, followed by an explanation of this combined analysis in relation to the broader social practice in which the discourse practice occurs. I conclude this section with an overview of Halliday’s systemic-functional linguistics, as employed in much CDA, and in particular, what it adds to an analysis of text grammar, since together with the macro-level analysis of interdiscursivity (the mix of genres and discourses within a text) a focus on text grammar is a central element of my method of linguistic analysis. In these latter two sections I also introduce many of the most significant categories of analysis adopted in my work.

In the third section I introduce Fairclough contemporary dialectical-relational approach to CDA by presenting the concept of ‘dialectics of discourse’ that informs the model (and which has a strong influence on much of my analysis in the later chapters), which is a significant theoretical point that underwrites his later adoption of Bhaskar’s (1986) explanatory critique model. As this is the model that facilitates the construction of objects of research for each of my analytical chapters, I outline and explain in some detail the various stages required in operationalising this methodological framework. I also reflect on Fairclough’s transdisciplinary engagement with public sphere dialogue by presenting a method for engaging in public sphere discourse. Drawing on his operationalisation of concepts taken from Bernstein’s work (1990, 1996), I introduce elements of a framework for assessing public sphere interaction as essentially regulated and/or colonised spaces of social practices. As a central component of my methodological approach, I also try to extend the
possibilities afforded by this framework through an engagement with Bourdieu’s theoretical approach to neoliberalism as outlined. Finally, I conclude this chapter by summarising the categories of analysis introduced so far and highlighting those other categories that are adopted in my analytical work that have not been explicitly referenced up to this point.

In the chapter’s final section I maintain this focus on linking the theoretical and methodological approaches outlined and the work that follows in the subsequent chapters. I firstly stress how the distinction between analysis and interpretation is maintained through the effective operationalisation of the explanatory critique framework itself. I also highlight how the application of theory is necessarily maintained throughout the three analytical chapters, with the constant problematisation of each new topic addressed in relation to what has gone before and what has been found, and what this adds to the work as a whole. I therefore conclude this chapter by providing an overview of the approach adopted in the subsequent chapters, both in relation to the general rationale for the approach to each topic analysed, as well as with reference to the categories of analysis addressed in each of these chapters.

4.1 Discourse Analysis and the Emergence of Critique

The formalist and functionalist paradigms of linguistic inquiry provide different assumptions about the nature of language and the goals of a linguistic theory. This cleavage between these two perspectives also has an influence for understandings of discourse. The formalist worldview sees discourse as ‘sentences’ (in the plural), whereas the functionalist approach to language views it as essentially ‘language in use’. These approaches are influenced by the work of Stubbs, and of Brown and Yule respectively. Leech (1983) provides a brief overview of the relative distinctions in his comparison of the two paradigms, (cited in Schiffrin 1994: 21-22) which includes the following four-points:

1. Formalists (sic Chomsky) see language as primarily a mental phenomenon, with Functionalists (sic Halliday) seeing it mainly as a societal phenomenon.
2. Formalists see linguistic universals as deriving from a common genetic make-up or inheritance of humans, whereas Functionalists see them deriving from the universality of uses to which language is put in human society.
3. Formalists see child language acquisition in terms of a built in human capacity to learn language, Functionalists see it as the result of the development of a child’s communicative needs and abilities within society.
4. Formalists study language as an autonomous system, whereas Functionalists study it in relation to its social function.
Thus for functionalists, language has two basic assumptions:

1. Language has functions that are external to the linguistic system itself, and;
2. External functions influence the internal organisation of the language system

These points are naturally irrelevant for a formalist approach to the development of (a) linguistic theory.

In discussing the paradigmatic distinction in some detail, and with reference to discourse as ‘language in use’ specifically, Schiffrin (1994: 31) asserts that ‘this view reaches an extreme in the work of critical language scholarship, that is, the study of language, power, and identity’. In her detailed comparative approach to traditions of discourse analysis however, she chooses not to examine critical discourse analysis, focusing instead on explicitly non-critical approaches to discourse analysis. Likewise, Taylor and Cameron (1987) ignore critical approaches to discourse covering much the same ground as Schiffrin, with the addition of a reflection on social psychology. In studies such as these non-critical approaches to the analysis of discourse may be differentiated simply in relation to the quantitative or qualitative nature of their approach to data analysis.

Generally (see Schiffrin 1987 and 1994), these approaches include:

- Conversational Analysis, with its focus on social roles and the philosophical studies of the subject that forms the basis of phenomenology;
- the Ethnography of Communication which emanates from an anthropological perspective, drawing on the work of Dell Hymes, with a focus on communicative competence and explanations of behaviour and meaning;
- Interactional Sociolinguistics with its basis in anthropology and its interest in cross-cultural difference, based on the work of Gumperz and Goffman in particular;
- Pragmatics, and in particular Grice’s maxims of conversational implicatures required to adequately explain speaker intention;
- Speech Act Theory, developed by Austin and Searle and the knowledge of the underlying conditions for the production and interpretation of acts through words; and,
- the Variationist Approach based on Labov’s work on the structural nature of observed variation and change in language use in the social world.

From the perspective of critical approaches to the study of language then, the significant cleavage is not between the formal and functional paradigm (since this is taken as given), nor between quantitative or qualitative methodologies, but between the critical and non-critical approaches to the analysis of discourse.
It is accepted that the use of the term ‘non-critical’ for such approaches to discourse analysis can be read in a pejorative sense, and as it is not a label that the sociolinguistic schools referenced here would necessarily ascribe to themselves or their work, it should be clear that the author is not using the term in this way. Also the distinction can never be completely clear-cut, since all fields of inquiry are perennially branching out and extending into new directions, and into new fields of inquiry over time. Neither is the distinction between ‘critical’ and ‘non-critical’ approaches to discourse analysis uncontentious. Blommaert (2005), for example, in elaborating the background and remit of the critical discourse analysis project as he sees it, maintains that many strands of sociolinguistic research often considered to be outside of the CDA stream by people like Fairclough, are just as critical in their focus on the share of linguistic resources and repertoires. He specifically cites the ethnographic work of Dell Hymes on the privileging of elaborate codes in society, (itself based on the separate work of Bernstein and Labov), and again echoed in the work of Bourdieu, which for Blommaert (2005: 13) ‘is where inequality enters the picture’. He therefore includes many mainstream sociolinguistic approaches as potentially falling within the critical pool. As well as the work of Hymes, he adds the work of Gumperz, the tradition of American linguistic anthropology and, in particular, the work of Franz Boas, and Slembrouck’s work based on the British Cultural Studies model, as developed by people like Stuart Hall and ‘The Birmingham School’.

This position can partly be seen as a reaction to the notion of a ‘school’ of CDA, which many sociolinguists feel is what the primary movers within CDA have sought to establish. It should be stressed that the members of the original CDA peer group, people like Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, and Teun van Dijk, however, do not feel that CDA is a school, a movement, or a specialisation, and have stated as much on numerous occasions (van Dijk 1985 and 1993, Wodak and Fairclough 1997, Wodak and Meyer 2001). From the perspective of this work therefore, critical approaches to semiotic analysis prioritise an engagement with power and knowledge and its historically contingent and social constructionist nature, in both the theorisation and the practical design and execution of analysis. This is in contrast to approaches that see such issues as secondary considerations, perspectives that might be somehow factored into a description of analytical findings alongside traditional descriptive methodologies, or indeed after the fact.

It therefore remains important to make a distinction between critical approaches and other approaches to discourse analysis at this early stage, if the import of the term is to be fully appreciated, and if the substantially different order of possibilities opened up by such approaches to analysis is to be understood. With this intention in mind, and in mapping a
trajectory towards Fairclough’s method of CDA, I start from within a (socio)linguistic perspective moving from general sociolinguistic approaches to the analysis of discourse, followed by a review of the emergence of the work of the critical linguists that underpins contemporary approaches to CDA. Finally, I supplement these observations with contributions from the field of post-structuralism and social constructionist perspectives that have added much and continue to supplement critical approaches to semiosis from outside the field of sociolinguistics.

4.1.1 Sociolinguistics: description over critique

To quote from Fowler et al in their groundbreaking work on critical linguistics:

Sociolinguists seem to assume that there is for each language-community a given grammar which pre-exists social processes, and that there is thus language and use of language (competence versus performance again), that social structure only has its effect at the level of ‘use’. (Fowler et al 1979: 189)

According to the authors, in much sociolinguistic theory such appropriate links between society and language are accidental and arbitrary and that it is the task of sociolinguists to discover and document these links. For those working with a critical paradigm however, language is seen as an integral part of the social process, or to put it more directly, ‘language’ and ‘society’ are not separate concepts where the job of the linguist is to go and search for the links.

The traditional non-critical paradigm of sociolinguistics moreover, therefore also fails to acknowledge the two-way relationship between language and society, that is, it speaks of the influence of social structure on (the use of) language, but not the other way around, on systems of power or dominance forging and maintaining social structures through language itself.

Language serves to confirm and consolidate the organisations which shape it through manipulation, oppression, and the maintenance of the status quo via direct and indirect speech acts and by more generalised processes where the ideology of a culture is tacitly affirmed.

(ibid. 190)

Significant for a critical approach to language study, in mirroring one of the fundamental points in their preface to Language and Control, Fowler et al claim sociolinguists’ failure to identify and reluctance to respond to this state of affairs is in part a product of the ideology embodied in the language and practice of sociolinguistics itself (ibid.).
The primary preoccupation within much traditional sociolinguistics can be captured by the term ‘correlation’. Correlation here refers to the fact that in given communicative contexts, appropriate forms of speech and writing occur regularly, where variables in linguistic structure ‘correlate’ with variables in type of situation, speaker, subject-matter, class-context etc., in a rule-governed fashion. Such variables may be situated in any area of linguistic structure – in phonology, morphology, vocabulary, and syntax. In paralleling the theoretical concepts that Bourdieu would later come to elaborate, the critical linguists note that words like ‘select’ and ‘choose’ seem to appear a lot in the non-critical sociolinguistic literature, implying that specific forms of language are freely chosen. In reality, ‘select’ really means ‘select what is appropriate’ and ‘appropriateness’ is established by socioeconomic factors outside the control of language users, and the abilities they draw upon in ‘choosing’ are available to them through socialisation. Thus, sociolinguistic competence is an ability which society has imposed on language-users whether they like it or not. Simply put, ‘performance’ is under the sanction of social norms. The process is both deterministic and unconscious. Fowler et al (1979: 194) ultimately show that ‘correlation ceases to be a neutral facet of sociolinguistic description, and emerges as a fact about social organisation that invites critical scrutiny’.

In Discourse and Society Change (1992), a key early work on developing a social theory of discourse, Norman Fairclough also reflects on the descriptive but non-critical nature of much contemporary sociolinguistic research. He interrogates a number of approaches through available analyses ranging from a study on classroom discourse by Sinclair and Coulthard, Labov and Fanshel, Potter and Wetherell’s social psychology approach to discourse (1992: 12-25). All such approaches are found to avoid general theory, as well as concepts such as power, class, or ideology. There is a concerted if to his mind, a somewhat limited focus on text description, but there is no level of interpretive analysis precisely because of the absence of any operational paradigm or overarching theoretical perspective that covers the relationship between language, power, and society. In general, the common feature is the recurring absence of a social orientation to discourse that is central to the approach of the critical linguists.

4.1.2 Critical Linguistics: and the origin of Critical Discourse Analysis

In advocating a critical approach to language study, which itself evolved from their earlier work in literary criticism and linguistic criticism, Fowler et al (1979) not only point to the need for a ‘critical’ approach, which has been reflected in one way or another in the work of
virtually every author within CDA since, but significantly, they also point to the shortcomings of many research approaches employed within linguistics and sociolinguistics of the day. Their thesis starts from the premise that the connection between linguistic structure and social structure goes far beyond that described by sociolinguists heretofore. Social groupings and relations influence linguistic behaviour, these patterns influence non-linguistic behaviour, such as cognitive activity, and therefore ideology, is linguistically mediated and habitual for the uncritical reader. A text embodies interpretations of its subject and these processes tend to be unconscious. As they state:

If linguistic meaning is inseparable from ideology, and both are dependent on social structure, then linguistic analysis ought to be a powerful tool for the study of ideological processes which mediate relationships of power and control. (Fowler et al 1979: 185)

Building on the work of Hymes, the critical linguists contended that any realistic theory of language ability should be a theory of communicative competence, incorporating the perception and production of contextually appropriate utterances (for example, the recognition of context and other pragmatic elements, such as speech act theory, the performance of illocutionary acts, recovery of the implicatures of a discourse, etc.), and not merely the ability to produce and comprehend sentences. This competence varies from person to person unlike, as in Chomsky’s model, being the same for all members of a linguistic population. Language ability is more accurately understood as a product of social structure (see Halliday 2004), that is, language is learned in contexts of interaction and since the structure of language in use is responsive to the communicative needs of these interactions, the structure of a language should generally be seen as having been formed in response to the structure of the society that uses it. It is Fowler et al’s contention that the relation between form and content is not arbitrary or conventional, but the form signifies the content that fully enables us to complete the link between social reality and linguistic form, pointing to the speaker’s articulation of one kind of meaning rather than another. For the critical linguists, conventional (or non-critical) sociolinguistics on the other hand, does not assume any more intimate relationship between (what it separates as) social structure and linguistic structure than Chomsky’s linguistics does.

The group of critical linguists therefore sought to move linguistic analysis away from a formal description of text and beyond concerns such as stylistics and literary theory, and to use such analysis as a basis for social critique. Significantly these scholars (Fowler, Hodge, Kress, and Trew) also employed the insights of Halliday’s systemic-functional linguistics for this purpose. To this link between grammar and meaning-making and experience-representation, the critical linguists added two further elements; drawing on Marx and the
historical-materialist perspective generally, they concluded that patterns of experience are not by their nature neutral, but are ideological; and, based upon Whorf’s concept that different languages encode the world and experiences differently, so too do different users of the same language. Therefore, if different patterns of experience can be encoded within the same language, different ideologies can exist simultaneously. Combining the threads of Halliday, Marx, and Whorf, Fowler et al see a critical approach to the study of language in use as an act of ‘demystification’ (1979: 196).\(^2\) That is to say, critical linguistics interprets grammatical categories as potential traces of ‘ideological mystification’ where a text ceases to be a stylistic choice amongst a number of possible variants, or as some conventional yet ideologically empty marker of group membership.

Up until the groundbreaking work of Fowler et al in the 1970s, sentences and components thereof were still regarded as the basic units of sociolinguistic analysis. Following the work of Labov and Hymes in particular, the main preoccupation was description followed by explanation. In such an environment the role (if not the fact) of social hierarchy, class and power received very little attention. In this way, the work of Kress and Hodge (1979), Fowler et al (1979), and de Beaugrande and Dressler’s work on text linguistics, with its focus on the production and interpretation of texts and their relation to social structures, marked a very different kind of research programme. The group at the University of East Anglia (UK) self-consciously adopted the term critical linguistics from its social-philosophical counterpart, yet by the 1990s, due to the development of a social theory of discourse (see below) the term ‘critical discourse analysis’ has come to replace that of critical linguistics. Nevertheless, many of the fundamentals of what has become CDA are elaborations of some of the basic assumptions of the critical linguists.

4.1.3 Social Constructionism: critical approaches to discourse beyond linguistics

In outlining the contours of a critical approach to the analysis of discourse, its historical development, and what sets it apart from other forms of discourse analysis, there remains another theoretical influence which is important to acknowledge. The significant contribution to critical approaches to discourse analysis that emerges from within social constructionism. This point has been indirectly referenced above through Fairclough’s

\(^2\) In a similar vein, the French linguist and discourse analyst Dominique Maingueneau views a critical approach to analysis as a ‘de-sanctifying discipline’ in refusing to rule out any area of discourse production from scrutiny, (2006: 229)
critique to Potter and Wetherell’s research (1987), and much of the theoretical force of the
critical linguists’ critique of descriptive methods over genuinely critical methods also comes
from this perspective. This is especially important given the significance of CDA’s
transdisciplinary nature. Critical Discourse Analysis is accepted as an approach to language
and discourse that sits within the general set of theorisations and resultant methodological
approaches to the study of culture and society known as ‘social constructionism’ (sometimes
termed social constructivism). Though a focus on discourse is just one approach employed
within social constructionist research, it is a major one. Indeed, the heavy emphasis on the
study of discourse, however ill-defined, is the basis of what is referred to as the ‘discursive
turn’ in the contemporary social sciences generally. Drawing on the work of Burr (1995) and
Gergen (1985), (cited in Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 5-6), the fundamental philosophical
position on which all social constructionist approaches to language are based include the
following premises:

- A critical approach to taken-for-granted knowledge;
- Historical and cultural specificity;
- The link between knowledge and social processes; and
- The link between knowledge and social action

In brief, the overarching contention is that social and cultural knowledge and
identities are not fixed or ‘given’, but are essentially contingent. This ontological
arbitrariness (and the resulting epistemological arbitrariness) is not however completely fluid
either, since social situations (action and events) are constrained by social structures that
define what is ultimately permissible in any situation. The above premises of social
constructionism have at their heart a post-structuralist theory, and approaches to discourse
analysis adopt post-structuralist positions to greater or lesser degrees, depending on their
particular philosophical and theoretical positions. All approaches within post-structuralism
however can be seen to be a response to the overly deterministic, or what are often labelled
the ‘totalising’ theories that held sway up until the middle of the twentieth century, such as
Marxism and structuralism. For example, to varying degrees social constructionist
approaches may embody Foucault’s approach to knowledge, Gramsci’s notion of hegemony,
and Bourdieu’s theory of practice, with its reconciliation of objective structures and
subjective dispositions.

The significant point for all approaches to semiosis is that wherever we draw the
boundaries of areas of study, all fields of inquiry have ‘an inalienable ethico-political
dimension’ (Rajagopalan 2004: 261). In the same way much the same can be said for the
phenomenon of language itself. As the critical linguists noted, mainstream linguists seem unable to accept the fact that there is a fundamental political underbelly to the focus of their study because to do so implies that their work has political implications. It seems that the only way to explain this lacuna is to assume that such scholars see (or convince themselves at least that they must see) languages as natural objects that have essentially fallen, pre-formed from the sky. The ‘critical’ in critical approaches to discourse should never be equated with partisan in contrast the use of ‘scientific’ to mean neutral. To extend Rajagopalan’s argument, to start from this standpoint leads to an obvious contradiction when one poses the question whether one can be both (2004: 262). No approach (including critical discourse analysis) has ever sought to be the one true epistemic route to truth. What actually gives critical analysts their edge is their political and/or ethical commitment coupled with the fact that this is firmly out in the open.

More accurately perhaps, it is this commitment, allied to, as Horkheimer (1972), cited in Rajagopalan (2004) puts it, their unflinching faith in the truth of the one existential proposition that things do not have to be as they are. Since the objects of study are man-made, it is not the pursuit of ‘truth’ that preoccupies the critical field generally, but rather, – and in Foucauldian terms – the genealogy of specific regimes of truth that are securely tied to specific moments in the march of history. The critical means going beyond the truth of established orders and to ask what power relations help to sustain those orders and what kind of corrective action would be needed to challenge such a status quo. A critical scientist is then a political activist, whose activism stems not from some covert action to use science as a cover for pushing political reform, but rather from a conviction that there is no ultimate fact of the matter as such in man-made affairs, including science. There are only states of affairs whose own claims to factuality seem to have accidentally become almost unassailable simply by virtue of years of unquestioning acquiescence.

Unlike non-critical traditions within sociolinguistics, social constructionist approaches to language and semiosis at their core all presuppose that language use, the content and form of any discourse, is therefore never neutral. Discourse, the use of text and talk or indeed any semiotic system, constructs identities, representations, and processes. In essence discourse constructs the world and any and all social relations within it in particular ways, and is furthermore central to reinforcing and/or challenging such formations. The purpose of a social constructionist approach to researching semiosis foregrounds its critical dimension, that is, to analyse often opaque power structures (that necessary ‘demystification’ identified by the original critical linguists), and proposes normative ways of formulating a critique of such structures and social processes which afford possibilities for progressive social change.
Social constructionist approaches to the analysis of discourse that have emerged from outside the field of formal linguistics, such as Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory or discursive psychology therefore share this perspective with the critical analysis of discourse that has emerged from within the field of sociolinguistics. Despite their particular philosophical divergences and methodological differences, these three approaches all share the same basic assumptions and orientation that is absent in non-critical varieties of sociolinguistic discourse analysis.

The central point that needs to be stressed from the perspective of social constructionist approaches to the analysis of discourse is that the practical analysis of text and talk, in so far as such is a method of analysis, must be embedded within a structuralist or a post-structuralist theoretical framework. It is for this reason, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, that Fairclough downplays the use of a ‘method of analysis’ for CDA in favour of a methodological approach which itself rests on a theoretical understanding of discourse and its social nature (see Fairclough, 2009: 167). To paraphrase Jørgensen and Phillips (2002: 4), essentially approaches to discourse analysis such as Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory, discursive psychology, and CDA all combine a philosophical position on the role of language in constructing the world, theoretical models that result from such a position, a set of methodological guidelines for proceeding with analysis, and specific techniques for the actual analysis of discourse.

As my approach to discourse analysis emanates from a background in linguistics and as the focus of this research is the actual analysis of discourse samples and their relationship to a particular theorisation of discourse and politics, that is, my work is not a comparative analysis of methods of the critical analysis of discourse, nor on contrasting CDA with other social constructionist approaches to discourse, I have only briefly presented the issue of social constructionism and the discourse turn here. I have done so moreover, not so much to illustrate their presence as the valuable contributions to social science research that they undoubtedly are, but primarily to underline what the use of the modifier ‘critical’ means when attached to discourse analysis. That is, that the use of the term ‘critical’ in critical discourse analysis and in my research here presupposes that the actual analysis of discourse at the micro-level is embedded within an overarching theoretical position at the macro-level in which such micro-analysis is undertaken. Moreover, that such a position is historical materialist in nature and fundamentally post-structuralist in orientation. The more particular and nuanced elements of the theoretical positions and features of the Fairclough model of CDA and that I am adopting in my work are elaborated in the next section.
4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) regards language as a social practice, both construing and construed by power and shaped by context. CDA has now become a broad grouping of scholars focusing on larger discursive units of text as the basic units of communication. Researches also acknowledge the interdependence of research interests and political commitment. Heterogeneity of methodological and theoretical approaches is a feature of all critical work within the field of CDA, which van Dijk (1993: 131) would assert are, at most, a shared perspective in doing linguistic, semiotic, or discourse analysis. As elaborated above, the use of the word ‘critical’ is not to be understood in terms of negative faultfinding, but in the scientific sense of critique. This shared perspective on the word ‘critical’ can be traced to the Frankfurt School and the work of Jürgen Habermas. Now used in a slightly broader sense, it can be seen as linking social and political engagement embedded in a sociologically informed construction of society. Fairclough, for example (1985: 747), posits that critique can be seen as essentially the act of making visible the interconnectedness of things.

CDA can be understood as a programme designed to analyse opaque as well as transparent structural relations of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 2). Language serves as a medium of social domination and force, legitimising relations of organised power, and borrowing on Habermas’s contention (1977: 259) that since such legitimations of power relations are not articulated, language is also ideological; critical analysts are in effect, required to take a close look at discourse. Unlike other streams in discourse and text analysis, such positions require the critical discourse analyst to develop a full theorisation and description of both the social processes and structures that lead to the production of a text, and of the social structures and processes that influence a subject’s interpretation of a text. Thus the concepts of power and ideology are all indispensable to a full appreciation of CDA.

Separate from much work in some branches of sociolinguistic inquiry, CDA tries to avoid suggesting simple deterministic relations between the text and the social. Following Foucault, and accepting that discourse is structured by dominance, that every discourse is historically produced and interpreted, the more complex approach advocated by CDA makes it possible to analyse the nature of the dominant forces from above and also the possibilities of resistance from below to such prevailing unequal power relations that appear as social conventions. In keeping with a social constructionist perspective, the CDA approach also recognises that dominant structures stabilise conventions and naturalise them, removing any
sense of arbitrariness for subjects, resulting in the social conventions of discourse being taken as given.

4.2.1 Approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis

In terms of the various approaches to critical discourse analysis, what unites them is the desire to ask different research questions to those posed within non-critical strands of discourse analysis, as outlined. Specifically, CDA researchers are concerned with issues of normativity and advocacy. And as Wodak and Meyer (2009: 19) point out, a practical consequence of this position is that the line between social science research and political argumentation can become blurred. For a large proportion of the life of the CDA enterprise four distinct approaches have been identified. These are Fairclough’s original socio-cultural approach; Wodak’s discourse-historical method; van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach, and the original critical linguistics approach itself. Over time the latter has been seen more as a precursor to most current approaches and is not generally considered to be a contemporary version of CDA.

To the other three approaches some (see van Leeuwen 2006) would suggest that critical investigations of multi-modality and social semiotics, as developed by Kress (2010), Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), van Leeuwen (2000) should be included as a critical approach to the analysis of the extra-linguistic dimensions of discourse. Moreover, new areas of CDA have since emerged. Wodak and Meyer (2009: 33) for example, add a corpus-linguistics approach, a social actors approach and a dispositive analysis approach to the three earlier forms of CDA. Likewise, they also propose that research in discourse that is critical in the CDA understanding of the term, could also be considered forms of CDA, such as Lazar’s feminist CDA (2005) and they concur with Blommaert that his critical ethnographic approaches (2005) could also be included in a broader understanding of CDA. See also Krzyżanowski (2010: 67-71) for other approaches (and other ways of classifying approaches) to CDA, and their various distinguishing characteristics along side these approaches.

What distinguishes these approaches is probably best seen not from an operational standpoint but from a theoretical one. In other words, a main dichotomy between approaches to CDA is whether they tend to be inductive or deductive and the related choice of objects of research (Wodak and Meyer 2009: 19). The former, for example, tend to be further removed from the grand theories of social constructivism for example, and place greater emphasis on in-depth analysis of case studies. Such inductive approaches are a feature of the discourse-historical, the social actors, the corpus linguistics, and dispositive analysis approaches. The
deductive approach on the contrary, foregrounds the macro-level theoretical approach to
discourse and tends to propose a closed theoretical framework analysing particular discourse
samples to facilitate an interpretive process that links back to the grand narrative.
Fairclough’s original socio-cultural and his more contemporary dialectical-relational
approach, and van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach fit into this category. Obviously these
two approaches are very different from each other, with the latter prioritising language’s
cognitive dimension, and unusually within CDA approaches, rejecting Foucault’s assertion of
the productive dimension of discourse (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 14, 64), that is, the way
subjects are created from social actors in discourse.

**Common features to approaches to CDA**

Two of the main architects of critical discourse analysis propose five features common to all
CDA approaches (see Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 258-84):

1. **The character of social and cultural processes and structures is partly
linguistic-discursive.**

Discursive practices are held to be a major form of social practice, which contribute to the
constitution of the social world, including social identities and social relations. The aim of
CDA is to shed light on the discursive dimension of social and/or natural phenomena and
processes of change in late modernity. This necessarily comprises a focus on written texts
and spoken language, as well as on visual images.

2. **Discourse is both constitutive and constituted.**

For critical discourse analysts discourse is a form of social practice that both constitutes (or
‘construes’) the social world and is constituted (or ‘construed’) by other social practices. As
a social practice, discourse is therefore in a dialectical relationship with other social practices
and consequently does not simply contribute to the shaping and reshaping of social structures,
but it also reflects them (see Fairclough on this dialectics nature of discourse, 2001a). This
conception of discourse moreover distinguishes the approach from more post-structural
approaches, such as Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory which rejects this dialectic.

3. **Language use should be empirically analysed within its social context.**

CDA remains a form of praxis, at all times engaging in the actual analysis of discourse
samples in real world interactions. This feature also distinguishes CDA from Laclau and
Mouffe’s ‘discourse theory’ and from Foucauldian approaches to discourse analysis
generally, and also sets up a cleavage with discursive psychology, which all defer from the
4. **Discourse functions ideologically.**

CDA views discursive practices as contributing to the creation and reproduction of unequal power relations between social groups. That is, the productive nature of discourse means that it functions ideologically. In situating itself within a historical materialist tradition, the research focus of CDA is therefore both the discursive practices that construct representations of the world – social subjects, social relations (including power relations), and the role that these discursive practices play in furthering the interests of particular social groups. This represents a departure from non-Marxist approaches to semiosis, such as those of Foucault and Laclau and Mouffe.

5. **Critical research.**

CDA does not see position itself as a neutral enterprise. Critique aims to uncover the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of unequal relations of power with a view to contributing to critical social research more generally. This overtly political position separates CDA from discursive psychology with its primary interest in social psychology and how individual subjects (and groups) sense of self is constructed and transformed through social interaction through a focus on discourse.

More specifically, Fairclough and Wodak’s assessment of the principle tenets of CDA (1997) can be summarised in the following points, (being a condensed version of van Dijk’s original set of Principles of CDA, (1993)):

- CDA addresses social problems
- Power relations are discursive
- Discourse constitutes society and culture
- Discourse does ideological work
- Discourse is historical
- The link between text and society is mediated
- Discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory, and
- Discourse is itself a form of social action

**The meanings of ‘Discourse’ in CDA**

Fairclough (1992, 1995a, and 2003) uses ‘discourse’ in three distinct ways:

1. In the abstract, non-count noun sense discourse is language use as a social practice. It is this sense of the word for example, which is meant when we talk about discourse being constitutive and constituted.
2. In the less abstract sense: discourse is used as the general term for a kind of language used in a specific field (for example, political discourse; scientific discourse, etc.).

3. In the most concrete sense: as a count-noun; a discourse is a way of speaking which gives meaning to experiences from a particular perspective, or as Fairclough says ‘an area of knowledge and the particular way in which it is constituted’, (for example, a feminist discourse on advertising, an environmentalist discourse on urban planning, or a neoliberal discourse on individual responsibility, etc.).

Unlike Laclau and Mouffe, Fairclough confines the term discourse to ‘semiotic systems’ (that is, to systems of meaning-making) and does not extend the term to cover all social practice – not everything is reducible to discourse. He nevertheless maintains the emphasis on the contribution discourse makes to the construction of social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and meaning. This necessarily implies that discourse has three functions: an ‘identity’ function; a ‘relational’ function; and an ‘ideational’ function which mirrors Halliday’s functional approach to the study of linguistics and forms the basis for his approach to ‘text grammar’ as will be discussed below. In any analysis two dimensions of discourse are important focal points:

1. The communicative event, the instantiation of the text, and;
2. The order of discourse, or the semiotic configuration of a particular social order, or the ‘social structuring of semiotic difference’ (2001b: 235).

### 4.2.2 Social theory, CDA, and Norman Fairclough

CDA sees discourse as a social phenomenon and it is therefore a basic claim of the discipline to take social theory as its starting point. Central to an understanding of social theory are theories of power and ideology. Significant among such theories are those of Foucault (1984) on ‘orders of discourse’ and of power and knowledge; Gramsci (1971) and the concept of hegemony; and, Althusser (2001) and ‘ideological state apparatuses’ and ‘interpellation’. Fairclough gives these ideas a linguistic translation and projects the theories and concepts on to discourse to provide a linguistically grounded expectation for changes in these relations (see Fairclough 1989, 1992, and 1995a). In an attempt to overcome the ‘structuralist determinism’, Fairclough draws on Giddens (1984) to maintain that actual language products (utterances, texts, etc.) stand in a dialectical relation to social structure.
That is, linguistic-communicative events can be formative of larger social processes. This concept draws heavily from Bourdieu’s Language and Symbolic Power (1991) and Habermas’s Theory of Communicative Action (1984, 1987). These various theoretical positions help ground CDA within a theoretical framework can be traced back to the influence of post-structural theory and, to a degree, the emergence of cultural studies (see Blommaert, 2005). As with cultural studies, CDA continually and critically engages with new research trends (see Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999), it remains however, firmly planted within the linguistic milieu and a linguistically oriented pragmatics.

The centrality of social theory and a social theory of discourse is one of the ways, and probably the most significant way in which CDA has developed out of and away from critical linguistics. That is, by being embedded in critical social theory and by articulating the relation between discourses and social practices in which they are rooted. By the last decade of the twentieth century discourse had achieved a high profile position in post-modern philosophy and cultural studies, yet CDA explicitly distances itself from the preoccupation in such fields to reduce the social to discourse and discourse only. Firstly, as shown by Fairclough (2010: 91-125), the process of ‘marketisation’ for example, can include both a changing set of practices, such as the market-oriented management-speak of institutions, as well as the changing discourses that play a role in selling and legitimising such practices. This is precisely the dialectical relationship between discourse and the social practice that separates CDA from earlier critical approaches. Secondly, and as I will elaborate below, CDA has moved on from critical linguistics in adopting a far more interdisciplinary approach to discourse analysis. In contemporary CDA the focus is very often no longer a printed monographic text or a conversation transcript, but also the contexts of such texts, which may be historical or ethnographic. Such work often sees analysts working closely with historians, anthropologists, ethnographers and political scientists and in turn such work facilitates a reflection on the nature of interdisciplinarity itself.

Thirdly, much work in CDA has also moved beyond language to included multi-modally constructed discourses that incorporate image as well as text and talk. The development of a visual analysis along the lines of Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (see section 4.2.4 below) by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) in particular, has been used to show how visual racism can be realised by more subtle methods than verbal stereotyping. Overall and primarily through the theoretical writings of Fairclough, CDA has consistently gravitated to a more explicit dialogue between social theory and practice, a deeper contextualisation, more interdisciplinarity and a greater attention to the multimodality of discourse.
Fairclough’s approach then is a text-oriented analysis that tries to unite three traditions:

1. Detailed textual analysis within the field of linguistics (such as Halliday’s ‘text grammar’ or ‘Systemic Functional Linguistics’).
2. Macro-sociological analysis of social practice (including Foucault’s theory, itself lacking any methodology for a linguistic analysis of texts).
3. The micro-sociological interpretative tradition within sociology (including for example ethnomethodology and conversation analysis), where everyday life is treated as a product of people’s actions, in which they follow a set of shared ‘common sense’ rules and procedures.

He is therefore critical of analyses that focus merely on textual analysis, but also of analyses which lack a developed understanding of the link or the relationship between text and society.

As a deductive exercise, Fairclough’s approach to CDA sees textual analysis alone as insufficient since it does not shed light on the societal and cultural processes and structures which inform the practices that produce the text, that is, textual analysis has no interdisciplinary perspective and interdisciplinarity is essential for CDA. Likewise, theoretical approaches that foreground contingent knowledge and take account of power, but which avoid any actual analysis of text (such as those of Foucault and most of Bourdieu’s work) are also seen as unable to fulfil CDA’s objectives. The contribution of drawing on the macro-sociological approach is that this takes into account that social practices are shaped by social structures and power relations, and that people are often unaware of these processes. The contribution of the micro-sociological interpretative tradition is that it provides an understanding of how people actively create a rule-bound world in everyday practices. And the contribution of analysis of texts (verbal or written) is that it allows the analyst to reveal how, and in what ways, power and ideology operate discursively.

### 4.2.3 Fairclough and the three-dimensional model of discourse analysis

The most developed and elaborate attempt to both theorise a model of CDA and provide an appropriate methodological tool kit however, comes from Norman Fairclough (see Blommaert 2005, Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, Mesthrie *et al* 2000, Simpson & Mayr 2010, and Talbot *et al* 2003). In his original CDA model Fairclough constructs a social theory of discourse, drawing heavily on Michel Foucault, but one where he also advances a blueprint for a textually oriented analysis of discourse (see Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995a). Central to this original approach is a three-dimensional model for understanding and analysing
discourse. The model is so called since every communicative event is understood to be composed of three distinct dimensions:

1. The text
2. The discursive practice (the production and the consumption of texts), and
3. The social practice

In this model analysis should therefore focus on all three levels or dimensions. See Figure 4.1 below.

The first dimension is *discourse-as-text* where ‘text’ is understood as the product of discourse or as a record of a discursive event (Bloor and Bloor 2007: 7). Such text analysis looks at the formal linguistic features and the structure of actual instances of language in use. This covers the analysis of lexical items as vocabulary use, grammatical items such as issues of transitivity and modality, and text cohesion and text structure amongst others, as well as semantic items (word meaning and metaphor) and syntactic items, (see Fairclough 1992: 234-37). This dimension of analysis will be addressed in some detail in section 4.2.4 below. The second dimension is *discourse-as-discursive practice*. Based on the understanding that discourse is something that is produced, circulated, and consumed in society, this step is an analysis of how speakers and authors draw on already existing genres, discourses, and styles to create a text, and also on how listeners or recipients of texts apply their available genres, discourses, and styles in the consumption and interpretation of texts (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 67). Such processes are seen as consisting of the circulation of specific and concrete linguistic objects or text types. Central to this analysis are concepts such as intertextuality (the presence of other exogenous texts or voices within the text under analysis); orders of discourse (the particular configuration of genres, discourses, and styles; as well as the interdiscursive features themselves (including genre, discourse, style, and activity type), where other texts are less overtly drawn upon yet where their presence may result in ambiguity or tension, reflective of a number of heterogeneous elements.

Genres can be a significant component of interdiscursivity and therefore deserve some closer attention. As ‘a way of acting in its discourse aspect’, (Fairclough 2003: 216) the current CDA concept of genre is drawn from Bakhtin (1986), and closely corresponds to a social practice, being a relatively stable set of conventions, or a partly enacted socially ratified type of activity. Indeed, Bakhtin explicitly refers to genres as ‘the drive belts from the history of society to the history of language’, (1986: 65). Genre can be understood simply as linguistic register (being variation in accordance with use) plus purpose (Thompson 2004: 42), or what it is that speakers or authors are seeking to do to accomplish through linguistic interaction and how they adjust their utterances accordingly. Examples of different genres
would be an informal chat between work colleagues; a job interview; and an interview between a television journalist and a politician. Genres are seen as overarching other interdiscursive elements, which, ranging from the least to the most autonomous, include ‘activity type’, ‘style’ and ‘discourse’. An activity type at its simplest is seen as a structured sequence of actions of which the activity is composed, and in terms of the participants involved. Fairclough provides the example of buying goods in a greengrocer’s shop. Activity type is defined by its designated subject types (a shop owner and a customer in Fairclough’s example) and sequence of optional or repeated actions (querying freshness of produce, price etc.), but is usually more helpful in delimiting a range of potential options, rather than defining a discursive interaction in its own right.

Genres are usually associated with a particular style varying along three parameters borrowing the vocabulary of Halliday’s work in functional grammar (2004). The first is ‘tenor’; the sort of relationship that exists between the participants, for example, whether it is formal, official, intimate, casual, etc. The second is ‘mode’; whether the text is written or spoken, or is it written as if spoken, or spoken as if written and by extension, whether it is conversational, academic, journalistic, etc. The third is ‘rhetorical mode’; whether the text is generally argumentative, polemical, conciliatory, expository, descriptive, etc. (Fairclough 1992: 127) The term discourse (as elaborated above in section 4.2.1), is used to cover both symbolic interaction in a general sense, that is, in the sense of discourse as a mass noun, but also more explicitly here in terms of analysis of the discourse practice, as a count noun used to identify particular forms of communication related to particular often institutional contexts, such as the discourse of economic growth or a discourse of poverty and social exclusion. More specifically, however, the term discourse is more precisely defined by its content, its topic, and its subject matter. In this sense ‘discourse’ stresses the combination of an area of knowledge, together with the way it is constituted. An example would be the ‘green’ discourse on ‘climate change’, where climate change or ‘global warming’ is the area of knowledge. This concept of discourse is seen as being more autonomous than style and activity type, and can be associated with a range of genres. This general combination of a focus on the categories of genre, discourse, and style can therefore be seen as an interrogation of the discursive practice and on interdiscursive processes generally.

The third dimension of analysis in this model however, is on discourse-as-social practice and is concerned with the ideological effects and hegemonic processes in which discourse is seen to operate. It is from this third dimension that Fairclough constructed his approach to social change, central to his original socio-cultural version of CDA. Since the relationship between a text and a social practice is mediated by discursive practice, this
implies that the analysis of the discursive practice is essential for considerations about whether a text reproduces or restructures the existing order of discourse – being a relatively stable and conventional form of discursive interaction central to a network of practices (Fairclough 2003: 220) – and about what consequences this might have for the broader social practice. Or as Blommaert phrases it (2005: 30), where hegemonies change, this process can be witnessed in a change in the discursive practice when viewed through the lens of intertextuality. That is, the way discourse is being altered or re-written sheds light on the emergence of new orders of discourse, struggles over normativity, attempts at control, and also on resistance to regimes of power.

**Figure 4.1**  Fairclough’s Three-dimensional model of discourse analysis

In parallel to this three-dimensional model of conceiving of and analysing discourse, Fairclough adds a threefold distinction in terms of research methodology. CDA should move from a *description*, to *interpretation*, to *explanation*. The *descriptive* phase relates to the linguistic analytical dimension of the model. The description can be very similar to the
activity carried out by the participant since the researcher uses the participant’s categories in his description, but the researcher then has to make his interpretive framework explicit. Interpretation is concerned with the way participants arrive at some kind of understanding of discourse based on the cognitive, social, and ideological resources. This phase requires a degree of distancing between the researcher and the participant, but the research is still carried out in relation to categories and criteria provided by the discourse participant. Such interpretations often display what Fairclough calls ‘ideological framings’ where participants reproduce elements of social ideologies through their everyday discourse interaction. This is essentially an act of revealing what Bourdieu would see as subjects inhabiting a stable network of social practices and fulfilling or realising their subjective ‘corporeal’ dispositions within such objectives circumstances. That is, of essentially reinforcing the nomos of the field in question.

In order to facilitate the necessary reflexive space for the analyst Fairclough makes a distinction between the participant’s understanding of a text and the analyst’s interpretation of the text. This is why Fairclough’s model feels a third analytical dimension is required. In the explanatory phase it is the job of the researcher to draw on social theory to reveal the ideological underpinnings of unreflexive interpretive procedures. It is the presence of social theory that creates the necessary distance that allows for a move from ‘non-critical’ to ‘critical’ discourse analysis. This explanation phase provides both the larger picture, in which instantiations of text and talk can be placed, and from which they derive their meaning, and it facilitates a move beyond the limitations of lay consciousness about the ideological dimensions of discourse. Consequently, the overall direction of Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of analysis is one in which social theory is used to provide a meta-discourse of linguistic phenomena, where the goal is a refined and more powerful technique of text analysis.

Orders of Discourse

An important point to stress in relation to CDA is that any investigation proceeds by an analysis of specific instances of language use in relation to the prevailing order of discourse. For Fairclough the relationship between the communicative event and the order of discourse is dialectical, a point I elaborate below. In summary, the order of discourse is a system, but not in any structuralist sense in so far as a communicative events can both reproduce and alter an order of discourse (since a discourse is socially constitutive as well as being socially constituted). The semiotic aspect of a social order is its order of discourse. It is the social structuring of semiotic difference (Fairclough 2001b: 229), or a particular social ordering of
relationships amongst different ways of meaning making. An order of discourse can therefore be seen as the sum of all genres, discourses, and styles that are in use within a specific domain at a specific point in time, (regardless of whether such a mix of discourses and genres is historically indigenous to that domain), which implies it is both a limiting structure and an active practice and open to change. It should be clear therefore in advance of elaborating Fairclough’s later Dialectical-Relational approach to CDA employed in this work (see section 4.3), that in terms of the external dimension of language analysis that genre, discourse, style, order of discourse, as well as ‘manifest intertextuality’ as interdiscursive elements, are all central categories of analysis in the data-analysis chapters that follow, a point I will return to in section 4.3.5 below.

**Discourse, Ideology, and Hegemony**

Ideology is a system of ideas, beliefs, speech and cultural practices that operate to the advantage of one particular group. Central to the critical paradigm, and along with ideas of ‘force’, the notion of ideology as a ‘modality’ of power is central, and with this view is a rejection any purely descriptive view of ideology that makes no reference to relations of power and domination. Ideology can therefore be understood here as ‘meaning in the service of power’ (Fairclough 1995b: 14). That is, as constructions of meaning that contribute to the production, reproduction, and transformation of relations of domination, ideology is also largely semiotic in character. Discourses can be more or less ideological in that their contribution to the maintenance and transformation of power relations is a matter of degree. Fairclough’s original view of ideology is drawn from Thompson (1984, 1990) as a practice that operates in processes of meaning production in everyday life, whereby meaning is mobilised in order to maintain relations of power (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002: 75). Most Marxists treat ideology as an abstract system of values that works as a sort of ‘social cement’ securing coherence and social order. Like Thompson, Fairclough’s early work drew heavily on Althusser and Gramsci in relation to approaches to ideological practice, that is, cultural Marxist perspectives. But Fairclough ultimately distances his perspective from that of Althusser’s theory and its conception of interpellation and fixed subjects (like most within critical cultural studies) in seeing people as not being passive ideological subjects in fixed social positions.

For Fairclough ideology is not a universalising or ‘totalising entity’. He draws on Gramsci’s idea of hegemony and consensual ‘common sense’ assumption which contains competing elements that are the results of negotiations of meaning in which all groups participate. Hegemony is not only ‘dominance’, but also a process of negotiation out of
which emerges a consensus in relation to meaning. It is never stable since the existence of competing elements bears the seeds of resistance since elements that challenge the dominant meanings can equip people with resources for resistance, meaning consensus is always a contradictory and unstable equilibrium. The concept of hegemony allows us the means by which we can analyse how discursive practices challenge, negotiate, and/or reproduce power relations as a key part of social practices. A discourse practice is an aspect of hegemonic struggle that contributes to the reproduction and transformation of the order of discourse of which it is a part, (and consequently of the existing power relations) since discursive change takes place when discursive elements are articulated in new ways.

### 4.2.4 Systemic Functional Linguistics

Halliday’s functional grammar (sometimes referred to as ‘systemic grammar’ or ‘systemic functional grammar’, Chalker and Weiner 1994: 392) can be seen as a reaction to the Chomskyan revolution in transformational and generative grammar of the mid-twentieth century (Chomsky 1957, 1965). In essentially excluding any social and cultural dimensions to his study of language, Chomsky’s work left the emerging and multi-disciplinary area of sociolinguistic inquiry searching for a general theory of grammar that incorporated language’s social semiotic functions. Halliday (1993 and 2004) began by stressing the relationship between the grammatical system and the social and personal needs that language is required to serve. According to his functional grammar the resources of language simultaneously fulfil three meta-functions:

- The ideational function by which language gives structure to reality and experience (which has a dialectical relationship with social structure, both reflecting and influencing it);
- The interpersonal function where relationships or social interactions between individuals, speaker and listener etc., are generally negotiated and constituted, and;
- The textual function, which facilitates coherence and cohesion in texts.

Ultimately it was the critical linguists that highlighted the significance of an understanding of Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (SFL) to the critical analysis of discourse. Most analysts use some elements of SFL in their research and it remains a mainstay of the work of Fairclough. Others however, most notable van Dijk, do not, preferring instead to elaborate and develop techniques from text linguistics, argumentation
studies, and rhetoric. Van Dijk (2009) is primarily interested in cognitive linguistics, how texts come to mean what they mean for speakers, whilst Wodak has a history in interactional studies, although she also maintains that argumentation studies can be successfully combined with SFL (Wodak and Meyer 2001). Theo van Leeuwen on the other hand, has sought to elaborate Halliday’s meta-functions of language to incorporate semiotic elements of discourse (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996). Nevertheless, as Blommaert points out, SFL is still held to be crucial to CDA today because ‘it offers clear and rigorous linguistic categories for analysing the relations between discourse and social meaning’ (2005: 23). Indeed Halliday himself suggests that ‘a discourse analysis that is not based on grammar is not an analysis at all’, (cited in Thompson 2004: 249). As well as being based on the interrelatedness of grammar and social structure, SFL therefore also provides a verifiable tool for practical qualitative (linguistic) textual analysis.

With a focus on the productive dynamic of discourse, the basic analytical approach in Fairclough’s model of CDA is to undertake a qualitative, factual linguistic study of texts, employing a grammatical and semantic analysis. This naturally draws heavily from Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics. As outlined, analysis of the discourse practice, with its focus on interdiscursivity and intertextuality, is analysis at the macro level. This analysis however, needs to be supplemented by a detailed linguistic analysis of the text in question. This is necessary for two reasons; firstly, any observations on the discourse practice must find support within the textual analysis, and secondly, the textual analysis can provide much greater clarity, and more tangible evidence of the ideological assumptions behind the text in question. Significantly, and separately from a focus on lexical tendencies such as wording, word meaning, metaphor use, etc. (see Fairclough 1992: 234-37), much textual analysis is concerned with the text grammar, specifically with the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic elements of the discourse sample, as micro-aspects of the discourse practice. Textual analysis is therefore significantly concerned with text grammar as evidenced by the syntactic choices made by the speaker or author, and this concern with text grammar provides some of the central categories of the internal analysis of language use in this work.

Text Grammar

Most approaches within CDA borrow their understanding of grammar from Halliday’s notion of functional grammar, and prioritise an analysis of grammar along these lines as a key component of any analytical work. In practice, discourse analysts are interested in three ‘dimensions’ of the grammar of the clause, namely transitivity, modality, and theme. These dimensions relate directly to Halliday’s functional grammar, and to his concept of the three
meta-functions of language, the ideational (or experiential) function, the interpersonal function, and the textual function respectively. This is also reflected in Fairclough’s approach (1992: 64-65) where in the dialectic of discourse and society, discourse contributes to systems of knowledge and belief (the ideational); the construction of social identities and subject positions, and by extension, the social relations between people, (the interpersonal); and to the ways in which pieces of knowledge are foregrounded or backgrounded, picked out as a ‘topic’ or ‘theme’, taken as implicit or presented as new, and linked to other parts of a text and connected to the world outside the text, (the textual).

The ideational function relates to how and in what ways texts attempt to ‘signify the world and its processes, entities and relations’, (ibid. 64). The analytical focus is therefore on the types of process ‘coded’ within clauses and the elements involved in them, that is, on transitivity (ibid. 177-85). There are processes and elements (or participants) in reality and there are processes and participants in language, but there is no one-to-one relationship between these two. The real world relationship between process and participant may be expressed linguistically in a number of ways. The focus for the discourse analyst is therefore to try to assess what social, cultural, political, and/or ideological factors are at play in the production of a particular linguistic process–participant relationship, or from what perspective is this form being constructed and interpreted. Fairclough highlights ‘relational processes’ between clauses, using verbs like ‘being’, ‘having’, marking a relationship between elements, as well as ‘action processes’ where an agent acts upon a goal, event processes (event and goal), and mental processes.

Any analysis is particularly concerned with the agents of action and event processes and whether they remain visible or are ‘deleted’ such as by way of passive constructions, or other processes like nominalisation of verbs. The same event, for example, can be represented by the active statement, ‘the doctor examined the patient’; the passive sentence, ‘the patient was examined (by the doctor)’; or the nominalised form, ‘the patient had an examination’, which can naturally be explained by the discourse analyst in different ways. Action processes may also be ‘directed’ involving a transitive verb, or ‘non-directed’ using an intransitive verb. The experiential function then is concerned with how experiences of the world are (re)presented in text and discourse and relates at the syntactic level to transitivity. In summary, we are looking at process types and participants to see what is favoured and what choices are being made, as reflected in the choice of voice (active or passive); tendencies such as nominalization; passivisation, and the elision of agency; the expression of causality; and the attribution of responsibility. Items to be aware of therefore include the process types being used, whether grammatical metaphor is significant in the text, and
whether passive clauses and nominalisations are deployed frequently. Transitivity is therefore a major category of analysis in this research.

The interpersonal function is based upon the understanding that we interact, maintain relations and influence others in all discourse situations, and is reflected syntactically via mood (declarative/indicative, imperative, or interrogative), by polarity (through the construction of opposites), and significantly through modality. Modality requires a focus on the textual patterning in an attempt to discern degrees of affinity to expressions of truth or probability (epistemic modality) often seen as weak affinity, or necessity, obligation, or permissibility (deontic modality), or strong affinity (see Fairclough 1992: 158-62). Modality in grammar is usually associated with the use of modal auxiliary verbs such as ‘can’, ‘may’, ‘must’, ‘should’ etc., but systemic functional linguistics is also interested in the less obvious ways that affinity to truth or necessity can be imparted textually. Key indicators can also include tense; that is, the use of the simple present tense in a statement (as opposed to the future simple, or the conditional), is an example of categorical modality. For example, when a government department states that ‘globalisation is a force that has to be recognised’ they are placing this statement in a separate category to one where they state ‘globalisation may be a force…’ or ‘globalisation would be disconcerting if we did not have the means to influence it through democratic means’. There are also modal adverbs such as ‘necessarily’, ‘obviously’, definitely’ and the corresponding set of modal adjectives, such as ‘likely’, ‘possible’, ‘probable’ that also need to be taken account of.

In conversation moreover, there is the use of what Fairclough calls ‘hedges’, terms such as ‘a bit’, ‘sort of’ where one speaker in a sense pulls back from overt assertion, leaving room for the addressee to feel perhaps more room to disagree with, amend, or add to the original statement. One significant element to bear in mind with regard to written texts is that of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ modality. When a speaker uses non-factive verbs like ‘believe’, ‘think’, ‘hope’, etc. in the main clause, it is usually clear that the subsequent clauses can be taken as representing the speaker’s own, subjective, point of view. Modality however, may also be ‘objective’ with the subjective basis of a speaker’s text remaining implicit. In such a case, it is important to dwell on precisely whose opinion or perspective is being expressed, or whether a subjective view is being presented as a universal, incontestable one, as often goes with the exercise of social power. The challenge is to take account of the use of modality features in so far as they are indicative of social relations within a discourse sample and an attempt to control representations of reality. For example, factive verbs like to know or to regret, or factive predicate phrases such as ‘it is a pity that…’, can be deployed objectively as surrogates for what are non-factive, subjective positions. Any analysis
therefore has to be conscious of what sorts of modalities are most frequent, whether modalities are predominantly subjective or objective, and which modality features are used most often, and whether there is a shift from low or weak affinity statements (epistemic modality) to high or strong affinity expressions (deontic modality) or expressions. Consequently, modality is also a significant category of analysis in my work.

The textual function is based on the understanding that discourse sees messages organized in a particular way to indicate how they connect with other messages and is reflected in a text’s theme or thematic structure, and therefore requires an examination of patterning in the text’s overall structure. The theme – as the first constituent of the clause (Thompson 2004: 143) – may be seen as the text producer’s ‘point of departure’ for a clause and is associated with what is taken as understood, or knowable, or established for the producer and the interpreter. As Fairclough points out however, what is often taken as given is not always something that is stated explicitly, and as such looking at what is presented as a theme can say a lot about ‘a producer’s common sense assumptions of social order and rhetorical strategies’ (1992: 183). Themes can be ‘marked’ or ‘unmarked’ such that in a declarative sentence for example, the subject of the main clause is the unmarked theme and the interpreter recognises the subject as such without the theme being explicitly flagged.

‘Marked’ choices can be quite illustrative of assumptions and rhetorical strategies, for example, words like ‘inevitably’ or ‘therefore’ in a sentence like ‘It inevitably follows therefore that the Government must react to these developments’, though technically acting as syntactic adjuncts, actually serve to foreground a marked theme, that is, the Government as thematically pro-active (in relation to these ‘developments’). What is placed initially in clauses is worth paying attention to as it can highlight underlying assumptions and strategies that are nowhere made explicit. In summary, in addressing a text we are looking to assess its thematic structure, and what assumptions underlie it, whether there are frequent marked themes, and if so, what the motivations might be for their use. As a category of analysis, theme also features where it proves useful. Another category of analysis which follows from a focus on text grammar and transitivity, modality, and theme is that of assumption and presupposition. Assumption has already been trailed above in relation to grammatical representations of subjective and objective modality through factive verbs, for example. But I now want to address assumption and presupposition in more detail.

Fairclough sees presupposition – being the assumed relationship between two propositions (Yule 1996: 26) – as bridging the gap between the internal categories of analysis and the external interdiscursive categories of genre, discourse, style, and order of discourse (1992: 234). Presupposition is that which a speaker assumes to be true in advance of making
an utterance. And significantly, as it is speakers and not sentences that have presuppositions, they are a significant area of interest from an analytical perspective, especially as presuppositions hold up or maintain the ‘property of constancy’ under both negation and disagreement (Yule 1996: 26-27). A statement such as ‘Our immigration problem can be solved’, for example, for which the truth value is unknown, assumes within it that there is an ‘immigration problem’. Likewise, an utterance such as ‘We all know that the state is not the appropriate body responsible for providing a universal childcare system maintains the assumption of no state responsibility whether we all know this to be true or not. Producing a text with presuppositions can therefore be a powerful way to circulate ideas, whether or not such ideas are held to be true or known, or even knowable.

There are several distinct ways in which presupposition can be formulated grammatically, many of which are triggered or marked, but many of which are unmarked. For example, existential presupposition can be identified through the presence of the definite article such as ‘the problem’, or through demonstrative pronouns, such as ‘this challenge’. Factual presupposition can be indexed through the use of factive verbs, so for example a sentence that starts ‘We regret choosing this path’ implies we chose this path. The same is also true of non-factive verbs such as to pretend, or to imagine where ‘I imagined we voted for change’ implies we did not vote for change, etc. Yet many lexical presuppositions are not overtly trailed as presupposing fact or action. For example, the use of the verb to manage asserts that the subject succeeded in a task, but it also presupposes that they tried to do something, as does the negative form, where they did not succeed, but the asserting of attempting to do something nevertheless remains intact. The use of unmarked presupposition in particular highlights the need to pay close attention to what a text producer is trying to achieve with a text or utterance and how it may link with other ideas and other texts. That is, presupposition is often a way a text producer introduces elements of another text into a new text, or what Fairclough calls samples of manifest intertextuality (1992: 117-23). Assumption and presupposition, like intertextuality, is therefore another category of analysis adopted in this work and one that straddles the space between the internal and external elements of textual analysis.
4.3 Semiosis in Social Practices: a Dialectical-Relational approach to CDA

Fairclough’s original three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis (1992 and 1995a) has largely been superseded by an approach that sees discourse as less bluntly ideological. For example, Althusser’s concept of the interpellation of subject positions has been found wanting and no longer constrains the theoretical approach to the actions of the individual or institution within its network of social practices, or field. The three-dimensional approach was also felt to be weak in responding to issues of text consumption and the facilitation of post-analysis interpretation. The contemporary Faircloughian methodology (see Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, Fairclough 2003 and 2009) in contrast places more emphasis on social processes with language, or as Fairclough prefers ‘semiosis’ (2001b: 229), understood as a significant element of such processes. That is, the issue of the relations between discursive and non-discursive elements assumes centrality in the later model, which necessarily prioritises a ‘transdisciplinary’ approach to analysis and not simply an interdisciplinary one (Fairclough 2010: 87). The means that the resultant combination of theory and method is seen as being in a dialogical relationship with other social theories, hence Fairclough’s contemporary methodology it is usually referred to as the dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis, (Fairclough 2009 and 2010).

Essentially, the dialectical-relation model sees CDA ‘recast’ (Fairclough 2010: 163) in terms of a differentiation of three levels of social life: social structures, social practices; and social events & actions, with social practice seen as mediating the relationship between abstract structures and concrete events and actions. Each level has a semiotic element or dimension: languages for the level of structures; orders of discourse for the level of practices, and texts for the level of events and actions. Secondly, CDA is viewed primarily as a form of relational analysis. Specifically, this analysis includes relations between semiotic and non-semiotic elements (of social processes); relations between levels, especially between texts and orders of discourse; and, also relations within orders of discourse and within texts. The model approaches relations as articulations between semiotic and non-semiotic elements. That is to say, between discourses, material processes and events, and the non-semiotic elements of social relations, and between semiotic elements themselves, such as different discourses and different genres, which are variable and change over time. Thirdly, it sees these relations as dialectical, that is, as relations between elements which are different but not discrete, where one element can be ‘internalised’ in others. And finally, it identifies action,
representation, and identification as three primary, simultaneous and interconnected facets of social process and social interaction, and genres, discourses, and styles respectively as semiotic or discoursal elements or ‘moments’ at the level of social practices.

Also, in working within a realist and specifically a ‘critical realist’ ontology (ibid. 164) the dialectical-relational model asserts that there is a real world that exists independently of our (always limited) knowledge of it and of whether or how we represent it, rejecting versions of discourse theory which collapse the distinction between reality and discourse, yet also asserts that the real world is socially discursively constructed. That is, a rejection of ‘discourse imperialism’ and post-modernist approaches to discourse that characterises much of recent social theory, and that treats semiosis as a play of differences among signs without extra semiotic conditions and limits on the one hand, and as an entity that can only be analysed subjectively. Moreover, the relationship between semiosis and extra-semiotic factors (social actors, social relations, practical contexts, etc.) is a dialectical one with elements being regarded as different but not discrete. In this model therefore a distinction is also drawn between construal (how things are construed or represented) and construction (the material effects of construals), where the move from the former to the latter is contingent on extra-semiotic as well as semiotic conditions. Essentially, discourses may be operationalised in three ways (ibid. 233); they may be enacted as new ways of (inter)acting in genres; they may be inculcated as new ways of being (identities) in styles; and they may be physically materialised in new ways of organising space, structures, entities, institutions or professional roles.

Specifically, Fairclough means that by combining aspects of different theories and methods of analysis, research can produce outcomes in theory and method that would not otherwise be produced. As he states ‘each [theory and method] should be open to the theoretical logics of others, open to ‘internalising’ them in a way which can transform the relationships between them (2010: 398). One consequence of such a dialectical-relational approach to analysis of discourse is that methodology per se is not reducible to a method or a toolbox of methods alone, there is no ‘correct’ technical approach to analysis, but rather, that all approaches must foreground theoretical perspectives in combination with more fundamental approaches to the analysis of semiosis. Where discourse is understood as one element among a number of different elements that combine to form social practices, and where these elements though discrete, are understood to be continually interacting with and internalising each other, they are necessarily understood to be in a dialectical relationship. Hence the theoretical position of Fairclough’s current analytical approach is based on the concept of a ‘dialectics of discourse’ (see Harvey 1996).
4.3.1 Dialectics of discourse

Fairclough’s general methodology sees semiosis as an irreducible part of material social processes where semiosis includes all forms of meaning making (visual images, body language as well as spoken and written language). This also explains Fairclough’s preference for the use of semiosis over language or discourse in any general sense in his later work.³ Social life is seen as interconnected networks of social practices (or ‘fields’ in Bourdieu’s terminology), for example, economic, cultural, political, etc., where every practice has a semiotic element. The reason for focusing on social practice is that it allows for a combining of the perspective of (social) structure and the perspective of (social) action; since a social practice is a relatively permanent way of acting socially, being defined by its position within a structured network of practices, but significantly, which also has the potential to be transformed.

All practices are practices of production (Fairclough 2001a: 231) – arenas within which social life is produced, economic cultural, everyday life etc., and every practice includes many elements, such as:

- Productive activity
- Means of production
- Social relations
- Social identities
- Cultural values
- Consciousness
- Semiosis

Fairclough later settles on distinguishing four main categories of elements (2010: 173), being; physical elements; sociological elements; cultural & psychological elements; and, text (or ‘discourse’ as an abstract noun). In that these diverse elements are brought together to constitute a practice they are called ‘moments’. Each of the four categories of elements contributes its own distinctive generative powers to the production of social life, though the generative powers of each works through the mediation of the generative powers of the others. The key point is that these elements are dialectically related, they are separate but not discrete, and that there is therefore a sense in which each internalises the other without being reducible to them. So social relations and social identities are in part semiotic, but we do not

³ Though my analytical samples are printed texts and there is therefore no specific need for me to adopt Fairclough’s current preference for using ‘semiosis’ over ‘discourse’ in my work, given the potential for confusion resulting from the number of meanings of the word discourse, I shall generally adopt Fairclough’s convention from this point.
theorise them and research them in the same way that we theorise and research language. These elements rather, have distinct properties, and researching them gives rise to distinct disciplines.

CDA is concerned with these dialectical relationships between elements of social practices and with the radical changes that are taking place in contemporary social life. Specifically, its interest is in how semiosis figures within processes of change, and with shifts in the relationships between semiosis and other social elements within networks of practices. From the critical realist perspective the issue for Fairclough is what is the distinctive generative power of text, or to take Hasan’s term, what is the ‘semologic’ of instantiations of discourse (Hasan, 1998). For Fairclough the specificity of semiosis as text in this dialectical matrix is the power to socially produce or, in Foucauldian terms, to make subjects, or to confer subjecthood on actors through the use of language in any social practice. Simply, semiosis works in its textual moment, where the ‘moment’ is the specific instance of interplay or interaction between the semiotic element in a given social practice with the other social elements present in that practice. In short, the distinctive feature is the power to produce texts (Fairclough 2010: 174). But the role of semiosis has to be established through analysis and not taken for granted. For example, semiosis may be more or less important or salient in one practice, or set of practices, than in another, and may change in significance over time.

A fundamental position of the approach to semiosis (as referenced in the overview of Fairclough’s three-dimensional model above) and the dialectics of discourse is that semiosis figures in broadly three ways in social practices (see Fairclough 2003: 203):

1. As part of the ‘doing’; as part of the social activity in a practice;
2. As representations (or construals); where social actors produce ‘representations’ of other practices, as well as reflexive representations of their own practice in the course of their activity in a practice; and,
3. Semiosis figures in the ‘performance’ of particular positions within the social identities of people who operate in positions in a practice are only partly specified by the practice itself. People who differ in social class, gender, ethnicity etc. and in life experience produce different performances of a particular position.

A central feature of the dialectical-relational approach to analysis of semiosis is Fairclough’s linking of the three ways in which semiosis impacts on social practices with the historical categories of an interdiscursive or ‘external’ level of analysis of text. Specifically,
he posits that semiosis as part of a social activity constitutes genres, or diverse ways of acting, of producing social life, in the semiotic mode. This includes actions or events such as everyday conversation, meetings within organisations or institutions, or forms of interview, etc. Secondly, that semiosis in the representation or self-representation of social practices constitutes discourses (in the specific, count-noun sense of the term); diverse ways of representing social life which are inherently positioned, since differently positioned social actors ‘see’ and represent social life in different ways, in different discourses. And thirdly, that semiosis in the performance of positions constitutes styles, such as those of doctors or teachers in the performance of their professional duties. Each position is performed in diverse styles depending on aspects of identity which exceed the construction of positions in those practices. Styles are ways of being or identities in their semiotic aspect. In this way we can see that this fundamental aspect of Fairclough’s analytical model is itself a product of transdisciplinarity.

Social practices networked together in a particular way moreover constitute a social order, for example, globalised neoliberalism at a macro level, or at the local level, the social order of education in a particular place, at a particular time. The semiotic aspect of a social order is its ‘order of discourse’, a network of social practices in its semiotic aspect or the way in which diverse discourses and genres are networked together. More bluntly, this ‘social structuring of semiotic difference’ (ibid. 220) is a particular social ordering of relationships amongst different ways of meaning making. One aspect of this ‘ordering’ is dominance; some ways of making meaning are dominant or mainstream in a particular order of discourse, others are marginal and/or potentially oppositional or alternative. For Fairclough, by 1999 the concept of an order of discourse is seen as synonymous with Bourdieu’s concept of ‘field’. A ‘field’ is a relatively autonomous social domain, obeying a specific social logic (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996: 94). Actors in a field are struggling to achieve a goal which leads to conflictual relationships with other actors in the field. For Bourdieu society consists of a range of fields, governed by an overarching ‘field of power’. For Chouliaraki and Fairclough an order of discourse can be seen as the discursive aspect of a field. They nevertheless criticise Bourdieu for under theorising the role of discourse in the struggles within and between fields (see also Hasan 1998), leading them to propose CDA as a necessary supplement to Bourdieu’s theory (1999). Nevertheless, Bourdieu’s theory helps anchor the order of discourse in an order of social practice (with its combination of discursive and non-discursive moments).

The concept of hegemony can be usefully employed in analysing orders of discourse; where a particular social structuring of semiotic difference becomes hegemonic, that is, a part
of the legitimising common sense which sustains relations of dominance, (though this legitimising is always in a state of tension). This means that an order of discourse is not a rigid system, but an open system, which is ‘put at risk’ by what happens in actual interactions. As CDA oscillates between a focus on structure and action – between a focus on shifts in the social structuring of semiotic diversity (orders of discourse), and a focus on the productive semiotic work which goes on in particular texts and interactions – a central concern for analysts in relation to hegemonic processes is precisely these shifting articulations between genres, discourses, and styles. Moreover, it is because the shifting social structuring of relationships between genres, discourses, and styles, which achieve a relative stability and permanence in orders of discourse, manifest themselves in texts and interactions that the analysis within CDA ultimately moves beyond theory and focuses on texts. This latter point remains the issue of ‘interdiscursivity’ where the interdiscursive dimension of a text is a part of its intertextuality; a question of which genres, discourses, and styles it draws upon, how the text works them into particular articulations, and how, from the critical perspective, such articulations may ultimately be explained.

**The Four Moments of the Dialectics of Discourse**

In addition to the specific discourse moment, the instantiation of the interplay of the semiotic element with other elements of a social practice in any field at and given time, following Harvey, Fairclough identifies four distinct ‘moments’ of the dialectics of discourse. These moments are concerned with the development and deployment of new discourses and with how they achieve a level of ideological success (see Fairclough 2005). The four moments are emergence; hegemony; recontextualisation; and operationalisation (see Harvey 1996 and Fairclough 2007). Emergence is the translation, condensation, and simplification of complex realities into discourses. Fairclough provides the example of the construction of new discourses through cherry-picking in relation to the broad discourse of globalisation. A critical focus therefore must be on why is it that some discourses are selected and not others at any point in time, that is, why a focus on ‘globalisation’ at the time the (new) discourse(s) begins to emerge. He posits that where there is a crisis competing strategies will emerge to resolve it. Hegemony is therefore concerned with relations of contestation between discourses as part of contestations between strategies and between groups of social agents which may lead to particular discourses (and strategies) becoming hegemonic. New discourses emerge as facets of strategies which constitute imaginaries for a new economic or legal or political fix, a new order, (with its new order of discourse).
Recontextualisation examines the dissemination of discourses across structural boundaries, such as from one social field to another, for example, from business and management to education and the provision of social programmes, and scalar boundaries, for example, from the global, transnational level down to the local, community level. That is, when new discourses achieve a level of hegemony there is a process of contestation between discourses, leading to the diffusion of such new hegemonic discourse across social fields and at the level of scale. Operationalisation is the resultant enactment of discourses as new ways of (inter)acting, their inculcation as new ways of being (identity), and their materialisation in features of the physical world. Where a discourse is successful in achieving hegemony it is enacted in new ways of acting/interacting, inculcated in new ways of being (forms of identity), materialised in new ‘hardware’, such as in new architecture, machinery, technologies, etc. Significantly for the analysis of discourse, these changes naturally lead to a change in discourse, but such processes of change are usually, at least in part, also led by changes in discourse, and therefore in the dialectical relationships between discourses.

This relationship is naturally often complex or opaque partly because changes in discourses can naturally obfuscate processes of change. This is why a reflection on the moments of the dialectics of discourse, can be a useful tool of analysis in addition to the general framework introduced below. The moment of emergence for example, is particularly significant in cases of diachronic change since it can help to distinguish between rhetorically motivated changes in discourse on the one hand, and deeper ‘hegemonic’ social change on the other. And likewise, recontextualisation and operationalisation are important discourse dialectic moments in terms of the colonisation of networks of practices (or fields) by newly dominant discourses. Consequently, the four moments of the dialectics of discourse are significant categories of analysis in much of the text analysis undertaken in this work.

4.3.2 An analytical framework for Critical Discourse Analysis

I now want to highlight the particular analytical framework that Fairclough has employed since 1999 for this more transdisciplinary approach to semiotic analysis which is employed in each of the three discourse-analytic chapters in this thesis. This framework is based on Bhaskar’s critical theory concept of ‘explanatory critique’ (Bhaskar 1986) but developed here in an attempt to examine the explicit contribution of discourse (and semiosis more broadly) to social change. The methodological model draws on the fundamentals of earlier Faircloughian approaches with its socially and politically informed sweep from description (of semiosis) to interpretation (incorporating linguistic and interdiscursive analysis) to
explanation (situated in social constructivist approaches to social practices). In summary, the fundamentals of semiosis as part of a discourse practice, itself part of a social practice, coupled with a theory of power based upon Gramsci’s conception of hegemony and a theory of discourse based on the concept of intertextuality, remain central to the approach.

This ‘explanatory critique’ model is so named as it draws upon Bhaskar’s theory of Critical Realism (1986), which presupposes that a normative social research can be both identified and therefore advanced, and with discourse, or ‘semiosis’ at its centre. As summarised in Fairclough (2003 and 2009), the adaption of this model for discourse analysis leads to an analytical framework that prioritises the semiosis of social practices (the dialectical specificity of semiosis as an element of social practices, like other such elements). It also centrally sees semiosis as constituting genres and (count-noun) discourses, and that the semiotic aspect of a social order is reflected in an order of discourse. In reflecting the ideological interest of the three-dimensional model, certain orders of discourse become hegemonically useful at certain times and in certain situations, meaning that the mainstreaming of certain orders of discourse over other orders of discourse results in an ordering of dominance.

An outline of the Bhaskar’s analytical framework, as employed by Fairclough, has been presented in many of his publications, they are all similar but in the period since 1999 there have been some amendments to both the language and the format (particularly to that area specifically focussing on discourse analysis, here stage 2, step 3), the version I present here is, at the time of writing, the latest version (see Fairclough 2009), and the one I am adopting for my data-analysis chapters. It can be summarised as follows:

Stage 1. Focus on a social problem (or ‘wrong’) in its semiotic aspect

   Step 1. Select a research topic that relates to the problem
   Step 2. Construct an object of research by theorising in a transdisciplinary way

Stage 2. Identify obstacles to addressing the social problem

   Step 1. Analyse the dialectical relations between semiosis and other social elements
   Step 2. Select texts, and focuses and categories of analysis
   Step 3. Carry out analyses of texts; both interdiscursive and linguistic (semiotic)

Stage 3. Consider whether the social order ‘needs’ the social problem

Stage 4. Identify possibly ways past the obstacles

The above schema is also relevant to critical social research generally but this version foregrounds CDA in its method of analysis of 2.2 & 2.3, which are the steps that a discourse

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4 See Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999: 59-66) for a fuller explanation.
5 For an explanation of Fairclough’s later preference for the term ‘social wrong’ as opposed to ‘social problem’, see Fairclough (2010: 254).
analyst will primarily be concerned with. Nevertheless, CDA is best used in combination with theoretical and analytical resources in various areas of social and political science. Thus the methods employed in any specific piece of research which draw upon critical discourse analysis are likely to be a combination of CDA methods and those of other disciplines. In this light, I stress again that as a critical discourse analyst my novel contribution in this work relates to precisely these parts of the analytical framework and not in any first instance to the broader theoretical issues raised in this work. Yet it should now be clear how and why, in order to be productively useful or to be evaluated as appropriately relevant and rigorous, I also need to work through the schema from stages one to four not simply for the purpose of contextualising my analytical work, but more fundamentally, to construct my objects of research in such a way as to afford an appropriate semiotic point of entry, bearing in mind the overarching research question within this work. As the bulk of the analysis chapters is taken up with operationalising this framework across three broad policy areas, each stage and step will be illuminated a number of times, but for the sake of clarity, and to illustrate the holistic nature of the explanatory critique framework as a contribution to critical social research generally, I will briefly outline the purpose and content of each stage here.

**Stage 1.** Focus on a social problem (or ‘wrong’) in its semiotic aspect

In operationalising a critical approach to social science this framework eschews the more conventional research question, instead, as a first step it seeks to identify a social problem (or as Fairclough (2009) later phrases it, a social ‘wrong’) and reflect upon its nature to better understand its intractability. Problems are generally aspects of social systems that have adverse effects upon collective human well-being and which could be altered or even eradicated.

**Step 1. Select a research topic that relates to the problem and which can productively be approached in a transdisciplinary way with a particular focus on dialectical relations between semiosis and other elements**

The objective here is to form a link between the identification of the social problem with its semiotic dimension as actualised. The notion of ‘productive’ is rather open but relates to the fact that there may be significant semiotic features of a topic which the existing social research has avoided researching or has only attempted in a limited way. For example, a common dichotomy is to identify whether the ‘problem’ is in the activities of a social practice or in its representation, whether the practice is for example, racist acts upon the person or racist journalism in its depiction or representation of a group or members of a group.

A challenge often is to avoid taking issues at face value, as presented or generally understood in some conventional way. For example, a focus on the discourse of youth
unemployment might assume as a starting point that official or media discourses of ‘skivers versus strivers’ is a valid point of entry to the topic. This is a rather crude example but approaching a research topic requires a level of transdisciplinarity from the outset to, as Fairclough says, ‘translate’ topics into objects of research in a genuinely critical way. That is, the topic needs to be appropriately theorised. So in the example of high levels of youth unemployment, after the initial step of interrogating a media construal of unemployed youth, a necessary secondary level of reflection immediately becomes clear. For example, this might be a reflection on what function this idea of indigenous youth is serving for media interests (and possibly for other interests too). This helps to answer the question of whether the idea is problematic in terms of representation or in terms of what the discourse practice is doing, that is, whether the focus of analysis should be on discourse(s) or genres. This leads on to the next step.

**Step 2. Construct an object of research for an initially identified topic by theorising in a transdisciplinary way**

A first step is to essentially break down the identified topic of research by focusing on a particular aspect of it that has implications for human well-being. In drawing on relevant bodies of theory, the idea is to try to produce an original formulation of the social problem. As such, it may often be necessary to move away from the broad topic itself and focus on a single sub-aspect of the topic and to theorise this issue in isolation. The main requirement is to go beyond that which is obvious and to draw on research from beyond the field of sociolinguistics but which can be shown to relate to or overlap with theories of semiosis. It should be clear that there is no correct way to do this, there is no theoretical perspective that must necessarily influence such theorisations of a topic, but in general terms rich, well-grounded theorisations are usually more helpful as a basis for defining coherent objects of research, which can then facilitate critical research to illustrate implications for human well-being and also possibilities for improving such well-being. It is at this step that analysts often work in teams since a lack of familiarity with non-linguistic theories can be a stumbling block to operationalising the framework as a whole. Regardless of cooperative team work, this step usually involves an engagement by the discourse analysts with the literature of fields such as political science, or economics, or state theory, or perhaps a combination of all of these, especially where the focus is on the relationship between the social problem, its reality (or an aspect of its reality) and the way it is formulated, and semiosis, including the role of semiosis in its formulation.
Stage 2. Identify obstacles to addressing the social problem

Here the social problem is approached tangentially by seeking to understand what it is about the problem, about the way social life is structured, that prevents the problem being addressed. The general objective with this stage of the analysis is to try to identify obstacles in the various networks of social practices in which the problem is located at different levels of generality or abstraction. For example, is the authoritarian relationship between a doctor and a patient related primarily to the network of practices around patient care, or the network of practices of the institutional and professional organisations in a hospital, or is it even located within the network of practices of the free-market reality of healthcare provision more generally. The answer of course depends upon the precise nature of research question being asked. In my work, for example, in terms of official discourse on social issues these first two stages taken together need to assess whether and to what extent any official government text is responding to a ‘need’ or is a matter of ‘representation’, and if it appears to be both whether this can be explained by the combination of actors and voices present. And also, whether the content of any text (including any inherent tensions and contradictions), can be traced back, beyond the immediate remits of the various actors, to the more global, or macro-economic level.

Step 1. Analyse the dialectical relations between semiosis and other social elements: between orders of discourse and other elements of social practices, between texts and other elements of events

Step 2. Select texts, and focuses and categories of analysis, in the light of and appropriate to the constitution of the object of research

Step 3. Carry out analyses of texts; both interdiscursive and linguistic

The combination of these steps within the second stage of the analytical framework highlights how any linguistic analysis of a text is only a part of the broader semiotic analysis. The broader analysis is based on the theorisation of the topic as assessed in the first stage which then affords a semiotic point of entry, formulated in a transdisciplinary way, which frames the semiotic analysis. It is important to restate that in this version of critical discourse analysis, the version I am adopting, though the method of analysis is always dependent upon the way in which a particular object of research in constructed, there remains a core method of analysis, what Fairclough formerly called ‘interactional analysis’ (see Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, and Fairclough 2001b).

This is the combination of interdiscursive analysis (the particular combination of genres, discourses, and styles or voices present in any text sample), coupled with the detailed linguistic analysis of text, and drawing heavily on Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics.
The discursive analysis in particular can also be seen as a mediating or linking level between the linguistic analysis of a text and the social analysis of the network of practices of which the text is a part. This approach necessarily requires a focus on the order of discourse (or the orders of discourse) set up within the text. To use Fairclough’s term, the object is to identify which of the representations used are more likely to ‘flow’ across different fields, such as the political, economic, media etc., and how these representations are likely to be taken up in other social practices. This process leads directly into an analysis of the structural and interdiscursive elements of the text, but in the broader explanatory critique being outlined, this actual analysis is postponed on ‘delayed’ until step 3 in order to better frame this step.

Stage 3. Consider whether the social order ‘needs’ the social problem

The third stage is concerned with reflecting on whether the social problem under analysis is an integral part of the social order of which its set of practices is a part. In other words, to what degree can we say that the social problem is not a consequence of certain processes but is in fact fundamental to the operation of said processes? In the earlier example, does an effective medical system need authoritarian doctors? Or in the case of high levels of indigenous youth unemployment in Ireland, is there a pay-off to the state, for example, in recruiting immigrant workers to fill service sector jobs, in contrast to hiring local workers who might reasonably expect to earn more than the minimum wage and who might demand fixed length contracts with a guaranteed number of hours of work per week, etc? In short, might there be a plausible political scenario that might result in sidelining strategies to enhance youth employment as a preferably national option? From this point of view questions such as whose interest is being served by the social problem and its related social practice (or by any proposed change to the social practice) and to what possible end, become easier to answer.

Of course the ability to assess this stage effectively depends upon the appropriateness of the original theorisation of the social problem and the resultant linguistic analysis. Therefore effective positioning of the problem allows for a better assessment of the extent to which the semiotic aspect of the problem is an insuperable part of the social order as presently constituted. As Fairclough points out, this is a way of contrasting what currently ‘is’ with what ‘might’ or ‘should be’ the state of affairs regarding any social issue. As Fairclough states (2010: 238), ‘if a social order can be shown to inherently give rise to major social wrongs, then that is a reason for thinking that perhaps it should be changed’. This movement from ‘is’ to ‘ought’ also reflects the inherent normative nature of Bhaskar’s framework. Responding to this question, to stage three, necessarily links with issues of ideology (as can be seen from my unemployment example) where appropriate interactional
analysis can highlight how unequal patterns of domination can be sustained semiotically in any
social order’s network of practices.

**Stage 4. Identify possibly ways past the obstacles**

In terms of a discourse contribution to the broader critical social research agenda, the fourth
stage looks to open up and exploit gaps and tensions identified in the semiosis of the social
order under scrutiny. This is understood by Fairclough as a central aspect of the relational
dimension of his broader dialectical-relation method as the step adds a positive critique of a
social order to the negative critique advanced in stages two and three. Specifically, the
analyst’s focus is on contradiction, variation, and difference, not merely to point up anomaly
in the semiotic representation of the social order and the social problem in question, but with
a view to discerning and opening up of hitherto unrealised potentialities for change that may
emerge from the preceding analytical work. In its fullest sense this stage can address both the
textual and interdiscursive dimensions of the text to identify a semiotic point of entry to an
assessment of how the original obstacles that prevent the social problem being challenged are
or can be confronted or resisted, whether by individuals or organised groups or movements.
That is, how precisely does a text produce its own local network (dialectically drawing on
and interacting with a range of social practices) and how does it relate to, mask, or reveal any
underlying contradictions (in its construal of what is and what should be) which can be used
to point to spaces and opportunities for progressive opposition and action.

### 4.3.3 Fairclough and an empirical engagement with the public sphere

This is precisely the intention in the analytical work that follows, but before elaborating
further on how my work links to Bourdieu’s invitation I want to contextualise my work in
relation to that of Norman Fairclough and his methodological approach to analyses of the
public sphere and public sphere discourse. The first analytical chapter on immigration
discourse mirrors the format of a piece of Fairclough’s research on welfare legislation reform
in the British context (see Fairclough 2001b: 251-66), but the analytical work elaborated in
this work, taken as a whole, moves away from this strict association with a compromised
public sphere. My critique of the semiotic dimension of neoliberalism’s undermining of
democracy prioritises Faircloughian methodologies of analysis (as outlined) coupled with a
broadening out of Bourdieusian notions of fields as spaces of contaminated sets of social
practices, in part semiotic, and the increasing valuation or forms of symbolic capital that
(re)produce the neoliberal nomos of the economic field and in and across other fields, that is,
processes of contamination or colonisation. In other words, my focus is on processes that
compromise the autonomy of non-economic fields by the pro-market discourses of the economic field and the role of discourse in these state and civil society interactions. This is a more rounded way of approaching a critique of neoliberalism that centres on the crisis of the public sphere by way of an investigation into the nature of the systematic distortion of the discourse of a number of fields in Irish public life.

In viewing the health of a public sphere as essentially related to its discursive features, Fairclough proposes CDA as a useful way of approaching the question of whether the public sphere is in crisis under contemporary political conditions (Fairclough 2010: 378). The focus on the public sphere originally comes out of Fairclough’s intense interest in the rise of New Labour in the UK in the mid-nineties (see Fairclough 2000) and his twin areas of his analytically focus. The first of these is ‘spin’ and the perceived preoccupation with public relations by the party, or the role of semiosis in the management of perception and action (Fairclough 2001b: 254), and the second is the role of focus groups and New Labour’s preoccupation with public opinion generally (2010: 392-96). Specifically, Fairclough sees the public sphere as related to the latter interest of Blair’s post-1997 government.

Fundamentally in understanding opinions as notions that are formed dialogically in interaction and not as fixed pre-given positions, on the one hand Fairclough sees focus groups not as methods for genuinely accessing opinion, but rather, as ways of testing potential policy ideas, and on the other hand that they can be an attempt to legitimate parts of the political system at a point where its legitimacy is seriously compromised, which can be seen as an attempt to systematically colonise the public sphere, contributing to the general ‘debasement of democracy’ (ibid. 394).

Following from Arendt’s (1958) work on the public sphere, Fairclough notes that the question of the public sphere is centrally the question of what discursive practices, what forms of dialogue, are available for civic deliberation. In terms of the type of contribution that CDA can make to this research project. Since CDA contributes a sophisticated and socially framed understanding of the properties of practices of public dialogue, Fairclough proposes it as a useful way to evaluate existing practices and discerning potential alternatives from the perspective of the public sphere. Fairclough’s perception of the public sphere borrows more from Hannah Arendt than from Habermas. In particular, he stresses Arendt’s distinction between individual (and group) ‘action’ as a form of praxis in the philosophical sense, as the manifestation of human action as opposed to human manufacture or ‘labour’. Action has two essential features: it instantiates freedom in the sense of the capacity to do the unexpected, to create; and it presupposes plurality – it inherently involves other people, and, moreover, instantiates a dialectic between what they have in common and what makes each
individual unique. It inherently goes with speech and involves a reflexive loop through which discursive constructions of action are themselves part of the action. Action is also based on consent between participants and for Arendt action is the locus of power, which she understands as the capacity of people to act in concert for public-political purposes.

It is only through action that people develop the judgement, the capacity to see things ‘not from one’s own point of view but in the perspective of all those who happen to be present’ (Fairclough 2010: 397), which converts mere opinions into public discourse. For Arendt the public sphere is defined by being based in a shared world, a ‘world in common’ on the one hand, and by the emergence of ‘spaces of appearance’ on the other, understood as both shared spaces and practices ‘whenever men are together in the manner of speech and action’. For Fairclough this view of the public sphere is important since it firmly links speech (and semiosis) to action to power. Based on this understanding Fairclough then develops a transdisciplinary framework for assessing discursive practices as genuine examples of public sphere dialogue. I will employ some aspects of this framework in my analytical work in the second two analytical chapters that follow and consequently the framework will be explained in greater detail in advance of its application in the appropriate place. Here however, I would like to summarise this distinct ‘framework’ for the evaluation semiotic practices as a final component of my methodology now that I have addressed the issue of the public sphere and its relationship to a critique of neoliberalism.

4.3.4 A framework for public sphere analysis

Fairclough draws up four analytical foci as a basis for evaluating particular discursive practices as public sphere dialogue (see Fairclough 2010: 397-400). I will employ some of these ways of approaching public space interactions in Chapters Six and Seven below, and will provide more detail in the relevant sections of those chapters before I operationalise any specific focus. Here however, I want to briefly outline Fairclough’s general semiotic approach to the public sphere by looking at each of these four areas of interest.

The first focus is to see a discursive practice as a regulative practice, where the goal is to specify the regulative properties of a discursive practice in the sense of how practices are controlled. This is based on Bernstein’s work on pedagogy (1990, 1996) and particularly on notions of ‘classification’ and ‘framing’. Classification is concerned with how strongly or weakly categories (discourses, subjects, voices) are insulated from each other in any practice, where they are included at all. Framing, on the other hand, looks at how an interaction is managed, whether it is jointly managed, what he calls ‘weak’ framing, or whether it is
asymmetrically managed, and therefore exhibits ‘strong’ framing. This means that an effective public space must exhibit a regulative practice that is maximally open to diverse discourses, subjects, and voices, where insulations between these categories are weak, and also where there is jointly managed control of interaction, that is, where the framing of the interaction is also weak.

Central to the framework’s value however, is the transdisciplinary nature in which it is constructed, which means that the logic of one theory can be effectively put to work within the logic of another. In this case, for Fairclough, the sociological Bernstein’s category of ‘classification’, of ‘defining’ or ‘representing’, translates into the discourse analytical category of a discourse (or discourses) in the count-noun sense of the term –as an area of knowledge and how it is constructed or defined – that is, the issue of ‘representation’. While the category of ‘framing’ as a way of operating or ‘acting’, equates to genre(s). In this transdisciplinary operationalisation the discourse analytical categories can be seen as being enriched by the application of Bernstein’s sociological insights such that empirical instances of a discursive practice can be effectively evaluated as public sphere dialogue. The second focus of the framework is to view a discursive practice as a space of emergence. In effective public sphere dialogue, following Arendt, there is a process of becoming in which people’s individual identities, their collective identities, are constituted simultaneously through a weaving together of different facets of the self. Fairclough draws upon Arendt’s work to assess to what degree individual and collective identities, social relations, and knowledges are collectively constituted in dialogue. This implies that genuine public sphere dialogue will demonstrate this property of joint production in its space of emergence.

Thirdly, a discursive practice can also be assessed as a principle of recontextualisation. The basis for this focus also draws on Bernstein’s work. The basic point is that as a result of both the productive nature of discourse and its non-asocial but contaminate form, particular discourse practices assimilate other discourse practices in specific ways unique to them. That is, they have their own distinctive principles of recontextualisation, where recontextualised practices are always transformed from real to imaginary and then brought into the space of ideology. Fairclough’s point is to reflect on the fact that there are many public spaces, with some, but not all, successfully managing to recontextualise others meaning that ultimately the question is one of the ‘terms of exchange’ pertaining to such transformations. He provides the example of television (2010: 399-400), and the price social movements may have to pay, how their arguments have to be amended to fit strict criteria not of their making, etc. in order to deal with appearing on television, or otherwise attempting to get their points of view across using television. Recontextualisation
relates to Habermas’s notion of colonisation and Bourdieu’s of contamination. Indeed, Fairclough (ibid.) elaborates on the complementary relationship between recontextualisation and colonisation maintaining that where the former focuses on the bringing of external practices into the space of the recontextualised practice, the latter is essentially an issue of the incursion into a particular practice of external practices.

Finally, a discursive practice can be assessed as to the degree to which it is a constituent of action. This focus is ultimately concerned with what Fairclough terms the danger of ‘empty words’. Effective public sphere discourse is naturally a constituent of action and tied into power but in practice much dialogue between civil society actors may never transpose from words into action. That is, we need a theoretical and analytical apparatus such as Harvey’s on ‘dialectics of discourse’ (1996). Where discourse is understood as one element of social practice related to other practices, public dialogue can be evaluated to assess the level of interaction between discourse or semiosis as a practice with other material practices such as institutions and their rituals and beliefs. A public sphere is not just discourse, if it is to be genuine and effective a public sphere is always an articulation of discourse moments within which discourse constitutes an effective constituent of action. These analytical foci for assessing public sphere discourse therefore act as categories of analysis for my work.

Specifically, my interest is particularly in the first and third foci, the analysis of a discursive practice as a regulative practice and as a principle of recontextualisation. Indeed, Fairclough’s transdisciplinary operationalisation of the concepts of classification/insulation and framing/management, as being synonymous with the productive aspect of discourses and genres respectively, proves particularly helpful in the work undertaken in Chapters Six and Seven. And contrary to what can be seen as Habermas’s major concern in Structural Transformation, the task of developing frameworks which can help us to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of particular institutions (see Goode 2005: 27), my interest is actually in what is for Habermas a different question, of how radically we should rethink the institutions of democracy itself. The two strands of Fairclough’s framework for evaluating public spheres that I employ on the discourses of childcare policy and on the social partnership dynamic, are essentially operationalised to investigate this point, the extent to which spaces of public dialogue in interactions have been compromised through the interactions of the government and other institutions of the state. Through the application of these elements of Fairclough’s framework these topics are tackled to assess to what extent they exhibit semiotic evidence of what Bourdieu would call a neoliberal doxa, being a neoliberal nomos of the field of economics, business, and management.
4.3.5 Remaining categories of analysis

In sections 4.2.3 and 4.2.4 above I have introduced several of the most significant and most operationalised categories of analysis within the data analysis chapters that follow. Explicitly, in the latter section, I have highlighted the internal relations within texts concerned with semantic and lexical issues, and in particular syntactical and grammatical relations, and with particular emphasis on issues of transitivity, modality, and theme. I have also stressed the issues of assumption and presupposition. In contrast, in section 4.2.3 I introduced the external relations between texts and other elements of social events (and at a more abstract level, social practices, and social structures). With its interest in the analysis of how texts figure in actions/interactions, representations, and identifications or subject formation, these interdiscursive categories are genre, discourse, and style respectively. External relations are therefore also interested in the categories of the order of discourse and intertextuality. In sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.4 I have augmented this key set of categories with the four moments of the dialectics of discourse and approaches for the analysis of discursive practices as genuine or successful public sphere interactions based on Fairclough’s work in this area.

To these categories of analysis I want to add several more that are adopted at certain points within the three chapters that follow. The first of these is captured in the term legitimation strategies. These are discursive techniques employed by text producers to highlight and circulate ideas (and their related practices) that they see as desirable, and which therefore also operate at the expense of contrary ideas and sets of practices, which such choices seek to downplay or undermine (see Fairclough 2003: 98-100). An example is to pay close attention to new policy position papers produced by government or its agencies and the discursive assumptions (as opposed to grammatical assumptions) inherent in such texts. Very often that which is being promoted or ‘politicalised’ involves the marginalisation or ‘depoliticisation’ of another topic or assumption relating to how such other ideas and practices might normally be promoted. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) and van Leeuwen (2007), Fairclough suggests four distinct strategies for legitimation (2003: 98-100). Firstly, there is authorisation, or legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition or statute, and of persons in whom some kind of institutional authority is vested. Secondly, there is rationalisation, or legitimation by reference to the utility of institutionalised action, and to the knowledges that society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity. Thirdly, there is moral evaluation or legitimation by reference to value systems; and finally,
mythopoesis, or legitimation exerted through narrative alone. In this work the main categories employed are those of rationalisation and mythopoesis.

Related to the interest in official actions devoted to public persuasion and argumentation generally are the categories of the logic of explanation and the logic of appearance. In terms of promoting or arguing for decisions or actions seeking to effect social and political change, an explanatory logic that seeks to elaborate the causal links between social processes and change might be seen as the most appropriate structure for a discussion or consultative document aimed at the general public. What is of interest here however, is whether this type of logic is what is actually produced by official bodies, or whether such documents instead display what can be called a logic of appearances (see Fairclough 2003: 94-96). Texts imbued with the latter make no case for causal linkages but, on the contrary, present lists of ‘evidence’ or cumulative relations between sentences and clauses only. Fairclough argues that this logic of appearances can be a feature of contemporary official policy documents because any socio-economic analysis of the contemporary world would necessarily involve a certain level of detailed explanation and argument, since without such the reader is in no real position to evaluate the policy case being advanced. Such texts can ultimately therefore appear to be promotional, rather than analytical, designed to exhort a particular view and to persuade the readership of a particular set of choices or course of action, rather than to open up an informed space for dialogue. The logics of explanation and appearance are therefore categories of analysis for my engagement with governmental texts circulated in the public domain.

The final categories of analysis employed in this work are the distinct processes of ideological critique and strategic critique. Fairclough (2005) maintains that the predominant form of critique associated with CDA, at least from a historical perspective, has been ideological critique. He argues however, that there are in fact three distinct forms of critique which are relevant to and therefore should be considered as important for critical social research. These three forms of critique are: ideological critique itself, rhetorical critique, and strategic critique. Where ideological critique is interested in the effects of semiosis on ‘the social relations of power’, and rhetorical critique concerns itself with argumentation strategies or ‘manipulation’ in individual texts or talk; ‘strategic critique’ on the other hand focuses on the ways in which semiosis features as part of speaker and author strategies pursued by groups of social agents seeking to change societies in particular ways. Moreover, he sees the four moments of the dialectics of discourse highlighted above (emergence, hegemony, recontextualisation, and operationalisation) as objects explicitly associated with strategic critique. In viewing strategic critique as linked to processes of social change a focus
on such a form of critique therefore takes on greater significance in times of socio-political upheaval and policy paradigm change. As such, this category of analysis naturally supersedes a focus on ideological critique in much of the work undertaken in the forthcoming chapters, especially where the focus is on the dialectical moments of recontextualisation and operationalisation in Chapters Six and Seven.

4.4 Implications for the Analytical Chapters

4.4.1 Reflexivity and the interpretive process: The distinction between analysis and interpretation

In keeping with the stress on the two complementary patterns of inquiry adopted in this work, as outlined in the thesis Introduction (the ‘analytical’ or descriptive pattern and the ‘argumentative’ or theory-specific pattern), I want to begin the final section of this chapter on the synthesis of theory and method by more clearly explaining how the issues of (semiotic) analysis and theoretical interpretation (and explanation) are distinguished in this work. The explanatory critique framework, as outlined, is not just a useful methodological tool for a socio-cultural approach to the critical analysis of discourse with a normative focus; it is also a central element of what makes the dialectical-relational approach reflexive, where reflexivity always features as a central component of effective critique. In advancing an objective interpretive position on discourse samples, it is the operationalisation of the framework in relation to the way the subject under analysis has been constructed in any piece of research, which ensures that the analyst cannot simply project their interpretation of underlying social practices (such as the operationalisation of dominant ideological positions) onto a text. In advocating the analytical benefits of the explanatory critique framework Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) highlight the complex nature of the processes of ‘interpretation’ which the operationalisation of the earlier three-dimensional model overlooked. As a result, they maintain the process of interpretation needs to maintain a distinction between ‘processes of understanding’ and ‘processes of explanation’.

As Chouliaraki and Fairclough argue (1999: 67-68); if we take Bernstein’s (1996) conception of the interplay between an ‘internal language of description’ and an ‘external language of description’, where the properties of the framework can be seen as the former, as the ‘syntax’ where a conceptual language is created, and where the external language is the discourse sample under analysis and the particular way it has been theorised and
conceptualised in relation to the framework (*ibid.* 135-37), it is the analyst’s attention to both of these components of description that avoids problems of circularity of argument and subjective bias. It is therefore this combined descriptive method that informs the analyst’s interpretation of a text’s content on which the analyst’s explanation of that text rests. Or, as Chouliaraki and Fairclough state:

> Interpreting a text ideologically is not a part of understandings of texts but a part of explanations, in that it involves locating texts in social practice partly by reference to the theoretical category of ideology. (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 68)

They add, furthermore, that this does not mean that there may not be other explanations for descriptive findings, but these other explanations need to be argued for, since within the critical paradigm such explanations are out in the open and have been for some time. This explanatory method has a professed theoretical grounding, being historical materialist and critical realist (that is, though being post-structuralist, is not post-modernist – meaning not all explanations or ‘subjectivities’ are equally valid) and it is this basis which informs CDA’s interpretative process. This is not the case with understandings or interpretations based simply on reading off the surface of a text, where the reader will always bring their ideological position into the explanatory phase of such ‘analysis’. For the critical discourse analyst interpreting a text in a certain way is therefore not a part of understanding a text in its simplest sense, as a text can of course be understood by a reader or listener in any number of ways.

Interpretation is rather, a part of the theory-based explanation of the text, and since the theoretical position is both fixed and transparent, this means that, by definition, interpretation cannot be various. It is in the operationalisation of the descriptive-explanatory interface moreover, that such explanations therefore maintain their objective reflexive space. Furthermore, although adopting a theoretical position in this way may appear overly rigid and constraining of Bernstein’s conception of an external language of description, because it actively contributes to hypothesis-testing and remains transdisciplinary, transparent, and testable; the method is at all times objective and scientific in a way that purely quantitative, data-led descriptivist analyses cannot be. It should also be clear from this elaboration of the analytical–interpretative interface just why the constant theorising and re-theorising that takes place in each analytical chapter is so integral to the broader research endeavour being undertaken in this work.
4.4.2 The permanence of theory with method

As has been highlighted at the outset, this chapter is not a methodology chapter in the sense that it is not devoted to the presentation of a 'set of methods' for analysing text samples, a 'tool-box' so to speak, or at least, not exclusively. In essence this is a theoretical chapter that follows from the examination of the interrelationship between neoliberalism and discourse addressed in Chapter Two and which seeks to advance an analytical framework as well as a set of tools for (or categories of) analysis based on this broad theoretical footing. In advance of summarising the approach taken to each of the three discourse-analytical chapters that follow it is important to re-state this point here because, as with Chapter Two and this chapter, the theorising does not end here. As illustrated in the overview of the explanatory critique framework above, the approach to each topic, to each case study, necessitates a certain amount of more acute theorising in order to ensure that the analysis can provide data that can contribute to responding to the problematisation of each topic in its respective chapter, and also to the broader thesis topic.

As a *gesamtkunstwerk* the strength of this research is not to be found in its combined presentation of the findings of three separate and distinct pieces of analysis laid out in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, and cumulatively reflected on and summarised in the thesis conclusion. Rather, the strength is in theorising the approach to each topic in a way that draws on the findings from the previous chapters (at least for Chapters Six and Seven). This means that in terms of the qualitative analysis undertaken, in a deductive sense the same discursive issues and dynamics are not being addressed in each of these three chapters. Likewise, where the same categories of analysis are applied to the texts under review (though oftentimes they are not) they are not being applied in the same order and to the same degree across each of the three chapters. That is, each case study is not to be viewed as just that – a stand alone case study – since it is not approached in the same way each time precisely because the theoretical approach to each topic evolves in relation to the analytical findings that come before it, and to the way in which the combined analysis succeeds in responding to the overarching research question. These findings essentially open up an avenue of possible future theorisation and analysis where the approach to childcare discourse in Chapter Six, for example, is based on the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the discourse of immigration in Chapter Five, and likewise, the approach to the discourse of social partnership is based on the findings from Chapter Five but also primarily from those of Chapter Six.

Since the conclusions of each analytical chapter only emerge as a consequence of the theoretical approach to each topic and, significantly, from the resultant semiotic analysis
whose form is directly influenced by such an approach, the theoretical approach to each subsequent topic cannot be completed at this stage. Moreover, to provide a summary overview of the methodological approach taken within each analytical chapter at this juncture, without elaborating the theoretical position adopted in each case would, I fear, only confuse the reader and unnecessarily complicate the presentation of the analytical chapters. I will however outline the categories of analysis employed across each of these three chapters below, both to underline the point that this is not primarily an inductive exercise, where the priority is to collect as many discourse-findings as possible from which to try to carve a path through the data to derive some macro-level conclusion; but also to illustrate to the reader those analytical categories that emerge as the most significant for this deductive critique of semiosis (see Chouliaraki and Fairclough 2010). At all stages of analysis the point is to reflect on and learn from what the analysis is revealing and to adapt the analytical approach accordingly (both the theorising of each topic and the tools or categories of analysis to be employed). This is presented as a more fruitful macro-level methodological approach to a critique of neoliberal discourse in Ireland than the possibly more straightforward but less revealing meso- or micro-level approach to an analysis of for example, the discourse of individual policy issues such as immigration legislation or childcare provision policy.

This constant interplay of theorising, analysing, and reflecting on findings, followed by more theorising, analysing, etc., as built into the explanatory critique methodological framework being employed in each analytical chapter should therefore be seen as a concrete form of praxis, and one which also advances the methodological possibilities opened up to this form of CDA. That is, this work can also be seen as going beyond merely showing the empirical benefit of a CDA approach to demystifying texts. In this work CDA does not simply uncover opaque practices and their recontextualisation of the practices of different fields, but in employing Fairclough’s interdisciplinary dialectical-relation approach across the three topics examined, in the compound analytical way outlined, illustrates how CDA can be theoretically and methodologically productive. Specifically, in being operationalised through repeated theorisation, or more accurately, through repeated problematisation based on earlier work, the deductive work produces an piece of inquiry that is more deep-rooted and robust than could possibly be the case without the dialectical-relational approach to theory with method, as adopted in this research.
4.4.3 The approach to the three analytical chapters

In terms of how precisely I apply the methodological framework, I want to conclude this chapter with a brief explanation of what the reader will find in the analytical chapters that follow. With regard to the use of the explanatory critique framework, as outlined, the first point to reiterate is that in the work of Stage 1 (focusing on a social problem, of theorising it effectively in order to be able to approach it scientifically and productively as an appropriately constructed object of research), is necessarily different for each of the three chapters. This is likewise the case for the second and third steps of Stage 2 for each of the three topics addressed in these chapters (that is, the selection of particular texts, the categories of analysis, and the analysis itself). Step one of Stage 2 however, as it relates to a reflection on the dialectical relationship between semiosis and the other elements of social practice is actually quite similar in each of the three analytical cases. Although all topics and texts being addressed relate to a common ethico-political position in relation to contemporary neoliberalism and its semiotic effect on the public sphere, (as elaborated in Chapter Two on the construction of the object of research); in each case the discourse of neoliberalism as it manifests itself in the official texts of government on each topic, can be understood to be doing or attempting to accomplishing different tasks, which requires a distinct theorisation of each topic in each chapter.

The positions arrived at in Stage 1 of each chapter therefore naturally link directly with the second and third steps of Stage 2, but what needs to be underlined here is that by successfully theorising a topic for linguistic and interdiscursive analysis in relation to a particular framing of neoliberalism and its democratic nature (Stage 2, step one) naturally implies that the (inter)relationship between semiosis and other elements of social practice is taken as being of the same order in each of the three analytical cases. I nevertheless devote some space to contextualising the relationship between semiosis and the other practices that are relevant to the particular theorisation of the social issue in each case. In terms of steps two and three of Stage 2 (text selection and the macro and micro-levels of textual analysis); the work in each of the three analytical chapters is purposefully quite varied.

In fact, in the Chapters Six and Seven I take a somewhat different combination of analytical tools to different texts in an effort to be both rigorous in my analysis, but also to better tailor my analysis to the particular theoretical position adopted in relation to the topic at hand. That is to say, not all of the grammatical categories of analysis such as transitivity, modality, and, theme, nor all of interdiscursive categories, such as genre, discourse, and style are addressed in each case. At each step however, I precede the actual analysis with and
explanation of my particular approach its rationale. This is qualitative research project and as such the analysis contained within each of the three chapters on some level has to complement what has gone before, aware that the measure of the work’s overall worth has to do with how the findings stand as a unified whole in relation to the broad theoretical position being adopted, a task naturally made easier the more precisely the role of semiosis is theorised in each of the three topics under review.

Explicitly, the first chapter on legislative reform of immigration policy addresses an official public consultation process that invites contributions from civil society actors, as well as from the general public. As a time-bound process facilitated by a government text, the analytical approach involves a straightforward focus on that text using the explanatory critique framework, which follows a contextualisation of the public sphere along Fairclough’s original lines. The work problematises the official text as a public relations document that seeks to close down debate, rather than open up input as it outwardly purports, and moreover, one that seeks to disseminate a new context for immigration debate, that is, as a key component of a national economic growth strategy. In terms of linguistic analysis, I address argument structure through pronoun usage, its legitimation strategies, and the construal of ‘change’ adopted in the Minister’s foreword. I also highlight the recontextualisation of economic terminology, the use of epistemic modalities, and the shift to deontic modalities that seek to draw the reader’s attention to a particular understanding of what is at stake in legislative reform and what ought to be ‘our’ response.

I conclude the focus on the document’s foreword and move to the analysis of its first chapter with an analysis of genre use. I also address the issue of the chapter’s internal logic of appearances, contrasting this with its absence of any explanatory logic. I also identify the modality of the chapter’s summary of the paper’s proposals and their directive nature as being particularly problematic from a deliberative point of view. In this case, as the publicly inclusive aspect and the document’s orientating to action based on some broad collective agreement is shown to be compromised from the analysis undertaken, there is no need to proceed with assessing the text from the public sphere foci of whether, for example, it acts as a regulative practice. The concentration on legitimation strategies, genre use, and modality are sufficient to conclude that the text is fundamentally incapable of acting effectively as a component of public sphere discourse.

The second case looks at the workings of a more formal civil society working group as it partners with government and state actors in trying to develop a complete national childcare strategy for the first time in the state’s history. As a more complex and nuanced process involving a lot of imposed structure on the actors’ work, I have taken an approach to
analysis that combines a focus on a particular policy text within the explanatory critique framework, as well as an assessment of the document that results from the combined work of the civil society actors and the state, by employing the two perspectives for approaching public sphere dialogue from Fairclough’s framework, highlighted at 4.3.4 above. That is, two separate texts are analysed in this chapter, one that looks at the form and content of an actually implemented childcare policy from 2006, and one addresses a social partnership-facilitated public sphere process through its final report from 1999. Following from the recontextualised pro-market practices associated with immigration related to enhancing labour market flexibility identified in Chapter Five; in the first case I address a ministerial policy speech mainly through a textual analysis, focussing on wording, transitivity, and modalities, as well as on the text’s themes. The directed nature of the text revealed by this linguistic analysis, along with observations of the generic structure of the document, point to a recontextualisation, or an evolving construction of practices associated with the concepts of (parental) ‘choice’ and state and family ‘partnerships’ along neoliberal lines.

In the case of the deliberative national childcare policy development process formally incorporating civil society actors, I examine sections of the final report in some detail for evidenced of how effectively the group acted as a genuinely inclusive, action-oriented initiative. This work is also enhanced by some detailed archaeological work on a number of significant official childcare reports and related texts. Specifically, by addressing how the dynamic acted as a regulative practice – in terms of issues of control and the degrees to which distinct policy ideas were insulated from each other, that is, issues of framing and classification – and based on the analysis of the type of childcare policy that actually gets implemented, I also address the report’s content as a principle of recontextualisation. This is necessarily an interdiscursive as opposed to a textual approach, with a focus on discourses and genres in particular, the voice of official experts, and the heterogeneous mix of understandings of the issues relating to childcare provision. Ultimately, the analysis is interested in the (inter)discursive ways in which pro-market ideas about childcare policy become hegemonic. That is, the views that simultaneously understand childcare as a business opportunity in its own right on one hand, and as an issue of individual/parental responsibility on the other. And moreover, in how these ideas come to dictate the final report of the collective group’s interactions, revealing at best an inhibited or compromised public sphere experience.

In the final analytical chapter I develop the findings of Chapter Six and the influence of the social partnership process on public sphere interactions, positioning it as central to issues of neoliberal hegemony in Ireland. The nature and life-span of the social partnership
process however, forces me to be selective when it comes to a useful and productive focus of analysis. This is why the only truly historical discourse analytical work undertaken in this research appears in this chapter. In going back a decade before the 1997 general election (the starting point that frames all the other analytical work), and closely examining the emergence of the partnership process, I assess its provenance through a detailed analysis of a key formative document. I then conclude the analytical work by moving back to the present by addressing an aspect of post-partnership’s social policy aimed at tackling poverty and exclusion; namely the emergence of the notion of social capital and the resulting programme of ‘active citizenship’. Both sets of texts are analysed using the explanatory critique framework and both are assessed for the degree to which their inherent discourse practices are regulative and recontextualising.

In brief, I analyse the state’s social partnership founding documents (the full text and a shorter summary version produced at a later date) as instigating a radical policy shift in Irish economic and political life, and theorise their practices as central to contributing to the adoption of a neoliberal policy prescription that came to be institutionalised in the various social partnership agreements over time. In undertaking an ideological critique of this dynamic it ultimately allows me to take a view of social partnership’s order of discourse as essentially the discursive element of a broader emergent and latterly hegemonic neoliberal social order in the Irish Republic. As ideological documents, the initial analysis focuses on the two texts’ thematic structure and text cohesion generally. One route taken is to compare how the arguments proposed in the full text are elided in the summary text. This second document rather, promotes ‘new’ ideas about the role of the state and how it should act in a time of crisis (1986), which are transplanted wholesale into the first social partnership agreement text (1987). Simplification is prioritised and there is no evidence of any explanatory logic present. In terms of the moments of a dialectics of discourse, the pattern followed is the circulation of new emergent (sets of) ideas as dominant or ‘hegemonic’ imaginaries which are repeated, without critique or debate, and which then become ‘recontextualised’ in concrete discourses through the partnership process itself.

The original, more detailed full text does demonstrate an explanatory logic, however in arguing for radical policy change no competing or contradictory voices or perspectives are presented or acknowledged. And as the only identities permitted are those concerned with enhancing economic competitiveness at all costs, no rationale for why this pro-market model is being prioritised ever emerges. The textual patterning therefore becomes one of assumption – fact – further assumption – further fact – etc., as explicitly revealed through an analysis of the texts modality. In drawing on what this ideological critique shows and adding
it to the way market practices have been shown to impact upon state and civil society interaction in the chapter of childcare, I conclude this work by theorising a particular approach to social policy development in the contemporary period by addressing the emergence of the discourse of social capital. In identifying the particular approach to social capital favoured by the state as essentially promoting individual self-reliance, I adopt a strategic critique to two policy texts, a task which also draws on a number of related background texts.

By adopting an interdiscursive analysis with a focus on the order of discourse, I assess these texts as public documents in terms of their inherent logics and the ways in which they frame and classify debate. That is, I examine how they discursively seek to regulate the interactive policy space, and also how they both work to ‘recontextualise’ community policy development in keeping with a market logic that presupposes individual responsibility for solving problems of poverty and social exclusion. The analytical focus is therefore on the issue of how they effectively ‘operationalise’ new policy initiatives in ways that inculcate such ahistorical, individualistic identities, and which then succeed in becoming materialised in new roles and structures. The analysis is ultimately designed to assess the degree to which social partnership’s discursive dynamic, as an institutionalised and ever-expanding neoliberal order of discourse, is implicated in constantly regenerating a neoliberal social order, to a large degree facilitated by its undermining of the public sphere, by essentially co-opting civil society to its market logic. In combination with the analysis undertaken across the three data chapters in this work, the final chapter therefore seeks to demonstrate the central role of semiosis in how this dynamic has happened in practice.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have offered a necessarily brief overview of the emergence of what has come to be called critical discourse analysis from within sociolinguistics on the one hand, and from the broader field of critical theory and post-structural approaches to the study of society and culture on the other. The critical linguistics of Fowler, Hodge, Kress, and Trew sought to challenge the absence of a reflection on power and ideology in the prevailing approaches to discourse analysis, while the general ‘discourse turn’ of the late twentieth century, as influenced by Foucault in particular, simultaneously focused attention on the relationship between language, or better, discourse and the subject, and the contingency of the socially constructed cultural and historical world. I have naturally devoted considerable space to an elaboration of Norman Fairclough’s contribution to the development of an approach to
critical discourse analysis, and subsequently to the features of his socio-cultural approach and latterly to his dialectical-relational approach as this forms the basis of the analytical approach I adopt in my research. These contributions include adopting a systematic-functional approach to language use as a way of facilitating (and prioritising) a textually-oriented analysis of discourse; and a concentration on social practice and the dialectical role of discourse or semiosis as an element of social practice amongst others. Significantly, his work has involved a revisiting of Foucault’s concept of an ‘order of discourse’ by, in his words, setting it to work within a normative agenda.

In relation to my methodology, I have presented social constructionism and post-structuralist approaches to the study of society, together with an adherence to historical materialist conception of progress and development, with its dialectical component, as my theoretical framework. As a methodological framework I have outlined the critical realist ‘explanatory critique’ model, developed by Bhaskar and as operationalised for discourse analysis by Fairclough, to show how a normative social research can be identified and advanced through a focus on discourse. And ultimately, in terms of a set of analytical methods, I have summarised Halliday’s systemic-functional linguistics approach to the analysis of text grammar for micro-level analysis; and described the various ways the issue of interdiscursivity can be addressed at the macro-level of analysis. Added to this is an explanation of the particular framework I use for approaching public sphere interaction, and a summary presentation of the range of categories of semiotic analysis employed in my analytical work as well as an overview of their deployment in the forthcoming chapters. The challenge is to operationalise this broad methodological framework by approaching contemporary neoliberalism and issues of its democratic legitimacy as it relates to the activity of the Irish state in instances of public discussion, consultation, and debate. The issues of discursive and linguistic analysis of Irish polity emerge as the central concerns of the next three chapters.

Throughout this chapter I have sought to stress the interrelated nature of working with theory and method together to operationalise Fairclough’s methodology in an effective manner, but also to produce a combined piece of research that reveals more than would be the case by simply compiling three separate pieces of analysis. In pre-empting this goal in the analysis that follows I approach the texts on immigration and childcare as fundamentally heterogeneous in trying to conflate two or more contradictory practices, such as ‘national competitiveness’ and ‘security’ in the immigration text, and ‘equality of opportunity’ for women and ‘personal choice’ as it relates to the market-place in the childcare texts. Such disfluency is revealing of the emergence of underlying sets of practices through the
discursive aspect seeking a level of hegemony which demands a focus on changes to the orders of discourse of the respective networks of practices contained in these texts. The social partnership texts furthermore, are seen as essentially a broad normative attempt to, in Bourdieu’s terminology; actively alter the valuation of capital in non-economic fields with the nomos of the field of neoliberal economics.

That is, we see evidence of a process of recontextualisation of the order of discourse of a network of practices in the social field with an economic order of discourse that has already achieved a dominant or hegemonic position in other fields and consequently proves to be a particularly rich area of analysis. In wedding Bourdieu’s theorisations of the way the discourse of neoliberalism has managed to reconfigure the nature of this hegemonic habitus and consolidate new sets of practices, new dispositions within it setting the limits of all possible discourse, together with Fairclough’s dialectical understanding of the functioning of semiosis in social practices, we can say that the idea of neoliberalism as doxa essentially manifests itself in a neoliberal order of discourse. In the next three chapters I will empirically engage with real world examples of this discursive aspect of the social order of neoliberalism in Irish Republic.

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Chapter Five  

Immigration: Legislative Reform and Public Debate

On July 26th, 1999 the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE), Mary Harney TD (Progressive Democrats – and previously Fianna Fáil), under increasing pressure and lobbying form the business sector, and the Irish Business and Employers’ Confederation (IBEC) in particular, succeeded in changing the law with respect to that category of asylum seekers living in Ireland and awaiting judgements on their claims. These people were to be allowed, within quite strict parameters, to seek employment within the state for the first time. Though this was not news to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), the Minister, John O’Donoghue TD (Fianna Fáil) felt it necessary to issue a statement of support in advance of the change, largely as his department had been voicing concerns about such a move for over a year. In these pronouncements he called into question the logic of the move as it would act as an additional ‘pull factor’, further clogging up an under-stress asylum processing system. In the end the law was rescinded exactly 12 months later, partly due to poor take up by asylum seekers, primarily a result of the cumbersome conditions of the programme, (see Fanning et al 2000). Nevertheless, what the incident clearly shows is that whatever about the feasibility of being assigned to a single Department and to one Minister, many emerging social issues are influenced by and themselves have an affect on the operations of a number of Departments, offices, and agencies simultaneously.

From the perspective of an analysis of political semiosis moreover, out of the tension that emerges from the concern over the public perceptions of a relaxation of entry rules (as expressed by Fianna Fáil) being challenged by other pro-business imperatives (being pushed by the Progressive Democrats), this episode succinctly demonstrates the dialogicality, or ‘the competing presence of different voices’ (Fairclough 2003: 214) within the one discourse of a social and political issue. Any treatment of official discourse must therefore recognise this dialectical relationship in contemporary government and the potential dysfluency that follows, where, at any point in time, competing agendas manifest in certain social practices but not others, are circulated in particular discourses but not others, and which are indicative of particular orders of discourse but not others. In this way, scenarios like this one can act as a valuable site, or point of leverage, for the investigation of precisely which discourses are being circulated, and which social orders are being operationalised in an attempt to achieve a hegemonic position. Also, in relation to the matter of the issuing of work permits to a new

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and emerging sector of Irish society, it bears directly on the focus of this chapter, the contemporary Governmental discourse on immigration to Ireland.

Though my focus in this chapter is on immigration and not asylum, the above reflection, with its focus on the rationale for legislative change in 1999, is not wholly random. A presupposition that informs this work is that any economy operating within a general neoliberal economic framework must, by necessity, be concerned with issues of the labour market and its ‘flexibility’, particularly as they relate to inward investment, consumer spending, and the control of inflation. In the Irish context, particularly since the turn of the millennium, immigration has played a significant role in maintaining a sufficient and flexible labour market (see Allen 2007b). Yet, as expressed by the Minister of Justice in 1999, many of the issues connected to immigration of which government must take account relate to social practices within the fields of justice, security, and law & order, as well as the broader networks of overlapping practices that include a range of areas of social life such as housing, education, health care provision, and even social cohesion itself; that is, of practices that lie outside the field of economics.

As a starting point for resolving my overarching research question as to how precisely semiosis advances the anti-democratic nature of contemporary embrace of the neoliberal project at the level of the nation state; with this chapter I want to look at how official interventions in one area actively minimised levels of dialogicality in undermining genuinely open, inclusive, and balanced debate. Specifically, I will examine how close management of a consensus-generating process that depoliticised central elements of the debate, while simultaneously narrowing the parameters of that debate, effectively reduced the whole interaction to an exercise in public relations. That is, I will analyse the role of semiosis in the dual processes of depoliticisation and the management of public opinion. Specifically, I will look at the development of a single text in a contemporary process of immigration legislation reform. Before engaging in the research agenda however, I first want to very briefly revisit the historical picture of immigration in Ireland, as elaborated in Chapter Two above.

As noted, in the years preceding the decade examined in this work, the Republic of Ireland has historically been a country of net emigration. The relatively few parliamentary acts passed on the issue testify to the fact that immigration (as opposed to emigration) was never an issue that overly occupied the time of policy-makers and legislators alike. Since the foundation of the Irish Free State in fact, the first piece of immigrant-specific legislation was not passed until 1935, and even though the next act (The Aliens’ Order Act in1946) was later amended, no further acts were passed by the Irish state on the topic of immigration until 1999. From this point forward however, and as a direct consequence of the rising number or
non-Irish and non-EU arrivals, there followed a rapid sequence of legislative activity. This included the passing of The Immigration Act 1999; The Illegal Immigrants’ (Trafficking) Act 2000; The Immigration Act 2003(on carrier liability and forced removals); and The Immigration Act 2004 (on the residential status for non-nationals following the defeat of the national referendum on the automatic right of parents of Irish-born children to Irish citizenship).

Even in the decade before this flurry of activity moreover, there was no incremental pressure for a revision of policy or legislation, with immigration remaining a substantially marginal political issue. Ireland in fact, was the only country of the then fifteen member states of the EU to show a negative net rate of migration (being more people leaving the territory than entering it) between 1990 and 1994. And even as the national economic picture started to improve around the end of that period, following Luxembourg, Ireland’s annual net migration rate was the second highest (or the second ‘most negative’) of the fifteen states for the period from 1995 to 1999. Indeed, in the sixteen year period from 1980 to 1995 inclusive, only the years 1982 and 1991 showed a surplus of immigration over emigration, yet even here the figures were as low as approximately 2,000 and 8,000 persons, respectively (CSO 2004).

Though a net positive rate of migration had been a feature of many of the years in the 1970s, the picture changed radically after 1995 with positive net figures regularly in excess of 25,000 per year from 2000 onwards. Moreover, the figures for emigration alone also fell consistently from 2000. As intimated in Chapter Two, in the ten years from the mid-1990s through to the next decade the majority of immigrants were returning Irish citizens. In this period however, the non-EU and non-US cohort of immigrants rose from a figure of 10% of the total intake in 1999 to 30% by 2004, and almost equalling the number of returning Irish in that year (ICI 2005: 2). By looking at the issuing of work permits in 2004 moreover, we can see that the majority of the new arrivals were taking up employment in the service sector, with about 75% working in the combined sectors of services and catering (DETE 2005, cited in ICI 2005: 3).

On this basis it can generally be accepted that in drafting the Immigration and Residence Bill (2005), (later the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill, 2007), the DJELR was responding to a set of internal concerns and external pressures. Any parliamentary bill will therefore have internalised this dynamic, being a mix of different genres (where the text is trying to do a number of different things) and different discourses (being the various representations of the subjects raised and how they relate to the issues at hand). As such a critical analysis of the semiosis is charged with uncovering the fault lines
reflective of these different sets of practices. Bills (and Acts) however, do not easily lend
themselves to textual deconstruction, being composed of an arcane language and laid out in a
specific, codified format. In the case of this bill however, the process did not begin with a
similarly obtuse departmental White Paper (or Green Paper), rather, it began with the drafting
and circulation of a public consultation document. This document was presented in plain
language by the DJELR as a detailed summary of, and rationale for, the need for the new
legislation on immigration, and furthermore actively invited contributions from the public. It
is this document that forms the basis of my analysis of the Irish Government’s discourse on
immigration.

In moving on from the reflection of immigration in Ireland and its relationship to the
economic health of the nation as outlined in Chapter Three, in this chapter I employ
Fairclough’s explanatory critique analytical framework to problematise immigration and the
semiosis of immigration in Ireland in a way that relates to my broader research question on
what happens to issues of democracy and sovereignty when the state embarks on a neoliberal
path. That is, I discursively interrogate what is actually happening when drives to cohesion
and consensus are prioritised over genuine dialogical processes and when decision-making
processes become essentially privatised. This necessitates a detailed elaboration of what it is
about the text and its background that makes it problematic, and also, what it is about the
external political considerations (and their particular configuration) beyond the consultative
process that makes the problem particularly intractable.

A major part of this task is therefore to elaborate the reasons for a focus on the
particular text I have chosen to analyse why it is appropriate for the task at hand. I also
explain how the document was produced, its structure and content, and highlight those parts
of the text that I am analysing in detail. In this way we arrive at the central concern of the
critical discourse analyst; where the social problem is one of an undermining of those
alternative voices required to maintain the conflictual equilibrium of a healthy democracy,
what semiotic role is a document like the immigration discussion document playing in the
hegemonic struggle to prioritise a particular social order with a neoliberal order of discourse?
I end with a summary of the findings of what this analysis of strategies of depoliticisation and
public relations entails, and by drawing out some issues that emerge from the analysis which
the approach to immigration discourse alone cannot fully answer, I will identify some
questions to be taken up in the subsequent analytical chapters in this work.
5.1. A Transdisciplinary Approach to Text Analysis

It is the way in which the research topic is constituted as an object of research that determines the precise texts selected for analysis and the nature of that analysis. Here I want to formulate the object of research in a quite specific way, which incorporates some of the observations made previously about neoliberalism and the contemporary political condition, and what such observations mean for the analysis of political texts like the document selected for analysis here. That is, the concern with the dialectical relationship between semiosis and other elements of the social practice, specifically, the relationship between those practices inherent in the emergent neoliberal order of discourse and other sets of social practices. This is particularly significant in terms of an approach to the framing of the text in Stage 2 of the explanatory framework I am adopting. This broader formulation of the object necessarily therefore tends to the general (and draws on observations from disciplines beyond discourse analysis), before allowing for a narrowing in on immigration discourse and on official texts on immigration legislation reform in the Irish Republic.

The particular way the social problem of a curtailing of democracy and its semiotic component is contextualised, as well as the identification of obstacles that prevent the problem being challenged effectively are drawn from Fairclough (2001b and 2009). In particular, my approach to an official public consultation process of immigration policy development in the Irish Republic is oriented towards approaches developed by Fairclough in relation to political language, public relations, strategies of depoliticisation, the public sphere, and the impact of globalising discourses of open markets, amongst other topics. Fairclough (2006: 172) summarises the contemporary political landscape as reflecting a number of assumptions. These include the assertion that globalisation in the dominant neoliberal form has been associated with changes in the state and national (as well as international) politics; that there is a tendency of the state to become a ‘competition state’ with the primary objective of securing competitive advantage for the capital based within its borders; and also, that there is an associated tendency within mainstream politics for the political divisions and contestation (for example, between political parties, and even between Trade Unions and Employers’ groups) characteristic of the previous period to weaken, and for consensus to emerge on the main strategic and political issues.

In relation to the key theme of this research, the issue of genuine democratic debate and strategies employed to curtail a healthy public sphere, the final point is the most significant even if all trends are interrelated. Drawing on Rancière (1995 and 2006), Fairclough (2009: 172-73) claims that we can view contemporary democracy as a form of
‘oligarchy’, where government is exercised by the wealthy and powerful minority over the majority. He maintains that the term ‘modernisation’ is often used by governments and institutions to conceal the site of real political and economic power, as a shift away from existing understandings to a different set of arrangements as something new, positive, and necessary, in short, as progress. The fact that such a state of affairs can survive and propagate is simply because this oligarchic minority, or elites, are occluded by being invested with the power of the people because governments that support them and advance their goals are elected. In reality however, such progress has seen a transfer of power from the public sphere to the private sphere.

A consequence of this dynamic is that in contemporary societies, as opposing principles, democracy and the objectives of the elites are always in a state of tension, and the relationship that prevails at any point in time – between any particular form of elected government and any interchangeable group of oligarchs – is only ever a compromise between them. This fact is, for example, reflected in the energy governments spend talking about the ‘now’, and in promoting the ‘new’, of modernity, ‘modernising’ and ‘modernisation’. In a genuinely health democracy it is the public sphere that acts as the arena of encounters and conflicts between these principles. So any action by government that interferes with the health of the public sphere – including the incorporation of the wishes of elites into decision-making processes – can be seen as an attack on democracy and as advancing of the power of elite-oriented, private democracies. In this way democracy can be seen as the struggle against the public/private division imposed by government.

The construction of a consensual vision that aids the privatisation of power is therefore seen as undermining this necessary ‘conflictual equilibrium’ in contemporary democracies (Fairclough 2009: 173). As such any political discourse that seeks to argue that the contemporary global economic system, with its focus on never ending growth, is all-encompassing and all-pervasive, and leaves no real choice for any individual national economy to advance its own specific trajectory, is ultimately playing its part in this curtailing of democracy. Furthermore, in this scenario, government’s main task then shifts to one of ‘managing’ the local effects of these global demands, while any serious political division is viewed as an indulgence, not in step with the present, the modern reality. This is essentially a depoliticisation dynamic directly impacting political (and social) life. The strategy of depoliticisation is essentially the exclusion of issues and of people from processes of political deliberation and decision-making, placing them both outside of politics and then confining them to the margins.
In thinking of these processes as active strategies as opposed to passive consequences, it is possible to usefully develop a specifically semiotic ‘point of entry’ into analysing these official depoliticisation processes – and their related delegitimation strategies – available to the state, designed to carry the public with them in their reorientation to the market and to the adoption of the sets of practices that this entails. These strategies can be explicitly identified, for example, van Leeuwen & Wodak (1999), and van Leeuwen (2007) (both cited in Fairclough 2009: 174) propose that ‘authorisation’, (that which is allowed, acceptable, appropriate etc., as opposed to that which is not on the agenda), and ‘rationalisation’, (that which is reasoned and reasonable, as opposed to that which is illogical, dangerous, etc.) can be viewed as legitimation strategies (see also Fairclough 2003: 98-100). Significantly, though these processes are political strategies, they are to a large degree realised in semiotic strategies through issues like the thematic structuring of text, as well as transitivity and modality issues at the level of the clause.

It is also important to say something here about politicisation as a process (with its attendant strategies) in parallel to depoliticisation. Political analysts have noted that over the period marked by a growing consensus about political choice in the economic sphere, that there has been a simultaneous emergence of new political debates, with new actors and new forms of organisation (see Fraser 2000, 2003, Hay 2007, and Honneth 2003; see also Muntigl 2002b, and Palonen 1993, both cited in Fairclough, 2009: 173). The primary example is captured in the term ‘identity politics’. Covering virtually the same period of late modernity, there has been a significant rise in the politics of sexual identity (‘queer’ politics), ethnic identity, cultural identity (such as religion as a cultural signifier independent of belief and practice). The emergence of these politics can be read as a natural, or organic consequence of a narrowing of more fundamental political debates, almost as a ‘grassroots’ generated improvement on the perceived ‘archaic’ issues of class and society, and the related adversarial politics of competing political systems. In fact, the representation of class politics as being consensually viewed as ‘old-fashioned’ or ‘irrelevant’ is precisely the kind of discourse that is emblematic of the forward-looking, modern age that Fairclough is describing.

Others (see Fraser and Honneth) make the point that the emergence of a politics of identity is actually an anti-egalitarian concern with ‘recognition’ over genuine (material) ‘redistribution’ of wealth and, as a consensus-generating political ethos, while seeming to offer much, in reality delivers cohesion at the expense of genuinely progressive change. From a critical perspective there is therefore a need to closely examine whether and in what ways the depoliticisation processes of the oligarch-democracies which have narrowed one
area of conflict, have actually opened up other areas that are perhaps less challenging to the project of the elites as a whole. Or whether and in what ways the governing structures have actively politicised certain areas of public debate, that are not genuinely and participatory, even where such initiatives seem popular. A critical perspective (see Meade 2005) moreover, views these new structures and their related concerns as having been actively facilitated in ways that the more fundamental and more important political debates have not. The general point at issue here however, is that certain topics become politicised – have their profile raised – for particular reasons of the oligarch-democracies (and their transnational representatives), whilst others are simultaneously depoliticised – being effectively sidelined or downplayed – and that these dynamics are linked. As such, the choices made by governments in the current climate cannot be assumed to be benign, and certainly not progressive for the majority of citizens. In future I will use the perhaps clunky term (de)politicisation to refer to this simultaneity, to these dual dynamics.

5.1.1 Stage 1: A social problem in its semiotic aspect:

The public sphere and (de)politicisation

In terms of selecting the research topic and constructing it in such a manner that it can be approached in a transdisciplinary way, it is important here to relate my approach to immigration discourse and processes of (de)politicisation more precisely, to what I mean by a public sphere. Where the understanding of a successful public sphere is one that supports the notion of ‘real dialogue’, of a symmetrical relationship between participants designed to lead to action, a fundamental issue in relation to official processes of consultation becomes the precise nature of this interaction. The interest here therefore is the precise nature of the conjuncture of the DJELR’s discussion document’s publication and the degree to which it acts as an obstacle, or, the way in which its discursive practices are operationalised and how they impinge upon the social practice of developing legislation. Are the semiotic strategies for example, being deployed designed for a different purpose, not to facilitate the conflictual equilibrium central to a genuinely inclusive and improved procedure, but to engender cohesion and consensus as a strategy for downplaying difference in pursuit of advancing a different goal?

The question is whether the process of consultation being promoted is an example of the ‘sincere engagement’, or whether it is a case of politicising the immigration debate in a certain way that suits the ideological perspective of the State’s neoliberal ethos. The network of social practices under review can be identified as government and politics, linked to practices primarily in the economic domain, with some reference to the domain of security.
In relation to the coalition Government’s desire to ‘modernise’ its economy in a general sense, and its immigration legislation more particularly, at issue for the analyst is the effect that this move has on the relationship between government and the people through the ‘management’ of social life by the state, and how this process impacts upon areas of ‘contestation’ between different groups over the distribution of social goods. In contrast to the historical norm of governments employing one-way communication, genuine communication is a two-way process, and at issue here is whether there is really any shift with this discussion document to true dialogicality, or if not, is there evidence of communication in the management of control of perception and action, as well as evidence of communication as a strategy of (de)politicisation?

My position in this chapter, in relation to an emergent discourse of immigration emanating from the discussion document, is that as a minimum a question mark exists as to the sincerity of official openness to public input into policy change. The issue being addressed in this chapter therefore also has a greater resonance for this work as a whole. If, on the one hand, we can be open to the notion that a feature of the contemporary political situation is the privatisation of the formation and expression of public opinion – as a strategy for limiting genuine democratic participation in policy development – is the fomenting of a crisis of the public sphere a strategy in a general process of (de)politicisation, or is (de)politicisation a strategy in a process of engendering a crisis of the public sphere? That is, is one hierarchically superior to the other, or does one chronologically precede the other?

The position I am adopting at the outset, is that though, in a general sense a specific act of limiting or marginalising the public sphere can be seen as a (de)politicising strategy, since the public sphere exists a priori of any governmental actions, I see the public sphere as a structure on which strategies of (de)politicisation have an effect. The emphasis for analysis of the discourse of immigration legislation is therefore on (de)politicisation strategies (as a social practice, significantly semiotic in nature), employed in the discussion document in contributing to the process of undermining and marginalising public sphere interactions. But this emphasis will be reviewed in successive chapters to take account of the analytical findings of the preceding chapters, since the author seeks to remain sufficiently reflexive to be able re-orientate the analytical focus where necessary, to effectively respond to the overarching research question as it relates to the role of official semiosis in actively restricting democracy.
Step 1. Selecting a research topic which points to a social problem, which can productively be approached in a transdisciplinary way.

The social problem I am focusing on is the suppression and marginalisation of political differences over important issues of and policy and strategy. Or how a sovereign state like the Irish Republic is to best respond to the changes in the contemporary international economic climate including an understanding of what these changes are, without reverting to the assumption that consensus, emerging from state structures moreover, is sufficient for our needs. The imposition of such a consensus is proposed here as a social problem or in Fairclough terms a ‘social wrong’, in that it undermines the conflictual equilibrium central to the effective function of any democratic state. A semiotic point of entry is proposed as possible and potentially fruitful, focusing on semiotic realisations of the macro-strategy of (de)politication as part of a process of engendering a crisis of the public sphere, in accordance with the construction of the object of research – immigration legislation reform – as elaborated. In Bhaskar’s account of explanatory critique (1986) this stage marks the shift from ‘is’ to ‘ought’ (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999:65) – the shift from explanation of what it is about a practice that leads to a problem, to evaluation of the practice in terms of its problematic results.

Step 2. Constructing the object of research by theorising it in a transdisciplinary way.

Going outside of the text and drawing on the macro-level socio-political observations above, I can situate the text’s social context and identify the issue as a ‘needs-based’ problem of the public sphere. That is, a problem of ‘doing’ or of ‘action’, in that the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR) is attempting to achieve something, specifically to reform the laws dealing with immigration, in part by inviting input from the general public. With neoliberal processes seeing control over large aspects of social life resting outside of the remit of national governments, the tendency to advance social cohesion through political consensus will necessarily put pressure on those spaces where deliberative democracy can take place – such as the public sphere. In this climate, texts like the DJELR’s immigration legislation discussion document can be seen as part of the problem, since the text engages directly with that space of potential conflict. Such texts therefore offer an obvious semiotic point of entry into addressing the social problem, the discursive manifestations of
(de)politicisation and public relations strategies in national responses to the global economy, in the debate on immigration legislation reform.

At a general level, in so far as the DJELR text may be representative of the dominant tendency towards (de)politicisation, a more precise formulation of the object of research in this chapter can be represented as an interest in the semiotic realisations of strategies of depoliticisation (of governing with minimal interference from political divisions), in national responses to the ‘global economy’, through a focus on immigration policy change in the Republic of Ireland, within the network of economic practices related to issues of human capital, labour-market flexibility, and advancing national competitiveness. Specifically, in the following stages of the analytical framework the focus is therefore on the ‘needs-based’ problem of the public sphere and its semiotic aspect; being, the promotional nature of the discussion document, and its role in both closing down discursive spaces for genuine dialogue and in consolidating a social order of immigration debate through the circulation of a novel, economically-enriched, neoliberal order of discourse.

5.1.2 Stage 2: Obstacles to resolving the social problem: Dialogue and debate as an exercise in management and control

Step 1: Analysing the dialectical relations between semiosis and other social elements.

This stage of critique is concerned with what it is about the social problem that prevents it from being addressed, and is composed of three related but distinct steps. Starting from a transdisciplinary perspective; what is required here is firstly an assessment of the network of practices that both impacts upon and from which emanate those conditions that give rise to the problem. This requires a focus beyond the immediate issue being analysed since it necessarily must position the problem in a way that allows it to be addressed both critically and semiotically. Secondly, there is the need to focus on in what ways the intractable nature of the problem is a function of the role semiosis plays within the relevant network of practices (or networks of overlapping practices). Are there, for example, imperatives that at first might not appear to be influencing the set of practices related to the issue but have a strong discursive presence? If so, what are their semiotic characteristics (both in terms of orders of discourse and textual features), how are they structured, how do such characteristics
manifest themselves in social practices and events, and what light can such an analysis shed on resolving the problem, or righting the wrong?

Finally, there is the analysis of the semiosis itself, combining a structural assessment with a focus on the order of discourse, a reflection on the text itself, on its interdiscursive traits, with a focus on genres in particular, and the ways in which they are combined. This interdiscursive analysis is supplemented by an examination of the linguistic dimensions of the discourse and the text’s functional nature with an analysis of the syntax and the grammar of the clause. The analytical approach, as with the background and framing sections, draws heavily from Fairclough (2001b and 2009). As a piece of research that concentrates on one text, I present my focus on immigration legislation reform as almost a stand-alone exercise, that could be undertaken separate from the broader questions being addressed in this fuller work. As such, I have tried to orientate my analytical approach in this chapter towards similar approaches operationalised by Fairclough, as highlighted.

This necessarily means that as well as the analytical approach employed in Stage 2; step three, the framing of the analysis (Stage 1 and Stage 2; steps one and two) also borrows heavily from Fairclough. Theoretically and analytically, as part of the work as a whole, this chapter in a sense establishes a marker, a jumping-off point for my contextualisation of the approach I am adopting in the remaining two analytical chapters. In other words, the findings of this chapter will allow me to adjust my approach to, and my contextualisation of the remaining topics (and the texts being analysed) in a different way, attempting to highlight areas and issues that the work in this chapter reveals but cannot challenge in any great depth. As such, the framing and analytical dimensions of Chapters Six and Seven will move away somewhat from a strict adherence to Fairclough’s examples that I draw from in this chapter, and are to be viewed as essentially extensions of the Faircloughian methodology adopted in this chapter.

The Networks of Practices the Problem Is Located Within

In the case of Irish Governmental discourse and the explicit instance of an immigration debate, obstacles to the problem being tackled can be located in the networks of practices it is embedded within at various levels of generality. The text is located within one practice, immigration reform, but also within a broader network of practices that constitute government and its engagement with public opinion, in increasing levels of scale. There is the network which constitutes government and its related concerns, (including other governments), intergovernmental agencies, and transnational organisations. In the transdisciplinary framing of the object of research I have already said much on the social
practices and orders of discourse at issue, but here I want to elaborate on the significant processes that directly relate to the international dimension of government and governance, namely the processes of restructuring and rescaling (see Fairclough 2006a and Jessop 2004).

Restructuring in this context implies changes in the structural relationship, notably between economic and non-economic fields or networks of practices, which includes extensive colonisation of the non-economic (including politics) by the practices (including the discursive practices), of the economic field. Rescaling refers to changing relations between global, regional, national, and local scales of political and social life, including changes in governing and governance. As a central component in the broader task of identifying obstacles to the problem being addressed moreover, analysing these tendencies can help contextualise the Governmental strategies and policies which are in focus in this research. This is a way of determining of what they are a part, or which sets of ideas and practices are framing these strategies’ specific objectives.

The Government of the Irish Republic is, as stated, increasingly incorporated within parts of broader networks that include other governments but also international agencies. And like other governments, and particularly since its accession to the EEC in 1973, the Irish Government is increasingly coming to function as an intersection, a point of conjuncture, or a nodal point, within this transnational network based upon a ‘business-government complex’ (Fairclough 2009: 175). As per the oligarch-democracy model outlined, the central function of this nexus is to create, maintain, and advance the climate for a number of conditions relating to the effective running of neoliberal capitalism. Fairclough, for example, highlights financial, fiscal, legal, human capital conditions that relate directly to promoting competition within a global market. The fact that the Government’s strategies and policies are locked into such powerful networks naturally constitutes a serious obstacle to addressing the social problem, since at a national level ‘democracy’ – the public sphere, and political activity in its broadest sense – is severely compromised since the standard expressions of the peoples’ will have little or no impact on the priorities and preoccupations of the elites at the heart of this business-governmental complex to which national governments increasingly defer.

The Dialectical Relations between Semiosis and their Social Elements;
(Orders of discourse and elements of social practice, texts and elements of texts)
This step implicitly includes the dialectic between structures (social practices permitted by these structures) and events (strategies employed in action). Significantly, the processes of restructuring and rescaling have important semiotic dimensions too since the networks of social practices they entail are also orders of discourse which themselves cut across structural
and scalar boundaries (Fairclough 2009: 175-176). For example, the discourse of the free-market is not only prevalent in the network of social practices (or field) of economics and industry, but also in areas of social policy (health care, education, etc.) as well as in politics more generally. These orders of discourse, composed of a specific networking together of various genres, discourses, and styles (as ways of doing, being, and identification within this social order) are being disseminated structurally across scales in a similar way. Moreover, the semiotic dimension is fundamental to the processes of restructuring and rescaling in that these processes are largely semiotically driven (see Bourdieu & Waquant 2001).

One way to view these processes is that they begin as discourses that constitute imaginaries – imaginary projections – for new relations of structure and scale in economies, government, education etc., which may then become hegemonic, and become recontextualised (Fairclough 2009: 176) in other fields, in other sets of practices. That is, relations of structure and scale can semiotically manifest themselves through intertextuality, the presence of texts from one domain (structure and/or level of scale) in the texts of another. In so far as they do become hegemonic, they may then be operationalised (become everyday events) in new structures, relations, and institutions. Moreover, this operationalisation has a partly semiotic aspect in the emergence and dissemination of genres and ‘genre chains or genre networks’ (see Fairclough 2003: 31-32) and styles, thereby facilitating the governance of these complex new networks. In essence, in terms of the crisis of deliberative democracy, as Fairclough (2009: 176) claims, ‘the semiotic dimension, deeply embedded within and constitutive of the new structural and scalar relations, is itself a part of the obstacles to addressing the social wrong’.

Also, recognition of the significance of recontextualisation necessarily elevates the importance given to processes of communication. Communication in contemporary social life can mean more than one thing, only one of which is government communicating ‘with’ the public. In effect what we are talking about is better captured in the concept of government communicating ‘to’ the public, reflected in the space, tools, and resources devoted to managing policy and institutional change. This is what Fairclough (2001: 254) calls semiosis in the form of essentially ‘promotional genres’. In managing perception, discussion documents, like the immigration document being addressed here, become a crucial element in producing change. Such texts not only shape how people see an issue like immigration, but significantly, they also introduce and add to orders of discourse of immigration by introducing and promoting other orders of discourse (economics, competitiveness, etc.). Another major obstacle in dealing with the crisis of the public sphere is therefore what precisely gets labelled as ‘communication’. In the process of policy
production and institutional change, even when restricted to a supposed process of ‘consultation’ or ‘discussion’, communication bears this evermore one-sided, promotional, and perception-management character.

Regarding the dialectical relationship between texts and other elements of social events, the point is clearly made that political texts are not only products of political events, but are a fundamental, constitutive part of such events. Taking this analysis in the case of the DJELR, the immigration policy discussion document demonstrates the textual character of the political objective that sees the relaxation of immigration entry conditions as a strategy for improved competitiveness in adapting to a global economy. Such texts are formed, disseminated, and legitimised within complex ‘chains’ and ‘networks’ of events (Fairclough 2009: 176). These chains can include committee meetings, reports, parliamentary debates, press statements, press conferences, etc., which are mainly chains and networks of texts, that is, different types of texts which are regularly linked together. They are linked in accordance with the ‘genre networks’, which see a mixture of genres (for example, discussion, report, debate, etc.) discursively produce a mixture of sets of procedures for governance. The significant point in analytical terms is that such chaining of genres within texts can invest new texts with objectives or goals of a specific colour that are not clearly traceable back to the network of contributing texts, or at least not readily and often not without close examination. This highlights the need to pay attention to ‘important’ texts that, for example, seek public input or relate to changes in policy or legislation, and also the need for a critical approach to the analysis of semiosis of such texts.

In terms of an immigration debate the issue is to what extent such forms of discussion and debate, such forms of semiosis, are structured in relation to the promotional forms found in the official government discussion document. That is, the structuring of orders of discourse. Essentially this requires an examination of the structuring of social relations between the semiotic forms of the public sphere and the semiotic forms of ‘public relations’ (Fairclough 2001b). This requires us to ask whether and to what extent the Government is attempting to simulate debate in the public sphere in ways they can keep under control. Image-focused and perception-driven elements of government can attempt such steps through structures as simple as interactive web-based questionnaires or the hosting of targeted focus groups, but also in the case of significant and sensitive legislation like immigration reform, through the opening up of apparent direct input from the public at large to the discussion process itself. For Fairclough (2009: 172-73), as a powerful tool orienting debate in a particular direction, or of restricting it within a particular paradigm, this dominance of public relations over the public sphere, of attempting to manage perception in the order of discourse
of government and politics, can be seen as a clear strategy of (de)politicisation, and as the prime contributor to the obstacles to the crisis in the public sphere being resolved.

Step 2: Selection of text and categories of analysis:

Immigration and Residence in Ireland – Outline policy proposals for an Immigration and Residence Bill, (2005):

A DJELR consultative document (April 2005)

The constitution of the object of research (Stage 1, step two) indicates the selection of texts in which the macro-strategies of (de)politicisation and the management of public opinion in the public sphere are semiotically realised. I am focusing my analysis on the textual moment of a specific aspect of the Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrats’ coalition government (2002-2007), namely, immigration legislation reform, with a concentration on just one point in the process, the publication of an official discussion document in April 2005. This particular point in the reform process itself involves a network of practices, and in its textual moment a network of genres and discourses. Appropriate focuses and categories for the analysis include semiotic strategies which realise (de)politicisation and manage perception, as well as semiotic aspects and realisations of legitimisation, rationalisation, identity, and ideology (particularly genre use and modality). I will elaborate more on this point in step 3 below.

Rationale for the selection of the specific text

I am focusing on the 125-page text entitled; ‘Immigration and Residence in Ireland – Outline policy proposals for an Immigration and Residence Bill’, from 2005 (henceforth referred to as the ‘discussion document’). The rationale for choosing this document is that in attempting to elucidate public contributions to the prospective bill, the document (as well as its separate 15-page summary version) remained accessible from the Departmental website for some time after this date, finally being withdrawn when the bill entered the committee stage in 2007. In tandem with the publication of their document, the Department issued a deadline of July (2005) for the receipt of submissions. I see this one document as not only the most practically useful text for my purposes but also by the nature of its design – as encouraging public debate and response – it remains not only accessible but also as politically significant, and therefore positions itself as an important text for any consideration of official (de)politicisation processes and of covert exercises in public relations.

\(^2\) See attached CD-ROM; Chapter 5, document 5.1.
In terms of the identifiable research objectives that this government document satisfies, we can say:

- Firstly, as a bill drafted by the DJELR and as a consultative document produced by it, this text embodies the closest official representation of immigration and migration issues and how they are being discursively construed by the Irish state, as they relate to the official perception of the socio-political landscape in Ireland. That is, the text remains officially unmediated, approachable from a critical perspective as that voice the state is wishes to project outwardly.

- Secondly, and with specific reference to my general research hypothesis, in producing a bill that seeks to ‘consolidate legislation in the area and provide for future developments’, (as stated in the programme for Government of June 2002), the bill attempts to incorporate the concerns and therefore the discourses of other departments, (most notable the DETE) and other entities. As a corollary to the text’s officially unfiltered or unmediated nature, from a critical point of view, such a declaration calls for an analysis of the emerging order of discourse of immigration emanating from the competing agendas and the potentially contradictory voices within the text. In short, as a site of discursive disfluency alone, it is significant.

- Thirdly, as a text that explains how the discussion document, as well as the bill have come into being, of the different strands and processes that have led to its current content and structure, it clearly reveals the sequence of actions taken in the formulation of this draft policy. From a critical perspective this partly signposts the dialectic nature of the emergent discourse thereby, highlighting its intrinsic value as a focus for semiotic analysis.

- Finally, and potentially most significantly, as a document written for public consumption and open to public response, the document projects this emergent position, a new social order of migration and residence, into the public sphere with the express intention of precipitating civil society input into the configuration of this social order and its order of discourse. The way in which it does so, its level of openness, how it classifies and frames the issues is therefore particularly significant for broader evaluations of public consultation, dialogue, and debate. That is, the document operates as an index of official processes of politicisation and depoliticisation.

In being a document that has engendered bill submissions from many civil society actors, including a number of organisations with which I have spoken, this document has also
acted as a useful focus for these discussions with those groups, which has also helped to broaden my approach to appraising the Irish State’s discourse of immigration and a deeper understanding of civil society’s evaluation of the Government’s openness and its level of sincerity in this consultation process. In acknowledging the purpose of the ‘Immigration and Residence Bill’ as stated, and its public sphere role in inviting input from civil society, it can be argued that the discussion document presents the most self-contained, carefully argued and legible expression of the Irish State’s contemporary discourse on immigration. It is emblematic of what such a discourse is composed, how it is situated within a neoliberal order of discourse, and remains indicative of what its particular configuration may be doing in relation to the health of the very democratic processes that the document is nominally designed to strengthen.

The Background to the Discussion Document (2005)

In advance of the drafting of a new piece of legislation a trend has seen a move away from the issuing of Green Papers and White Papers, normally designed to propose the ‘scheme’ or content of a bill to be discussed by parliament before passing into law as an Act of Parliament. It has become quite common rather, to draft and circulate a ‘consultation document’, especially on topics of public interest. At the conclusion of this consultation process the civil servants within the relevant department then draw up the ‘scheme’ for the bill directly. Three separate elements have combined to produce the content of this consultation text being addressed in this work. At the time of research, these discrete sources were all accessible from the Departmental websites, political party websites, and Government reports, as well as from the discussion document itself in a summary fashion.

In 2001, under the then Minister for Justice, John O’Donoghue (Fianna Fáil), an earlier public consultation document was launched by the DJELR on a prospective immigration policy, to which responses were invited and collected (DJELR 2002). In tandem with this process two further actions were carried out. The first of these was a consultancy study undertaken by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) on behalf of DJELR to look at perceived best practice from the international arena in the area of immigration legislation and to make recommendations for the future. This document, published in August 2002, looked primarily at the situation in the UK, the EU, the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. It remains unclear however whether this IOM report influenced the first public consultation process’s report above, since the latter was published in July 2002.

The final pillar of the strategy was the setting up of a ‘cross-Departmental Group’ on immigration. This commission represented all the relevant Government departments and also
took on board the findings of the IOM consultancy study and the conclusions of the public consultation report. The ‘Immigration and Residence Bill’ discussion document of April 2005 is presented to the public as the result of the combined findings of these three strands of work. It was issued in a 15-page summary form as well as in its full 125-page format, with comments being invited from the general public, with its three-month deadline for the receipt of submissions. It remained available to be read or downloaded from the Department’s website up to 2007 and was also available for purchase from the Government publications’ sale’s office.

**Comments on the Origin of the Content of the Discussion Document**

In advance of the semiotic analysis, some observations, gleaned both from personal communication with Departments and through interviews with the civil society groups can help contextualise how precisely these three pieces of work produced the discussion document’s final text. Specifically, I make three points of note. Firstly, with regard to the original public consultation process, as per the Department’s own report, some sixty six submissions were received from non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), agencies, and other associations, as well as from a number of individuals. In the questionnaire format of this consultative process respondents were asked to respond to the following questions or issues in as much or as little detail as desired:

i. Who should be allowed reside in Ireland?

ii. How many people should be admitted through the immigration system?

iii. What entitlements should immigrants have?

iv. What immigration procedures are necessary?

v. Illegal entry

vi. What general issues should be contained in the new legislation?

vii. Visas/Pre-entry clearance

viii. Administrative Arrangements

ix. Entry controls

x. Residence

xi. Enforcement

The author has read many of these submissions, particularly those of the responding organisations that I have interviewed, but also some of the individual responses, (although I have only been able to identify sixty one submissions via the Departmental website of the stated sixty six received). The Departmental report of the procedure from July 2002 however, makes no comment and provides no information as to how these disparate contributions may have contributed to or otherwise been incorporated into the discussion document’s final text. Likewise, there is no attempt to explain how particular responses were
weighted against each other. This leaves the reader to wonder whether for example, carefully prepared submissions from organizations professionally, vocationally, or otherwise involved in the issue of immigration (such as The Irish Centre for Human Rights, The Migrants’ Council of Ireland or the Irish Congress of Trade Unions) were assessed in a different fashion to the thirty two submissions received from individuals, many of whom simply responded via an Departmental e-mail address provided in the document and set up specifically for this purpose.

In fact, though the majority of the July 2002 report is given over to respondents’ views, by merely stating each question posed in the original questionnaire and combining the responses into bullet points, the format of the report seems to confirm that there was no such weighting of replies. So, for example, as part of the section on ‘Policy Issues to be Considered’, the first question is presented as ‘Who should be allowed reside in Ireland? The first bullet point then reads, ‘There were a number of submissions calling for labour market driven skills based immigration’, (DJELR 2002: 4). That is, in presenting this finding, the report does not even contend that this (or any other point) is a majority decision (how ever one might arrive at such a definition of a majority). Moreover, for those areas above that were not presented as direct questions (numbers v, vii, viii, ix, x & xi), the questionnaire introduced each topic by way of leading inquiries. So, for example, for question v. on ‘Illegal Entry’, the text asks ‘what additional measures are appropriate to tackle illegal entry and trafficking in human beings?’ The use of presupposition in this way, intentional or not, is nowhere countered in the final report, or even acknowledged in the presentation of findings. This obviously raises issues in terms of objectivity and calls into question the Department’s claim to be developing draft policy in line with the wishes of the public.

Secondly, the process of producing the 2005 discussion document seems broad, far-reaching and transparent, but a closer look reveals something not so dramatically highlighted. As with the lack of clarity with regard to the incorporation of input into the 2001/2002 process, nowhere in the 125-page document does the Department address the issue of how the invited responses to the new discussion document are to be dealt with. Moreover, in the introduction, it is clearly stated that the ‘assessment’ proposed in the document is also based on ‘discussions […] with other interested bodies’, (DJELR 2005: 8). The inference here is that the Department and the reader would be in general agreement as to who would be ‘interested’ in immigration issues, or perhaps, in whose interest it would be to play an active part in the development of relevant legislation. That is, as with the presuppositions employed in the 2001 questionnaire, the assumption of ‘common interest’ in this discussion document is not transparent or open to collective evaluation. Through my meetings with respondent
organisations, and the Irish Council for Civil Liberties in particular (as well as conversations with Departmental officials), I learned that two of these interested bodies are the British Home Office and An Garda Síochána, yet no explicit reference is made to either of these entities in the 125-page document or indeed to how exactly they may have influenced the discussion document’s content.

Thirdly, at the bottom of page 7 (Chapter 1), we read of the one interested body mentioned explicitly, namely, the Enterprise Strategy Group (ESG).3 No further mention is made of this group, nor is there any explanation as to what it is. This is noteworthy since it is unlikely that the layperson would be familiar with this group. Its import however is perhaps that in its report of July 2004, ‘Ahead of The Curve – Ireland’s Place in the Global Economy’, the group estimates ‘that the demand for new workers over the period up to 2010 could be in the region of 420,000, of which a large proportion may be filled through immigration’ (ESG 2004: 7-8). The purpose of the ESG’s 2004 report is to make recommendations to the Government and business sector of how best to maintain and advance ‘Ireland’s’ competitive edge in a ‘globalised’ economic system. In its Background chapter (page 7), the report provides three domestic reasons for the state’s recent rapid growth, one of which, demographic trends ‘ensured that labour supply did not limit growth potential’. Specifically, the ESG report points out that from the mid-nineteen nineties the country’s growth was facilitated by ‘a growing population of working age, increased female participation rates, a large pool of unemployed people and net immigration’, (ESG 2004: 14).

In the report’s second chapter, ‘The Case for Change’, the ESG points out however, that since about 2003, of the above ‘all but the last of these sources are diminishing’, (ibid. 24).

At the launch of the ESG report on July 7, 2004, the Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Mary Harney TD (progressive Democrats) declared:

The report outlines the challenges and opportunities facing the enterprise sector in Ireland over the coming decade. More importantly, it outlines the measures the Government and industry must take if we are to meet those challenges and capitalize on the opportunities. (DETE 2004: 4th paragraph)

By including a reference to the ESG’s report, the Department of Justice is demonstrating a certain amount of agreement with the Tánaiste and her department and is

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3 The Enterprise Strategy Group was established by the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Mary Harney TD, in July 2003. It was requested to develop a medium-term strategy, and to propose and prioritise national policy responses to strengthen competitiveness, innovation, entrepreneurship, and develop the Irish economy as a whole. It was overseen by Forfás, the national policy and advisory board for enterprise, trade, science, technology, and innovation.
setting up a direct thematic link with the ESG and its observations. The point to remark upon is again the unanalysed view that the general public shares the DJELR’s belief in the significance of a body like the ESG and the weight given to its labour market concerns in relation to the development of legislation in the areas of immigration and residence. In this vein, it is worth remarking that the scheme for the final bill, issued in September 2006, (after the consultation period closed), was exactly the same as the text of the 2005 discussion document. That is, none of the many submissions received by the DJELR resulted in the text being altered in any way. In relation to my broad research question, this reality adds a certain amount of weight to my observations on presupposition, the management of the debate as partly a public relations exercise, and on strategies of (de)politicisation, thereby adding significant value to any critical examination of the text.

The Focus of the Analysis:
The Structure and Content of the Discussion Document
The discussion document has several discrete sections. Following a Title and a Contents’ page, the first section is the two-page foreword (DJELR 2005: 5-6); written by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Michael Mc Dowell TD (Progressive Democrats). The next section, Chapter 1, is the document Introduction and Summary, (ibid. 7-20). This is broken down into a Departmental account of the background to the document (page 7), the policy of developing an immigration and residence bill (page 8), the process of developing immigration policy (pages 9-11), plus a summary of the key proposals by topic (pages 12-20), which are then elaborated – chapter by chapter – in Chapters 2 to 14 of the document. Chapter Two of the document outlines the overall objectives and basic principles on which the proposed legislation is to be based, pages 21-27. Chapter Three outlines the structure of the bill (pages 29-33). Chapters 4 to 14 inclusive (pages 35-125) expand on the provisions of the bill by topic, for example, Visa and Pre-Entry clearance (Chapter Four); Border Controls (Chapter Five); Admission for the purpose of Study (Chapter Eight); Monitoring and Compliance (Chapter Twelve), etc.

Sections of the Discussion Document to be Analysed
As my analytical approach requires the close linguistic analysis, coupled with the fact that the document sees a certain amount of repetition between the overview sections and Chapters 4 to 14 in particular, I am limiting my analysis to only a portion of the discussion document. Specifically, the sections under review in this research are as follows;

- The Minister’s Foreword (page 5-6), and
• Chapter One, the Introduction and Summary, (pages 7-20), with a specific focus on the background section, (pages 7-8)

The analysis of the discourse practice will take in all of these 14 pages, the textual analysis, by nature of the more detailed approach required, will be confined to pages 5, 6, 7, and 8 only. The section of Chapter One titled ‘The process of developing immigration policy’ (pages 9-11), has been extensively referenced above in relation to my explanation of the origin and genesis of the document as a whole, but will not fall within the textual analysis. Elements of the section on ‘Objectives and Basic Principles’, (pages 12-20), will be referenced where such observations add to the points being raised through analysis of the four highlighted pages, but this section will not be analysed as a whole.

The focus on the Minister’s foreword and the Introduction is emphasised since it is here that the explanation of the need for new legislation and the foregrounding of the key issues relating to immigration takes place most directly. Also, by concentrating on sections reproduced in full in the summary document, (that version of the discussion document most likely to be read by the public), it is reasonable to assume that the DJELR will have taken care to ensure that which it feels most pertinent to the issue of immigration legislation and to the public’s understanding of what is to be done, its ‘assessment […] of what is required’ (ibid. 8), is contained within these pages. And since it is my objective to address and analyse the Government’s best efforts at conveying their position, these pages necessarily form the core of my investigation. It is also important to note that following the sections I am addressing the document presents chapters composed of a set of assessments and proposals, that is, evidently less dialogical than the pieces I am looking at here.

Categories of analysis

As the focus with the immigration discussion document is on (de)politicisation strategies and the crisis of the public sphere, the central analytical issue is one of ‘dialogue’. And as the particular textual moment of the official discourse on immigration – as represented by the production and circulation of the discussion document – sees the interaction of this semiotic element with the other elements of social practices of state-citizen interaction, in this interactional analysis I will focus on the textual work of relating, the problem being one of social relations and on the argumentation structure deployed. Consequently, in terms of the interdiscursive analysis the emphasis is on genre, on what the document is ‘doing’, on how the text sets about trying to achieve its goals. In terms of the linguistic or grammatical analysis; where the interpersonal metafunction of language is concerned with the relational value of the words and the grammatical structures which the text exhibits, the specific focus
is on modes (as expressed in declarative, interrogative, or imperative mood) and modality as features which are particularly relevant to genre. In practice, the interest is in systematic asymmetries in the distribution of modes between participants, being significant indicators of participant relations, and on how significant these iterations may be viewed in terms of ‘relational modality’, of the authority of one participant in relation to others.

Ideationally, the significance of relational processes will also be noted in so far as such observations can be shown to reinforce observations from an analysis of modality in relation to the signification of participants and of agency. Observations will also be made on the expressive value of words and structures in terms of expressive modalities, or instantiations of the authority of the speaker in relation to the truth, or particular evaluations of the truth. The relational work of words and grammatical structures is central to positioning the needs-based problem, implicit within which is a move away from a focus on issues of representation. In this case that means a move away from any textual focus on the construction of the immigrant, and onto those textual features that act as a trace of, or a cue to, a particular understanding of social relations and relationships. In terms of a discourse on policy change being addressed here, the analysis as a whole is primarily concerned with social relations expressed as systems and the particular ways these systems are being joined-up. This means that positioning the immigration legislation text as an action-oriented, needs-based problem is in keeping with an understanding of the document as one that raises problems of social relations, social identities, and cultural values.

Step 3: Analysis of the text:

**Immigration and Residence in Ireland – Outline policy proposals for an Immigration and Residence Bill (DJELR 2005):**

*DJELR consultative document*

a. **The Minister’s Foreword**

The first section of the DJELR discussion document, the Minister’s Foreword, is significant in being both the first part of the report (present in both the full document and the twenty-page summary), but also as being the only part attributable to a particular author (the Minister, or some other principal voice). Apart from surmising that the semiotic structure and content may be different to the rest of the document, the important point about these two pages is that if the text as a whole is functioning effectively at a macro-strategic level as non-dialogical, of contributing to a process of (de)politicisation and, by extension, a diminution of
the public sphere, and if the foreword to the document is doing its job effectively, such
evidence should be present and identifiable here.

**Argumentation structure**

Following Fairclough (2001b: 229-266 and 2009: 177-181), the first observation is that the
Minister’s text is structured as an argument, which can be represented as premise, implicit
premise, and conclusion. Explicitly; the premise is that despite a history of emigration,
Ireland has changed and is prospering in the modern world, which, to a significant degree,
involves more and more people choosing to come, to work and to live in Ireland. If ‘we’
want to maintain current levels of economic prosperity, ‘we’ must therefore open our country
to more workers, more immigrants. The implicit premise is therefore set up as; yes, we do
want to maintain and improve levels of economic prosperity. The conclusion is that we must
compete more effectively, and do whatever is in our control, including facilitating or enticing
more foreign workers to Ireland, to ensure that this happens.

This argumentation semiotically realises the strategy of legitimation, specifically of
rationalisation, or legitimation by reference to the utility of institutionalised action, and to the
knowledges that society has constructed to endow it with cognitive validity (van Leeuwen &
Wodak 1999). Put simply, the Government is attempting to legitimise its political strategy
and related policies as ‘necessary’ responses to a non-problematic external situation. The
argument is formally valid, structured in a non-contradictory way, but whether it is sound, a
reasonable argument – whether the premise(s) on which it is based – is/are are factually true,
is open to debate. As such, the argument can be challenged to see if it is fallacious by
challenging the truth of its premises. My contention is firstly, that the projected policy
change and resultant economic dividend are predicated on a problematic identity category as
subject ‘we’. And secondly, that the claim that the ‘change’ attributed to the modern world,
to which ‘Ireland’ needs to respond as an inevitable fact of life that ‘we’ must accept, remains
unanalysed meaning its validity cannot be assumed. I also argue that both of the flaws in the
premises emanate from the macro-strategy of (de)politicisation.

‘We’ is based upon the false equation that ‘we’ = ‘Ireland’/the Republic of Ireland’
and that ‘we’ simultaneously = all the citizens of Ireland/the Republic of Ireland. The subject
pronoun ‘we’ appears six times in the Minister’s text (all condensed into paragraphs 2, 3, and
4 with the exception of the foreword’s final sentence). The dual ‘we’ is problematic since in
most iterations the identified subject could be the citizenry, the nation, or national economy,
and conversely, in no case is it necessarily one and not the other. For example, statements
like ‘It is a tribute to the progress we have made as a nation’ (4th paragraph, first line) and
'We have much to gain from our continuing development as a diverse but coherent society’ (fourth line) are ambiguous and could be read both ways. People as a society can ‘make progress’, but so too can a territorial nation/national economy. Likewise, people, communities, and society can gain in a general, holistic way from diversity, but so too can the national economy in a material sense. My point is that this is a problematic premise to sustain since if Ireland achieves and maintains ‘success’ or ‘prosperity’ it does not follow that all of its citizens and their communities will achieve such success, or indeed any prosperity.

This is a ‘fallacy of division’, where the properties of a general category – Ireland prospering economically – are mistakenly attributed to each of its parts, to all of its citizens. Statements that commit this fallacy, for example, ‘for the wellbeing of society that we pass on to future generations’ (6th paragraph, final sentence), represent a banal feature of official discourse, which is fundamental to the macro-strategy of depoliticisation, whose basic strategic goal is not benign obfuscation for the sake of an inclusive message, but a deliberate ploy to differentiate potentially antagonistic identities, such as the division of the political community into ‘us’ and ‘them’. This fallacy can be read by adopting a critical approach to the language of the foreword as I have done here, but there is a further signal of the fallibility of the premise in the single use of the word ‘communities’ at the end of the fourth paragraph. Where ‘we’ can signify Ireland (society, economy, government) and its people (including the Minister), but implying no specific divisions beyond this duality; in stating ‘That diversity which has always existed in Irish society has now become even more varied and complex and has the capacity to benefit all our communities’, the Minister is recognising that immigrants will not in all likelihood be distributed geographically across society in an even manner.

They will most likely congregate in specific areas for specific pragmatic and socio-cultural reasons, and will interact primarily with some communities and not others, and the Minister is therefore indirectly acknowledging the unstated fact that the benefits of ‘prosperity’, material resources, and equality of access are likewise not to be redistributed equally across society as a whole. In this way he is undermining his own argument by indirectly drawing attention to the fallacy of division. In this sense identity and the semiotic construal of identities are a major focus in analysis which prioritises (de)politicisation. In moving to the construal of the Minister’s own identity in the foreword, the issue in semiotic terms is personal deixis, with two personal deictic centres of the Minister (or ‘author’/‘principal author’). He positions himself within two group identities, ‘we’ = the government, and ‘we’ = the country. But identity declaration or affirmation implicitly entails difference, so in reading ‘we’ the reader also infers the presence of ‘they’. In practice this means that when we read ‘we’ as the government, the ‘we’ is implicitly construed in
opposition to ‘they’, and since there is only ever one national government at any one time, the ‘they’ can only refer to previous governments, which pursued different strategies in the historic past, which have not been responsible for the prosperity currently being enjoyed by all.

Notwithstanding that the Minister’s own party, the Progressive Democrats was a minor coalition partner, the main Government party in 2005, Fianna Fáil had been in power continually since the mid-1990s (and for most of the 1980s), and saw it as appropriate to claim credit for the ‘pragmatic’ choices made that led to the economic prosperity experienced in the decade preceding the publication of this document (see O’Sullivan 2006: 59-99). The final sentence in the last paragraph above can be read in precisely this way, as the Minister positioning himself as part of the government that seeks to maintain ‘prosperity’ for the ‘wellbeing’ of society that will be passed on to ‘future generations’. Likewise, the Minister includes himself as part of the ‘we’ as country, which is construed in opposition to ‘competitors’ on the European or global stage. For example, we read ‘Our society and economy require people with specific skills and energies to ensure that we have a dynamic labour market and continued economic growth’, (3\textsuperscript{rd} paragraph, first sentence). Note too that in this example the sentence-initial possessive pronoun underlines the earlier point on the fallacy of division, since the society and economy are explicitly referenced, coupled, with no distinction.

On the contrary however, the construal of personal deixis in this way excludes a ‘we’/’they’ division, both within the current political community (‘the Republic of Ireland’), and within the political field (political system), where no contemporaneous political ‘opposition’ is construed. With the five iterations of the possessive pronoun ‘our’, added to seven appearances of ‘Ireland’ and five of the adjective ‘Irish’, there is only unity of purpose and vision, with no space for contrary national perspectives. The right path has been found and recent results prove this to be true, and any deviation or alternative strategy would naturally therefore jeopardise ‘our’ future. The implication is that there is a consensus within the political community and the political field (within Ireland), reinforcing this general depoliticisation strategy. This is a clear example of the placing of contrary views and voices outside the debate, cut off from the dialogical process apparently being introduced by the discussion document. Texts semiotically construe identities and simultaneously seek to make these construals persuasive, so just because fallacies in the argument can be identified, it does not however follow that the argument will be widely seen as fallacious, hence the prevalence of fallacy in official discourse, which requires some reflection upon what it is that makes the construal of identities persuasive.
For example, the Minister’s foreword can also be seen to be stretching legitimation by rationalisation in its own terms. As instrumental rationality (or ‘means-ends’ rationality) (see Fairclough 2003: 98-100), assumes certain agreed ends, and legitimises actions or procedures or structures in terms of their utility in achieving these ends, the premise set up in this foreword is a clear case in point. In this instance the means are the proposed relaxation of immigration laws, with the goal of a greater level of flexibility in the workforce, leading to greater material outcomes within in the broad pro-market, neoliberal paradigm. This means that in practice, rationalisation often overlaps with moral evaluation in the legitimation discourses of state and institution. Moreover, policy documents can exhibit a narrative slippage from statements about the way things are currently, or descriptions, to predictions about the future, which is a point also illustrated in the Minister’s foreword. Separate from the last line of his foreword, where the Minister is making broad claims about the future in a general sense, he is also clearly making explicit claims about what ‘we’ must do. In practice the policies expressed are legitimised by claims about the ‘changing world’, or the ‘globalised world’, or the ‘interconnected world’; for example, ‘[to embrace] the opportunities of the international marketplace’, (2nd paragraph, fifth line), ‘[we] require people with specific skills and energies’ (3rd paragraph, first line) etc. In terms of legitimation strategies this is a form of mythopoesis (legitimation conveyed through narrative).

At a broader level of generality, mythopoesis can be recognised here in the creation of a symmetry between the history of Irish emigration and the narrative of the emigrants’ contribution to the development of the economies and societies of their host countries, on the one hand, (in the first paragraph), and the projected contribution that wished for new immigrants will make to the Irish economy and to Irish society on the other. This is evident in lines like ‘We have much to gain from our continuing to development as a diverse but coherent society’ (4th paragraph, fourth line). Even where a policy document like the Minister’s foreword is not a narrative in a strict sense, it involves the building up of a picture of the ‘new reality’ as a statement of fact, or soon-to-be fact, with the combination of a moral tale with a cautionary tale. This new reality is also precisely the kind of unattributed dynamic that Fairclough (2009: 172) notes seems central to official expressions about the contemporary political condition internationally, and as a general prescription for policy change. I will turn to this issue now as it relates directly to the second flaw within the Minister’s foreword, namely, to the background of the premise on which the Minister’s general argument is based.
Specifically, this is the component of legitimation via mythopoesis, manifested here as the construal of world change. It is common for the dominant construals of the ‘new global order’ to have predictable linguistic characteristics (Fairclough 2009:178). These include: processes of change being construed categorically and authoritatively as unmodalised truths; statements about the new economy being presented as familiar, yet unqualified truisms; and based on these assertions there is a movement from the ‘is’ of the economic to the ‘ought’ of the political (and hence of the socio-cultural); the new reality is construed as indifferent to place; series of evidences or appearances in the new economy being construed paratactically as lists; processes being therefore construed without responsible social agents; and being understood to take place in a timeless ahistorical present. These features can be sustained through recontextualisation (often simply through intertextuality), appearing first in economic texts, and from there finding their way into political texts. Likewise, these features can first appear on a transnational scale, from the EU of IMF for example, ultimately finding their way to national governments, and eventually pervading local governance structures. Many of these features are also evident in the Minister’s text, and can be seen as aspects of the semiotic realisation of (de)politicisation.

**Clause Grammar**

In the Minister’s foreword to the discussion document there is no overt reference to ‘change’ in the broad sense of neoliberal globalisation, although references to economics and the economic health of the nation can be clearly read as indirect links to the structural scalar changes inherent in the neoliberal project. Where, for example, the Minister opens the third paragraph with the assertion – in the form of a deontic modality – ‘Our society and economy require people with specific skills and energies to ensure that we have a dynamic labour market and continued economic growth’, he is overtly referencing the restructuring and rescaling of national competitiveness in the global economy through the discourse of flexible labour markets. This is a key sentence in the document in analytical terms since it highlights the requirement to respond to external forces, in a prescribed way because it is only by acting in this way that prosperity will be protected. A discursive link is therefore made between the unsubstantiated construal of the now, and significantly, the way it must be responded to. This representation of a subjective position as an objective reality (prescription based on contention) proves to be a common feature of the discussion document. In terms of speech acts, a sentence like this can be seen as a form of ‘activity exchange’ (as opposed to an epistemic ‘knowledge exchange’) of a particular type. That is, as a demand that directs the reader to follow the premise and the Minister’s resultant conclusion. Significantly, this is
also a stance that is antithetical to dialogue, since the reader can only infer that in broad terms, the argument is over.

In this vein, ‘change’, where it can be seen to be most directly referenced at the beginning of the second paragraph is construed in an overarching way as a categorical assertion. Via an epistemic modality – by use of the simple present tense – and after summarising Ireland’s history of emigration and its effects in the first paragraph, the Minister claims ‘Now, at the beginning of the twenty first century Ireland is in a very different place’. The implication is that everything has changed and, as a way of bringing the reader with him, he goes on to outline the specific reasons why ‘we’ are in this different place. Specifically, he cites the ‘range of factors’ over which ‘we’ have had control, namely; good economic policy; sound management of the public finances; high quality education, and in the next sentence, high levels of investment in Ireland by Irish and overseas companies. One factor is presented as perhaps more fortunate, something that we could not control in any precise way, that is, a favourable demographic profile. Of all the processes highlighted however, only one has not been in ‘our’ control, namely ‘the opportunities of the international marketplace’, although in constructing the sentence as ‘our embracing of the opportunities of the international marketplace’, the Minister attempts to show ‘us’ as proactive on all fronts.

The significant point to note though is the representation of the international marketplace as something that generates ‘opportunities’ which is simply presented as a categorical fact, as an unmodalised truth. Taking this observation, that there is an agentive marketplace (which provides opportunities to places like Ireland/economies like Ireland’s), together with the requirement to acquire a larger labour force as a central factor in sustaining prosperity, we can see that the primary reason for amending legislation is linked to these processes of change. Specifically, the legislation is to be designed to improve competency levels in the national workforce, yet the narrative is at all times being presented in an unreflexive construal of reality.

Where the domain of ‘is’ is world change and that of ‘ought’ is appropriate national responses; a divide is textually constructed between economics and politics, which helpfully for the Minister, excludes the former from the latter. As evidenced in the opening section of the third paragraph, above, ‘Our […] require[s] people […] to ensure […] continued economic growth’. There are economic and industrial policy choices, but the choices to be made are ones that yield to the current economic process, rather than ones that radically try to reshape or even simply question it. Choices that are presented as national responses, in terms of modality, simply appear as authoritative and categorical assertions. In the fifth paragraph onwards, for example, ‘ought’ is explicit and recurrent – the modal verb ‘need’ occurs five
times, and in ‘foreign nationals are fulfilling a real need’, (in the third paragraph), it also features once as a noun. That is, the Minister advances a strategy of (de)politicisation through the presentation of the world – as an economic entity invested with the agency to demand certain things – as an inevitable fact of life.

As well as the agentive ‘international marketplace’ ‘having’ or ‘providing’ opportunities (2\textsuperscript{nd} paragraph, fifth line), the attributive adjective ‘dynamic’ in ‘to ensure we have a dynamic labour market’ (3\textsuperscript{rd} paragraph, second line), also implies agency in a labour market. Phrases like these, that point to the international labour markets providing opportunities, or the labour markets being dynamic and responding to decisions taken at a national level, are existential statements located within processes of change that are not open to examination or detailed explanation. So when it comes to national responses to the processes of global markets (the ‘is’ of the Minister’s representation of the contemporary reality), agents, such as ‘business’, ‘the government’, ‘foreign nationals’, and especially ‘we’ are fully present. In contrast, when it comes to responding to the need for immigration change as a contribution to the requirement for competitiveness (the ‘ought’ of ‘our’ reactions), the agents are implied but absent, that is, the grammatical constructions are passive. In returning to the purpose of the discussion document in the foreword’s fifth paragraph, what is to be done is presented by deontic modalities with the agent elided. We read, for example, that ‘migration needs to be managed and proper structures and procedures need to be established, (5\textsuperscript{th} paragraph, first line); and in the next sentence ‘In the Programme for Government of June 2002, there is a commitment to prepare a new […] Bill’.

These constructions can be seen as underscoring the Minister’s desire to remind the reader that their input is invited, a reminder of the document’s dialogical intent, but they also act to define the ‘ought’, the necessary actions to be taken. Yet in that paragraph’s sixth line, where he says ‘I am now publishing this discussion paper which outlines the range of issues that will need to be addressed in the legislation and details the current thinking on those issues’, the Minister is simultaneously indicating the restrictions that apply to any public submissions by making clear that only certain topics are open to debate, and more broadly, that what is presented in the discussion document has already been defined by the views of others, the ‘others’ being those whose views are already present in the actions that must follow – a point further underscored in Chapter One. In this way, before the foreword is through, the Minister is already circumscribing the reach of any genuine dialogue on immigration legislation reform, and simultaneously establishing the structures and processes on which the Government is motivating these changes. In essence he is construing ‘change’
as articulated above, as dictating the necessary set of appropriate responses from the outset, a view which the Government also wholly accepts.

**Syntax**

In keeping with a text of less than two pages that seeks to summarise the need for legislative reform as laid out in a document of 125 pages, in relation to the syntax of the foreword, it is primarily paratactic, in both relations between sentences and between phrases within sentences. What is noteworthy is that the sequence of the sentences, if not the paragraphs, is not significant and is changeable without affecting the overall meaning, since what is included is a list of evidences with arbitrary elements. The only examples where hypotactic syntax is present are in those paragraphs dealing with change, both as it is construed as a contemporary reality (the second paragraph), and as that force dictating a set of necessary measures to be undertaken in response to it (the fifth paragraph). Even here however, the evidences listed for Ireland’s prosperous economy are interchangeable. For example, the one thing the text states that Ireland does not control, the markets, is not placed first or last. Likewise, in the fifth paragraph, the need to respond to the former, the ‘ought’ to the existing ‘is’, the need to manage migration, the need to establish proper procedures, and the fact that extensive preparation has been undertaken, etc., is fundamentally a paratactic list. What is discursively significant, which mirrors the observations already made, is precisely this relentless accumulation of evidences of change, which persuasively establishes the new economic reality as a simple fact which must be responded to.

**Genre Use**

I want to conclude an analysis of the Minister’s foreword to the discussion document by making some brief observations on the discourse practice, on interdiscursivity, and particularly on genre. As a critical challenge to the soundness of the text’s premises shows, the Minister’s introduction is a recontextualisation of analyses of the ‘global economy’ of a particular type. The author contends that this is the type of analysis found in a more fully elaborated form in the texts of institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, the OECD, etc. and their particular discourse (that is, narratives of and arguments about the ‘global economy’). Yet the Minister’s text is not so much an analytical text as an advocative text, arguing for a ‘necessary’ politics. That is to say, the ‘expert discourse’ here is not the same as it would be in specialist economic texts. In fact, there is no direct reference to experts other than to the existence of the ‘current thinking’ on the issues that will need to be addressed in reforming immigration legislation, in the fifth paragraph.
The point to note is that though the discourses of the current reality (of the ‘is’ of the first half of the foreword) are borrowed, their experts are omitted completely, and their analyses are not presented in a detailed expository way a reader would expect to find in an official, institutional report, such as those produced by the transnational bodies referenced above. The premises are not argued in the same manner, even summarily, and not supported by data. The reality rather, of the prosperous New Ireland of neoliberal globalisation is rather, supported by a list of evidences only. And since there are no facts, no scientific background analysis, what the Minister is doing falls into the genre of advocacy, and it is the strength of the advocative genre on display here which constitutes the dramatic and potentially persuasive formulations of premises in the official argument. The foreword is therefore interdiscursively complex in grounding this advocative argument in the recontextualised analysis – a transformation to suit the new context – combining analytical and advocative genres (as well as economic and political discourses), contributing to the promotional nature of the Minister’s text.

The Minister’s foreword can therefore be said to demonstrate a ‘logic of appearances’, as opposed to an ‘explanatory logic’ (Fairclough 2003: 94), where the former can be identified by the presence of lists of appearance or ‘evidence’, that is, the additive, paratactic relations between sentences and clauses exhibited here, as opposed to causal relations inherent in a genuinely explanatory text. I now want to address this point, (de)politicisation as a function of the document’s dialogical/non-dialogical properties, continuing the focus on genre, but moving to the next part of the discussion document. I begin with the Introduction’s background section (at the start of Chapter One), since it is here that the reader might anticipate a generic shift to exposition over advocacy.

b. Chapter One

**Genre use and the ‘logic of appearances’**

The next section after the Minister’s foreword, Chapter One, is composed of the document Introduction and Summary, *(ibid.* 7-20). This is broken down into a Departmental account of the background to the document; the policy of developing an immigration and residence bill; the process of developing immigration policy; and, a summary of the key proposals by topic – which are elaborated further, chapter by chapter, in Chapters 2 to 14 of the document. I want to focus here specifically on pages 7 to 11 of the document, and particularly on pages 7 & 8, the background to the discussion document and the policy of developing the prospective bill, as presented by the DJELR. As I mentioned in the conclusion to the analysis of the
Minister’s foreword, in a text calling itself a ‘discussion document’ one major expectation might be that much energy will be invested in an explanatory logic. That is, a text featuring an expository genre, with ample space given over to an explanation sufficient to justify its conclusions, and not a document constructed in an advocative genre, a report, presented as basically no more than a collection of unanalysed evidences for change. Yet on examination, within the whole discussion document, the background to the issue of immigration reform receives only four paragraphs and the bill development section only three. The background section can easily be summarised by paragraph as follows; fact + evaluation + role of agent; fact + role of agent + evaluation; role of agent + observation + evaluation; and, prescription for action + role of agent.

In more detail; the text begins with an observation akin to the Minister’s on the changing relationship between Ireland and emigration/immigration, followed by an evaluation that immigration is desirable, (for the same specific, but unqualified reasons to do with external factors, economic growth and Ireland’s ability to maximise its strengths internationally, as expressed by the Minister). Added to this is the concern as to how the immigration system – as an agent – is or will be capable of managing the current change. The second paragraph opens with a fact about the number of immigrants who have entered the country in the preceding ten years, presenting these people as ‘workers’ and ‘students’, it continues with five explicit references to how the system has been coping to-date, and an assessment that an opportunity now exists to do something to ensure the system’s suitability for the changing situation, the new reality.

The next paragraph sees the DJELR presenting the ‘system’ as something that ‘touches’ people, that ‘creates’ an impression, that ‘plays’ a role. For example, in fulfilling one role it protects the state from incomers who are ‘traffickers’, ‘criminals’ and ‘terrorists’ as well as welcoming ‘bone fide’ visitors, and so it concludes, a ‘delicate balance’ needs to be struck by the system. In the section’s final paragraph the text moves quickly from the previous ‘knowledge exchanges’ to an ‘activity exchange’, a demand that must be met, backed up by new figures on projected immigrant numbers up to 2010. The system, the reader is informed, is presented as being in need of an urgent overhaul, again, both for the benefit of new workers and to keep out undesirables, and it is to this new reality that the called for legislation must respond.

The ‘Development of an Immigration and Residence Bill’ section which follows the Background section (page 8), opens with the only example of reported speech in the whole document, where a full line quote from the 2002 Programme for Government in relation to drawing up new immigration legislation is presented. There then follow three paragraphs
before the section concludes at the end of the page with both postal and an e-mail addresses for public submissions. The second and third paragraphs are quite matter-of-fact dealing with a summary of what the legislation will be seeking to do in broad terms (to overhaul the 1935 Aliens Act), and a repeated statement that the Minister would like to receive contributions from groups and individuals on the bill’s formation, respectively. The first paragraph is more interesting for analytical purposes since it summarises the Department’s understanding of the discussion document, by stating that it represents ‘an assessment by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform of what is required’. It goes on to justify its assessment of what is needed by telling the reader that this view is based on discussions between the DJELR and other Government departments, and with other ‘interested bodies’ who, as noted earlier, are not named.

The Department adds that the text represents the ‘major issues which need to be addressed in legislation and an indication of the manner in which it is proposed to address them’, (fourth line). The paragraph concludes by clarifying that the discussion document is not a definitive document and does not ‘set out in detail the legislative provisions proposed or the form which the exact provisions will take’, it is designed rather, ‘to focus public discussion’ in a general sense. Though the DJELR is quite specific in this paragraph, in being so succinct it is quite revealing in terms of dialogicality when the reader reflects on what the discussion document is not trying to do. Based on these few lines the Department is saying that for example, other factors not referenced here might ultimately influence the final form and content of the new legislation; that unnamed groups and interests have influenced the general assessment of what is relevant and needed; and significantly, that any discussion open to the public is confined to those ‘major issues’ as defined already, and as presented in the following chapters. As with the Minister’s foreword a document to be taken as opening up a dialogue is, from the outset, narrowing down the parameters of any debate on its own terms – politicising the issue in its interest by depoliticising concerns that it does not wish to entertain.

In essence the DJELR, like the Minister’s foreword, is positioning its own discourse within an advocative genre. As a three-paragraph summary of the development of a bill, readers might perhaps not expect to find any full explanation or justification for the Department’s position in these pages, but it is important to state that at no point in the following pages does the DJELR return to any analysis of the ‘assessments’ it has made on the ‘major issues’ presented at the outset. Pages 9 to 11 cover a short piece on the development of the discussion document itself; followed by a two-page summary of legal developments at a national level and directives at EU level since 2002 that relate to
immigration, movement of persons, and asylum. The final part of Chapter One ‘Summary of Key Proposals’, (pages 12 to 20), simply summarises the recommendations of Chapters 2 to 14, mainly in bullet-point form, about which I will say more below. In terms of genuine dialogicality, the only exposition, apart from that in the first paragraph of the Development of a Bill, is to be found on page 9, where the Department explains how the discussion document came into being. As noted, this process consisted of three elements; a best-practice consultancy study carried out by the International Organisation for Migration (2002); a public consultation document on immigration policy (2002), based on an earlier consultation process in 2001; and a cross Departmental group on immigration that looked at both of the above reports.

Though the text adds that work in 2001 and 2002 ‘set out a broad framework for determining what should be in the legislation’ there is no indication of how the contributions to the 2001 consultation process have been weighted and assessed, and how any conclusions from that process have materially influenced the discussion document at hand. For example, the 2002 report on the earlier consultation process consists of no more than a cover note from the Minister, followed by a compilation of all the submissions received (over sixty in total from representative bodies, NGOs, community groups and individuals). What is relevant to the analysis at hand is that this section on page 9 of the report is the part that deals most directly with the issue of public dialogue and consultation, yet it is evident from what the Department says here, added to what is presented on the preceding page about the ‘major issues’, that genuine dialogue on any future configuration of immigration legislation, is, for all intents and purposes, being seriously compromised.

Where an explanatory logic is absent, where the text’s arguments are not motivated in an explanatory fashion employing an expository genre that might support an understanding of the text’s construal of the contemporaneous reality and possibly concluding with a justification of its recommendation for necessary action – the relationship between the ‘is’ and the ‘ought’ – the text reveals a logic of appearances only. Precisely where a reader might expect to see the DJELR (if not the Minister) make an attempt to contextualise and advance its position in relation to globalisation, world markets, and the need for particular responses by a national economy as one reading amongst many ways of understanding and responding to the international environment, perhaps at the beginning of the first chapter, or in a later chapter referenced in the first, there is nothing.

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4 When this author contacted the DJELR in mid-2007 he was informed that ‘no information exists’ as to how these contributions were assessed and taken on board.
If we stress the relational approach to text and text analysis, interdiscursivity generally (and genre as a concrete example) can be seen as an ‘interlevel’ between what Fairclough (2003:35-8) refers to as ‘external relations’ and ‘internal relations’ of texts. Where external relations are concerned with the analysis of the relations between the text and other elements of social events (and more abstractly, practices and structures); and the internal relations of texts includes analysis of the semantic, grammatical, lexical relations; in genre analysis we can see evidence of more than simply an understanding of how texts figure in actions. We can also see genres as devices for ‘framing’ (as means for controlling work in a textual mode), where framing is both a property of individual genres and the chaining of genres (such as an advocative genre together with a report genre observed in the Minister’s foreword). This framing can be ‘strong’ with ‘control’ being one-sided, or ‘weak’, where control is shared (Fairclough 2010:178). In this light the evidence from both the foreword and Chapter One can be read as a clear attempt by Government to leave as little to chance in the policy formulation process as possible. For example, in the foreword the Minister talked about a ‘range of factors’ that have contributed to economic growth over which ‘we’ have had control, but the one over which ‘we’ do not have complete control is the ability to maximise ‘opportunities’ of the market, which depends on various factors, significant among them a more flexible workforce.

At the level of framing – or ideologically contextualising reality – in order to minimise any interrogation of the substance of the ideological position in question, the genre use is naturally always going to tend to the advocative and report-style than to the explanatory and to an explanatory logic. This logic of appearances is common in contemporary policy documents (Fairclough 2003: 95) precisely for the reasons it is being operationalised here; because any socio-economic analysis of the contemporary world would naturally entail explanation, causality, and expository argument, since without analysis there can be no genuine understanding of the changes in late modernity, to which the Minister and his department allude, and therefore no real sense of its contingency – how changing things at one level could produce different possibilities at another level (or in another structure or at another scale). Analysis also produces ‘time depth’, a sense of how changes over a certain period of time can produce effects subsequently, and how trends can also be historically contingent. Conversely, everything that is happening in the Minister’s contribution and in Chapter One is of the present, a timeless present with no concrete relationship to historical developments other than general references to the past, a past of emigration and economic hardship. Exposition or in-depth explanation by way of an explanatory genre (rather than
advocative or report genres), would in short, reveal the nature of the thinking, the ideological imprint of the Government, and its embracing of the pro-market, neoliberal project.

This is precisely how a critical, transdisciplinary approach to the text’s semiotic structure and content can reveal the discussion document to be promotional, rather than analytical, designed to persuade the readership of a particular set of choices and course of action, rather than opening up space for real dialogue. This is what Fairclough (2003: 96) might call a ‘hortatory report’; that is, a report exhorting or encouraging the reader to a particular conclusion, being the opposite of a genuinely dialogical text. Moving away from the chapter’s interdiscursivity and its use of advocative and report genres, further evidence of the document’s logic of appearances can clearly be seen in Chapter One, where characteristics of these particular generic structures can be identified textually in the syntax.

**Syntax**

As noted in the discussion document’s foreword, series of evidences or appearances in the new economy are often simply and uncontroversially construed paratactically as lists, which is precisely what the reader finds in Chapter One’s ‘Summary of Key Proposals’ through pages 12 to 20. Here each set of proposals features the subsequent chapter title and explanatory strap-line, followed by a bullet-point list of that chapter’s recommendations. For example, on pages 12 and 13 we read ‘Visas and pre-entry clearance – Chapter 4’, followed by three sentences explaining the challenge the DJELR wants to deal with, followed by thirteen bullet-point recommendations; such as ‘There should be provisions to permit the prioritisation of certain categories of visa application’, and ‘Customers should be given reasons for refusals and details of review or appeals procedures, if any, applicable’, and ‘There should be automatic refusal of visas applications where false information is supplied’. It is also significant to note that together with the Minister’s foreword and the first two pages of Chapter One - Introduction (Background and Development of an Immigration and Residence Bill); it is these nine pages of proposal summaries that combine to form the full, published summary report of fifteen pages.

Moreover, in the full 125-page report each chapter from Chapter Two onwards places the relevant bullet-point list of proposals on its first page, immediately under the chapter title, highlighted in a shaded box. Through these semiotic choices, the DJELR is directing the text’s readers to ‘what is required’, to ‘the major issues’ it has identified as the ones to be addressed and ‘the manner’ in which the Department proposes to do so. This is textual evidence of the strong generic framing, of control in the management of perception, and the antithesis of any attempt at achieving dialogicality. In the same way that the argumentative
structure of the Minister’s text (old Ireland – new prosperous Ireland – linking with the international marketplace – the risk of slippage if we cannot remain competitive – the role of new workers/immigrants – the role of new legislation in ensuring future success, etc.) is reflected in the background section to Chapter One, so too can the flawed premise – the lack of explanatory argument – be traced back from Chapter One to the Minister’s foreword from the perspective of legitimation, through rationalisation and appeals to authority.

Clause Grammar: Modality

I would like to conclude the analysis of the semiosis of the discussion document with a focus on the textual work of relating; the problem (depoliticisation and the crisis of the public sphere, being one of social relations), and specifically on modality. Where the Minister’s argument appeals to rationality, where his assessment of what ‘is’ moves to a prescription of what ‘ought’ to be via the use of the modal auxiliary ‘needs’ – ‘migration needs to be managed’, and ‘procedures need to be established’ etc. – by paragraph five, he is moving away from a strategy of rationalisation to a strategy of legitimation through authorisation, or appeals to knowledge by reference to the authority of tradition, law, and of persons, in whom some kind of institutional authority is vested (Van Leeuwen & Wodak 1999). This precise trend is mirrored in the four paragraphs of the background section of Chapter One, where initially we find rationalisation through the use of epistemic and categorical modalities, or knowledge exchanges. Here the DJELR commits itself to expressions of truth, that is, instances of the expressive mood, the authority of the author in relation to the truth, as well as through bald statements of fact using the present simple tense.

In the first paragraph, for example, we find ‘It is accepted by all commentators on the Irish economy that immigration will continue to be an important feature for the foreseeable future’ (second line). This is a factive predicate, standing in for a factive verb, but which has presumably been chosen instead of employing a verbs like ‘to know’ or ‘to argue’ because these latter examples would draw attention to the subjective nature of the claim, which the factive predicate does not. Note too the passivisation, eliding the precise commentators or other agents whose view this is; followed by the related ‘the Irish immigration system has been able to facilitate the significant levels of legal migration to Ireland’, and ‘The immigration system has been able to facilitate these movements’ in the second paragraph. But when the reader gets to the final two paragraphs of the background section, from presentations of what is, and what is understood to be true, to prescriptions for action, or action exchanges, we find seven examples of deontic modality.
These are ‘The immigration system must therefore play the dual roles of being welcoming to bone fide visitors and also deterring those who have malevolent intentions in seeking to come to Ireland’ (3rd paragraph, seventh line); and ‘This is the delicate balance which the Irish immigration system, in common with all such systems worldwide, must try to achieve’ (eleventh and twelfth lines). In the next paragraph we find ‘In drawing up new legislation for the immigration system a similar balance must be achieved’, (4th paragraph first line); and immediately following this; ‘The legislation must be capable of dealing with the currently projected migration needs and allowing for flexibility and responsiveness in attracting qualifying migrants to Ireland.’ In looking to the reality the discourse seeks to bring into being, we find; ‘There will therefore be an ongoing requirement for significant immigration levels’ (sixth line). Then ‘The system will also need to be able to respond to the ongoing threats of illegal migration and trafficking in human beings’ (ninth line); and ‘The legislation and the administrative system must provide the means for dealing effectively with such threats’ (the twelfth and thirteenth and final lines of this section). The concentration of these modalities is characteristic of the directed nature of a promotional document over a genuinely dialogical one.

It should also be noted that in terms of authorisation and directedness, there is a shift from the declarative mood of knowledge statements and assertions, to the implied imperative of the deontic modalities (the demand form of an activity exchange, the author’s commitment to obligation or necessity through pre/proscription, or as here, through use of deontic modal auxiliaries). A further point on the issue of mood is that there are no questions, no examples of the interrogative mood in either Chapter One or the Minister’s foreword. In fact, it is in the listing of the chapter proposals that the strategy of legitimation by authorisation is most clearly displayed. As per the examples given above, the proposals are simple declarative statements, such as ‘The Bill will respect the principal of Ministerial discretion’ (from Chapter Three) or, more usually, deontic modalities, such as ‘There should be provision for the detention of persons refused permission to enter’ (Chapter Five); or ‘Penalties should be set for individuals who start businesses without the relevant permission’ (Chapter Seven); and ‘Primary legislation should allow the Minister to specify, in secondary legislation, schemes for persons seeking to migrate to Ireland for non-economic purposes’ (Chapter Ten). ‘Should’ as a strong modal auxiliary clearly directs the reader to ‘must’, or that the view of the experts in each case is ‘must’.

Overall, of the 138 iterations of modal auxiliaries employed in the Summary of Key Proposals section of Chapter One (and repeated across the openings of Chapters 2 to 14 inclusive), fully 100 are of the auxiliary ‘should’, there are also 11 instances of modal
adjective use, eight of which are uses of the adjective ‘necessary’. As the general textual analysis therefore shows, despite the heavy presence of these strong, deontic modalities in the presentation of the document’s key proposals, it has been clearly demonstrated that all sections of the discussion document analysed show frequent use of modal auxiliaries. In keeping with the observations of interdiscursive elements of the document, an investigation of the relational work of the text as expressed in modality features clearly supports the contention that the document is leading the reading to a particular understanding of immigration legislative reform, or how it is to be understood and how it is to be followed through. That is, the text depoliticises the issue as a primarily social and legal one and politicises it as an economic issue. The heavy presence of strong modal features is also indicative of the document’s attempt to control and manage perception of the legislative reform process along and within these precise politicised lines.

**Conclusion**

A summary reflection on the emerging significance of the issue of immigration to the Irish Republic during the period in question (as both a set of practices and its discursive elements) shows how it has come to be inimitably bound up with the economic life of the nation. From the efforts devoted to enticing Irish emigrants back to ‘their homeland’, to the flurry of revisions of visa and work permit regulations of the early years of the century, (as summarised in Chapter Three), all point to the ‘expert’ position – as advanced in the DJELR discussion document – that to avoid a descent into the fiscally challenged experience of the 1980s the national economy must continue to grow. From this position it follows that the economy must remain consistently competitive in an international market, and as such, workers must be found to enhance levels of flexibility central to maintaining a competitive edge. What quickly emerges from an official perspective however, is that in drastically relaxing the existing legislative framework on immigration, the Government, through the DJELR, is conflicted about the social aspect of such a change and therefore sets about trying to win support for policy change through directly appealing to the citizenry for input into the process. This four-year process (culminating in the 2005 discussion document analysed in this chapter) however, clearly points to the deployment of a set of strategies to both ensure passage of the legislation in a way desired by the Government (and DETE in particular), but also to inculcate in the electorate the fundamentals of the way immigration is now to be understood within the new globalised reality that we all inhabit.
The first task is not difficult to accomplish, since if it had wished the Government could have avoided any real difficulty by simply retaining the development of the new bill within the parliamentary system. But the fact that it chose to invite public input into the debate is illustrative of how high the stakes are in relation to the second challenge. Specifically, we see immigration discourse largely removed from the more traditional social practices related to security and control on the one hand, as well as from practices related to individual (human) and family rights on the other, and from their inherent orders of discourse. Instead the semiosis that emerges, and particularly clearly in the discussion document, sees a reorientation, or better, a recontextualisation of a generic and discursive mix of economic practices, and specifically of a pro-market neoliberal variety. Essentially immigration becomes part of an order of discourse of economic competitiveness. In this dynamic shift, texts like the discussion document are shown to play a major role. Central to the strategy of reformulating the semiosis of immigration are the twin processes of depoliticising and the management of perception. As a consequence, immigration is decoupled from traditional social orders and politicised within a different social order. Likewise, control over what the legislative reform is trying to do, or in this case, trying to safeguard, becomes largely a matter of public relations.

The analysis of the discussion document has therefore been an examination of indeed whether, and in which ways, this compound strategy has been realised semiotically. So when we read that the changed, modern reality expressed in the argumentative structure of the Minister’s foreword, both rationally (through assertion), and authoritatively (through modality) is construed as a list of known appearances in the present, indifferent to place, whose social agency is effaced, and which must be responded to in certain ways; we are clearly seeing evidence of processes of legitimisation and rationalisation as part of the macro-strategy of (de)politicisation. This is supported by the strong framing manifest in the advocative and report genres, the structure of the syntax (with its interchangeable clauses and sentences), the presentation of a list of evidences (in place of genuine explanation and argumentation), and the categorical un-modalised assertions of truth (as represented by a number of epistemic modalities with all subjectivity removed). These ideational observations on what is being favoured textually are significant since our ideological interest rests precisely in these authenticity claims, these claims to knowledge, evidenced by the use of weaker modality forms. As a result, the discussion document both construes the modern world and the change associated with it as an inevitable reality. And in closing down avenues to debate rather than opening them up, the promotional nature of the document strongly resists any concession to alternative perspectives on Ireland’s place in modernity and
the official responses that this might demand, notwithstanding other more fundamental non-market oriented issues related to immigrants and their welfare.

These features together construe the new economy as a simple fact to which there is no alternative, and having established what ‘is’, what exists, and highlighting certain opportunities and threats for its readership, the text carefully configures the ‘ought’, that is, a thematic shift to the necessary national responses through legitimation by authorisation – in both the foreword and more explicitly in Chapter One – textually construed by extensive use of deontic modalities. In this way the global economy, and specifically in ‘our’ case its desire for competitive labour markets and their flexible workforces, is located within the realm of necessity, and therefore outside the realm of contingency and deliberation, ostensibly outside the realm of politics, which semiotically realises the macro-strategy of (de)politicisation. We can say that in so far as the sort of discourse present in the discussion document is not dialogical, yet achieves significant public acceptance, which it has, it is a major part of the obstacles to addressing the social problem of neoliberalism’s order of discourse undermining forms of deliberative democracy at a deep-seated level.

In this analysis we can see how the national and international networks that Irish Governmental strategies are embedded within, the consensual character of mainstream politics in Ireland and an influential political discourse – as exemplified in the DJELR text – which in various ways contribute to an eradication of the conflictual equilibrium central to a functioning democracy, are all advanced through ‘consultation’ as a strategy of (de)politicising and an elaborate exercise in public relations. As such, this analysis of official semiosis has identified a number of obstacles to addressing the crisis of the public sphere, and has shown how semiosis plays a significant controlling role in managing perception and facilitating this problem. Where the space of public dialogue, the public sphere has been officially managed and compromised to such a degree as to be denuded of its public nature, to be effectively fake, how are we to proceed? Can we, for example, go about assessing what happens when – unlike the case with the immigration discussion document – the state, willingly or otherwise, is structurally locked into a consultative and deliberative process on national policy development involving formalised public and civil society bodies that have been explicitly invited to participate in the process? This is the goal of the next chapter.

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Chapter Six

Childcare: Developing a National Strategy

By the late nineteen nineties the macro-level political concertation process of social partnership had radically expanded its participation base to include a ‘community and voluntary pillar’. Composed of members of a number of local and national anti-poverty and equality groups, non-governmental organisations, and socially-active religious groups, the pillar was presented as a way of advancing the social and anti-poverty agenda at a time when the economic picture in Ireland had vastly improved since the first social partnership arrangement of 1987. From the beginning however, this process was not universally seen by the members of this grouping as being as progressive or even as inclusive as they had been led to believe (see Connolly 2008). In fact, some representatives from the pillar went as far as to claim that their inclusion within the process was no more than a ‘smoke screen’ that simply allowed the Government to present itself as serious about tackling deep-seated issues of inequality and social exclusion (Murphy 2002). Indeed, as far back as 1997 members argued that these issues were being treated merely as ‘residual issues’ to issues of pay and taxation policy (Community Workers’ Co-operative 1997).

When in 1998, for example, we see the National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCI) publically express its frustration immediately after the delivery of the Minister for Finance’s budget speech for 1999, at the decision not to invest in affordable childcare at a time of a well-trailed budget surplus, we can see evidence of the kind of conflict inherent in the uneasy day-to-day relationship that developed between the state and the social pillar. By ignoring this basic recommendation from the Expert Working Group on childcare (EWG), and informing the Government that a vital opportunity had being missed – and by rhetorically asking how the government could in effect have wasted the 18 months’ work of social partnership’s EWG, going as far as to call the policy omission a ‘slap in the face’ (Murphy-Lawless 2000: 93) – we get an insight into the level of distrust and rancour at play. I will return to the overarching dynamic of the social partnership process in the next chapter, but here I want to pick up the specific issue of social policy debate and the prevailing conflictual equilibrium by looking at the area of childcare policy development in particular.

At the broad level where the emerging hegemonic economistic discourse on immigration policy remained unbowed by a process of public consultation, as interrogated, there remains the possibility of assessing whether it is conceivable to expect that such processes can function effectively elsewhere. That is, whether the orders of discourse of
other areas of social practice can be jointly negotiated between the state and civil society in such as way as to demonstrate an effective public sphere. In terms of my broader research question there therefore remains the question of whether there is semiotic evidence of government with a neoliberal ethos facilitating the advance of a genuinely deliberative process. One way to pursue this challenge is to focus on areas of social practice and their orders of discourse where the encroachment of the economic into the social, cultural, and political life of the nation might be anticipated to be part of the picture. I therefore propose the governmental preoccupation with labour market growth and flexibility in the years leading to the new millennium, as identified previously, as an appropriate starting point for such further study.

As successive governments have identified the control of the labour supply as one of the few tools available to them in maintaining economic competitiveness and enhance national economic growth, many of the reports and interventions on the matter (see ESG 2004, ESRI 1998, and FÁS 1999) have pointed to the need to focus on increasing the number of women in the workforce. This position has naturally put the issue of childcare centre stage in debates about skills, services, and ultimately about would-be employees being locked outside and effectively lost to the jobs’ market. Indeed, as part of the social partnership deliberations for Partnership2000 (P2000) (1997) official documents raising the issue of a national childcare strategy are highlighted as far back as 1980 (EWG 1999: 104). In researching official texts on childcare it would therefore be expected that discourses of competitiveness and growth are to be found in a way that they might not be so readily anticipated in texts on, for example, immigration. This is true, but what also becomes clear is that apart from the labour market concerns of the Department of Trade and Employment (DETE), or quasi autonomous bodies like the Enterprise Strategy Group (ESG); the issue of childcare is raised equally as much, at least historically, in the fields of health care provision, of education and early childhood development, and more recently in the field of gender equality, as a central component of steps to combat social exclusion.

The challenge for my work therefore is to assess to what degree recent discussion and debate on childcare and childcare policy development has been predominantly construed semiotically within the field of economic practices at the expense of these other practices. My specific objectives therefore are to investigate whether the market-oriented debate in this period was confined to economic texts, with the equality debate being restricted to social policy documents only – a clear separation, or ‘insulation’ of practices – or whether there was some movement, some colonisation of debates in one field by the practices emblematic of another field, of one order of discourse. Also, where such a colonising dynamic is
identifiable through semiotic analysis, the task is to identify how this has been accomplished, or what the analysis of individual texts can tell us about the discursive ways in which such processes have been taking place. Finally, and again, in terms of the broader research question, what was the role of public debate in such a dynamic, and is there evidence of official strategies being designed to control open dialogue and debate. In essence, is there evidence of a strategy of (de)politicisation being employed in the contemporary formulation of an order of discourse of childcare provision?

Specifically, I will undertake a critical analysis of a Ministerial speech from 2006 on an element of the second national childcare strategy (2006 – 2010) as well as the National Childcare Strategy document of the Expert Working Group on childcare (EWG), (1999). In terms of my broader objective however, limiting the approach to an analysis of two official texts on childcare is insufficient. The construction of official debates on childcare being historically wide-ranging requires a certain amount of historical or – in the Foucauldian sense – archaeological work, to reveal the genesis and development of those discourses and those practices in which childcare has featured. The main focus of my work in this chapter therefore is to assess to what extent recent official debates on childcare, in so far as they are conceived as being inclusive of all stakeholders, can be taken as being examples of genuine public sphere dialogue.

Practically then, the primary analytical task in this chapter is to examine whether the work of the EWG that emerged out of the P2000 national concertation process actually functioned as a healthy public sphere. This group was drawn together specifically to draft a first national childcare strategy, with its membership drawn from the post-1997 augmented social partnership family, totalling over eighty representative groups. The group was not completely autonomous since it was tied into the P2000 process and had to report to Government through the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), but it nevertheless was designed to include all the areas covered by official childcare reports up to its founding in July 1997, making a concerted effort to attract all stakeholders.

The group’s final report (1999), the first national childcare strategy text, forms the basis of my attempt to meet this chapter’s second two objectives on the means and manner of colonisation of practices and the effect on the public sphere, as outlined above. This work takes place in the second part of Stage 2’s step three (Step 3(b)) of the explanatory critique framework that I am adopting for my work. This is a new analytical approach for this work and involves the application of Fairclough’s model for assessing a discursive practice as a healthy public sphere (as outlined in Chapter Four above). This detailed engagement with the EWG text involves some archaeological work on texts that fed into its formation and
particularly on the tensions that emerged from the different objectives of such texts and their authors. The analysis is therefore primarily concerned with issues of the regulation of debate and the recontextualisation of social practices that emerge in the period under review in the discourse of childcare policy development.

The analysis of the Minister’s speech from 2006 in the first part of Stage 2’s step three follows a more conventional analytical format. In assessing an actually implemented programme, the task is also reliant on some archaeological work on the imprint of the mixture of texts, still partially visible in this document, and with a focus on genre-mixing, discourses, and textual strategies employed, the analysis essentially completes a significant piece of genealogical work. That is, to uncover the origin of practices in their discursive form in earlier texts that later combine to produce policies the Government is willing to support, and what this says about the neoliberal credentials of the Government. This work therefore comes before the analysis of the EWG text to illustrate those sets of practices that come to be symptomatic of the type of childcare policies that ultimately find favour with the state, but also, through the archaeological dimension, to help contextualise the deeper engagement with the EWG document.

In terms of the chapter layout more generally, in Stage 1 of the analytical framework I formulate an approach to childcare debate, the EWG, and a structured public consultation process that allows the subsequent analysis to say something about strategies of (de)politicisation and the way non-state approved perspectives come to be undermined and effectively eroded. The politicisation of childcare as an issue involved in the setting up of the EWG allows for an investigation of the level of ‘communicative rationality’ (Crossley 2004: 91-96) that the process is willing to tolerate. It is this construction of the research object that ensures useful conclusions can be drawn from the analysis then undertaken. In Stage 2, step one I return to the issues of recontextualisation and the dialectics of discourse more generally, again to highlight the value of an examination of the EWG, and to facilitate an appropriate development of the analytical work that follows in steps three and four, as outlined above.

The chapter conclusion therefore attempts to sum up to what degree it can be said that the EWG on childcare (1997-1999) acted as a genuine space for public sphere dialogue, as an inclusive space for speech and action, and as a result of the combined analysis, what the particular experience of this group tells us about (de)politicisation as an official strategy. Moreover, in building on the observations on immigration in the preceding chapter and in advancing the critical possibilities for this work as a whole, I end this chapter with a

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1 ‘Communicative rationality’ is Crossley’s term for capturing Bourdieu’s understanding of rationality and the role of semiotic practices in its production, based on interaction, appeals to logic, and the historically contingent nature of social organisation and the individual and group dispositions this produces.
reflection on how such a strategy operates within the public sphere, in contrast to the idea that the public sphere itself may have been actively co-opted as part of the macro-strategy of (de)politicisation and the generation of consensus within specific political parameters.

6.1 A Transdisciplinary Approach to Text Analysis

6.1.1 Stage 1: A social problem in its semiotic aspect:

Governance, social policy and civil society-state interaction

In terms of formal childcare provision in Ireland, a look at the context in which it emerges and the topics to which it is related, coupled with the stakeholders presented, reveals a consistent pattern. In the period leading to the production and publication of the EWG childcare report in 1999 and the adoption of a national childcare strategy, childcare and childcare provision, wherever it involves the active participation of the state, is always tangential to other socio-political issues. As per Fahey et al (2000), Murphy-Lawless (2000), and Ruane (1999), the primary issues are ‘gender equality’ and, by extension, the ability of women to participate in the labour market. Whether the push is coming from women themselves (the demand-side of the equation as outlined by the EWG) or the pull of economic strategists and employers on the other (the supply-side), nearly all the discourse revolves around access to employment and the prevailing impediments therein. Moreover, given the limited official action on the demand-side (facilitating abilities to access childcare), it can be argued that the demands of women’s groups and civil society generally have had little impact on policy development prior to the Partnership 2000 (P2000) process of 1997.

In contrast, it is rather, the Government’s desire to maintain a national competitive economy that has shocked it into action on childcare, leading ultimately to the setting up of the EWG in July of that year. As elaborated below, this is the unifying force of a perceived common ‘national’ threat, namely the imminent exhaustion of a flexible labour supply to facilitate the growing needs of the burgeoning economy of the late 1990s. As discussed by the Enterprise Strategy Group as late as 2004, with only immigration and a dwindling supply of returning émigrés to forestall this imminent tragedy, it was that large proportion of the ‘unproductive’ female population that concentrated the mind of Government, leading to a critical reflection on the unstructured approach to childcare then in place.

As illustrated by Fahey et al (2000: 247), the idiosyncrasies of the Irish situation ensured that though the country had developed consistently for the previous two decades, the
steep increase in female labour market participation since the 1970s was still lower than the EU average. Also, the benefits to the labour market of the natural decline in female fertility rates in this period were also being offset by a huge increase in children being born outside of marriage and being raised by single parents, for whom entry into the labour market was not being encouraged through and specific measures. By the mid-nineties it was clear that the characteristics of female labour market participation were being complicated by these demographic changes, and compounded by the nature of the Irish welfare and taxation systems (ibid.). In effect, the latter made it often more expensive for married women and mothers to enter or return to the labour market, and the former discouraged single mothers from seeing employment as an achievable goal for similar reasons.

Of the actors called upon to address the national challenge of freeing-up more women for the labour market in 1997 very few expressed the need for comprehensive childcare provision in any other light. The National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCI) were one of these few voices who did. Specifically, they called for investment in childcare as a fundamental investment in society’s future. Central to their childcare policy lobbying strategy (1998) was the claim that formal state investment in childcare should be seen as an investment in child development and in social cohesion. Employing the simple language of fiscal growth, the NWCI consistently stressed the future social dividend that would naturally accrue to the nation by investing small amounts of cash at the early stages of a child’s life, which would mitigate the need for a heavier investment in social integration initiatives in later years. Through their participation in the EWG, the NWCI and others at least ensured that ‘the rights and needs of children’ featured as the first principle of the emergent national childcare strategy, (EWG 1999: ii).

In contrast to the marginal voice of groups like the NWCI and their focus on childcare as part of an equality agenda, in the broad climate of childcare debate leading to the development of a national childcare strategy, the loudest voices present were those of the enterprise lobby, the employers’ bodies (IBEC 1998a & 1998b), and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (DETE). They viewed a roll-out of a comprehensive childcare policy as an essential way to ensure economic growth and continued national competitiveness. In being conscious of the unstructured mature of childcare provision in the state, all felt that it must be possible to do something with the prevailing ‘maximum private responsibility’ (Callan and Farrell, 1991) model in an attempt to engineer a flow of indigenous labour into the labour market. Another significant voice in the push to a national childcare strategy is that of the European Commission, which criticised Ireland for its lack of action in advancing gender equality (1998), specifically in terms of meeting criteria for
accessing future rounds of structural funds, (a concern moreover, that is also directly referenced in the final EWG report). As the social partnership process evolved, trade unions and some other civil society groups also began to give voice to a call for effective measures to advance and protect female equality, to eradicate social disadvantage, and promote cohesion inclusion.

It is noteworthy that in the period 1999 to 2006 the EWG’s report, and specifically its recommendations, remained the Government’s national childcare strategy. The fact that many of the recommendations were never implemented, however, and seemed, in effect, to have been deprioritised (particularly many of the demand-side measures directly related to a mother’s ability to take up work) did not see a reappraisal of the stated seven-year strategy. In understanding governments’ willingness to be proactive on the issue as having a fundamental economic imperative, it is perhaps likely that the post-2004 enlargement of the European Union and the generally unanticipated influx of immigrants from eastern Europe meant that the projected and much feared labour shortage of the mid-2000s, to which official action on childcare provision sought to respond, simply never materialised. In response to this state of affairs, with the report’s underlying progressive social considerations and the impact such policies might have had on intra-coalition tensions, fulfilling all the EWG’s recommendations seemed to effectively lose its appeal to successive governments.

Step 1. Selecting a social problem which can be approached in a transdisciplinary way

This chapter covers the same socio-political terrain as the chapter on immigration, with a similar critical perspective, namely, confronting the propensity of the actualisation and implementation of the neoliberal project by national governments to narrow public debate and to close off channels to the circulation of political difference on policy, strategy, and on the broader characteristics and dynamics of the project itself. In so far as this is a continuation of a discourse-analytic led examination of this reality, an appropriate semiotic point of entry to the social problem remains a focus on the semiotic realisations of the macro-strategy of (de)politicisation as part of a process of facilitating the crisis of the public sphere. More specifically however, the objective of this chapter is to move on from simply highlighting the short-comings, or built-in limitations of official efforts at engendering public debate (as seen in a ‘discussion document’ on immigration), that is, their centrality to an ultimately fake public space dialogue, and to more rigorously examine whether it was even possible to overcome the significant official impediments to effective public dialogue in the period in question.
In this light and in extending the transdisciplinary theorising for this chapter by drawing on Arendt’s position on the public sphere and Bernstein’s sociological categories of analysis, I will employ a framework for a CDA approach to researching public sphere dialogue developed by Fairclough (1999, 2010) and outlined above in Chapter Four. This theoretical position, coupled with the framework for analysis when combined, can constitute both a tool for description as well as a normative template for the evaluation of public space dialogue in terms of its quality or success in creating and supporting a genuine public sphere and in being a constituent for action. In short, with its central concentration on the dialectical relations between semiotic and other ‘moments’ of social practice, the research topic for this chapter is whether effective public sphere dialogue in Ireland was really feasible under the prevailing social conditions at the turn of the millennium.

Step 2. Constructing the object of research in a transdisciplinary way

In constructing the object of research in a more specific and identifiable way it is important to move away from the obvious limitations of endless reflections on whether public ‘discussion documents’ have their merits and are only compromised or ‘fake’ by virtue of the process. The broader challenge here is to interrogate the promotion-control dynamic of government (and related institutions and structures) when it comes to public involvement in policy development in its discursive aspect. The issue from a critical perspective for this work is therefore, not what it is that can be said about where government is falling down so much as what the government and state institutions were trying to achieve in the social practices related to public dialogue. Fairclough (2001b, 2002, and 2010) has already addressed the issue of an official preoccupation with ‘focus groups’ as a method of eliciting and informing public opinion. Habermas too has reflected on the flawed nature of such processes and their damaging impact on the public sphere (Crossley and Roberts 2004: 6). Both observations however, point to the permanent tension in governmental attempts to gain feedback and public involvement, which reveals official interactions with civil society, in the public space as a problem in need of serious attention. This is particularly the case when claims of ‘openness’ feature as a central component of official strategies being developed in the formation of national policy.

Drawing on Arendt (1958) Fairclough (2010: 397) indentifies two virtues of a healthy public sphere. Firstly, in being based on a logic of identity, a public sphere crucially does not involve negotiation between pre-given identities, but is characterised by the ongoing construction, the emergence of a ‘we’ – the novel ‘we’ – of a collective identity. Secondly, a
public sphere links speech to action (and to power); that is, it is always a form of praxis. In this light public space dialogue is therefore largely defined by its discursive properties. In terms of the type of contribution that critical approaches to the analysis of discourse can make to research on public sphere discourse, Fairclough stresses that the question of the public sphere is centrally the question of what discursive practices, what forms of dialogue are available for civic deliberation. Since CDA contributes as an elaborate and socially framed understanding of the properties of practices of public dialogue, it can therefore evaluate existing practices and discern potential alternatives from the perspective of the public sphere.

**Governance and the Viability of a Public Sphere**

A thematic departure for this chapter is the framing of the broad debate on the issue of childcare provision – as signified by the establishment of the Expert Working Group and its final report – as a particular and identifiable space of public dialogue. As a network of intertwined and overlapping social practices – a social field – significantly discursive in nature, the focus on the EWG document contrasts with any focus on debate in some general but undefined public sphere. The caveat is that given the working group’s origin as an entity established by government, its public sphere credentials are already compromised to some degree by virtue of the centrality of the Government’s role in its functioning. As above, this partly explains why the working group’s report will not be analysed in isolation, and also why the nature of the analytical work is a departure in that the focus is not a detailed stand-alone interdiscursive and textual analysis, but an analysis of its health as a real public sphere, based on Fairclough’s framework for analysis of such spaces.

In this regard it is noteworthy that the issue of childcare policy achieves a national profile when it is politicised by government. As with immigration legislation reform, this process, as seen in the establishment of the expert working group, can be read as a strategy of ‘depoliticisation’ through governmental politicisation of a certain type or order. In short, the issue of childcare is to be debated, to be prioritised among social issues, but on terms dictated by the demands of national governance. But with regard to the thesis aims, as outlined, and the role of analysis, this official intervention makes this particular way of constructing the object of research on childcare policy all the more interesting and relevant as an area of study.

As the ideal public sphere requires undistorted communication (Habermas 1972) on the one hand, and where Bourdieu (1998a) maintains that many fields operating in the period of late capitalism exist only as flawed prototypes of communicative forms, being ‘colonised’
and thus corrupted by economic encroachment on the other; I present Fairclough’s framework as a response, as a discourse-analytic contribution to this assessment. That is, as a way of assessing Bourdieu’s claim by providing semiotic evidence from the field of childcare policy development, to support or challenge the genuineness of the working group’s level of ‘communicative rationality’ over its ‘systematically distorted communication’. Also, in underlining Bourdieu’s view that the real world conditions of discourse (power, constraint, strategic action) appear necessarily as contaminants (Crossley 2004: 110), in approaching the semiosis of the childcare debate, the centrality of governmental discourse can be contextualised in this way, as potential encroachment, colonisation, and contamination. Moreover, as an extension of the objectives of the chapter on immigration discourse, with the semiotic analysis that follows I am essentially examining the interrelationship between (de)politicisation as a strategy for undermining the public sphere and interventions in the public sphere as a strategy within the broader macro-strategy of (de)politicisation with a view to contextualising an analytical approach in the subsequent chapter.

6.1.2 Stage 2: Obstacles to resolving the social problem:

The merging of national social and economic agendas in the emergence of a discourse of childcare

As an extension of the focus of analysis in the previous chapter but one that inhabits the same field, the same network of social practices, the three steps of critique within this stage of the analytical framework being employed remain those of the previous chapter. In the third step however, I will present the work in two parts (Step 3(a) and Step 3(b)), with the later work directly related to an analysis of the experience of the EWG on childcare above, as an instance of public sphere interaction, referenced in the methodology chapter, and which I will elaborate further in step two, below. What is required here is a restatement of the network of practices that give rise to the conditions that sustain the problem, namely strategies designed to marginalise conflicting views and alternative ideas about childcare policy in the name of maintaining socio-political consensus as a requirement to the adjustment of practices in a non-economic field in the image of economic practices within a neoliberal paradigm.

Following this there is the need to focus on the manner and the degree to which the social problem is a product of its discursive features, of the role semiosis plays within the relevant network of practices. This necessitates a focus on the texts being analysed and the methods being employed, which will be discussed in the next step. There then follows the
analysis of the semiosis itself, combining a structural assessment with a focus on the order of discourse and predominantly on interdiscursive features of the texts. The first text is approached in a conventional way as laid out heretofore and is addressed in the first part of step three, (Step 3(a)). This is followed by the analysis of the second text, which is approached as a specific instantiation of public sphere discourse, examined using Fairclough framework, and as outlined and explained further in the second part of step three, (Step 3(b)).

Step 1: Analysing the dialectical relations between semiosis and other social elements

*The Networks of Practices the Problem is Located Within*

By virtue of the setting up of the Expert Working Group on childcare and the Government’s role in the process, governmental discourse is a central feature of the childcare debate. As such, obstacles to the problem being tackled remain located in the network of practices within which governmental discourse is embedded. Official texts are necessarily located within one practice, childcare policy reform, but also reside within the broader network of practices that constitute government and the related networks of which government is a part, as well as the practices that inform the policies being implemented. In this way the structural relations between the fields of the economic and the non-economic, which includes colonisation of the latter by the former, is of central concern here. This means that the contemporary processes of restructuring and rescaling are as relevant to the childcare debate as to immigration. This approach, elaborated below, will try to highlight those semiotic aspects of government strategies and policies which have implications for resolving obstacles to the social problem being addressed from the way in which the approach to childcare discourse has been conceived and as this relates to my overarching research interest.

*The Dialectical Relations between Semiosis and other Social Elements; (Orders of discourse and elements of social practice, texts and elements of events)*

The processes of restructuring and rescaling have important material implications for social structure, social practice, and social events. In the neoliberal globalist economy national governments, such as that of the Irish Republic, see themselves as competing in an international trading arena. The perennial focus is to try ever harder to create and improve the conditions for successful competition in the global economy in those areas over which it has some control, such as the indigenous labour market. In this light, when official state groups, such as the ESG or the EGFSN, point to the inherent dangers that a diminishing
labour supply will pose to the health of the national economy, the neoliberal state is likely to respond proactively.

Given the role that the neoliberal discourse of globalisation plays in the dynamic of colonising other fields, it logically follows then that any such restructuring and rescaling in the area of childcare policy development should be identifiable in the discourse of childcare. More explicitly, the networks of social practices that such processes of restructuring and rescaling entail are also orders of discourse which themselves cut across structural and scalar boundaries. The semiotic dimension of these processes may begin as discourses, as imaginary projections, as potentially new ways of structuring social policy, but in the same way that particular structures and practices (realised in particular discourses and genres) become entrenched, become essentially hegemonic in the economic sphere (and therefore in the field of neoliberal governance and management), they also always have the potential to become ‘recontextualised’. In so far as they become hegemonic they may be operationalised in new structures, practices, relations, and institutions in the field of social policy. In short, the semiotic dimension of policy development and change is a central part of the obstacles to addressing the crisis of public sphere dialogue. Moreover, as these policy processes have a large textual character, they therefore require textual analysis.

These official state strategies are formed, disseminated, and legitimised within complex chains and networks of events (for example – as highlighted in the previous chapter – through meetings, reports, parliamentary debates, press statements, speeches, etc.). These events are also largely chains of networks of texts, being different types of texts systematically linked together in particular generic structures, (as discussions, reports, debates, etc.) which semiotically constitute procedures of governance. Following the interrogation of the semiotic aspect of governance and immigration, it can be anticipated that in a national deliberative programme on more central issues of social policy – of addressing social exclusion, poverty, gender inequality around an issue like childcare provision – that the official perspective of the globalised economic framework might be even more directly at play. That is, even where the process seeks to be materially inclusive, as is this case, there should be clear evidence of existing practices and their representations (in discourses), codified in other texts in particular ways (in genres) being formally imposed on new sets of practices in a new and distinct policy area like childcare. In fact, we might anticipate an even greater level of orientation of national policy towards economic imperatives than policy examined previously simply by virtue of the historical distance between the pre-existing fields of economic and social policy formation.
Step 2: Selection of texts and categories of analysis

In so far as ideology is a relation between meaning (here texts) and social relations of power and domination (Fairclough 2010: 79), and is firstly a matter of representation or construal, my primary analytical area of focus with regard to the official texts in this chapter is therefore on discourse(s). This is particularly so with the recontextualisation of discourses, as this process can constitute meaning as a modality of power relations across networks of practices, or more simply, as recontextualisation can make meaning ideological. With novel representations emerging and gaining political capital – becoming hegemonic – in the economic field for example, such representations are more readily construed in other networks of practices as sets of imaginary projections for new relations of structure and scale in other fields and in this way becoming widely recontextualised (Fairclough 2010: 244).

That is, relations of structure and scale can semiotically manifest themselves through intertextuality; the presence of texts from one domain, (structure and/or level of scale) in texts of another domain. In so far as such relations become hegemonic, as per the conception of a dialectics of discourse, they may then be operationalised (become everyday events) in new structures, relations, and institutions – where the operationalisation itself has a partly semiotic aspect in the emergence and dissemination of genres and genre chains or networks – thereby facilitating the governance of these complex new networks.

The issue of recontextualisation of practices in the development of a national childcare strategy and childcare policy more generally, is therefore a central component of the semiotic analysis within this chapter. In fact, although I assess the Minister’s speech from an interdiscursive and linguistic perspective as well as from the perspective of recontextualisation, the analysis of the EWG report is primarily restricted to the issue of the recontextualisation of hegemonic discourses originating outside the field of social policy. Processes of regulation and recontextualisation are deeply embedded within and constitutive of the new structural and scalar relations and are therefore a central obstacle to addressing the crisis of the public sphere, which necessarily elevates the importance given to processes of official communication. This is why official consultation processes are generally significant for analytical purposes of a critical type. The particular focus on recontextualisation however requires that a fourth step be added to the explanatory framework deployed here.

Fairclough’s framework for the analysis of a discursive practice as a healthy public sphere, as summarised in section 4.3.4 of Chapter Four, will therefore be elaborated again in step three (part b) below, with a focus on the EWG national childcare strategy report.

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2 See attached CD-ROM; Chapter 6, documents 6.1, 6.2.i and 6.2.ii.
Unlike one-off public consultation documents, the working group established by the social partners through the P2000 programme is a collective of official and civil society representatives, from a number of fields, all with a direct involvement in issues relating to childcare and/or social and political concerns that can benefit from the introduction of effective, affordable, and accessible childcare strategies. In this light I will address the work of the group as expressed through its final national strategy document from 1999 to interrogate the veracity of the claim that it acted as a genuine space for public sphere dialogue and action. The work in Stage 2, step three (b) will therefore also provide the main methodological focus of the discourse-analytical work of this chapter. Firstly, I want to begin the analytical process by outlining the first text being analysed as it is only in doing so at this stage that the merit of the discourse-analytical course of action to be taken becomes clear.

**Outline of Documents and Observations**


*The speech of the Minister for Children at the launch of the initiative*

*(11 August 2006)*

Presented as an element of the national Childcare Strategy for 2006-2010, the Early Childcare Supplement (ECS) is a very specific measure designed specifically to meet the demand-side needs of parents for material support in accessing childcare. As a direct payment to parents moreover, it is a policy with no precedent in terms of childcare policy in Ireland. The scheme’s operation bridged the 2000-2006 childcare strategy and continued into the 2006-2010 childcare strategy, but having been cut back in May 2009, the supplement was eventually wound up at the end of 2009. I want to look at Minister Brian Lenihan’s (Fianna Fáil) speech (OMC 2006) at the official launch of this programme, from August 11th, 2006, and in particular at its construction of discourses of (parental) ‘choice’ and of ‘partnership’ and their origin. I also address the textual strategies adopted to facilitate the emergence of such discourses in the set of practices related to childcare support. Moreover, by incorporating the analysis of discourses and the broader work the speech is trying to accomplish through its generic structure, the analysis of this short two-page document also allows for further interrogation of recontextualised practices more generally.


*The National Childcare Strategy document for 2000-2006*

In explaining where the impetus for a national childcare strategy originates, the this document (EWG 1999) foregrounds the P2000 process in whose ‘spirit’ the work of the ‘expert group’
has taken place. In the foreword the EWG chairperson draws from the P2000 document (Chapter 11) to summarise elements of this broader process. On the one hand partnership is reified; ‘Partnership […] is a key mechanism’, ‘the partnership process reflects…’, ‘partnership is characterised by…’, and ‘the partnership process involves…’ (ibid. iii). Yet simultaneously the process is characterised by its problem solving approach, in which various interest groups jointly address common issues, and that this requires partnership to involve ‘trade-offs between and within interested groups’ (page iii). The foreword also goes on to state that separate from the general social partnership process, in the work of the EWG itself ‘many tensions’ arose and that developing a national childcare strategy document became ‘a complex matter’ (page iii). These tensions however are not named or described explicitly in the 20-page Executive Summary, the six pages of Introduction, or in the 120-page document. The document’s Executive Summary (pages iv to xx) summarises the content of the document’s eight chapters and its recommendations. Here I will summarise both the composition of the working group and of its final national childcare strategy report, and make some observations drawn from the text’s Introduction relevant to its analysis as a focus for genuine public sphere dialogue.

The report, published in February 1999, was the culmination of almost two years’ work by the EWG. It was to be the guiding document for the development and roll-out of a first national childcare strategy in the Irish Republic. Its production was seen as being central to better meeting the objectives of the P2000 programme, or Partnership 2000 – for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness (1997-2000), to give it its full title. The strategy was also set to influence policy on childcare in the next Partnership process, the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, set to run from 2000-2002 and beyond. The report’s executive summary of 20 pages follows the chairperson’s foreword and comprises a summary of each of the full report’s eight chapters. Between the summaries for chapters seven and eight for no obvious reason, a coloured box presents eleven recommendations divided between supply and demand-side measures (page vii). Not only are these only a selection of the report’s twenty-seven recommendations, (which are presented in the order in which they appear in the full report, after the eight chapter summaries on pages viii to xi) but these recommendations, all taken come from chapter seven, do not even cover all of that chapter’s fifteen recommendations.

Being situated at this point in the Executive Summary, the exact origin of these recommendations is not immediately clear, nor why they alone are being given such prominence. All of this information is then presented in Irish. The executive summary is followed by a six-page introduction, and subsequently by the eight chapters. Each of these
chapters presents the relevant recommendations in greater details (presented again in coloured boxes). The report concludes with a bibliography, a series of twelve appendices spread over thirty two pages, as well as a glossary and list of abbreviations. Just like the case of the Immigration document, the strategy of developing a national childcare policy was opened up to public contributions, but unlike that process it was the EWG itself that oversaw the process of producing the strategy document. Of course, as a group representative of the social partners, the Government at all times had a strong input into the process alongside the new community and voluntary pillar members of the social partnership programme.

Overseen by the DJELR, the EWG was set up to be as representative as possible, ultimately involving eighty stakeholders from government, the social partners, statutory bodies, NGOs, and parents. Over one hundred individuals are listed as having participated in its work over the two years of its life. As well as receiving 135 submissions in advance of its work, the group also commissioned a number of pieces of work during its lifespan (such as the Goodbody report on the Economics of Childcare, as referenced). The document’s Introduction, placed after the Executive Summary and before Chapter 1, gives a good overview of the challenges faced by the group and its assessment of how it sought to overcome them. It is at this point that I begin my analysis in the second part of step three, (step 3(b)) below.

**Categories of analysis**

The substance, authenticity, and relative health of the national public sphere dialogue on childcare policy development is to be assessed by concentrating on the EWG childcare report – ‘The National Childcare Strategy, 2000-2006’. Published in 1999, and emanating from the broader P2000 Social Partnership process, this is the government-facilitated result of an elaborate consultative process involving many actors and agencies, public and private, whose mission was to produce a first ever childcare strategy for the Irish state. The analysis will be an assessment of elements of this report, primarily its summary sections (contents, principles, and recommendations) in terms of the socially productive work or action they are doing and their representational or ideological dimensions, reflected semiotically in a focus on genres and discourses. The second component of analysis is a comparative analysis of the particular mix of genres and discourses with those that feature in a number of publicly circulated Governmental texts. Specifically, I am addressing a governmental speech by the Minister for Children at the launch of the ‘The Early Childcare Supplement’ (August 2006). Reference will also be made to other official texts, namely; the Budget Speech, 1999 (Dec. 1998) – delivered by the Minister for Finance, the Tax Strategy Group – Discussion Paper on
Childcare (2004), and the Goodbody Report on the economics of childcare provision (1998), (see Appendix 3).

In terms of (de)politicisation strategies, the analysis of the EWG report might be seen as a sufficient focus for this chapter but I include the analysis of the Minister’s speech here for three reasons. Firstly, the speech text is a completely official text in a way that the EWG report, as a compiled document involving many civil society voices, was not. Secondly, with a focus on interdiscursive and textual analysis, the focus on the Ministerial speech brings the neoliberal-nature of actually implemented childcare policy and childcare policy discourse into sharper relief. Finally, and related to the last point, the nature of the analysis of the official text provides evidence for a broad characterisation of the governmental position on childcare policy and childcare provision policy, which the aspirations contained in the earlier EWG document can be contrasted against. In terms of explicit categories of analysis for the Minister’s ECS speech, the analytical focus is on word use, modality, discourse, genre, genre chaining, intertextuality, recontextualisation, and on orders of discourse.

In fulfilling this chapter’s objectives, the broad task is to try to ascertain to what extent the EWG functioned as a genuine and effective public space for dialogue and action based on a later reading of the characteristics of the official discourse on childcare as evidenced in the analysis of the speech text. Explicitly, the challenge is to both gauge the public sphere credentials of the expert working group process as reflected in its final report, and in parallel, to assess what the Government’s childcare priorities – through the programmes that it ultimately implemented – reveals about the (de)politicisation of issues and the suppression of public debate through the tight control of the parameters of the dialogical process. Or, to examine to what degree the semiotic component of official childcare policy reflects the aspiration of the working group, as discursively constructed. In terms of specific categories of analysis, with a focus on interdiscursive analysis, the analytical interest is in discourse, genre, classification and framing, that is, on regulation strategies; and on the dialectic moments of emergence, hegemony and recontextualisation, as well as on legitimisation strategies of rationalisation. Procedurally, for reasons that should now be clear, the analysis of the Government’s speech text will be presented first before the analysis of the report of the EWG.
Step 3(a): Analysis of the Text: Choice, ‘parental choice’ and an evolving construction of ‘partnership’

The Early Childcare Supplement (ECS 2006):

*The speech of the Minister for Children at the launch of the initiative*

As a contribution to the childcare costs of parents, The Early Childcare Supplement (ECS) was significant for a number of reasons that I shall briefly cover here. Firstly, the ECS responded exclusively to the demand-side needs of parents in accessing childcare. Unlike the ECS, most Government policies in the childcare arena, both up to and after 2006, responded only to supply-side issues, to issues related to increasing the provision of childcare places. Secondly, the ECS was a non-means tested universal cash payment made directly to parents. Under the terms of the ECS, everyone with children under six years of age was eligible for the same payment, which, just like child benefit payments, was an untied cash payment. Thirdly, the ECS was presented and justified as affording parents ‘choice’, choice to spend the money how they wished, and as they saw most suitable. On a broader level, and with measures like the ECS, the Government was in practice simultaneously withdrawing from any obligation or involvement in delivering and overseeing any structured national programme to provide accessible and regulated childcare. With the ECS the Government’s role in materially providing childcare places and parental access effectively ended.

The universality of the supplement is also significant in that it is indicative of the Government’s desire not to use the taxation system, particularly personal tax allowances or tax credits, as a way of trying to make childcare more affordable, (a move incidentally that many contributors to the EWG had specifically requested). This issue had been on the agenda since at least the 1999 budget (December 1998) when the Minister for Finance, Charlie McCreevy (Fianna Fáil), had used the taxation system to tackle supply-side childcare issues by allowing employers to offset expenditure on in-work childcare facilities through tax rebates. After grappling with the issue since the 1999 budget, for a number of reasons but primarily for ones of ‘equity’ – of treating all working people in the same fashion regardless of their family situation – Minister McCreevy and subsequent governments, decided against using the taxation system to help aid parents offset childcare costs.

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3 This was a novel development for childcare since earlier supports in offsetting childcare places for parents on low incomes within the Community Childcare Subvention Scheme were not given to parents, but to the childcare providers.

4 For an elaborated position on this matter, see page 17 of the 1999 budget speech (1998) and the Taxation Steering Group report on childcare from 2004.
Also, though not mentioned explicitly in relation to childcare, there is a specific ideological issue being advanced here. The fact that both Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats had an affinity with a low taxation economy, meant that there was also a drive to keep as many working people as possible out of the tax net. Prioritising measures such as the ECS therefore also allowed the Government to maintain that as working parents were paying relatively little income tax (in comparison to, for example, the EU norm) there would be no great benefit to families from any childcare-rebated taxation windfall. In this vein, on page 13 of the Minister for Finance’s 1999 Budget Statement (in the section on Taxation Policy), he states:

I have repeatedly - and ad nauseam to some - said that high rates in many areas of taxation - corporation, personal, capital, inheritance - lead to disincentive, evasion and finally less yield to the Exchequer, which ultimately constrains a Government from implementing progressive social policies to which all of us subscribe.

And:

The cry from the opponents of this view is best summarised as follows: they would prefer less economic activity which would mean no money to implement such policies. I do not subscribe to that view. (Dáil Éireann 1998)

In other words, for the government less tax and the perception of greater level of economic activity is the priority.

The key policy shift that takes on these issues, and the one that also demonstrates Fianna Fáil’s desire to use cash payments in contrast to amendments in the personal taxation system, is the decision to use Child Benefit (and its existing Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs system) as the primary vehicle for meeting demand-side childcare needs. This shift is captured in the text of the Tax Strategy Group report (2004); specifically, in a section entitled ‘Recent Increases in Child Benefit’, page 2, paragraph 8; the text reads:

Following considerable prior examination, in Budget 2001, the Government decided as a matter of policy that Child Benefit would be the main instrument through which support would be provided to parents with children. The core objective was to provide support that would offer choice to parents whatever way they chose to care for their children. Child Benefit does not distinguish between whether a parent is working or not and applies to all income levels whereas tax relief for paid childcare would be of little or no benefit to those with low or no incomes. (TSG 2004: 2)

The text makes it clear that Child Benefit, which had been increasing regularly since the 1999 surplus budget, is the chosen vehicle for dealing with demand-side measures and
significantly, that the ‘core objective’ is to support parents in their choices, and that such a methodology is justifiable in that it is equitable, that is, it does not discriminate against any category of parent, essentially the goal of Fianna Fáil. I content that it is in this climate that the speech launching ECS payment has to be viewed.

The Speech Content

The illocutionary force within the policy speech means that the Minister for Children (and the Government) is the agent in each of the printed version’s thirteen paragraphs. And though there is no sharp textual separation between media focused promotional elements followed by substantive reporting or documentary sections on the policy’s detail, this division and this generic flow is still present. The promotional detail, the programme title, the role of Government, the total funds being dispersed, the actual weekly payment amounts etc., are presented across the first five paragraphs. The next four paragraphs deal with the related issues of the Government’s thinking behind the policy, its exposition of its (ideological) position, the universality of the payment and the desire to support families in a particular way. And the final four paragraphs cover references to the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs (DSCFA) who are to oversee implementation of payments, and tie the ECS and Government into the broader childcare related polices, with a final summary line. That is, the Minister is listing information about the policy and policies more broadly, stressing figures and other programmes in a documentary genre, but this is done alongside the task of introducing the measure and repeatedly selling its positive features.

As a media event, the Minister’s speech can be critically analysed as recontextualising social practices according to the logic of the practices it draws upon. Specifically, the generic hybridisation that results from the chaining of the media genre and the documentary genre as semiotic elements of two practices; a speech (or press conference) and of a report (a presentation of an accumulation of declaration) should prove analytically accessible. The recontextualised practice manifests itself in its recontextualised form as a particular discourse (or discourses), and in the process both construing and then representing its ideological character in a semiotic form. From the perspective of hybridity, transition, and relexicalisation, I want to address the Minister’s speech from this perspective; to look at the interplay of action and representation, as semiotically expressed in genre and discourse, to interrogate the ideological character of the speech at a deeper level than can be accessed by reading off the surface of the text. Specifically, my objective is to focus on the recontextualisation of social practices in the relationship between Government and the public (here parents) in terms of the concepts of ‘choice’ and ‘partnership’. To better contextualise
analysis along these lines however, and to provide a deeper grounding for any conclusions, some additional information is required in relation to the Government’s decision to use direct cash payments as the primary response to meeting demand-side childcare issues.

As a contribution commissioned by the EWG, and facilitated by the DJELR, in the late 1990s Goodbody Economic Consultants were asked to undertake a ‘Study on the Economics of Childcare in Ireland’. Carried out in conjunction with the ESRI, the Department of Psychiatry, UCD, and the Policy Studies Institute, UK, part of their task was to undertake a comparative approach, assessing childcare policies in a number of countries to produce a set of proposals on childcare policy, particularly in terms of its potential impact upon Ireland’s economy. In chapter 8, ‘Policy Proposals’, section 3, ‘Introduction of a National Childcare Strategy’, (Goodbody 1998: 77); the report states ‘that State intervention to support childcare from an economic viewpoint should address identified market failures and should be directly targeted at the purchase of childcare places’. In other words, that a priority should be to help families meet the costs of quality childcare for their children, that is, a demand-side measure, (a point taken up in the EWG’s final report). But this point is even more interesting when the related footnote is read. It states:

most economists take the view that State supports to households are best given in cash rather than kind and should not be earmarked for any purpose. [...] We do not take this view in relation to childcare for a number of reasons. [...] These arguments are particularly relevant to consideration of an increase in Child Benefit payment as a means of supporting childcare. [...] While a policy of increasing Child Benefit could be supported from many viewpoints, we do not believe that it is appropriate response in relation to childcare. (ibid. 77)

In effect, the Goodbody report on the Economics of Childcare is strongly advising the government not to use direct cash payments to families as a means of meeting demand-side childcare needs (the footnote actually provides three reasons for this), and specifically not Child Benefit payments (for which a further reason is given). And it is important to remember that this view is not from the perspective of tackling poverty and social exclusion, but from the perspective of improving the state’s economy via increasing the available labour pool, and then retaining workers within it. Yet, as has been seen, from the 1999 budget onwards this has happened, and by the 2001 budget it became Government policy. In fact, the language used in paragraph 8 of the TSG document above on the Government’s

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5 The reasons given are; 1. The case for state intervention in this area rests on a number of market failures and the policy measures adopted must directly address these. Cash grants which are not focused will fail in this regard. 2. Families with low incomes, for whom good quality childcare is most important, are least likely, given competing needs, to use cash grants to purchase childcare. 3. Children are not in a position to influence the decisions of their parents in this regard and will suffer if parents make wrong choices. (Goodbody 1998: 77).
preference for using direct payments to parents is mirrored in the Minister for Children’s 2006 ECS launch speech, a point that I will return to later. In other words, what the Government chose to do from 2001 onwards, in word and in deed, directly contravenes Goodbody’s assessment of how best to respond to the ‘market failures’ in facilitating effective demand-side childcare measures as part of a national childcare policy. It explicitly goes against the unambiguous advice that though direct payments are positive in most instances, the learned experience of experts is to avoid such measures where childcare is concerned.

Moreover, as late as 2004 the TSG report also acknowledges this fact. In parallel to the clarity of paragraph 8, referenced above on the decision to use Child Benefit to respond to demand-side childcare needs, entries such as paragraph 38, page 8 below, in the section on a ‘Universal Approach’, illustrate that the Government had other options available. The report states:

Given the difficulty of a targeted approach in terms of parental choice a number of options were considered by the Tax Strategy Group in 2000 before the Government decided on a child benefit approach. These options looked at providing a universal approach in a more selective way than child benefit. (TSG 2004)

Here the TSG can be seen to be acknowledging the sorts of concerns raised in the Goodbody report more directly. Moreover, despite its explanation or justification for direct cash payments the TSG references two further reasons why direct cash payments can have adverse effects on families, this follows directly from the very fundamental observation that universal cash payments to parents (like Child Benefit and the ECS) have, at best an ‘unpredictable effect on the labour market’, (para. 45, *ibid.* 10). In other words, separate from issues of family welfare and coupled with the Goodbody criticisms of meeting childcare needs with direct cash payments; the Government’s own Tax Strategy Group believes that the effect of these measures on opening entry into the labour force for parents, and particularly for mothers, (as well as keeping them there after entry), cannot be accurately assessed, and is therefore problematic in being factored into any process of strategic planning.

The conclusion to be drawn from these general archaeological observations is that in stressing the notion of ‘parental choice’ (and being mindful that the word ‘choice’ appears nowhere in the Executive Summary of the EWG’s report), and facilitating it with ever-increasing cash payments, the Government is effecting a particular choice of its own. Given that both the Goodbody report and the Department of Finance’s own TSG have highlighted the problems with direct cash payments in actually meeting demand-side childcare needs, and in helping parents to access employment opportunities; by then choosing to ignore this advice
(and by ultimately being selective with what portions of their ‘expert advice’ they choose to quote publicly), subsequent governments have been demonstrating evidence of a ‘political’ choice. Their choice has been one that prioritises the maintenance of cash within the economy, coupled with, at best, an impression of personal freedom for parents and families, yet at potential cost to the broader social issues the measure purports to be tackling. This is despite the fact that the policies chosen cannot be relied upon to achieve what the government wish for from an economic perspective. Childcare provision may well be on the agenda but only in so far as its implementation can come at no obvious material cost to the state of national competitiveness. The social agenda is subsumed in practice into a holistic discourse of national progress and economic development. Significantly, as we will see, semiosis plays a major role in this set of practices, in the construction of this social order.

Problematic construals of ‘choice’ and ‘partnership’

In returning to the analysis of Minister Lenihan’s speech at the launch of the ECS, I want to make some genealogical observations on the historical work above, supplemented by some textual analysis and some further observations on interdiscursivity and on recontextualisation, concluding with reflections on the order of discourse. In the light of these observations it is clear that when we look in particular at the way the Minister concentrates on the rationale for the policy, and the relationship between cash payments, ‘choice’ and ‘partnership’ with parents, that he is adopting the same sentiment, and much of the same language as first seen in the TSG report.

Specifically, we can see that in a two-page speech more than a quarter of the text covers the interrelatedness of these topics across five paragraphs, as follows;

Paragraph 2

1. The introduction of the Early Childcare Supplement represents a very substantial commitment by the Government to supporting parents, particularly during the early years when the costs associated with caring for children can be particularly high.

2. I believe the new Supplement also illustrates the multi-faceted approach which this Government is adopting in addressing childcare needs and parents’ choices for their children’s care.

Paragraph 6

3. It is therefore a universal family benefit, and I think this is an important point to make. The policy of this Government is to support people in whatever decisions they make about the care of their children. That is why we have dramatically increased the level of direct financial assistance we give to parents.
Paragraph 7

4. Governments make choices and as Minister for children, I am delighted that this Fianna Fáil led government has consistently chosen to increase the level of direct payments to parents, especially the parents of pre-school children.

Paragraph 9

5. I’d also like to stress that the issue of parents’ choice is fundamental to the Government’s Childcare policy.

6. Parents are best placed to decide how to care for their children. Our job is to support them in that decision and that is what we are doing.

Paragraph 13 (final paragraph)

7. In short, whatever choices parents make in respect of caring for their children, today’s announcements are welcome news.

It is clear that the statements of the TSG, on settling on Child Benefit as a way of meeting the demand-side childcare needs of parents (TSG 2004: 2, Paragraph 8) – with their focus on ‘choice’ and ‘universality’ – are reproduced almost identically in paragraph 6.3 and in paragraph 9.5 and 9.6 above. This is a clear case of intertextuality; of the presence in one text of textual constructions originating in another, earlier text. This broader point will be picked up below, but in terms of the interconnectedness of the precise topics mentioned and the speech’s ethos, themes, and function; further analysis of textual strategies and text grammar can add to these observations.

Textual Strategies

In employing declarative statements like ‘a very substantial commitment by this Government to supporting parents’ (paragraph 2.1); ‘The policy of this Government is to support people in whatever decisions they make’ (6.3); ‘our job is to support them […] and that is what we are doing’ (9.6) etc., word meaning and ethos are combined to present actions of parental empowerment, which by way of its relationship with Government, imply an unmarked theme of a transfer of power, essentially of a form of ‘partnership’. The use of the active voice is significant in this regard in statements such as ‘that is why we have dramatically increased the level of direct financial assistance we give to parents’, (6.3), which, with the use of the transitive ‘to give to’, also shows evidence of directedness. With a central emphasis on choice, the transitive verb use in statements such as paragraph seven’s, ‘Governments make choices and as Minister for Children, I am delighted that this Fianna Fáil-led government has consistently chosen to increase the level of direct payments to parents’ (7.3), can be seen as
implicitly placing parents, now in possession of options, through collaboration, through this new partnership, in a similar agentive position.

In extending this point, and in terms of the attribution of responsibility specifically, it is clear that the Minister is presenting it as the Government’s role, its duty, to provide ever-increasing cash payments to parents, particularly of young children, but the inference is that it is unquestionably the parents responsibility to then organise whatever childcare arrangements they feel best suit their situation. That is, the unmarked theme is that parents begin to be textually construed as agents; they are in possession of choice, and ‘parents’ choice is ‘fundamental’ (9.5), ‘Parents are best placed to decide how to care for their children’ (9.6).

In contrast to the elision of the agents of policy development and the sidelining of programme implementers (not to mention civil society as represented by the EWG and its work), the Minister is presenting both his Government and parents as agents of their own fortune generally, and specifically, as ‘partners’ in childcare development.

Looking at the text’s overall function, several marked themes emerge. There is the theme of ‘targets’ (met early), ‘cash payments’, ‘choice’ and ‘freedom’ and the related theme of ‘parental autonomy’ – alongside the complimentary unmarked theme that getting directly involved in childcare provision is not the Government’s role. The declarative statements referenced encode the Minister and the Government as the subjects of the clauses of those unmarked themes, and present the topics of choice, parents, and the delivery of universal cash benefits as those themes the reader is encouraged to focus upon. We therefore need to pay attention to examples of marked choices as being illustrative of the text’s other assumptions and via transitivity within the text, any links to observations on directedness. One example is the use of ‘therefore’ in the sixth paragraph (6.3) when the Minister, as above, states ‘It is therefore a universal family benefit’. This underlines the point that the speech is not merely about launching a new programme and taking credit for delivering it early, or reaching a target ahead of schedule. Rather, the text’s function is revealed as elaborating for the reader the official thinking behind the policy; what it relates to in terms of policy thinking generally, and of how childcare provision and the network of practices it is being situated within, is now to be understood.

A significant consequence of such directedness, of how things are to be conceived and understood is the theme of the elaboration of a new conception of ‘partnership’. As is foregrounded in the ninth paragraph where parents are the ones with the knowledge; ‘parents’ choice is fundamental’ (9.5), ‘parents are best placed to decide how to care for their children’ (9.6); and where Government expresses its intention to support them in meeting their objectives; ‘our job is to support them in that decision’ (9.6); and where freedom to choose
and government support are the marked themes, a particular form of ‘partnership’ emerges as the unmarked theme. Critically however, this reflects one of the constructions of partnership contained in the introduction of the EWG report where language taken directly from the P2000 process constructs the ‘spirit of partnership’ rather pragmatically as a sequence of ‘trade-offs both between and within interested groups’ (1997: 61). As an intertextual element foregrounded in the report of the EWG, there is a symmetry between the presence of this element and the intertextual elements in the Minister’s speech than emanate from the TSG document – and even the earlier budget speeches – and the issue of this evolving construction of ‘partnership’. From the late 1990s onwards a new and essentially restructured understanding of partnership can be seen to originate in the broader social partnership discussions, materialising in the P2000 document, and then later in prominent positions in reports like that of the EWG, and ultimately, as evidenced in the launch of the ECS in 2006, in the presentation and implementation of new policy.

Intertextuality, Recontextualisation, and the Order of Discourse

This restructuring in its semiotic form can be seen as inhabiting both internal discussion and external policy and contributing to the normalisation of an emerging partnership consensus of a particular form. In returning to interdiscursivity and the intertextuality of elements of the TSG report in particular, it is important to be mindful of the history of that report in this regard. The main issue is to reflect on the kind of other documents (and the pattern of the chaining of genres, discourses, and text grammar) that fed into the TSG report and that it then alters and circulates in later texts (such as this speech). This necessarily takes in a range of texts such as conference reports, other press releases, and speeches, further consultation reports, their press releases, and yet more conferences and their reports, etc., and all such texts’ individual genres and discourses. In this case the Goodbody report is a concrete example of an element of such chaining. In this broader analysis, in his ECS launch speech the Minister can then be seen to be recontextualising the economy-focused concerns of other reports, (including the particularly ideological character of Finance Minister’s McCreevy’s budget speech) in a material way, here delivering a speech which launches a policy.

In so far as the economic discourse can be seen as colonising the development and, as here, the implementation of social policy, the Minister’s speech can be seen as evidence of a restructurung of the semiotic element of the practices of social policy, that is, of an example of neoliberal recontextualisation in practice. In this case the Government is essentially redefining ‘partnership’ from an economic perspective, or at least from a pragmatic perspective, as captured by the P2000 reference to ‘a series of trade-offs’. That is, the
bringing into the space of one network of practices or field (the field of social policy being recontextualised), the external practices from another ostensible unrelated field (neoliberal economics and how to implement them), by a weaving together of semiotically representational elements (in discourses) and social production, or the work (in genres) of texts in a particular configuration, at a particular point in time.

Specifically, the ECS speech is a practice which has recontextualised, according to its own particular logic, two other practices: a short press conference (over which the Minister maintains full control), and an ideologically-infused documentary practice of outlining the policy itself and, in particular, its rationale. With the repeated recontextualisation of ‘choice’ and ‘parental choice’ with direct cash payments, the discourse in Minister Lenihan’s speech has the characteristics of a neoliberal discourse of personal responsibility in individual and family matters, evolving into a discourse of partnership of a particular nature. By employing ideologically specific conceptions of ‘choice’ (with the double significance of the reciprocal marked and unmarked themes of individual responsibility and the withdrawal of the state) and of ‘partnership’ (with its understanding predicated on this withdrawal of the state), it seeks to win agreement, or confer a ‘settlement’ whereby the Government, on behalf of the state, literally ‘buys out’ any responsibility for implementing quality, affordable, and accessible childcare structures.

As a recontextualising practice, speeches like Minister Lenihan’s are a significant contribution to cultural governance, of developing practices of governance and management with particular ideological colour, circulated in a non-ideological way, designed to be adopted and recycled at large, in an unanalytical fashion, thereby losing all sense of their particular contingent and arbitrary characteristics. In inhabiting this transformative space such recontextualised practices, through their specific combination of genres, and discourses, and interactional elements take root and then appear in other discourses and in the semiotic aspect of other social practices, all the while extending their ideological reach. Ultimately, in terms of orders of discourse, of the semiotic aspect of the particular configuration of practices favoured by the Fianna Fáil-led coalition governments of 1997-2002 and 2002-2007, we have evidence then of a dynamic set of structural relations as opposed to a picture of static relations. That is, evidence of the condition outlined by Bourdieu (Crossley 2004: 96) in his assessment of contemporary public spheres losing their autonomy in being essentially colonised by set of practices from the economic field and its neoliberal nomos.

In concluding with a return to the real world conditions of discourse and power, of constraint and strategic action, as exemplified in this analysis that illustrates the dynamism of Fianna Fáil’s programme, of its neoliberal shift, and remembering that Bourdieu suggests that
this is the landscape that we should be seeking out, one that simultaneously enables, encourages, and yet constrains citizens to engage rationally with each other (Crossley 2004: 110); I will now turn to an assessment of the Expert Working Group on childcare. In attempting to secure the input of civil society in the regulated conflict of real world political debate, I want to assess to what extent if at all, the EWG has had, or was ever likely to be able to have, a positive impact on allowing citizens access to policy formation. In short, the question is to what degree did the EWG act as a genuine space for public sphere dialogue and effective action?

**Step (3b): Analysis of the Text: A Critical Discourse Analysis of a discursive practice as a public sphere interaction**

**The EWG Report on Childcare (EWG 1999):**

*The National Childcare Strategy document for 2000-2006*

I want to start by returning to the framework for analysing the EWG childcare strategy report as an effective public sphere, drawn from Fairclough (2010: 397-400). This framework has been summarised in Chapter Four (section 4.3.4), but I want to specifically highlight two elements of the framework here that will be deployed in this chapter. These are firstly, the assessment of a discursive practice as a regulative practice, and secondly, of the discursive practice as a principle of recontextualisation.

**i. The Report Introduction**

The report’s introduction starts with a summary presentation of the need for a national childcare strategy. Five reasons are presented, all relating to a shortage of childcare places. In short, the report identifies a potential crisis in childcare on the horizon which is exacerbated by the rising costs in provision and access. In trying to tackle these combined issues the EWG sought to develop a strategy that integrated strands of existing childcare arrangements, but in wishing to drop references to a national childcare ‘framework’ in favour of a national ‘strategy’, the group wanted to ensure that it would not be restricted to issues of implementation only. Its recommendations moreover were to maintain the ethos of P2000, and operate within the framework of gender equality, and, in particular, of promoting equal opportunities in employment.

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6 The EWG defines childcare as day-care facilities and services for pre-school children and school-going children out of school hours (from 0 to 12 years). This is supplemented on page xxiii of the report to include services offering care, education, and socialisation opportunities for the benefit of children, parents, employers, and the wider community.
The terms of reference of the EWG were however already quite specific, (EWG 1999: xxii). Sitting within the P2000 process, the EWG’s work was, from the outset, designed to take account of two external pieces of ongoing work, namely: the final report of the ‘Working Group on the Job Potential of Childcare’; and an ESRI survey on childcare arrangements being undertaken by the ‘Commission on the Family’. Added to these were six specific considerations, or terms of reference. These parameters are particularly relevant in light of the interrogation of the EWG and its work as a healthy space for public sphere dialogue and debate since, given the group’s broad membership; it is unlikely that many of the actors would have chosen to start from this preordained list of aims, or to work within these narrow parameters.

In parallel to the group’s terms of reference, the submissions received in advance of July 1997 are presented in the summary by issue according to the frequency of occurrence. Top of the list at 34% is ‘high quality training of childcare workers’; the need for state support for childcare provision comes next at 24%; followed by a number of issues with levels of support ranging from 16% to 5%. It is noteworthy that when combined, in excess of 40% of submissions requested that a national childcare strategy prioritise meeting the demand-side needs of mothers and parents, a higher figure than any other issue raised in the submissions. In terms of the supply-side/demand-side dichotomy of childcare provision, this is almost the direct inverse of the picture painted by the EWG’s terms of reference, and its apparent focus on creating childcare places and developing childcare as a business in its own right. The weight given to submissions for meeting the costs of childcare also contradicts the rationale for a childcare policy outlined by the EWG itself, which is based almost exclusively on observations to do with an absence of childcare places or their steady decline.

Putting these observations to one side for the moment, in terms of assessing the broader public sphere credentials of the EWG, it is necessary to assess as much as it is possible in what ways the membership worked, how they organised their work, how the topics and themes on which they focused were chosen, how they interacted, and how the final document represents their findings and recommendations. The difficulty with this task is the lack of surviving information on these matters. The only evaluations that do seem to exist are to do with the implementation of aspects of the national childcare strategy after 2000. In this light the only way to assess the reality of the EWG’s work is by consulting its own report. Accepting that this is a serious restriction, I want to briefly outline the working methods of the group as it describes them in the strategy document’s Introduction.

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7 In 2004, for example, the Minister for Justice Equality and Law Reform provides a mid-term evaluation of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP), linking it directly to the national childcare strategy, as contained in the EWG report.
The EWG operated on three levels; there were plenary meetings open to all members of the group; the larger group was also divided into eight sub-groups, each one focusing on a particular policy issue; and there was also a steering group set up to manage and co-ordinate the whole programme. This group was made up of the EWG chairperson, the chairpersons of the eight sub-groups, an EWG secretariat, representatives from the DJELR, and the Department of Education and Science, plus representatives from a rather obscure group called ADM (Area Development Management) who provided the logistical and technical support to the EWG, via the DJELR (ibid. xxiii). Despite the graphic representing the working groups structure and operations contained in the report’s appendix 1.5, exactly how these three levels interacted with each other, or indeed how frequently each of them met, is nowhere made clear.

A significant point of note is that the work of the eight sub-groups does not relate directly to the full report’s eight chapters, that is, there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the report’s chapters and the EWG’s sub-groups. For example, Chapter 3 deals with regulations, training, and employment of childcare workers; Chapter 4 deals with childcare provision in both urban and rural areas. Likewise, many of the chapters relate to issues not directly tackled by the sub-groups, such as Chapter 2, which looks at the current provision of childcare in Ireland, while Chapter 5 addresses the guiding principles of a national childcare strategy. This is not to conclude that the subgroups were not involved in producing substantial aspects of the final strategy report, but it is worth noting that it is not always clear how elements of the report were finalised. One thing that is clear is that there is a certain symmetry between the terms of reference adopted by the EWG and the formation of the sub-groups (see Report Introduction, page xxiii). Of course, this makes logistical sense but as it is unlikely that the terms of reference were drafted after the formation of the sub-groups, the reader is left to infer that whoever drew up the terms of reference maintained a level of control over the operations of the sub-groups, and therefore of the EWG as a whole, throughout the process.

Furthermore, and in terms of the tensions that exist vis-à-vis the submissions on the one hand and the way the rationale for a childcare strategy has been presented by the EWG on the other, the Introduction goes on to add that two of the sub-groups (5 and 6) had links to other pieces of ongoing work. It is clear from these additions to the description of the sub-groups that the EWG was therefore never in complete control of its work, which necessarily influences the content of its final report. This also underscores the directed nature of the group’s work, as set out by their terms of reference, which as has been seen, were also partly dictated by other ostensibly external concerns. Individual terms of reference are provided for
each sub-group in the report’s appendix 1.3, providing a brief description of the area of responsibility of each sub-group, followed by a list of its specific objectives, and concluding with a list of the sub-group members by name and organisation. As with the EWG’s terms of reference and sub-group topics, it is not made clear here whether these individual sub-group objectives emerged from the work of each group itself, or rather, were given to each group at the formation of the EWG, or indeed were a mixture of both.

As if in recognition of these potential anomalies for the workings of an independent group, the Introduction finishes by remarking on some considerations which shaped the work of the group (pages xxiv – xxv). The text references many ‘challenges’ faced by the EWG, with the ‘large membership’, the ‘wide-ranging’ and complex terms of reference, and the ‘diverse range of issues’ all mentioned. The report stresses the ‘wealth of knowledge’ but also the ‘disparate perspectives’ on childcare that the process brought together, stressing the perennial complexities and tensions. In trying to find a way forward the report says that the EWG always endeavoured to keep the needs of children at the centre of its work, but recognised early on that there was a dichotomy, an ‘essential difference’ between the needs of parents who wanted to look after their children themselves and those who wanted or needed to avail of childcare service providers in accessing employment. This resulted in two policy objectives which would necessarily require more than one solution. In other words, from the beginning the group recognised that one measure, a universal policy, such as increasing Child Benefit payments or a universal tax credit, would have a ‘negligible impact’ on the development of childcare services.

As the document says, ‘Universal policies […] are unlikely to result in improving either the quality or the quantity of childcare services.’ (ibid. xxiv). In terms of directedness, the section continues by stating that the group was directed to look at parents in the labour force, or trying to gain access to it, and not to focus on parents who work at home, and that this is what they did. The report adds that another significant factor was the need to meet European Union guidelines, specifically structural fund criteria. In noting that Ireland’s childcare infrastructure was much weaker than that in most other EU members, the EU stressed that ‘the policy focus must now shift towards a more effective implementation of the reform process’. The EWG adds that Ireland’s access to structural funds for the period 2000-2006 could be put in jeopardy if an appropriate and effective national childcare strategy was not developed due to a failure to satisfy the equal opportunity policy requirements ‘under a key criterion for childcare infrastructure support’, (ibid. xxv).

The Introduction concludes with the assertion that the package of measures being put forward in the report is a ‘consensus’ of the views of the EWG. The package includes
interrelated measures that are expected to build on existing structures and services, and that are cost-effective. Moreover, it stresses that childcare cannot be ‘compartmentalised’ by being given over to one department or similarly having elements of the policy separated out from other elements and individually prioritised or (de)prioritised. For example, in the closing paragraphs of the Introduction the group stresses that ‘universality’ cannot be viewed simply as a positive leveller (such as its later representation in Minister Lenihan’s ECS launch speech of 2006). The group rather, sees a ‘one-size fits all’ approach to childcare policy as necessarily blunt, clumsy, inflexible, unreceptive to the varied needs of parents and society, and ultimately destined to fail. The EWG consistently reminds the reader throughout the Executive Summary and the Introduction that this is a seven-year strategy (pages vi, viii, xxv and xxvi), that, in their view, will take seven years to fully implement in order to ‘develop a quality work force’ and for ‘the operation of tax incentives and schemes’ outlined to be rolled out. The strategy has, the text concludes, ‘been developed in consultation and partnership, and proposes a shared vision for the future of childcare in Ireland.’

The report of the EWG begins in its foreword by stressing partnership and ends in the Introduction on a note of consensus, built on consultation and partnership. Yet the tensions and challenges are likewise referenced both in the foreword and again in the final paragraphs of the Introduction (page xxvi). Even without these explicit references the issues of working methods and of (sub-)group interaction; of autonomy as it relates to the group’s and sub-groups’ terms of reference; and of the rationale for a national childcare strategy as presented in the report; all raise concerns over the membership’s control of the process and of issues of insulation or separation of themes and issues, of voices and discourses, of those that are present and those that are absent. That is, of questions of representation and control, of ‘classification’ and ‘framing’. Nevertheless, as a strategy document ostensibly compiled outside of government, materially supported over a considerable period of time, and actively facilitated in reaching its goal, current observations notwithstanding, it is appropriate as a starting point not to assume that the EWG did not, or could not function as a healthy public sphere.

ii. An archaeological examination of childcare texts and observations on the genealogy of the EWG report

The task of assessing the relative health of the EWG is not to compare their recommendations and observations to actually implemented policies. The challenge is rather, to assess the EWG and its work on its own merits. An important point to reflect on at the outset therefore, since it relates directly to the notion of autonomy, is whether we can identify what Habermas
might call a ‘conjunctural emerge’ in relation to a national debate on childcare provision. That is, in presaging the EWG and its work, can we say with any sense of conviction that there were even ‘virtual’ or better ‘episodic’ spaces of public dialogue on the issue of the development of childcare policy? A little archaeological work shows us that within the social partnership process alone, the issue of childcare first appeared in the programme document of the third phase of the process, ‘The Programme for Competitiveness and Work’, (1994). In fact, references appear in three main areas in that text, in section one, ‘Work’, under ‘Services’, the ‘potential for growth through childcare services’ is explicitly mentioned under point 1.61(iii), (Government of Ireland 1994: 21).

All other references in the text are found in Section 6, ‘Social Equity’, (a phrase used in both the first and second social partnership programme documents from 1987 and 1991). In section 6.2 on Education, childcare is raised in relation to ‘tackling problems in the area of special education’, 6.27, (ibid. 66). And in section 6.5, Equality Measures, the text states that ‘In view of the contribution childcare provision can make in promoting equal opportunities in employment, progress will be made on the development of facilities in regard to childcare for working parents’, 6.59, (ibid. 71). Eight points are then presented which include introducing measures envisaged under the National Development Plan (1994); bringing forward the proposals for childcare facilities by the relevant agencies; and significantly that consideration of the recommendations of the Working Group on Childcare for Working Parents will provide a basis for further action, (ibid. 72). The final reference to childcare, point 6.63 on the same page, relates to the setting up of a special working party to assess the job-creation potential of childcare services and related issues of training and certification.

The thematic representation of childcare seen in later documents seems to see its genesis here, with the primacy given to viewing childcare as a job-creation measure, then as a child-centred developmental measure, and then as an issue of equality, and even then as equality in employment before anything else. In terms of the issue of emergence, the point to note from this partnership document is that before this text was published there was already another, earlier working group on childcare (for working parents). No further details of this group are provided in the 1994 document, but appendix 1.8 in the EWG report which summarises all reports and legislation in the area of childcare in Ireland from 1980 to 1998, states that this group, overseen by the DJELR, identified ‘the current absence of a national strategy for the general development of childcare provision and […] the fragmentation of responsibility for child care issues at the level of Government as the principle reasons for the inadequate provision of childcare facilities’, (EWG 1999: 107).
Taken together, there was obviously some ongoing level of discussion within government and the social partners on at least some aspects of childcare provision well in advance of the EWG’s formation in 1997, which fed into its work. In fact, in citing a Department of Health’s Task Force on Childcare Service’s from 1980 as its first entry (in appendix 1.8), the EWG seems comfortable suggesting that official discussions on childcare strategy go back at least that far. Less tangible but perhaps more illustrative of a level of broader public discussion is to be found in the range of submissions to the group already outlined. In attempting to analyse the EWG’s national strategy document as emblematic of a genuine public sphere, and being sensitive to recontextualisations of official texts relating to childcare as evidence to the contrary, paying a little more attention to the contents of the report’s appendix 1.8 can be fruitful. The appendix lists fifteen separate ‘reports, pieces of legislation and initiatives’ in the general area of childcare over the eighteen years leading to the submission of the EWG report. The contention from a critical perspective would be that if the rationale for having an EWG on childcare is to tackle this very disjointed and unfocused historical picture, that in so being constituted it is to be anticipated that the EWG’s national strategy document will not repeat such a fragmentary approach to the topic.

Semiotically, this means that the text should not be seen to be recycling and recirculating the relevant voices and the combined discourses in the same generic form as these earlier texts. If it does, or does to some sizeable degree, then its public sphere credentials must be viewed as being severely compromised. In recalling the thematic appearance of childcare in earlier texts already referenced, such as budget speeches, the Goodbody report on the Economics of Childcare, the Tax Strategy Group report (and even discarding other policy texts such as press releases and speeches), a certain continuity can be traced backwards from these texts to the observations made on childcare in the 1994 social partnership document, ‘The Programme for Competitiveness and Work’. Summarising the contents of the EWG’s appendix 1.8 (ibid. 104-8) allows for a broadening of this picture and to fix it more securely from a historical or archaeological perspective. Of the fifteen relevant texts compiled the breakdown is as follows; three are produced by the Department of Heath and relate generally to children at risk; four are produced by The Department of Justice and relate to the status of women generally; one is by the Department of Labour on childcare facilities for working parents; two are by the Department of An Taoiseach on women’s affairs and family law reform ; one is published by NESC; one each is produced by the Department of Foreign Affairs; the Department of Education and Science; the Children’s Rights Alliance; and the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs.
If we then group these pieces of work thematically we see a picture of official childcare debate emerge over time structured some thing akin to the following; children’s care (health) and early development (education); increasing female participation in the work place and community, and establishing a childcare employment sector (employment/economics); and, facilitating gender equality and challenging disadvantage (equality/social inclusion). Obviously some themes are deliberately repeated or returned to across the fifteen texts, nevertheless, a breakdown that encompasses the four pillars of health, education, employment, and social equality is on the basis of the evidence, a useful way of capturing the landscape of official debates on childcare up to and including the formation of the EWG. This contention moreover, is underscored by the explicit appearances of childcare in the 1994 social partnership text as presented above. If a main objective of the group is then to get away from this fragmented debate, as per the recommendations of the earlier working group (1994), a focus on the group’s national strategy document should not only encompass a broader range of themes, and of perspectives, but even where it might naturally repeat some of the linkages outlined here, by its *modus operandi* it should do so in different ways, and not produce a final report that so clearly mirrors these four pillars. In short, it should add something absent from the existing picture.

In drawing from the perspective of this archaeological work, in terms of semiosis, it means that though discourses of physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing, of educational and cognitive development, of equality of access to training and the jobs market, of economic competitiveness and labour market flexibility, and of facilitating social mobility, gender equality and social inclusion should be present, they should be so in a non-compartmentalised fashion, or at least not exclusively, and where any ordering of discourses, any presentation of a hierarchy appears, it should clearly come from the EWG itself. This orientation therefore allows for a genealogical assessment of the findings of the EWG’s strategy document, and an assessment of their autonomy. Specifically, in terms of genre use there should be some move away from the features of reporting, documenting, and summarising that are typical of official texts, of the features indeed that are a central element of the fifteen pieces of work that make up the report’s appendix 1.8. Accepting that all reports are by their nature expected to summarise and prioritise, the point is to be aware of what is being summarised, (in relation to what is not) and how it is being summarised and prioritised, and therefore to reflect on what social practices (through the discursive formations) are potentially being recontextualised.

For example, since reports most easily recontextualise other reports, and as such background reports as referenced above are composed of the types of lists, targets, and goals,
etc. it might be anticipated that the emerging EWG report also heavily feature this type of structure. This means that a focus on voice (and style) in so far as discursively it relates to identities, is also significant. The potential for summarising compilations of lists of existing conclusions and recommendations can be seen as encoding in a new field the practices that emanate from certain voices only. Another way to approach this point is to ask whether, in terms of the earlier reflection on a conjunctural emergence of a national childcare dialogue, there is evidence of a novel ‘we’ in the report? In Arendt’s terminology, is their evidence of the emergence of a collective identity, linking speech to action? Where some voices are encoded in the process of strategy elaboration, others are necessarily excluded, as then are their semiotic ways of being, their discourses, and their ways of acting, their genres. My contention is that a final report that codifies childcare provision in the four pillars of health, education, employment, and equality in such a compartmentalised fashion, is essentially evidence of a problematic ‘we’, where a novel, genuinely inclusive ‘we’ can be seen to exist at all. A national childcare strategy report that produces a kind of compilation of earlier representations and recommendations for action would therefore ultimately be problematic in terms of providing evidence of a genuine public sphere dialogue.

iii. The report’s chapters five and six

I will return to the Executive Summary and Introduction below in bringing my analysis to a conclusion using Fairclough’s framework for evaluating public sphere discourse, but I want first to look specifically at the content of Chapters 5 and 6 of the EWG’s national childcare strategy document. In terms of the way I have constructed my approach to this issue, I see Chapter 5 – The National Childcare Strategy: Guiding Principles, and Chapter 6 – Rationale for National Childcare Strategy, as particularly significant. In concentrating on those areas of the report that relate to the underlying values and motives for the work, (that is, of ideas and how they are being communicated), we are afforded the best possible means of getting to the heart of the questions left unanswered in the Executive Summary and the Introduction, and of fulfilling my objectives with this chapter as they relate to the potential for the colonisation of discourses and practices and an appraisal of the role of the public sphere.

Given that it would have (or should have) been very difficult for the group as a whole to move forward without agreeing principles underlying their work and a rationale for it, it seems strange that these chapters do not feature earlier in the report. The first two chapters are grouped together under the title ‘Background Issues’ and perhaps it is not so strange for those to be placed first, but Chapters 3 and 4 collectively deal with what is labelled ‘Identified Issues and Concerns’. This naturally raises the question whether the principles
and rationale are then to be predicated on these ‘issues’ and ‘concerns’ alone, and if so, why, and more significantly, who identified these issues and concerns? Since these chapters are not given their position in the final report by accident such apparent anomalies are precisely the things that need attention. Another point to make is that none of the full report’s twenty-seven recommendations come from either Chapter 5 or Chapter 6, (which is also the case for Chapters 1 and 2).

Chapter Five

Chapter 5 is spread out over seven pages and as with the rest of the document, the text presented in two columns per page. There are five main areas covered producing twelve principles, each appearing in a shaded box in bold text. These principles are then grouped together in the chapter’s summary in normal text, but again, they are not reproduced in the report’s Executive Summary. The introduction to the chapter states that ‘the principles have been formulated following a lengthy consultation process involving all members of the Expert Working Group’ (page 44). The five headings under which the group has chosen to organise the principles are: the needs and rights of children; equality of access and participation; diversity; partnership; and, quality. Significantly, in elaborating the needs and rights of children the text states that the group ‘endorses the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child’ (page 45), going on to quote from seven different articles of that convention.

Later in this section the group states that it ‘endorses the European Commission Network on Childcare Action Programme’ and reproduces three of that programme’s ‘targets’. These all relate to education, and the educational philosophy of childcare. In the second section on equal opportunities and equality of access and participation, the text continues this rights discourse, stating that:

The provision of quality, affordable and accessible childcare is also recognised as a mechanism to create a framework where both men and women irrespective of their race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status, can participate equally in society, (page 46).

And in referencing section 2.1 of the United Nations Convention explicitly, continues to emphasise the point by declaring that ‘provision should be without discrimination of any kind’ (ibid.).

In elaborating on the context of equality of access the text stresses the need for a targeted approach of a national childcare strategy, and that in ongoing evaluation and implementation of the policy, it needs to be both ‘equality proofed and poverty proofed’,
This is a logical consequence of the thread of the text’s argument but it is worth stressing this point specifically because this is the sort of discourse that is not reflected in either the EWG’s terms of reference, nor in the set-up of its eight sub-groups. So where a critical eye might have been looking to the terms of reference for some general, overarching neoliberal-proofing, or more logically perhaps, ‘market-proofing’, (or ‘privatisation-proofing’), which is not to be found, here in Chapter 5 at least, in laying out its underlying principles, the group is producing a novel, if not a radical discourse by claiming rights be respected and upheld and calling for their absence to be structurally guarded against. This point is underlined further in the conclusion to this section of the chapter where the text stresses that ‘It is essential that a national childcare strategy is sustainable on social, economic and cultural grounds’ (page 47). Statements like this are significant since they embed the formulation of the strategy in a different discourse than those presented heretofore.

This rights’ approach is further extended in section three of the chapter under the issue of diversity. The document quotes directly from target 14 of the European Commission’s Network on Childcare Action programme (1996) as it relates to the provision of services which ‘acknowledges and supports diversity of language, ethnicity, religion, gender and disability, and challenges stereotypes’ (page 48). The next section looks at partnership and stresses ‘co-operation at a local and national level, between policy makers and local mechanisms that facilitate involvement of all interested parties at the planning stages and at the point of delivery’, (ibid.). This process of co-operation moreover is expected ‘to build upon and enhance existing successful partnerships’ (page 49).

The chapter’s final section looks at quality. The issue of how to define quality also draws on the European Commissions Network on Childcare Action programme, with the EWG quoting the programme directly where it says ‘defining quality should be seen as a dynamic and continuous process, involving regular review and never reaching a final ‘objective’ statement’, (ibid.). The use of this statement is particularly interesting since apart from the colour it adds to the EWG’s view on quality-proofing, quality is presented in a way that most formal, more technical reports would not formulate an objective. That is, without a verifiable indicator, or indicators that would alert the report’s audience as to how to identify that an objective has been achieved. This definition is precisely the sort of thing that all strategic planning documents are designed to avoid. In choosing to include this description of how quality (a central principle of a national strategy) may be defined – as something that needs to be constantly attended to – in this chapter the group is representing a set of practices that have evolved outside of the format sought in most reports and planning texts, and also
departing from what we have seen in this document’s Executive Summary and its Introduction.

Notwithstanding this observation the section nevertheless concludes with the EWG presenting a detailed list of fifteen bullet points of what a ‘quality service’ might include. The final summary section of the chapter brings together all the statements presented in the shaded boxes throughout the chapter, but these do not include any direct references to either the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, nor the European Commission’s Network on Childcare Action, nor does the summary include any of the fifteen hallmarks of a quality service, and as mentioned, none of the contents of the chapter summary appear as recommendations or otherwise find space in the document’s Executive Summary.

Chapter Six

Chapter 6, on the rationale for a national childcare strategy, sets itself the task of ‘outlining the benefits of quality childcare to children, their parents, employers and communities in general’ (page 52). It repeats the line from Chapter 5 (and from the Introduction), and quotes from European Commission’s Network on Childcare Action programme in stating that ‘a high quality childcare service can only be achieved within a national policy framework’. The chapter covers the topics of quality, the social benefits of childcare, the economic benefits of childcare, the future demand for childcare in Ireland, and a chapter summary. Beginning with the issue of quality might seem like a link to the close of the previous chapter, with possibly even a certain amount of repetition, but significantly this is not what we find. Instead we read a very different positioning and representation of quality. In contrast to the understanding of something that has to be constantly reviewed, assessed, and supported to ensure its presence, the discourse presented in Chapter 6 quickly defines quality as a number of perspectives such as the child development perspective, the social development perspective, the staff perspective, etc. The text then gives space over to an elaboration of how an understanding of quality can be conceptualised, including an academic reference, and immediately introduces the three dimensions of ‘stakeholder’, ‘beneficiary’ and ‘quality indicators’. These indicators are then further broken down into ‘input indicators’, ‘process indicators’, and ‘outcome indicators’.

The striking thing is not that the EWG report wants to approach the issue of a national strategy’s quality in this way; it is that it does so in a way that is completely at odds with the way the issue has been approached in the preceding chapter. Moreover, there is no reference by the EWG in Chapter 5 to any elaboration of the approach to quality being presented in the subsequent chapter of their report, and likewise there is no reciprocal reference in Chapter 6.
to the issue of quality being addressed in a particular way in Chapter 5. It is as if both chapters were produced by different authors, working separately, with no interaction between them, and furthermore, that this point, the lack of synchronisation, was left unaddressed in the compilation of the final report. The section on quality is also odd for another reason. In attempting to elaborate how ‘recent conceptualisations of quality’ can be understood and then operationalised, which is already a more difficult read than the style of presentation used in chapter 5, the explanation stops rather abruptly.

Following an explanation of the three types of indicators the text bypasses any instruction on how they are to be identified in service provision. This is odd given that the EWG report is a 120-page text, including 12 appendices, glossary, and a bibliography. The text rather, moves onto a statement about how ‘quality statements and targets will be determined at a local level in a consultative process which will take into account the interests of all stakeholders’ (page 53). This is noteworthy not just because of the truncated nature of the explanation, but because the text implies devolving issues of quality to service receivers and providers at an operational level. Besides leaving the provision of services open to non-state actors, to business and the markets more generally, and to possible privatisation, the presentation is again at odds with the monitoring of quality as per the European Commission’s quote in chapter 5 and never reaching a ‘final objective statement’, and also with the quote from the European Commission on the necessity of ‘national planning’ quoted at the beginning of chapter 6.

In the second section on the social benefits of childcare, the text continues by quoting from another piece of academic research (again, not referenced in the report’s bibliography) on potential future savings to the state based on spending on childcare in the present. After the presentation of bullet points on what this research has shown regarding investment in childcare, and also on what might constitute effective early childhood programmes, followed by a number of indicators, we find a quotation from one of the submissions to the EWG. The piece from the submission of a local partnership group in Limerick city refers to the social capital derived by all stakeholders in disadvantaged areas where accessible childcare facilitates are able to operate effectively. The comment is related to the text of the chapter in a general sense, but it sits oddly here next to truncated explanations of assessing quality and the material social benefits as outlined in academic papers. The fact that this tool of referencing contributors is only used here and no where else in the full report also begs the question of what exactly it is doing. I will return to this point below.

The chapter’s third section on the economic benefits of childcare restates many of the points that appear in earlier analytical texts and reports on childcare provision such as the
NESC study from 1991, the Commission on the Status of Women (DJELR) from 1993, the social partnership document from 1994, the P2000 document from 1997, and Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme, and the Goodbody report, both from 1998. As restated here in Chapter 6 of the EWG report, these cover the lack of childcare provision as an impediment to parents (and particularly to mothers) accessing employment and/or training, thus ‘depriving the economy of services and expertise’, (page 54); that ‘childcare is also a potential area of employment in its own right and needs to be recognised and supported to ensure that it can achieve its potential in thus regard, (page 55). This discursive shift see childcare move from being an opportunity, a vehicle for advancing gender equality and social inclusion, to a potential agent of national economic growth.

The economic case is then summarised in five bullet points which cover benefits to employers, childminders, job-creation, as well as to children and parents. The section then concludes with a list of five more bullet points presented as elements that the ‘development of a childcare sector should include’. The measures listed read not only like an economic report, but oddly to a large degree reflect the contents of the full EWG report’s Executive Summary. These items include ‘increasing affordability and choice for parents’; the targeting of ‘urban disadvantaged and rural areas’; and of ‘low income households’ – where the employment dividend is seen to be potentially greater; and in the same vein, a concentration on ‘the labour force participation of women’; and finally, a focus on developing a ‘strong, formalised and regulated sector’ and ‘providing opportunities for the development of sustainable businesses and job opportunities’, (ibid.). In some way or other all of these suggested measures, drafted in the framework of an economic case for childcare, are tackled directly in Chapters 2, 3, 7, and 8 of the EWG report.

The following section, 6.4 addresses the potential future demand for childcare provision. The introductory sentence is followed by five paragraphs that include a lot of figures and dates relating largely to the potential increase in female labour market participation, but also simultaneously, the probable need to attract more workers into the national labour force to maintain national competitiveness. The section concludes by claiming that the demand for childcare ‘could increase by between 25% and 50% over the period to the year 2011’, (page 56). This line is also reproduced in large font in a decontextualised form on the previous page, at the end of the previous section. There is a reference to the 1998 Goodbody report (Study on the Economics of Childcare in Ireland, 1998) at the end of the section’s second paragraph in relation to projections on the number of children that might need to avail of childcare by 2011 (in comparison to the figure for 1996). What is significant however is that when the actual Goodbody report is consulted to locate
the passage in question, it becomes clear that the full five paragraphs that make up this section of Chapter 6 all come from this report, (Executive Summary, page ii). This is not exactly a case of recontextualisation since the Goodbody work was commissioned by the EWG as part of its work, and so it is not so strange to find some of the observations from the former’s summary in the latter report. But it is significant to reflect on what this level of intertextuality potentially reveals about the origin and function of the EWG report’s Chapter 6.

I have already noted that much of the content of chapter 6 of the EWG report resembles elements of texts already produced going back to the early 1990s, and also that much of the overview of the preceding section on the economic benefits seems to be recontextualised both in the EWG’s Executive Summary and in the content of their report’s other chapters (in stark contrast to the content of chapter 5, which is not given voice elsewhere). We know that the bulk of the EWG report was ready by the end of 1998 because members of the group tried to impress upon the Minister of Finance elements of its contents so that childcare would be directly dealt with in the 1999 windfall budget, (December, 1998). We know too that the Goodbody report was published in December 1998, and therefore would not have been discussed in detail by the Department of Finance or Minister McCreevy (Fianna Fáil) before his budget was prepared. It is reasonable to conclude therefore that Chapter 6 may have been the last section of the EWG report to be produced since a large part of its contents relate to the findings of the Goodbody report, which might also explain how it was that there was no scope to look at the odd way Chapter 6’s contents, especially in relation to ‘quality’, sit with the text and sentiment of Chapter 5.

Unlike Chapter 5 and those chapters that contain recommendations, chapter 6’s text does not highlight any elements by placing them in shaded boxes or printing them in bold; this means that the final summary section is not a recombination of elements already explicitly presented. The nine bullet points presented in the summary are therefore a particular representation of the chapter’s essence. The first point is actually from Chapter 5 as it relates to the need for a national strategy; the second point then reiterates the three dimensions of quality assessment (stakeholders, beneficiaries, and indicators); the next three points relate to the conclusions from the ‘rigorous studies’ referenced; the seventh point relates generally to the capacity of childcare to combat social exclusion; the eighth to the potential economic benefits; and the final point to the potential future demand for childcare services by the year 2011. It is clear then that in its content, and as reflected in the chapter summary, the rationale for a national childcare strategy, the outlining of the ‘benefits of a national childcare strategy’ as the chapter formulates it, is already at odds with the sentiment,
indeed with the principles of the preceding chapter. There is no recognition for example, of the approach to ‘quality’ as detailed in Chapter 5 and also no repetition or other referencing of the need to ‘equality-proof’ and ‘poverty-proof’ a really existing strategy, or elements of that strategy at a central level, and no restating of the need to ensure sustainability beyond the economic.

Summary

The language in chapter 6 often seems odd, overly dense and the explanation of ‘quality’ and how it is to be assessed, also does not seem sufficiently elaborated for a reader to fully appreciate it. The reference to the study on possible returns to early investment in childhood education through childcare provision seems likewise oddly unelaborated and decontextualised. These pieces read almost as if they are part of a visual presentation, possibly intended to be accompanied by graphs and charts (with the graphs and charts omitted here) that would naturally invite questions from an audience to further clarify their meaning and significance, and that this commentary, once written up, was then simply appended to this chapter. As a consequence, and added to the fact that the projections are not particularly transparent as presented, it is also difficult for the reader to get a sense of what alternative views might be present and therefore what weight to give to these contributions. The fact too that the whole of section 6.4 comes from another source (the Goodbody report) raises the question of whether the inputs and indeed the text that comes with them in sections 6.2 and 6.3 might in fact also be recontextualised out of and uprooted from other earlier official or officially commissioned reports.

With its use of bullet-point summaries in each of its five sections, the chapter is clearly situated within a documentary genre, compiling lists of evidences to a particular end, as opposed to actually arguing for the conclusions it produces. In section 6.3 for example, on the economic benefits of childcare, the particular presentation manages to capture the four historic pillars of childcare themes; health, education, employment/the economy, and gender equality within the discourse of economics and competitiveness alone. In taking all of these observations together it forces us to conclude that since it serves no crucial purpose in the text, the likely reason for inclusion of the passage from Limerick group’s submission at this juncture is precisely to try to connect the chapter’s content and suggested measures more fully with the broader EWG membership and to harmonise more effectively with the content of the rest of the report. That is, to dilute or otherwise downplay the presentation of the external contributions from academic sources and the Goodbody report and their import.
This is in stark contrast to Chapter 5 which adopts a genuinely advocative genre, trying to bring the reader through the group’s thought processes in formulating its principles and arguing for a particular understanding of where these principles come from. This chapter manages to complete its task without incorporating economic discourses, or discourses of competitiveness, or by linking advancing gender equality to an expanding job’s market on the one hand, or what the national economy might gain in terms of services and skills on the other. Instead, the text draws on rights’ discourses and themes of child-centred, communal and societal well being and sustainability, as well as on a non-problematic discourse of partnership. There is evidence of a collaborative process in action, of an emergent identity, of a new ‘we’ of civil society voices, which is central to the chapter’s discourses. This collective identity moreover, is made real through what the text is doing, that though referenced elsewhere such as in the Executive Summary, is free from ‘tensions’, ‘challenges’ and ‘complexities’ that attend it there. This is an identity moreover, that does not sit oddly with the recontextualised references to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child or the European Commission’s Network on Childcare Action.

Though the text refers to particular ‘articles’ and ‘targets’ from these two documents, Chapter 5’s text generally avoids lists, except where it attempts to visualise for the reader what quality services might look like. There is an absence of programme objectives that can be measured by verifiable indictors, and instead the principles are presented as strategic aims, that is, structurally situated under what we might imagine would be a mission statement, but above specific objectives that through their being met contribute to the strategic aims of the group. In this way the chapter is fundamentally sound, that is, it has a proper place in the final report, even if its contents generally go unstressed, unrepeated, or unsummarised elsewhere. It avoids discourses of government and of government departments as seen in Chapter 6, and eschews any contentious construction of partnership as the need for ‘trade-offs’ between participants, and in stressing the need to avoid short-term planning, it also challenges many of the official discourses circulating at the time of its production that the genealogical work here has shown come from a variety of ‘official’ sources. I now want to build upon these critical observations on the content and format of these two chapters and advance the analysis of the document as emblematic of a genuine public sphere debate.
iv. A framework for a critical discourse analysis of the public sphere

**A Discursive Practice as a Regulative Practice**

Drawing on Arendt and Habermas, Fairclough proposes a number of analytical foci which constitute the basis for evaluating particular discursive practices as public sphere dialogue (2010: 398). The focus on a discursive practice as a form of regulation in a semiotic mode is linked to Habermas’s work on the public sphere, and specifically with the procedural properties of public sphere communication. The concern is to specify the regulative properties of a discursive practice in the sense of how contributions in the public sphere are controlled. To respond to this task, Fairclough’s framework draws on Bernstein’s concepts of ‘framing’ and ‘classification’ from his work on the sociology of pedagogy (1990, 1996). For Bernstein framing is a matter of control, of how interaction is managed, whether it is jointly managed or asymmetrically managed. For Fairclough control means the regulation of work, or of ‘social production’, and therefore of action and interaction which constitute work (2010: 181). Framing is ‘strong’ where control is one-sided and ‘weak’ where it is shared. As control is understood as the regulation of work, in Fairclough’s transdisciplinary approach to public sphere dialogue it is productive to think of genres as devices for framing (from Chouliaraki, 1998) or for controlling work in a textual mode. Framing is therefore a property of individual genres and of the chaining of genres.

Classification is a matter of which (sociological) categories (discourses, subjects, and voices) are included in the practice, and the degree to which they are insulated from each other. For Bourdieu discourses are forms of power, of ‘symbolic violence’, as they classify people, things, places, events, etc., as well as other discourses. Classification may be ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ depending on whether entities are sharply or loosely insulated or divided from each other. As classification is concerned with representation, Fairclough sees discourses as classification in its textual mode (2010: 185). So the analytical question becomes what sorts of boundaries or ‘insulations’ (from Bernstein) are set up between discourses. In this approach to analysis moreover, the recontextualisation of practices from one field transforms the relevant practices in another field into discourses and imposes upon these practices new classifications and divisions.

This approach means that genuinely open public space dialogue necessarily entails a regulative practice where control of the interaction is jointly managed and one which is maximally open to diverse discourses and subjects, where insulations between those categories are minimal. That is, a healthy public sphere is exemplified by weak framing and weak classification. For Fairclough the translation of these sociological categories of framing
and classification into the discourse analytical categories of genre and discourse (and style or voice) is evidence of the reality of working in a transdisciplinary way as opposed to a merely interdisciplinary way (see Halliday 1993 and Fairclough 1997). This is a demonstration that the logic of one theory can be put to work within the logic of another and without the one necessarily being reduced to the other. This means that discourse analytical conceptions of genre and discourse are greatly enriched by thinking of them in terms of Bernstein’s categories of framing and classification respectively, (see Chouliaraki 1998).

A Discursive Practice as a Principle of Recontextualisation

The concepts outlined in this analytical focus are also drawn from Bernstein (as above). The central notion here is that particular discursive practices assimilate others in ways which are specific to them, that is, discursive strategies have their own distinctive ‘principles of recontextualisation’. Recontextualised practices are always transformed, but the particular ways they are transformed depend upon the specific logic, the recontextualising principle of the recontextualising practice. As per Bernstein, in being recontextualised, discursive practices are cut off from their embeddedness in action and transformed into discourses which are articulated together in new ways according to the logic of the recontextualising practice.

Fairclough introduces recontextualisation here as a way of addressing the implications of accepting that there are many public spaces and many ways in which such diverse public spaces can interact with each other. He suggests that certain public sphere discursive strategies recontextualise others, and that ultimately, the issue is one of the ‘terms of exchange’ when different public spheres are brought together. The concept of recontextualisation therefore draws attention to the transformations and ideological appropriations public spaces undergo. There is a complementarity here between the concepts of recontextualisation and colonisation, associated with Habermas (1984) (cited in Fairclough 2010: 399), where the latter focuses on the bringing of external practices into the space of the recontextualised practice, while recontextualisation concentrates on the effects of the incursion on a particular practice of these external practices.

The focus on effective public sphere discourse seeks to specify how different discursive practices might be dialogically hybridised to form a new practice which is reductive of neither. As recontextualisation and colonisation inhabit the same theoretical space, in assessing levels of encroachment by and contamination of one network of practices by another, recontextualisation is a significant site of interest. Summarising, for example, where every practice (and every network of practices) recontextualises other social practices
according to principles which are specific to that practice, is an aspect of recontextualisation.
A press release is therefore, by design, a practice which has recontextualised at least two
other practices according to its own particular logic: a press conference and a documentary
practice. Recontextualising practices are in a way uprooted from their own social
circumstances, and appear in the recontextualised form of discourses or as an ‘imaginary’
form, where the move from real to imaginary is a transformative space where the play of
ideology occurs, becoming potentially hegemonic.

Using this concept as a way of thinking about the textual moment draws attention to
the links between genres (ways of working in the textual mode) and discourses (textual
representations) and points to the dynamics inherent in texts, and therefore calls for and
facilitates a close link between the analysis of genres and discourses (and styles). The
application of Fairclough’s framework will also incorporate some comments on other
elements of the framework that result from the above approach, namely comments on the
discursive practice as a ‘space of emergence’ of common identities and whether a particular
public sphere configuration can be judged to be a ‘constituent of action’.

v. Applying Fairclough’s framework for analysis of public sphere
discourse:

The Discursive Practice as a Regulative Practice
In this analysis of the public sphere credentials of the Expert Working Group on childcare I
am talking about the group and how it functioned – as expressed through its national strategy
document – but as I am also discussing the document itself, my approach is to start with the
content of the document and in a sense work out from the text. The EWG in its function and
form, in how it was put together and what it was asked to, would appear to suggest an
openness to weak framing, or minimal control, in its semiotic form. In looking at the reality
of the report however, as per the observations on the Executive Summary and the
Introduction in particular, a lot of significant decisions seem to have been taken out of the
hands of the EWG members, or taken in advance of their coming together. These include;
the rationale for a national strategy presented in the Introduction and the drafting of the
group’s terms of reference which we are informed come from the P2000 process (page xxii).
Likewise, the decision on the focus of each sub-group is never made clear. Two of the sub-
groups moreover, are completely tied into other, separate commitments to ongoing work and
not directly related to elaborating a national childcare strategy, which we can assume, was not
the choice of the EWG.
Neither is it clear who controls each sub-group as there is no information on how the chairpersons were appointed, but more significantly, on a programmatic level, there is no clarity around the issue of how each group’s individual terms of reference, or their ‘specific objectives’ were drawn up. Apart from the working of the sub-groups, and their level of interaction with each other, issues also remain about the proposal for a national strategy as represented in the report itself. It is never explained, for example, how the final structure and layout of the report has been decided. In particular, the content of the eight chapters, and their separation into the four areas of ‘Background Information’, ‘Identified Issues and Concerns’; ‘Principles and Rationale’, and ‘National Childcare Strategy’, goes unelaborated, which is significant since, as referenced, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the eight chapters and the eight sub-groups.

As framing is a matter of control and in Fairclough’s framework control means the regulation of work, of social production – and therefore of the action and interaction which constitute work – semiotically, we see genres as devices for framing, or for controlling work in a textual mode. Framing is a property of individual genres and of the chaining of genres, and from our general observations on the composition of the EWG in particular; we might anticipate evidence of weak framing throughout. In examining the detail of their final report however, we see that the chaining of genres generally seems to constitute strong framing of its process of production. This means that in the process of achieving its goal, of producing a national childcare strategy, the EWG is constrained by others in its work but also in accepting such influence, is actively limiting the parameters of the group and therefore the reach of its work, while facilitating specific inputs and potentially blocking others. One clear example of this dynamic is the sidelining of the public submissions. The result is that where the EWG would presumably be trying to accomplish a variety of tasks textually, which would manifest themselves in a number of genres, overall the group (or elements of the group) or others seem to have managed to tightly control the process, and consequently the report is characterised by content that is strongly framed through documentary and reporting genres.

This results in chapters telling the reader what the reasons are for each section of the report; what the social context is (Chapter 1); what has been done to-date (Chapter 2); what the benefits of a strategy might be (Chapter 6), etc. The issues and resulting plans (or recommendations) for the future – summarised in the Executive Summary (in Irish and in English) – are highlighted textually within each chapter where they appear. This means that to a large degree the group is presenting the task of implementing a national childcare strategy as a managerial process of problem-solving, of finding solutions to obstacles in the way of the various objectives outlined. But by virtue of the EWG’s make up and the breadth
of its task, the development of a national childcare strategy is not simply reduced to problem-solving (which would primarily be a matter of what discourse or discourses are present), the report rather, is partly enacted as problem-solving; that is, there is an ambivalence of genres present, or an oscillation between genres.

Drawing on our observations on Chapter 5 helps to illustrate this bigger picture. This chapter on the guiding principles of the group’s work sees explanatory and advocative genre chaining which attempts to do something different. The text is accessible and informative, it instructs the reader of its premises through elaboration and advocates a particular approach – which yield a particular set of principles – through argumentation. Here different voices are included to illuminate the discussion (specifically the United Nations and the European Union’s Commission), and there is an absence of the problem formulation and solution presentation approach used elsewhere, such as in Chapter 6. This is evidence of an explanatory logic or the employing of exposition and explanation, of a combination of causal relations as opposed to additive relations, as seen elsewhere, and illustrated with the heavy use of bullet points, targets, and objectives. These explanatory and advocative genres therefore clearly contrast with the documentary or report genres employed in the Executive Summary and in Chapter 6.

In these latter sections of the report we see generalised descriptions that arrive fully formed (for example, the rationale for a childcare strategy in the summary, or the measures required for the development of a childcare sector in Chapter 6), which are essentially descriptions of what ‘is’ or what ‘must be’, at a level of abstraction. Here no questions are asked; the mood is declarative; statements are categorical assertions or deontic modalities. This can be seen in the quote from Chapter 6, (page 55), before the list of measures that a programme that maximises the economic benefits of childcare provisions might contain, where the text reads; ‘the support for the development of the childcare sector should therefore include the following types of measures’. The logic of appearance – or the presentation of accumulated data as explanation – that is produced by the report genre and is particularly in evidence in Chapter 6’s sections on the economic benefits of a childcare strategy and on future demand for childcare are however particularly obtuse, and essentially force the reader to take what is presented at face value.

The fact that there is an amount of genre shifting going on, an oscillation between strong and weak framing can be seen by the fact that where the recommendations to be met are recontextualised out of the body of the report and into the Executive Summary, the principles from Chapter 5 are absent and it is rather, the demand-side and supply-side recommendations taken from Chapter 7 that are foregrounded. That is, in terms of what the
different sections of the text are trying to do, some sections, reflective of certain practices, but not others, (like Chapter 7’s) more easily fit with what the Executive Summary is doing, with its practices, and not others, notable the practices that underpin the advocacy work seen in the formulation of chapter 5’s underlying principles.

The problem-solving formulation favoured in much of the report conveyed by this logic of appearance – of additive relations between sentences and clauses as expressed in shaded boxes of bullet points – also contributes to a promotional element within the final report. In this way the shaded boxes can be seen as a resource for strong framing, for maintaining unilateral control over the work of the text. They figure as a pedagogical device, directing the reader to the main points (and their related practices) of the evolving national strategy on childcare. The example of the eleven recommendations from Chapter 7 being presented in the Executive Summary (page vii), in advance of the summary of the report’s full twenty-seven recommendations (pages viii – xi), (and being read therefore as potentially the recommendations of the report as a whole), is a clear example of this. Such presentations are reader-friendly but conceal the asymmetrical nature of the social relations being constructed (between who is doing the telling and who is being told).

The raison d’être of any report is in part to ‘sell’ a particular understanding of the relevant issues to its audience and to suggest how these issues might be addressed. This is why, as referenced, reports tend to most easily adopt, recycle, and potentially recontextualise elements of other reports. This is partly why actually giving voice to the 135 submissions received within the process of producing a final report would always be a challenging task for the EWG. But since a large part of what the report was selling is a collection of ideas (and knowledge and expertise) and how such ideas were to be understood, the presence of a logic of appearances is significant. Where legitimation through rationalisation is the mechanism for selling any understanding of the issues and their solutions, in the absence of any explanatory semiotic work and its appropriate reflection on causality, a purely instrumental rationality where actions are legitimised merely by reaching their goals demands that we pay attention to precisely what discourses are being employed, to what is being recontextualised.

This necessarily brings us onto the other element of the framework for assessing a discursive practice as a regulative practice, namely classification. The task here is to reflect on discourse and voice and assess what sort of boundaries or ‘insulations’ are set up between discourses. The recontextualisation of documentary and additive practices of a problem-solving structure, and of the resulting promotional practices above, transform the relevant practices into discourses and imposes upon these practices particular classifications and divisions. In continuing from the final observations on framing above, where shaded boxes
act as a resource for strong framing, their contents (bullet points, etc.) can also be seen as devices with a strong classification or insulation dimension since they are reader-directive, essentially dividing two subject positions, the teller and the listener. This brings us to the first significant division within the report of the EWG between what is included and what is excluded; specifically, between which voices and actors are present and which are absent.

The EWG was designed to be inclusive of as many voices as possible and the Introduction specifically remarks on the depth and breadth of ‘knowledge’, ‘skills’ and ‘perspectives’. This dynamic is potentially augmented by the voices and perspectives of those who contributed submissions, particularly everyone inside the process. But just as there is a certain ambivalence in genre use across the report as a whole, so too is there a shifting in the prominence of voices and actors at different points within the report. As the process was designed to be inclusive this observation, this division among those entities which are included is more interesting and revealing from the point of view of classification.

The collection of childcare experts comprised eighty members from government, the social partners, statutory bodies, NGOs, and parents, and as we are told in the Introduction, presented a ‘wealth of experience and knowledge on childcare but it also showed how disparate the perspectives on childcare can be’ (page xxiv). But in mirroring observations on framing, what is on the agenda and open for discussion is clearly separated or insulated from what is not open for discussion.

The terms of reference for the group as a whole come from the P2000 process, the sub-group topics are partly dictated by the concerns of other departments and other objectives (sub-group 5 is working for the Department of Health, and sub-group 6 is feeding into a separate Department of Education & Science process). Each sub-group’s objectives also separate what is on their agenda and what is not, which necessarily influences whether certain actor’s voices could ever be heard or not. And perhaps most significantly of all, the lack of any obvious ongoing interaction between the sub-groups means that each area of work was kept confined to its sub-group alone, thereby losing any potential benefit from the wealth of knowledge and experience available. The result is that in the Introduction the emphasis is on all the actors present and their general input with no specific acknowledgement of other actors beyond the group (other than to the DJELR, and the ADM support group, as well as a general reference to work commissioned by the EWG). Likewise, in Chapter 5 the only references to other actors beyond the membership of the group, as has been seen, are to the United Nations and the European Commission. Yet in Chapter 6 there are many other voices present, particularly those contained in the Goodbody report, whilst there is a simultaneous
absence of group members’ input, with the noted exception of one lone organisation that made a submission to the group.

In short, those who get to be heard and have their views incorporated into the report are economists, accountants, and other academics. Members’ contributions are absent or disjointed while the lists, targets, and objectives of this other set of ‘experts’ get summarised and reprinted elsewhere in the text. In Chapter 6 we can clearly see this other cohort of experts is involved in doing and acting, whereas parents, children, and local initiatives are at best waiting to see, waiting to identify their respective roles. Likewise, the text of Chapter 3 ‘Regulations, Training, Qualifications and Employment’ is predicated on the perceived need to attend to these issues as they have repeatedly been referenced in childcare reports going back over ‘twenty years’ (page 22), and following from evaluations of the issue of service regulation in particular, vis-à-vis the Child Care Act (1991). The chapter also sees heavy involvement of the Department of Health throughout. Chapter 4 on ‘Childcare Provision in Urban Disadvantages and Rural Areas’ similarly positions its approach to childcare in relation to the Government’s 1997 Anti-Poverty Strategy (page 36), which is overseen by the DJELR with input from the DSCFA.

This level of external directedness in the EWG’s work, of the involvement of these other agents in the strategy development process has serious implications for issues of classification. An example can be seen in Chapter 6’s elaboration of the three dimensions of assessing quality; where despite being included in the stakeholder group, children, parents, and local implementation groups feature only as ‘beneficiaries’, as opposed to the active stakeholders the report suggests. This delineation of external voices from internal voices coupled with the role given to the former then legitimises the EWG speaking on behalf of these stakeholders, but in large measure with the voice of others, those ‘expert’ voices outside the EWG’s civil society membership.

This dynamic is naturally reflected in the discourses present in the report. On the one hand, Chapter 5 is composed of a predominantly rights discourse, of inclusion, respect and protection, covering children’s rights, equality of opportunity and access, diversity, and partnership based on reason and mutually (and internationally) agreed norms, that is, on transparent principled positions, and without any reference to tension or complexity or a need for reaching consensus. Then where the Introduction covers much of the same territory and seeks to maintain the voice of all members, as expressed in the desire to avoid a ‘one-size fits all’ strategy to a national childcare policy (page xxiv), Chapter 6, in contrast, employs a simple discourse of economics and of economic competitiveness, with its focus on national growth whose logic remains unelaborated. The point to stress in relation to the presence of a
mix of discourses in the EWG’s report is that recontextualisation of practices, as highlighted, transforms the relevant practices into discourses and imposes upon the practices classifications and divisions. Therefore in assessing the relevance, the significance of this combination of discourses as an element of classification which contributes to regulating a discursive practice, it is necessary to reflect more closely on the nature of the recontextualisation that is evident in the EWG’s national strategy document.

**The Discursive Practice as a Principle of Recontextualisation**

Summarising is also an aspect of recontextualisation, where every practice and every network of practices (or field) recontextualises other social practices according to principles which are specific to that practice, deriving from particular forms of social production or work associated with that practice or field. So a Governmental speech, for example, is a practice which has recontextualised two other practices according to its own particular logic; that is, a press conference, or speech (such as that of the Minister for Children, Brian Lenihan) and a documentary practice (the content of the speech itself). Recontextualising practices are in a way uprooted from their own social circumstances and then appear in the recontextualised form of discourses or, for Bernstein, as an ‘imaginary’ form where the move from real to imaginary is a transformative space where the play of ideology occurs (Fairclough 2010: 399).

The concept of recontextualisation draws attention to the link between production (work) and representation, and in terms of the semiotic elements of such work, to the genres and discourses present and to the links between them in the set of social practices they help construe. The way in which other practices are represented depends upon the work that is going on, as well as the different positions occupied by those doing the work. This helps us to derive a focus for assessing the processes unfolding in the EWG report and the way in which the particular mix of genres and discourses accomplish their task. The reflection on the issue of to what degree the discursive practice of the EWG is regulated, how it is framed and classified, also helps us to better contextualise observations on these processes. In terms of framing, for example, summarising is a feature of reports as is the fact that reports most easily recontextualise elements of other reports (Fairclough 2010: 399-400). And as regards social practices, a report, like the EWG text, therefore tends to prioritise social practices which it can most easily assimilate into its own practice. This, in contrast to the group’s avowed inclusivity, is essentially a principle of exclusion.

Analytically this means that we can conclude from the amount of summarising (use of lists and bullet points, the presentation of objectives, targets, goals, boxes, shading, printing
selectively in bold, etc.) of which there is much, as evidence of the fact that the final national strategy document is in large part drawing from other pre-existing texts, and specifically the ideas and understandings (the social practices) contained in these texts – being the reports, studies, pieces of legislation, etc. such as found in the report’s appendix 1.8, (page 104), highlighted above. A corollary to this assessment is that many of the contributions from the 135 submissions received by the group, given the potential spread of themes and perspectives represented, would have made difficult work for the group members or their support staff if there was ever to be a concerted effort to incorporate them into the work of the sub-groups, and into the body of the final report.

This explains why they are most likely not present and why, when we do find one, as referenced in Chapter 6 – the specific quote being not particularly essential to what the chapter concludes – it seems odd. That is, these public contributions in many instances emerge out of a set of practices that when up-rooted are not easily synthesised into the production of an official report. Such attempts at recontextualisation, if successful, would necessarily produce a different report – if they produced a standard report at all – but which would naturally be evidence of weak framing and weak classification, of a process that is maximally open to genuine dialogue and publicly-oriented debate.

In comparison to the ‘experts’ contributing to official texts, many of the EWG members and certainly many of those who contributed submissions in advance of the EWG taking up its role, are engaged in other sets, other networks of social practices. These might include meetings, but meetings that may not incorporate visual presentations employing graphs and charts, meetings that may not be time-bound or goal-oriented, or even project-focused. These may be associations of actors and activists where there is never a microphone or even a lectern for somebody to stand behind, where they might anticipate undivided attention from the rest of the assembly. There may be no ‘brainstorming’ sessions or no demand for strategic ‘blue-sky’ thinking. These social situations may rely much more on face-to-face interaction, sometimes held in meetings, but often in more informal spaces, possibly involving inattentive children and non-participating adults.

Such gatherings moreover, may take place in meeting venues and trade union halls, but may just as likely occur in and around schools, playgroups, sports clubs, and other social and community centres, or even in rooms above a public house. Like the 135 submissions, the fruits of these practices, the knowledges and relations, the skills and expertise developed and available are always going to find it difficult to see their deliberations leave an imprint on any officially-guided and structured text, notwithstanding the presence of a set of practices actively trying to dilute, undermine, and exclude them. Given both the constraints on the
EWG and how the strategy document has been put together, it would be virtually impossible for this emerging identity, this combination of a network of social practices, this civil society originating social order to effectively colonise a national policy strategy of any kind.

The contrast between the difficulty faced by grassroots and community groups, as well as members of the EWG itself in having their practices represented in any debate on childcare, in constructing an order of discourse of their own, and the way in which the other expert voices succeed in leaving an impression on the order of childcare discourse is nowhere more stark than in the case of the expert voices of the Goodbody report on the economics of childcare. I have referenced this piece of commissioned work several times, both in analysing the official discourse on childcare and more recently in outlining and interrogating the content of the EWG report, specifically highlighting how a portion of its executive summary makes up a portion of the third section of Chapter 6. This is essentially an observation on how in reality the practice(s) of constructing an approach to childcare provision based on the imperatives of economic growth can colonise an official, non-economic national childcare strategy. But this is only part of the picture. I have also remarked on how it looks as if the Goodbody work was one of the last elements added to the full report of the EWG. This begs the question; why would a commissioned report that is given so much significance in the final report – a process that was spread over more than a year and a half – have been sought so relatively late in the EWG’s timetable.

This confusion is further compounded by the origin of the work. In its final report the EWG is happy to say that they commissioned the research, but the Introduction to the Executive Summary of the Goodbody report itself, expresses its genesis differently. Explicitly, it states that it was commissioned by Area Development Management Ltd., on behalf of the DJELR (page i). As per the EWG report’s glossary, ADM is ‘an independent company designated by the Government and the European Union to support integrated local economic and social development’, (page 116). There is a reference to this step being taken after the ‘deliberations’ of the sub-groups, but in the Goodbody text it clearly states that the DJELR was advised to undertake such a study by ADM, indeed the Goodbody report refers to ADM as an advisory body to that department. All we can say with any certainty is that somewhere along the way, some person or group of persons felt the ongoing work of the EWG was missing something, and as a result the Goodbody group was asked (by the DJELR or ADM) to undertake its research. Another point to note about the content of their study is that when it comes to identifying the ‘realities’ around which state provision of childcare revolves (page iv), those issues that feature are those that are ultimately presented in the EWG report.
These include the emergence of skills and labour shortages which could be mitigated by greater female participation in the labour force; that childcare costs are a significant barrier to female participation in the labour force; that childcare supports encourage mothers to remain in the labour market and to increase their hours of work; that high quality childcare will have positive benefits on a child’s development, reducing later costs to the state resulting from delinquency and unemployment; and that support for childcare is also warranted in terms of protecting children at risk (page v). This essentially covers the four historical pillars of official debate on childcare policy in Ireland – health, education, economy/employment, and gender equality/social inclusion (through access to employment) – all construed in a discourse of national economic growth. Also, when it comes to outlining their recommended programme for action (page vii) the text is not actually addressed to the EWG or even to the DJELR, but to the Government.

It is as if the researchers have forgotten that their work is supposed to feed into a broader process and is not to be presented directly to Government but to the EWG. Alternatively, this wording could be illustrative of what the Goodbody researchers believed would be the purpose of their efforts. This assessment is further supported when we look at their recommendations. Immediately, after its overview of Chapter 7 (page vii), the Goodbody report presents ten measures, divided into supply-side and demand-side measures, which are exactly the same as those eleven measures (minus one) that feature in the EWG Executive Summary (before all the recommendations are presented sequentially by chapter). In other words, not only do the Goodbody recommendations feature in the national strategy document exactly as the Goodbody report has drawn them up, but they feature in a shaded box more prominently than any of the EWG’s other recommendations.

**Summary**

In recontextualising such officially commissioned reports in its own image, the EWG report is ruthlessly converting the practices they represent into discourses of childcare provision and assembling them according to its own logic. In this way recontextualisation strongly frames the childcare debate and works ideologically as representation and classification, where the discourses of the final document are not for the most part influenced or colonised by parents (and their children), community groups, women’s groups, NGOs, and others, but by other ‘expert’ voices concerned with economic issues and their programmatic imperatives. If we return to the reflections on the possibility of a conjunctural emergence, of the disjointed, unconnected views on childcare provision coming together that the submissions and the depth of the EWG membership demonstrate is out there, of the potential for the emergence of a

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collective identity; we have to conclude that the EWG’s mechanism (despite the exceptions highlighted in the formulation of Chapter 5 and parts of the Introduction) has essentially neutralised this contrasting and conflictual input through the very forum that might have given it space to flourish.

Emergence requires dialogue as it is a dialectical process, so where there is no genuine dialogue, no dialectic, there can be no growth and no emergence of a collective identity, no novel ‘we’ of a genuine public sphere. In terms of Arendt’s contention that a really existing public sphere be evidenced by its combination of ‘speech with action’, all we can say is that the voice of civil society, of the non-governmental social partners and others is present in the national strategy document, but only in marginal ways. It has not managed to overtake or even to substantially influence and direct the practices as summarised by that document in textual form. Participants may have brought to the conjunctural assembly views and resources that might have left their impression on the national childcare strategy, but these have been filtered out through mediated practices of governance, management, and promotion, which many of the group’s actors – through their participation in the EWG – will then have recontextualise as their own amended discourses, essentially colonising their original ideas and resources, their practices, with the order of discourse of these ostensibly professional practices. In short, this is the exact opposite of the mix of colonisation and appropriation that those trying to advocate public sphere dialogue, those making submissions, and those civil society representatives participating in the EWG, would have hoped to find.

We are left to ponder what a genuinely democratic alternative combination of practices might have produced, what form its order of discourse might have taken and how it might contrast with that contained in the P2000 national childcare strategy document. The fact that the EWG was not able to break the rules so to speak, to do and to act in its members’ interests, to reflect their practices semiotically in their own genres and discourses, is a significant observation for the social partnership process generally and specifically in terms of its inclusive stance and its representative credentials. To reflect on Bourdieu’s observations on the challenge to contemporary public fields, the network of practices inherent in the open development of a national childcare strategy for the Irish Republic shows clear signs of economic encroachment of a particular neoliberal character. But this assessment of the contamination of this social field by economic imperatives of a particular order only confirms that the social partnership process existed as a necessary site of struggle for citizens and their organisations in fighting back against this advancing wave of social restructuring. The discourse analytical challenge emerges as an attempt to gauge what civil society might have done, how it might have acted to colonise the broader social partnership process to
better reflect its wishes and the needs of its broader membership, and to essentially re-establish democratic legitimacy in opposition to such a free-market-oriented restructuring of social policy. I will return to these points in addressing the third and fourth stages of the explanatory critique framework for all the analytical chapters in the final chapter below.

**Conclusion**

The main focus of my work in this chapter has been an attempt to assess to what extent recent official debates on childcare and childcare policy development, in so far as they are conceived of as having been inclusive of all stakeholders, can be taken as being examples of genuine open and symmetrical public sphere dialogue. Despite the detailed, elaborate, and consultative nature of the process of childcare discussion and debate entered into by Government and elements of civil society that emerged from the *Partnership 2000* process (1997), and possibly because of the parallel developments in relation to the expanding national economy; my general finding is that the economic imperatives of freeing up people to enter the workforce and be retained there, remained the dominant feature of official childcare discourse and action throughout the contemporary period. Though childcare is collocated with health (child physical and mental wellbeing); education (early learning and child-centred development); and with social inclusion (advancing gender equality by affording women access to education, training and employment); both in advance of and during the P2000 discussions, the analysis of official texts, and particularly of the EWG’s Chapter 6, shows that childcare – and the health, educational, and inclusive practices to which it relates – become collectively construed as a set of managerial and administrative practices related to the augmentation of the national workforce.

The semiotic element of these dominant practices, as seen in EWG report, represents particular ideological constructions of childcare that tie it to national economic advancement, and to collective progress of a particular order. That is, the productive work of these texts (their combinations of genres and discourses) is to reconfigure or ‘recontextualise’ an official narrative of national economic growth and prosperity found elsewhere, to colonise the debate on a national childcare strategy with representations of childcare as both a tool to increase the supply of workers for the labour market on the one hand, and of childcare provision as a potential business opportunity in its own right on the other. That is, the network of practices related to economics has expanded to incorporate the field of social policy. The semiotic disfluency around the issue that is apparent in the range of historical texts where childcare is a focus has been ironed out, but in one direction only. The goal is to essentially colonise the
childcare debate in this fashion to effectively manage perceptions of policy development and implementation in this ‘novel’ yet restrictive way, with its implicit assumptions about child health and development, and gender equality predicated on access to individual wealth opportunities through employment.

This way of ‘framing’ and ‘classifying’ childcare, of the emergent characteristics of its recontextualised order of discourse, is clearly evident in the Minister’s speech on the Early Childcare Supplement payment, delivered seven years after the EWG report’s publication. In this text moreover, we can identify not simply the origin of that set of practices in which childcare is positioned, but also how the speech advances the pro-market nature of these practices, that is, a particular order of discourse. This is visible in ways in which ideas about ‘choice’ and the active individual are advanced, and by the reorientation of the understanding of the ‘partnership’ relationship that is being forged between the citizen and the state through such texts and policies. A key point to remember in all of this analysis in terms of my overarching research question, as it pertains to a systematic weakening of democratic processes, is that the EWG has been central to these regulative and recontextualising developments. In the final analysis, the picture that emerges of the EWG and its work is that the group’s public sphere credentials remain seriously in question throughout.

From the beginning the parameters of the childcare landscape have been dictated by many official concerns not generated by the group itself, such as the group’s original objectives and the terms of reference of the eight working group sub-groups. Some of the group’s work, moreover, is directly related to narrowly-defined on-going state concerns in the area of child health and education. Most significantly however, serious question marks remain about the general level of interaction between all 80-plus members of the group, given their early separation into the pre-defined sub-groups. Added to this, is the recognition that late in the process a way was found to prioritise a study on the economics of childcare, whose recommendations seem to have essentially jumped to the front of the queue in the final report. The group’s civil society cohort, the representatives of social partnership’s newly-established community and voluntary pillar, seem therefore to have found it very difficult, impossible almost, to influence the process with the sentiment and force of their local grassroots perspectives and alternative voices, that is, of their own networks of practices in their discursive form. The possibility of an emergent collective identity reflective of these actors’ aspirations in relation to a national childcare strategy – of linking their speech to forms of action – seems oddly stifled and constricted by the very process that seems on the surface at least, to have been designed to facilitate such progress.
In terms of my final objective with this work, of reflecting on what the analysis reveals and how this impacts upon considerations for effective public space dialogue; my finding, that ultimately what is put on the table at the start of the process remains on the table throughout, forces me to return to issues of process and of procedural control. In the final analysis the result of the process only serves to highlight how the field of social policy and childcare provision in particular, has been contaminated by the field of economics and that civil society actors, far from advancing a genuine public sphere, have through their participation partly facilitated this encroachment, this colonisation. Essentially the working group, through its operations, has legitimised a strategy for the control of debate and for the marginalising of ‘unhelpful’ understandings and ways of working (of other genres and discourses) by the state. The significant point in contrast to the analysis of the discursive construal immigration policy is that unlike that case, there is clear evidence here of a genuine public sphere of activity and deliberation.

The public sphere was not a ‘fake’ one. Here, however, it appears to be the case that public space itself, that particular conjuncture of civil society and state agencies, which has been implicated in the closing down of debate. In this instance strategies of (de)politicisation do not appear to be acting on the public sphere so much as the public sphere appears to have been co-opted by the Government and its supporters as a central strategy in a broader process of (de)politicisation. Moreover the evidence from this chapter shows that this has largely been accomplished through making ‘experts’ of all participants within the EWG, and by then adjusting the rules of the game, the nomos of the field, in the interests of the ‘official experts’ at the expense of the other voices present, of other ways of being and acting. I wish to pursue this point further in the next chapter when I look more deeply at the relationship between the social partnership process, debates on social policy, and the public sphere.

* * *
Chapter Seven

Social Partnership: Consensus and a Neoliberal Order of Discourse

Fianna Fáil party leader and Ireland’s Prime Minister throughout the 1997 to 2007 period, Bertie Ahern was long a focus of interest and even ridicule, from the public, media, and opposition parties alike, for his idiosyncratic use of language.\(^1\) One particular case of a ‘Bertieism’ relevant to the focus of this chapter is his put down of critics of his Government’s policies as ‘creeping Jesuses’. This phrase was deployed in a speech to the annual conference of the Irish Management Institute (IMI) in Killarney, April 2000. At an event at which Ahern was a regular guest in the boom years in his consistent drive to talk up prospects for continued growth with prosperity, he used this phrase to characterise an unspecified group of ‘naysayers’ and ‘begrudgers’ whom he felt were in danger of undermining the economic health of the nation through their repeated critiquing of choices being made by Government and its supporters. Once reviews of his conference speech hit the media the issue gathered political steam.\(^2\) This culminated some weeks later in opposition leader John Bruton (Fine Gael) asking the Taoiseach directly in the Dáil chamber to whom precisely he was referring when using the phrase ‘creeping Jesuses’ and why such voices were so upsetting to the Government.\(^3\) In that particular exchange Ahern was reluctant to state explicitly who might have been the focus of his ire, saying only that he was thinking of voices from within the City of London who had expressed concern over the economic trajectory of Ireland’s growth and the prospect for future collapse. Indeed, his main objective seemed to be to nullify the idea that he might be talking about any Irish individual or group.

The phrase ‘a creeping Jesus’ is interesting (and not uncontroversial \(^4\)), but is generally held to be a variant on the British English concept of ‘a jobsworth’, being a person who pedantically applies themselves to their task to such a degree as to undermine notions of common sense and civility, and hence any respect for the position they hold. And maybe even more so, a creeping Jesus is someone who is overly zealous in the execution of their duties in adhering to a perceived orthodoxy and in being vigilant in ensuring others uphold its norms. In this sense the use of this particular phrase by the Taoiseach is especially noteworthy. Inherent in these concepts is an acceptance that such a person is not doing anything wrong, but that on the contrary, they are doing exactly what they are employed to

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\(^1\) See Hanafin (2007).


\(^3\) Dáil Éireann (2000).

\(^4\) Frank McNally. “And the Word was Flesched Out.” \textit{The Irish Times}: 64. Apr 22 2000.
do, only to a perceived unnecessary and irritating degree. By pouring opprobrium on critics of the Government’s policy choices in this way, Ahern was therefore indirectly acknowledging that there may in fact be some truth to these critiques, or at least that the blueprint being implemented by Fianna Fáil and its coalition partners – held as being responsible for the recent levels of growth – might actually be storing up problems for the future. The particular form of criticism from the Taoiseach is rather more reflective of a level of frustration that someone, anyone, might not be ‘playing ball’ so to speak, or that groups might be willing to undermine the nation and its economic performance by draw attention to such potential incongruities or anomalies in the policy prescription being implemented or its real world consequences. It is almost as if Ahern felt compelled to confront those whom he believed must be invested with some ubiquitous fatalism, having dared challenge what he and his Government saw as an unspoken national consensus.

Just a few weeks after the IMI speech, Irish Times columnist Maev-Ann Wren drew a distinction between how Ahern – with a phrase like ‘creeping Jesuses’ – approaches criticism of official policy, and how the arch-monetarist and Minister of Finance Charlie McCreevy did the same. Wren acknowledges that unlike tax-cutting McCreevy’s chiding of critics as perennial ‘pinkos’, Ahern at least seemed to recognise that it was not the Government alone who could take credit for the unprecedented levels of economic growth the county had experienced in the previous decade. Wren highlights that in cooperating with the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) and the ‘social partners’ ‘that while Ahern is politic enough to draw the mantle of the social partners and the last 14 years around his Government's policies […] his subordinates can be less judicious in tone’.

It is always possible therefore, when viewed in this light, that the Taoiseach’s anxiety about those ‘playing offside’ in the public sphere was reflective of the concerns of the social partners – trade unions, civil society groups, as well as business and industry – and a recognition by him that they may have had valid concerns about the nature of Irish society and its direction, regardless of the levels of economic growth. In this chapter I want to broaden out this interrelationship between the state and the social partners in the public sphere, to interrogate the specific role the partnership process has played in facilitating neoliberal political choices and their effects on social policy in particular. To do this I will focus on the ideological and strategic nature of social partnership in effectively co-opting civil society and in successfully managing the public sphere in its own interests as a result, and the role of semiosis in this dynamic.

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In drawing on the findings of the childcare chapter an approach to an investigation of the public sphere credentials of the social partnership process could still maintain the position that there were some positive elements of the experience of the Expert Working Group (EWG). Notwithstanding the group’s broader experience, an obvious point of departure could be to see in its (partial) rights-based approach to the issue of childcare that was construed and the broader vision of its social benefits, the potential for a functioning space for the interaction of civil society organisations, as well as the opportunity to effectively influence national policy from within the partnership arrangement. Indeed, the expanding incorporation of representative organisations from the community and voluntary sector as new ‘partners’ in the post-1996 social partnership process, could itself be read as a manifestation of just such a positive trend.

On the negative side however, and being mindful of the experience of the EWG, is the fact that those organisations invited to participate in the social partnership talks from the mid-1990s onwards were indeed ‘invited’ to participate. That is, Government and state structures have always maintained control over the approval of ‘partners’ for inclusion in what the process came to label the ‘social pillar’. Likewise, many aspects of the ongoing partnership negotiations, such as taxation policy (Hardiman 2001, cited in Ó Broin 2009: 122), always remained off-limits to this group, and, over time, their direct contact with representatives of Government – as opposed to civil servants only (Murphy 2002, cited in Ó Broin 2009: 121) – became ever more restricted.

In terms of the social agenda in particular, other ‘official’ parallel structures were also established, such as the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) in 1993, and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) in 1997, which, although not invested with the authority to dictate policy themselves, nevertheless began to limit the input from the social pillar, and to diminish the role of social partnership in social policy development generally (see Connolly 2008). Even if we can claim therefore that the public sphere credentials of the social partnership process – as assessed by the presence of the social pillar’s discursive practices – is a necessary condition for the process at large to be recognised as a healthy public sphere, we can see in the analysis of the debate on a national childcare strategy, that it is not a sufficient condition for such an assessment.

The conclusion therefore has to be that the idea that the social partnership process might be usefully interrogated as a potential site of genuine public sphere dialogue and debate has much more going against it than it has going for it. This assessment moreover, does not even take on board the views of members of the social pillar who participated in the partnership process and later withdrew. My thesis in this chapter therefore is that in terms of
official (de)politicising strategies aimed at suppressing open dialogue between conflicting perspectives towards an overarching prioritisation on producing consensus, the public sphere was more than an arena in which such strategies took place; the co-option of the public sphere was rather, a macro-strategy of the (de)politicisation ethic within Irish polity itself. And secondly, that in procedures designed to infiltrate and control public space debate, the social partnership process was a significant tool deployed by the state in effecting such a strategy.

In constructing a public system reliant on conceptions of bargaining and solidarity, it was accepted that a process of debate and of ongoing deliberation would be required to develop a ‘national understanding’ of what was required. This is especially the case since the existing tri-partite arrangements that led to the national pay agreements in the 1970s and early 1980s were deemed too weak to accomplish the required tasks in an era of mass unemployment, emigration, and a soaring balance of payments deficit. Yet the neo-corporatist, macro-bargaining model of social partnership, applied effectively internationally, faced obstacles in Ireland; principally, the lack of single monopoly organisations representing the social actors (see Allen 2000 and O’Donnell 2008). Indeed, this new national settlement would, in effect, need to incorporate the formulation of a kind of ‘identity’ of the partnership actors within a broader national agenda (O’Donnell 2008: 78). Or, more bluntly, a coherent set of ideas, an ideology, about what social partnership was, what it might be responding to, and why it might be necessary, all needed to be constructed. Moreover, through NESC, the twin objectives of ‘problem-solving’ and ‘consensus’ were prioritised and then inscribed within the elaboration of this national understanding. Public advocacy was to focus on analysis, dialogue, and shared understanding, with the Government all the while acting as gatekeeper, tightly controlling the arrangement throughout. In this way, and in keeping with the focus of this work, it can clearly be seen that from the beginning of ‘partnership’ the state was particularly interested in the semiotic dimension of the fledgling process.

The idea that the instigation of social partnership in Ireland marked a form of institutional transformation of a significant type, as a kind of ‘regime change’ has been expressed before (see Connolly 2008, Hardiman 2002, Harvey 2009, Kirby 2010, and Murphy 2009). A major observation on these critiques however, is that in all these cases this precise issue of semiosis is underdeveloped, or more precisely, the link between a radical set of new ideas and inclusive policy agreement; from a fundamental reformulation of the ‘crisis’ that is now at hand to how ‘we’ are to respond to it; from a new agenda to policy implementation, goes under-analysed. The area that is most of interest to the critical discourse analyst therefore remains the major lacuna in much of these critiques of social
partnership, that is, the under-theorisation of how precisely ideas accomplish structural and institutional change, of how the fixing of certain sets of ideas in the collective consciousness can be discursively accomplished. Or, as Legro (2000: 421) says, the ways in which ‘the enduring dominant mode of social thought on appropriate action in a particular issue domain, even if other often-contradictory views are sure to exist’ comes to be consolidated. The particular methodological challenge in this chapter is therefore to operationalise a theorisation of socio-political transformation that appropriately takes on board the way a powerful emergent ideology successfully resists any challenge from within society, which can be productively approached semiotically, and which also adds to the general contentions about social partnership’s role in neoliberal policy paradigm transformation in Ireland.

In building on the detail of the emergence of social partnership within Irish political history, as outlined in Chapter Three above, in the next section of this chapter I therefore begin the operationalisation of the explanatory critique framework by developing a theorisation of Irish social partnership’s place within policy paradigm change generally. Effectively, I make a case for social partnership as a material representation of a neoliberal social order in the Irish Republic. In connecting with my general interest in the anti-democratic nature of the neoliberal project, I also link this theorisation to a framing of social partnership as a mechanism for depoliticising the public sphere through the particular way its formulation impacts upon those civil society actors best willing and able to present a critique of the emerging neoliberal orthodoxy and to propose alternative perspectives. This theorisation is necessarily interdisciplinary in nature drawing on state theory, institutional learning, and ideation theory in particular. In a transdisciplinary way I then map this perspective onto the Irish case and significantly, I highlight the benefit of a critical analysis of the discursive dimensions of social partnership to illuminating how precisely the ideas about a nation in crisis and the need for a radical remedial prescription (including social partnership) came to be so readily adopted.

Central to the focus on social partnership is the official prioritisation of a need for consensus, cohesion, and a suppression of dissent. This reflection points to the need to take a historical look at where such notions have come from within the process. This leads to an analytic engagement with the state’s official, pre-social partnership NESC strategy document from 1986, a text that strongly advocates all of these concerns. The archaeological work that this position points to connects with the second stage of the framework. The challenge for the first step of Stage 2 of the analysis is to move from a well-grounded theoretical position to a semiotically oriented approach to social partnership as a depoliticising tool. This means that we move from seeing social partnership as a neoliberal social order to viewing its
discursive aspect as a neoliberal order of discourse. By this I mean an order that is a combination of genres, discourses, and voices that demonstrate and otherwise promote the rightness and normalcy of its ethic of the play of unrestricted global markets above all other concerns.

This theorisation of social partnership’s place in Irish polity therefore points to a twin analytical approach to official texts, producing a structural cleavage in Stage 2. That is, Stage 2; steps 1.i, 2.i, and 3.i all related to an overview and analysis of these NESC documents, where as Stage 2; steps 1.ii, 2.ii, and 3.ii relate to the more contemporary debate on social policy and the issue of social capital in particular. The historical analysis is essentially a form of ideological critique of the interrelationship between power and ideas, and, in the texts from the period that is the focus of this work as a whole, I adopt a strategic critique, or an examination of the choices pursued by agents to alter society in particular ways. This chapter therefore sees the only genuinely historical, pre-1997, analysis of texts since all other engagements with texts before this date (as in the chapter on childcare policy) have been presented and assessed for relevant background and contextual purposes only, and have not been analysed discursively.

In terms of methodology generally, the approach being adopted in this chapter requires a focus on the ideational and the interpersonal metafunctions of the clause, with a concentration on modality in particular in the analysis of the historical document. In the more contemporary case, with its strategic critique, the focus is less on the emergence of the ideological nature of the discourses being circulated, but rather, on the issues of recontextualisation and operationalisation of genres and discourses as elements of sets of practices transposed from the field of neoliberal economics onto those sets of practices in the field of social policy, and the equality agenda more broadly. The emphasis in this second part of the analysis is therefore on issues of interdiscursivity. Also, in relation to my overarching interest in the health of democratic debate and the public sphere, the contemporary analysis also concentrates on issues of classification and framing as indices of openness and inclusion in processes of citizen and state deliberation.

As the examination of civil society’s experience in the working group on childcare policy demonstrated, civil society’s role in the development of social policy through the partnership process has been difficult. This is why a focus on the (de)politicising potential of the partnership process as a neoliberal social order can usefully be directed at this broad policy area. That is, issues of the colonisation of networks of practices are more likely to be visible in their semiotic aspect in fields, like childcare policy, that are far removed from the economic field. As an organic extension of the background to the last chapter, in this case
my contemporary analysis focuses on the area of the equality agenda and the field of community development. Specifically, I focus on the emergent concept of ‘social capital’ and the official ‘Active Citizenship’ initiative, as a manifestation of the Government’s (and the Taoiseach’s) particular embrace of the concept of social capital.

Adopting a critical approach that draws on existing, non-linguistic, perspectives on social capital in Irish polity, I advance such contentions by tracing the origin of the ideas of social capital and active citizenship as an imaginary, and follow the classification of these ideas in the emergent, post-2000 discourses of civil republicanism and the active citizen. In the second part of my analytical work I therefore assess two official reports from 2007 from the perspective of a strategic critique, both linking back to what the ideological critique of the NESC texts reveals, but also connecting with investigations of the larger question of social partnership’s role in co-opting society and restricting genuinely open and balanced forms of dialogue and debate.

7.1 A Transdisciplinary Approach to Text Analysis

7.1.1 Stage 1: A social problem in its semiotic aspect:

Irish Social Partnership; a consensual vehicle for radical policy change

The challenge in this stage of the framework is to make a case for such a reading of social partnership in Irish political life that links to the colonisation of the public sphere and the co-option of alternative voices. That is, to problematise social partnership as integral to official processes of (de)politicisation and legitimation, designed to win agreement for official perspectives and actions in areas of social life, of how issues are to be understood and responded to; and secondly, to theorise this view of the concertation process in a transdisciplinary way such that it facilitates an approach to its semiotic aspect in the next stage. The construction of social partnership in this fashion draws on ideas from the disciplines including state theory and institutional change, which I shall also summarise below.

Step 1: Selecting a social problem which can be approached in a transdisciplinary way

A way to frame the question of what social partnership is doing in relation to the Irish public sphere is to ask whether we can see evidence of the process essentially creating a new public sphere...
sphere in a neoliberal image. In complementing the question addressed in the previous chapter of whether a healthy public sphere is even possible under contemporary socio-political conditions, the focus of the research in this chapter then is to further develop that critique and ask whether macro-level bargaining arrangements, like social partnership, are in reality inherently dangerous or have become dangerous to genuine open and inclusive public debate. Where official debate on immigration legislation reform can be seen as evidence of an ostensibly fake public sphere, and where the setting up of the EWG on childcare can be read as a phantom public sphere, can the multi-actor concertation process that is Irish social partnership be understood as an ‘infected’ public sphere. That is, is there evidence of the process, in its particular configuration and ethos, inhabiting and eviscerating a public sphere framework, of collapsing the potential for deliberative action and then of reconstructing and re-inhabiting it as a pseudo-public sphere in its own, neoliberal image? Or is there evidence of the Irish state attempting to do what Blyth (2001: 4-5) calls ‘establishing the centrality of a set of economic ideas as a key mediating variable between structural change in the economic field and institutional change in the political field’?

Discursively, this means that we are looking in a structured way for evidence of contamination of the public sphere through colonisation of that space by the social partnership process itself, that is, a process invested with the social and discursive practices of the economic field in their neoliberal form. In contrast to the two previous analytical chapters, in viewing social partnership as an integral part of the social problem of the neoliberal project’s anti-democratic tendency, in this chapter the framing of the approach is essentially reoriented. Here, a priori, the position is that the institutionalisation of social partnership as an agreement and as a structure has seen it deployed in a unique way to actively control and ultimately silence the multiple and contrarian civil society and political voices in Irish society at large. Before theorising the specific role of social partnership in the broader social problem in order to assess it semiotically, however, it is necessary to firstly clarify some positions taken in the particular theorisation of social partnership that I am adopting here.

Step 2: Constructing the object of research in a transdisciplinary way
Ontologically the presentation of the social problem here has already identified three entities: the neoliberal project, the social partnership process, and the public sphere. My position is that the former, as an economic programme predicated on liberalising markets for the exchange of good and services, and designed to prioritise the drive to national competitiveness with a view to open and effective participation in an ever more global
environment, has been and remains the blueprint for the model of social partnership developed in the Irish Republic since 1987. Essentially, this means that the national settlement that is Irish social partnership has been imbued with a neoliberal ethos from the outset (see Connolly 2008: 12-17).

In terms of the process’s role as a space for civil society actors, particularly for those who see the neoliberal model as something to be challenged, whose nature and purpose as officially expressed, are not things to be left uncontested, this characteristic of social partnership is particularly significant from the perspective of contestation and debate. Where social partnership acts as the focus for consensual or conflictual interaction between concerned citizens on the one hand, and the development and execution of neoliberal-infused national economic and social policy by subsequent governments on the other, it is clear that as a minimum, social partnership will always have a direct and significant impact on any attempt to maintain and develop an effective public sphere simply by virtue of the social space it occupies. In short, social partnership oscillates between the dual roles of gateway and gatekeeper.

This means that the partnership arrangement occupies a pivotal position between structure and agency, and in terms of the dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis being adopted in this work, this positions the social partnership process as a set of social practices (or networks of practices) that mediate – in large measure discursively – between structure and event. In terms of the neoliberal dimension of the social partnership programme at a general level, my position here is that not only is the concertation process bound up with a broader neoliberal project as a consequence of choices made in the political field, but by virtue of the significance of the ‘partnership’ process as initiated, and as it has been institutionalised and has expanded over more than two-and-a-half decades, it has become, in effect, a vehicle for disseminating the neoliberal orthodoxy throughout the Irish body politic and in society at large. Essentially, social partnership has occupied the position of an ideological and strategic conduit for Irish neoliberalism. That is to say, that the social partnership process has been centrally implicated in normalising the neoliberal paradigm across the social and political fields since its inception.

*Third Order Change*

As a way to advance the construction of social partnership as a set of key social practices in the field of policy-making and in incorporating observations on its neoliberal ethos, it is necessary to theorise the interplay of social partnership and policy implementation to allow for a semiotically oriented way of assessing Irish social partnership and the contention on its
role in co-opting civil society and of effectively hi-jacking the public sphere. My approach
draws on elements of political and state theory, and on institutional and policy studies, and
particularly on notions of radical ‘third order’ change (Hall 1993) and ‘cognitive locking’
(Blyth 2001). Inherent in Hall’s particular thesis is a rejection of what he terms ‘punctuated
equilibrium’, the notion that a period of stasis is intermittently broken, then replaced by
moments of incremental change, to be followed by another period of stasis. That is, he
rejects the notion that radical policy change over time at the national level can be explained
by a compilation of intermittent periods of incremental change essentially adding up to
radical change. Such change is more likely to come from societal pressure, the interaction of
internal actors, (political parties, trade unions, and other civil society actors), but for Hall
radical shifts in policy paradigms rarely, if ever, emanate from such material interaction, but
rather, from a ‘learning process’.

Hall proposes three levels of change, namely ‘first order’, ‘second order’ and ‘third
order’ change. First order change relates to adjustments to a policy tool’s settings, second
order change focuses on amendments to the policy instruments themselves, while third order
change results from a reorientation of the fundamental policy goals themselves. Most policy
change confines itself to first and second order change only, and follows from experience or
from the acquisition of new knowledge or from negative evaluations of existing policy
choices. The significant point for Hall in terms of social learning is that such adjustments are
predicated on the underlying goals of policy remaining unchanged. The pattern of third order
change on the other hand sees changes to all variables, including the policy goals, and he
presents the post-1979 shift from a Keynesian economic model to a monetarist one adopted
by the Conservative party in Britain as an example of the latter.6 The kernel of the thesis is
that social learning significantly relies on ‘ideas’ and the role ideas play in policy change,
therefore it draws on ‘ideation theory’, where policymakers work within ‘a framework of ideas
and standards that specifies not only the goals but also the kinds of instruments that can be
used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing’
(Hall 1993: 279).

In drawing on Tomas Kuhn’s concept of a ‘scientific paradigm’, Hall terms such a
framework a ‘policy paradigm’ in which third order change represents a paradigm shift, ‘a

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6 In terms of a state’s welfare response to adult unemployment, for example; first order change equates to the
rates of benefit payment, with second order change focusing on eligibility criteria, or on the division of the
payment between an insurance-based element and a discretionary component. Third order change however,
would signify a new understanding of the issue of joblessness itself, and one that perhaps fundamentally
reorients the way the state views its responsibilities vis-à-vis the continued provision of material support. This
new settlement may, for example, result in the placing of ever-increasing expectations and duties on the
unwaged in exchange for ensuring ongoing receipt of state support, or even the eradication of a guarantee of
support.
disjunctive process’ leading to discontinuities in policy. He postulates that third order change has some of the following characteristics; the replacing of one policy paradigm by another is likely to be more sociological than scientific, that is, the move will ultimately ‘entail a set of judgements that is more political in tone’; secondly, the issue of authority is likely to be a significant factor and the ‘policy community’ will engage in a contest for authority over the issues at hand; and issues of experimentation and failure will play a role whereby any ongoing policy failure to meet with the new policy goals will have detrimental effects on the contents of the new policy paradigm (ibid. 280). In other words, for those sectors who have the power to define the ‘problems’ and draw up policy ‘solutions’, so long as the new ideas keep working the new settlement will prove very resilient to new challenges.

Hall’s key contribution to state theory from this conception of social learning is in ‘drawing attention to the role of ideas in politics’, (1993: 289). That is, exclusively materialist or institutionalist accounts that rely on the actions and interactions of pressure groups alone cannot adequately account for the reality of policy discontinuities and radical change. This perspective then necessarily attaches significant power to the political system, but also – and crucially in remembering the experience of the EWG on childcare – to interested intermediaries that position themselves between the state and society. In short, it affords significant capital to politically or ideologically motivated groups who can position themselves as ‘experts’ in any particular field in advance of the actual formulation of policy. This fact also bestows upon their judgments (and their discursive practices) a value-added dimension, which elevates their position in the hierarchy of authority, and in incorporating Bourdieu’s interest in who it is that gets to set the nomos of the field, producing a dynamic that is self-perpetuating.

**Blueprints, Weapons, and Cognitive Locking**

In much the same way as Hall illuminates his thesis by drawing on the British case, in the context of the Irish Republic it becomes easier in this light to see the embracing of the neoliberal economic model and the neoliberal project generally as an example of a policy paradigm shift. But before I elaborate the relationship between third order change and the social partnership process further, I want to develop some of Hall’s points by drawing on the work of Mark Blyth on institutional change, encompassing design, contestation, and enforcement. Like Hall, Blyth positions the role of ideas as central to institutional change, or as he claims ‘as the sine qua non of institutional construction’, (2001: 2). He advances this position by challenging the notion that it is agents’ interests, given by their structural location, that have primacy. Interests, he contends, depend in large measure on ideas and sets
of ideas, especially at times of uncertainty and crisis. It is ‘by defining what the economy is, how it operates and the place of the individual or collectivity within the economy’ that ideas reduce uncertainty by (re)defining the problem or crisis ‘and project the institutional reforms that arguably will resolve it’, (2001: 4). In this way ideas are seen as ‘blueprints’, where, as with Hall, it is usually non-political actors, often ‘experts’, who develop such institutional blueprints, or from whose ideas others construct and begin to circulate such blueprints.

As with Hall’s hierarchy of judgements, Blyth suggests that the ideas contained in such blueprints need to be advanced above other (sets of) ideas and that the circulation, or as he terms it the ‘development and deployment’ of ideas is a prerequisite for change (ibid.). In this way ideas can be viewed as ‘weapons’ and in being weaponised agents embark on institutional change by highlighting solutions to current crises. The third and most significant element of the power of ideas in policy change follows from this aggressive deployment and is captured in the notion of a ‘cognitive lock’. Drawing directly on the work of Hall and others, Blyth operationalises this term to explain how once institutionalised, new ideas can effect policy outcomes such that policy-making – and even critiques of such policy-making – becomes possible except in terms of the ideas that emanate from the specific blueprint that are activated as weapons. Moreover, such sets of ideas, once institutionalised, produce outcomes independent of the specific agents who originally developed them.

This explains how successive national governments in any jurisdiction, of ostensibly different persuasions, continue to run with the same policy paradigm once it has emerged as a result of third order change; that is, of such cognitive locking. This has been a significant feature of social partnership success in Ireland (see Hardiman, cited in O’Donnell 2008: 88, and Connolly 2008). In advancing this concept, Blyth proposes that a policy paradigm will remain hegemonic indefinitely until such time as it can be shown to fail, where such a shift is reliant on a new blueprint – which itself may redefine what failure is, its causes and symptoms – with such ideational force and by such agents that its deployment breaks the hold of the existing set of ideas. In short, once a new set of ideas can break the cognitive lock of the waning paradigm and fasten its own cognitive lock. The wholesale rejection of the Keynesian economic doctrine and its replacement by the once marginal monetarist agenda undertaken by successive western governments from the early 1980s onwards can be seen as just such a breaking and setting of cognitive locks.

Again, as with Hall, Blyth maintains that it is not the agents (civil servants, academics, experts and politicians) or the institutions (structures, departments, offices, think-
tanks, quangos ⁷, etc.) themselves that produce this adherence to a particular blueprint over
time (that pattern that in the literature is often referred to a ‘path dependency’), it is rather,
the ideational cognitive locking that does so. Legro (2000: 420), in addressing some of the
gaps in ideation theory, suggests firstly, that actors must both concur that the old set of ideas
and its structure or institutional base must be recognised as inadequate for current needs, and
secondly, and simultaneously, that the actors must agree on a new set of ideas which must be
consolidated as a replacement for the old set of ideas to avoid a return to the previous
situation. Essentially, he suggests that successful ideational change, or as he terms it
‘discontinuous change’, requires both a stage of collapse, followed by a stage of
consolidation. Schmidt (2002: 171-173) points to both the communicative and the
coordinative dimensions of the deployment of new ideas as a way of understanding why
some transitions are smoother and more successful than others. Since such sets of ideas are
necessarily aggregations and not the ideas of individuals, the ability to successfully
‘transcend collapse’ is effectively an issue of what actors or groups – with the assistance of
which structures or institutions – get to define the nature of the failings of the current
condition.

If we then accept that where a collective idea can be understood as ‘an enduring
dominant mode of societal thought on appropriate action in a particular issue domain, even if
other often-contradictory views are sure to exist’, (Legro 2000: 421), we can clearly see the
central importance of agreement and consensus. That is, agreement on ideas, or more
explicitly, on fomenting an understanding of the set of collective expectations and on the
experienced consequences of critical events that for Legro are central to the identification of a
collapse of an outgoing orthodoxy on the one hand, and on the particular presentation of the
hierarchy of ideational elements that make up a new orthodoxy to facilitate its consolidation,
on the other (ibid. 424-25). Central to Hall’s notion of third order change, Blyth’s cognitive
locking, and Legro’s collapse followed by consolidation is not only an emergent official
position on why a need for radical change exists (and the way in which a state of crisis comes
to be construed and represented), but more importantly, that any new paradigm gets to define
survival, recovery, and success in its own terms, thereby affording it significant power. In
Bourdieuans terms then these ideas, once successfully ‘locked in’, become doxic and free to
establish the nomos of their network of practices, only ever being open to evaluation on their
own terms.

⁷ Literally: QUasi Autonomous Non-Governmental OrganisationS.
Radical Policy Change and the Semiotic Lacuna

In accepting that third order change and cognitive locking, as outlined, are largely ideological in character also implies an acceptance that these processes as substantially semiotic. As such, contributors on ideation theory and ideational change necessarily reference ideas very explicitly, yet in most theoretical pieces these elaborations lack detail and specifics. Hall for example, talks of ideas and economic ideas specifically as agentive, but he does not interrogate the concept any further. Likewise, beyond elaborating the role of ideas in his conception of a blueprint, of weapons and of a cognitive lock, Blyth does not pick apart what ideas might be, and what it might be that invests them with power, or indeed how such elements might be identified or recognised. In his focus on transformation in sets of collective ideas however, Legro does extend the concept to state that ideas can be embodied in ‘symbols, institutions and discourse’, (2000: 420), but other than maintaining that such ideas cannot be reduced to individual notions, he leaves any precise understanding of these terms unexamined. Vivien Schmidt (2002) by contrast, puts the notion of discourse at the centre of her study on relative levels of success in advancing neoliberal welfare policy change. She contrasts several pairs of case studies along two axes, the second of which relates to the level of what she terms ‘communicative discourse’ of public relations as opposed to the ‘coordinative discourse’ of actors already at the decision table. Though somewhat underdeveloped, essentially, Schmidt (ibid. 168) is advancing the notion of a set of ideas as being embedded in discourse, as ‘both a set of ideas and as an interactive process’.

This conception is not particularly problematic for operationalisation within a critical analytical paradigm, but later Schmidt seems to limit her understanding of discourse to mean ‘whatever policy actors say to one another and to the public more generally in their efforts to construct and legitimate their policy programmes (ibid. 169). Nevertheless, here the interplay of ideational transformation is clearly seen as a function of discourse and the operationalisation of discourse choices. Much the same position is adopted in Ellingson’s (1995) work on the role of discourse in understanding collective action (cited in Legro 2000: 421), where discourse is understood as ‘a set of arguments organised around a specific diagnosis of and solution to some social problem’. The point to note here is that however underdeveloped it might be, it is difficult for any thesis of ideational transformation in the area of policy change not to view semiosis as a primary factor in such change. And from within the analytical perspective, any reflection on ideation and ideational transformation therefore necessarily requires a focus on language’s ideational metafunction. That is to say, the function that deals with how aspects of the world are discursively construed, represented, and circulated, and requiring a particular focus of issues of transitivity, on actional and
relational processes, on what gets favoured in utterances, on expressions of causality, and on the attribution of responsibility. This position will be taken up in Stage 2 of the framework, below in advance of the analytical work, but I now wish to outline my specific understanding of how Irish social partnership fits into this ideational understanding of policy paradigm shifting, as has been elaborated.

The Irish Case: Social Partnership as a Cognitive Lock

The period of economic crisis in the Republic of Ireland from the late 1970s into the early 1980s was just the kind of environment ripe for the sort of discontinuous change that the contributors on policy paradigm change talk about. In this light we can see the ideas emerging from within the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) as ostensibly a new set of ideas, ideas moreover, likely to be more smoothly and successfully introduced in periods of upheaval or crisis. Indeed Taylor (2002) points out that ‘the narrative of crisis was crucial in forging a new policy paradigm’ (cited in Hay and Smith, 2005: 137). A strong element of these ideas was the apparent obvious nature of the features of that crisis (low growth, high unemployment, industrial unrest, a lack of a productive national industrial sector, emigration, etc.), which, through NESC, began to be packaged and presented as the causes of the crisis, rather than as symptoms, an idea, which once circulated, facilitated the fertile conditions for the reception of the very ideas and the resulting policies sought by the emergent neoliberal ideology. In this way the broad neoliberal project, and specifically, the priority for increased economic competitiveness on the international stage (Connolly 2008: 14), quickly became the integral elements of the blueprint for recovery.

Partly underwritten transnationally by the European Community’s advance towards policy harmonisation generally, but more heavily influenced on one side by the business-industrial lobby, specifically centred around the Industrial Development Authority (IDA), I contend that it was from this group of ‘experts’, coalescing around NESC, that the neoliberal blueprint emerged. Moreover, as this cohort of economists, accountants, taxation analysts, academics, and policy planners made up a large part of the NESC membership, I propose that in the publication of their 1986 document; ‘A Strategy for Development’ (NESC/83) that these collection of ideas, (attracting direct foreign investment, low levels of taxation, reduced social spending, deregulation of markets, etc.) become weaponised. That is, in being prioritised by Government from 1987 onwards the NESC document cannot be viewed simply as a collection of expert opinions on developments on the national and international landscape. It is rather, a doctrinal text, or as Connolly states (2008: 13), a transitional document that seeks to instigate ‘regime change’, simultaneously one that outlines ‘the depth
of the crisis, redefines the problem and suggests a policy solution’. With a prescription for the types of policies that need to be implemented immediately if the Irish economy is to survive its parlous state, this is a prescription moreover that is not an incremental move on from previous positions, but one that advocates a form of radical paradigm change.

It is in this manifestation of the NESC document’s blueprint of neoliberal ideas and policies that the power of the social partnership process lies and the reason why it positions itself as central to any critical unpicking of neoliberalism and its anti-democratic tendencies in the Irish Republic. Another factor that allows us to see the NESC text as a paradigm-altering ideological blueprint is the fact that a 36-page summary version (NESC/83/1) of the document – with the same title – was also produced, immediately following the February 1987 general election. Though now deleted from NESC’s online publications archive, this text is even more forthright in its neoliberal prescriptions, moving closer and perhaps crossing that line between ‘advising on principles’ only (NESC’s official remit) and advocating particular policy choices. It was however, only in acting as the ideological midwife to the first social partnership agreement, The Programme for National Recovery (PNR) in 1987, that the NESC blueprint actively achieved a level of cognitive locking, of third order change. By directly influencing the social partnership agreement text – and to a large degree, all subsequent agreement texts – the partnership process became a political and a social structure in whose image policies became construed and fixed. Essentially, it was the concertation process that acted as the vehicle, a kind of Trojan horse, for that set of practices (and its discursive elements) that emerged from the engagement with the new set of ideas weaponised in the NESC blueprint, and which subsequently ensured that the blueprint’s impact became institutionalised.8

Given the significance that I am attaching to the two NESC documents here I will look at the text of both versions its programme for national recovery text below in Stage 2, (steps 2.i & 3.i), but I firstly want to elaborate this general contention about NESC in two ways. Firstly, when social partnership is established it actively facilitates the process of institutionalising the new orthodoxy with new structures being established either directly related to the functioning of the partnership process, or as a consequence of new policy developments that emanate from the process. The first social partnership document, the PNR, trails a path to ‘recovery in its title thereby locking in the NESC text’s diagnosis of what it is that has led ‘us’ to where ‘we’ are, and also of what ‘we’ must done. In short, successive governments from 1987 onwards were able to set about achieving their policy

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8 See Connolly (2008) for a reflection on how social policy in particular became institutionalised through successive social partnership deals, based on the content of the first deal, the PNR in 1987.
objectives in large measure by securing an industrial peace so absent in the preceding decade based on an unanalysed and uncritiqued formulation of a remedy based on its apparent ability to secure industrial peace.

Secondly, social partnership, by design, advances and reinforces a sense of consensus for the policy outcomes of the set of ideas being pursued, since it allows successive governments to justify tough policy decisions as being the result of collective agreement. As O’Sullivan says, the new post-1987 Taoiseach, Charles Haughey (Fianna Fáil), could present himself and his Government as a party to an agreement that ensured they were ‘neither prisoners of the left nor hostages of the right but pragmatists of the centre’ (2006: 59). The important point to note about processes of institutionalisation and maintaining consensus however, is that they are dialectically related, both working to mutually reinforce the other over the lifetime of the partnership process.

The cognitive locking and its institutionalising dynamic are also clearly visible in the case of anti-poverty policy and the equality agenda specifically. That is, the way in which such policies became institutionalised within the social partnership framework from the outset. The PNR sees establishing international competitiveness as the key national policy goal, designed to both help ensure growth and increased levels of employment, with the latter seen as the most effective policy instrument in advancing a reduction in levels of poverty. All other aspects of social policy, such as the promotion of the equality agenda – as seen in the case of the EWG on childcare in the previous chapter – and advancing social inclusion, were subordinated to this task. But with cuts in public spending across the board, there was a narrowing of policy tools available to deal with this agenda and coupled with a thematic focus on notions of ‘absolute’ over ‘relative’ poverty, as the national economy improved (Connolly 2008: 15), the gap between those who benefitted from growth and those who did not only increased, storing up problems for the future. The significant contribution from Connolly’s assessment however, refers to how the components of these policies, the policy paradigm itself, come to be institutionalised within the social partnership process.

With the first post-election budget coming before the signing of the PNR partnership agreement in 1987, the Government (and its advisors) set the context for this first partnership deal, and with pre-election pledges also being factored into the budget, the level of genuine negotiation was severely restricted. In this way the social partnership process locked all participants (and the public) into the new orthodoxy, being basically Government and expert-led. But for Connolly this was not just what happened in 1987, she demonstrates rather, that these basic policy ideas also determined what happened in subsequent social partnership agreements. This naturally includes the particular conception of and the resources afforded to
the social agenda. In particular, her detailed work focuses on the spending provisions for social welfare, housing, health, and education in the social partnership agreements from 1987 up to the *Sustaining Progress* agreement of 2003 (the sixth agreement) (Connolly 2008: 18-19). These four topics are important moreover because they are the areas listed in the 1986/87 NESC assessment of the policy areas anticipated to promote equality and to tackle poverty.

Her research Connolly shows that to all intents and purposes, this original perspective remained unchanged throughout the history of the partnership agreements under review. Essentially, the first social partnership agreement presented a framework for action on the social agenda that remained fixed for sixteen years, this despite the very different economic climate of the late 1990s and early 2000s, compared to that of the mid-1980s when NESC codified the neoliberal blueprint that would form the core of the PNR text in 1987. The other significant point to highlight is how the key route out of poverty has, from the beginning of social partnership, been seen as entry into the labour market, an idea that has also consistently influenced subsequent policy choices.

It should not be lost on the reader that what Connolly presents here is not a completely novel picture in terms of my own work. Specifically, this historical investigation into the origins and development of childcare policy from within the social partnership process (beginning with the *Programme for Competitiveness and Work*, 1994) paints a similar picture. I identified that childcare has been invariably tied to four policy areas from the beginning, and four areas only, namely; health, education, economic growth (through the development of a childcare sector), and equality (in affording parents, mainly mothers, access to the workforce) and that this patterning had not changed up to the time the EWG published its report in 1999. These observations underscore how the NESC-centred ideation became and remained institutionalised over a long period, essentially realising a cognitive lock.9

*My Semiotic Point-of-Entry*

The focus for semiotic analysis has two basic components that take on board this theorisation of policy paradigm change. As the node of neoliberal ideation, the NESC strategy document from 1986 is seen as containing the Irish State’s ‘weaponised’ neoliberal blueprint. Therefore as a piece of historical critical discourse analysis an archaeological exercise is required to establish this point, to see how a set of radical ideas have been discursively construed and deployed. That is, the analysis of the NESC texts (there are two versions of

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9 Many critical approaches to Irish social partnership, particularly as they relate to the social agenda, have, like Connolly (2008), identified this institutionalisation within social partnership as a significant impediment to progress; (see Kirby 2010, Harvey 2009, Meade 2005, Murphy 2009, and Ó Broin 2009).
the strategy document) can be seen as a form of ideological critique, an interrogation of the effects of semiosis on the social relations of power. As my overarching interest however, is in the state’s colonisation of the public sphere as a fundamental depoliticising strategy, my main focus in this chapter remains the later period of the turn of the millennium and the marginalising of civil society and voices of dissent generally, through their co-option into the social partnership process. It is this partnership programme, through its successive agreements, that is seen as the cognitive lock, cementing neoliberal ideation in the political, as well as in the broader socio-cultural fields.

The semiotic analysis therefore needs to demonstrate a direct genealogical link between the discourse of social policy development and implementation in the present (1997 to 2007), as a consequence of the largely invisible ideological character of social partnership as a manifestation of the ideas and sets of practices contained in the NESC texts and the first social partnership agreement from 1986/1987. This second piece of analysis is therefore a form of strategic critique (Fairclough 2005), an analysis of the discursive strategies pursued by groups of social agents to change societies in particular ways, or in particular directions. A strategic critique of social partnership incorporates a focus on the dialectics of discourse, but where a focus on the NESC documents points to the emergence of discourses, with an interest in consensus-driven nature of social partnership and its institutionalising reality, the analytical focus in the later texts is on the moments of recontextualisation and operationalisation of practices that flow from the prevailing hegemonic ideation. That is, on the restructuring and rescaling of practices in other fields based on the prevailing hegemonic ideation inherent in the radical shift in economic and political thinking expressed in the NESC texts and internalised in social partnership’s practices.

In terms of the application of the framework to the analysis, the work of Stage 2 is being presented in two parts. Stage 2(a) deals with the historic NESC documents, and Stage 2(b) focuses on the social capital and Active Citizenship initiative. Each part of Stage 2 therefore has three corresponding ‘steps’, presented as step one to step three (a) followed by step one to step three (b).

7.1.2 Stage 2(a): (Historical) obstacles to resolving the social problem:

Social Partnership as a neoliberal order of discourse

I have advanced an understanding of social partnership as a transformative fix, which is largely semiotic. As an entrenched political and socio-cultural set of ideas and practices, partnership acts discursively as both a structured structure and as a structuring structure, or, in
Bourdieu’s sense, as a socio-political habitus. The challenge here is move forward from the understanding of social partnership that the theorisation above allows, and to analyse the discursive elements of process in a formal way. Specifically, this means paying attention to the networks of practices in which the ideological and strategic work of social partnership is situated, and also to the interrelated nature of the semiotic practices and the other elements of the set of practices. This positioning naturally influences the methodological approach adopted in step three where I take a historical perspective to identify how social partnership came about; and specifically, how its inherent set of social practices came to be formed, as well as a more contemporary approach to look at how the subsequent co-option of civil society voices was discursively achieved.

My starting point is to view social partnership as a social order with its own order of discourse, and that this is largely a neoliberal order of discourse. Or conversely, that the neoliberal social order in Irish political life is largely construed discursively through the social partnership programme and its order of discourse. Moreover, I view the NESC strategy documents (and the related social partnership agreement texts) as integral to the depoliticisation strategy of undermining public sphere debate by engaging civil society in ‘a smothering embrace’ (Broderick 2002, cited in Murphy 2009: 37) that has been discursively operationalised in all policy areas over a large portion of the life of this partnership programme. In terms of a dialectics of discourse, if we can point to the origin of these practices, to the dialectic of their discursive emergence, then it is easier to follow the dialectic of the recontextualisation of these hegemonic discourses within other, novel practices, and the operationalisation of these practices in new fields. Or, if this problematisation of social partnership proves productively useful, then I should find evidence for just these kinds of semiotic processes.

There is therefore, a dualism that marks out the rest of this stage of the explanatory framework which at a simple level reflects a focus on the oscillation between what ‘is’ presented (or represented) and what actions ‘ought’ to follow as a result. Textually this means a focus both on ideation and the ideational meta-function (the representation of factual reality and experience, of processes, participants, and circumstances) and the interpersonal meta-function (the relational processes between speaker and listener). In terms of approaches

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10 Based on the reflections on neoliberalism in Chapter Two, I propose a neoliberal social order to be that stable and identifiable combination of social practices (incorporating ways of being and acting) that emanates from a philosophical position and which seeks to advance a programmatic agenda with specific characteristics. These characteristics include the promotion of the responsibility of the individual in the private accumulation of wealth, the desire to restructure the contemporary nation state to diminish its role in public affairs, and the prioritisation of the liberation of economic markets as the most appropriate arbiter and regulator of individual and collective need.
to critique this means a concentration on ideological critique, followed by a concern with strategic critique of the semiotic choices made by social agents to alter society. And within the latter, there is a move from the dialectical moment of the emergence of hegemonic discursive practices, to a focus on the recontextualisation of practices and their subsequent operationalisation. It is directly as a consequence of this duality of purpose with this work that two distinct sets of text are being analysed. The historical focus on the NESC texts (83 and 83/1) relates to the first aspect of the framing of my approach to social partnership’s order of discourse, and the focus on the texts related to social capital and the ‘Active Citizenship’ initiative relates to the second aspect.

**Step 1(a): Analysing the dialectical relations between semiosis and other social elements:**

**Institutionalisation as Recontextualisation**

In terms of transnational moves to restructure and rescale as elaborated previously, social partnership institutionally restructures social policy, essentially producing a new order of policy, with its own order of policy discourse, whilst simultaneously rescaling its ideological character from the international to the national, and even to the local level of policy development and implementation. This rescaling produces policies that then have their own orders of discourse, in part composed of a particular mixture of neoliberal economic discourse, combined with discourse of individual responsibility and agency. As such, discourses naturally begin as ideological construals, as imaginaries, and given the theorisation of how social partnership comes to be so central to the modern policy paradigm, we would expect to find evidence of such imaginaries, or such classifications (to use Bernstein’s term), visible within the original NESC documents.

In terms of looking at how social partnership accomplishes its cognitive locking, or of how what it delivers actually contributes to the social problem of the closing down of the public sphere by co-opting it, we must therefore look for evidence of emergence, hegemony, and then of the recontextualisation of elements of the dominant order of discourse, leading to its operationalisation in new structural practices, such as social policy implementation in non-economic networks of practices. Through a focus on the genre and genre networks present in such policy delivery, the semiotic dimension can be seen to be part of the problem, specifically – as seen in the case of childcare policy development – part of the negative consequences of absorbing and corralling the community and voluntary sector voices within
the social partnership process that delivers a set of policies that do not reflect these actors’
sets of practices, their ways of operating, their classifications, and their identities.

As highlighted, many commentators have talked generally about the particular issues
and problems the members of the social pillar experienced in operating within the social
partnership process. And although there is no agreed definition of the singular problem or
range of problems, for my purposes, in assessing the semiotic aspect of the social problem in
terms of the development and delivery of social policy particularly, I want to briefly return to
a single issue drawn from Kirby’s historical assessment of the asymmetrical symbiotic
relationship between civil society and the Irish state, presented in the background to social
partnership, above. In summarising the many post-1996 critiques from the members of social
partnership’s social pillar on participation in the process, I propose his focus on the matter of
the state’s ‘blinking and obfuscating ideology’ (Kirby 2010: 17) to be particularly
significant. Apart from the expectation that in semiotic terms, there be a natural genealogical
link to the set of imaginaries contained in the NESC blueprint texts (and the related social
partnership programme documents), it is through the actualisation of this ideology at an
institutional level that I want to focus in the search for evidence of the semiotic components
of both the closing off of spaces for dissent, and for the simultaneous elaboration of a social
space that is constructed in a certain image and simultaneously constrained by the parameters
of that conception.

This ‘official’ image necessarily elides any historical materialist perspective on want,
or indeed any complication of an understanding of the role of social policy in challenging
poverty and social exclusion that is not drawn from an ahistorical focus on the role of the
individual in taking responsibility for making their own way out of deprivation into affluence.
This position is what Rose (1999) refers to as the ‘nonrelational conception of the self’,
central to neoliberal ideation (cited in Fairclough 2006b: 36). In terms of the dialectics of
discourse, a focus on this dimension moreover, affords scope to examine the moments of
recontextualisation and of operationalisation explicitly, of how ideation, central to the
blueprint and to the cognitive lock, invests and infects everywhere. In advance of the
analysis below, I now want to illustrate the reality of the ‘blinking and obfuscating ideology’
which features as a central component of this view; namely, the construction of the notion of
‘social capital’ as a discourse analytic way of picking up where many of the traditional
critiques of the restrictive relationship with social partnership end.
Step 2(a): Selection of texts and categories of analysis

The NESC Documents:

NESC 83 (1986); A Strategy for Development 1986-1990: Growth, Employment and Fiscal Balance, and

NESC 83/1 (1987); A Strategy for Development 1986-1990: Key Points

An examination of these pre-social partnership documents is undertaken within the frame of an ideological critique. This means that the interest is in the effects of semiosis on the social relations of power (see Fairclough 2003, 2005, 2009, and Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999). That is, we are looking for evidence of the origin of a set of ideas at the centre of the texts’ prescription of what national economic and social policy should consist of, or of how it should be developed and implemented, as a remedy to the critical state of the Irish Republic in the mid-1980s. In terms of a dialectics of discourse this is the moment of emergence (leading to an eventual hegemonic moment). But at the same time, and particularly in relation to the broader scope of the research in this chapter, we are looking for a movement from such moments that point to the simplification of ideas and practices to their potential translation from the economic field to the social.

In terms of the separate moments of the dialectics of discourse, and based on the institutionalising dynamic of the partnership agreements locking in such sets of ideas, the approach to analysis is therefore designed to identify the movement from the moments of emergence (and hegemony) to those of recontextualisation and operationalisation in the later texts. These contemporary documents are therefore approached as a form of strategic critique, of an examination of practices seen as an end to contestation over the process of ideational transformation itself. Firstly, however I want to address the NESC texts in some detail, looking at their content, as well as the categories to be discursively analysed.

Established in 1973, the role of the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) was to provide a forum for discussion and to produce advisory reports to aid Government policy development in the areas of economic and social policy. The Council was composed of representatives of the social partners (business, employers, trade unions, and the farming sector), as well as heads of particular government departments and other parties, all nominated by government. Its publications were seen as the work of impartial experts, drawn up by its separate and professional ‘analytical team’, and were held to be the best, most accurate up-to-date position on the challenges faced by the Irish State. Since their 1986 report however, the pattern shifted away from a reflection on the twelve-month period

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11 See attached CD-ROM; Chapter 7, documents 7.1 and 7.2.
immediately preceding each report with their recommendations for the following year, to the adoption of a medium-term approach. This was due in part to the growing assessment that short-term planning was in fact a part of the problem of overcoming the pervading malaise. In this light, the NESC report, ‘A Strategy for Economic Development 1986–1990’ (NESC 1986), necessarily saw the council attempt to capture the state of the nation, to rationalise it and to project ahead to the beginning of the following decade. Significantly, the summary ‘Key Points’ report (NESC 1987), seeks to stress that its contents carry ‘the unanimous agreement of the social partners’, (ibid. 2). Although the wording in the full report is a little less clear-cut, stating that ‘the various interests have been able to agree on the major elements of an integrated strategy, (NESC 1986: xiii).

That the social partners, led by the government of the day, adopted this NESC report as the rationale for the discussions on the first social partnership agreement ‘The Programme for National Recovery’, we can see this NESC text as marking ‘year zero’ in terms of an emerging policy paradigm. This is because the council was home to more or less the same partners involved in the fledgling social partnership programme discussions. Yet the cohort of senior civil servants and officially sanctioned ‘experts’ at the heart of the group always had the power to dictate a particular (ideological) position, a blueprint in Blyth’s terms. This means that through the bureaucratic arrangement between NESC, government, and the social partners, the ideological position always maintained a strong influence on official thought and policy. In this way the vision of the economic experts within NESC who composed these reports had a level of influence on the outcome of the social partnership agreements that cannot be overstated. Given that such experts cannot be viewed as operating outside of any ideological framework, if only in the simplest sense of their assumptions, observations, and arguments having some inherent systemic logic, in terms of an ideological critique in a discourse analytic framework, it is crucial that attention be given to the ideas represented in such observations, and in particular, to the discursive aspects of the policy prescriptions of these NESC texts.

Content and Layout

The full 1986 NESC report runs to three hundred and forty-eight pages, plus a thirteen page preface. The later Key Points text is condensed into thirty-six pages. The former comes with five appendices at the end, spread out over twenty-six pages, and the report also includes one hundred and seven tables. The shorter text has no appendix and elides most of the tabular material, although it does present some data in a combination of pie and bar charts. The full report is composed of twelve chapters as is the shorter text. There is no direct correlation
between the layout of the two texts, but the content and structure is similar. Every chapter in
the first report, with the exception of one (Chapter 4: Structure and Evolution of the Tax
System), has a corresponding presence in the shorter text, although some of the former’s
chapters are combined into one chapter in the second text. Excluding the first chapter (the
Introduction), the full report divides the chapters into four parts; Part I – Review; Part II –
Outlook; Part III – Policies; and Part IV – Conclusions. All of the content of the Key Points
text covers these same areas. Perhaps unsurprisingly however, the majority of this second
text, more than two-thirds, is given over to those sections that deal with the strategy for
recovery, policy recommendations, and conclusions, which together make up only about half
of the longer text. Multi-modally the full report is overly wordy, avoids summary
presentations of points; there are, for example, no shaded boxes or bullet point presentations.
On the contrary, and given its raison d’être, these feature heavily in the Key Points text.

In the latter document most chapters, or ‘sections’ begin with a statement of facts or
assumptions presented as bullet points in bold text, and conclude with a summary, or set of
recommendations in a shaded box. Where charts and tables are presented, they appear
completely uncluttered by text. This is obviously aimed at directing the reader to the salient
assumptions and recommendations of the original report’s authors. Remembering that this
second document was produced after the 1987 election at the request of the new government,
also reminds us of its intended readership. In this way, though the relative difference
between the forms of each document can seem logical, generically, in terms of what they are
doing semiotically, this is a significant point. That is, the accumulation of facts devoid of any
explanatory argument and reflective of causality is representative of a ‘logic of appearance’
only. Some of the analysis below will show that to a large degree this is what the original
report is composed of, but in comparing it with the later Key Points text, in the 1986 text this
logic of appearance at least coincides with a level of explanation. In the second text however,
the elaboration of social change, the tracing of casual links or relations between, for example,
the balance of payments deficit and soaring unemployment leading to formulations for action,
etc., is completely absent.

Categories of Analysis

As a form of an ideological critique of historical texts, the focus of the archaeological
analysis of the two NESC documents is fundamentally an interrogation of meaning in the
service of power, and specifically on the role of semiosis in propagating and deploying or in
Blyth’s terminology (2001), of ‘weaponising’ new ideas. As intimated in the chapter
introduction, the discourse analytic categories that I focus in the NESC documents are both
textual and interdiscursive. Textually, and at the level of grammar of the clause, an interest in social partnership’s role as consolidating an ideational transformation calls for a concentration on the ideational metafunction. But the interest is not simply on how aspects of the economic, social, and political world are being construed and deployed but also on the interpersonal metafunction, on how discursive interactions are portrayed, how relations between the state and others appear, on who is influencing these processes and how this is being accomplished textually.

This means that there is in the first place an interest in transitivity, on the ways in which actors and subjectivity generally is represented, on actional processes, and on relations of causality and responsibility. But there is also a concentration on modality use (on constructions of obligation and necessity and reflections on subjectivity construed as objectivity) through deontic and categorical modality markers such as verb use and tense use. In terms of the textual metafunction there is also some reflections on the introduction and circulation of novel themes. Interdiscursively, and in terms of the dialectical moment of the emergence of new practices in their discursive form in particular, as ideologically powerful texts that propose radical policy change, the interest in the analysis of the NESC documents is in the appearance of new discourses and on voice. Also, in terms of the justification for such representations, especially in the contrast between the two separate NESC texts, there is a further focus on the distinction between an explanatory logic and a logic of appearances.

**Step 3(a): Analysis of the texts**

**The NESC Documents:**

NESC 83 (NESC 1986) and NESC 83/1 (NESC 1987)

**Imaginaries**

If we take the elision of explanation that takes place between the circulation of the first and second documents as a starting point, we can see clear evidence of such in the sections dealing with a strategy for economic and social development at the macro-level. This issue is covered in parts of Chapters 7 to 10 in the full report and essentially section 5 in the Key Points document. In section 5 the ‘four pillars’ of this strategy are presented in a shaded box at the top of page 13. The only place to find these four pillars together in the full report however, is on page 306 of its final chapter. Accepting that this is not the most contentious distillation of a set of assumptions present in either document, the shorter text necessarily elides any explanation of how these points are arrived at that is to be found in the original
report, presenting them to Government as a *fait accompli*. Section 5 of the shorter text opens with five bullet points, the first of which states that ‘It is only the internationally trading sectors of the economy that can act as locomotives of economic growth’, (NESC 1987: 12). In terms of interpersonal metafunction, and specifically of modality, this statement, in the simple present tense form of its subordinate clause, is essentially a categorical modality containing a reference to an epistemic modality of possibility in the main clause. In terms of the ideational metafunction, this is not a suspect construction, but in its isolated appearance at the start of the section, it cannot be read as anything other than being reader-directive.

In the original report, by contrast, this point is explicitly afforded one and a half pages in Chapter 7: section 2, (NESC 1986: 147-48). Moreover, the reason for its significance is supported immediately prior to its discussion by more than two pages of text (Chapter 7: section 1). I would stress that the fact that space is given over to elaborate particular understandings and perspectives in the full report does not mean that such presentations are not contentious, but my point here is that in its form and content, the Key Points text, the one produced and circulated to and at the behest of Government, leaves almost no scope for the reader to assess its genealogy, and therefore the contingent nature of the ideas being summarised and translated into the policy prescriptions laid out across its thirty-six pages. This is not so much a case of recontextualisation, as it is a case of intertextuality of a particular type, of reproducing selective summaries from another, earlier text, where in terms of ideas and ideation, the new document collapses all context and consolidates subjective assumption as objective fact. It is in this way that ideas are transposed from one place, one type of discussion, argument, or ideological position (espoused here in one detailed text) to another place, in another text, as essentially imaginaries. That is, the relationship between the two documents and their different layout and textual structure sees the translation, condensation, and simplification of complex realities into new, emergent discourses, as an area of knowledge and the way that knowledge is to be represented or classified.

**Consensus**

In making the general point about ideology, an ideological critique and the moments of emergence; in so far as it relates to the issue of social partnership as an institutional structure, perhaps the most significant point to note about the NESC texts is their stressing of the need for consensus. The full report’s concluding paragraph states:

Finally, while the Council has reached broad agreement on the measures necessary to confront the present economic and social difficulties it is of the view that there is a need to foster a greater degree of consensus in Irish society if these measures are to be implemented
without giving rise to conflict. This consensus is necessary both at the national level and at the level of the workplace. (NESC 1986: 321)

Interestingly, and unusually these words are reproduced in exactly the same form at the end of the Key Points text. Not only can these sentences be seen as a consequential corollary to the level of agreement among the NESC membership on the assessment and particular remedies being presented, as referenced, but in continuing:

The Council intends to pursue this matter further, through examining the institutional arrangements for economic and social planning in a number of European countries and particularly the mechanisms in place for the achievement of consensus. (ibid.)

In the final line of both texts, we can see the ideational link from the NESC blueprint, to this subsequent institutional mechanism, to the cognitive lock that is the social partnership process itself.

When we look at the text of the first social partnership agreement (October 1987), which, at only thirty two pages, is even shorter than the summary Key Points published some months earlier, in listing those social partners who have agreed on the text, we can see in the Introduction’s first paragraph that they are the same as the members of NESC. Moreover, in the following paragraph in declaring that the ‘programme’ plans to make progress in four broad areas, we are presented with precisely the same four pillars codified and summarised in the full NESC report and the Key Points documents respectively. Essentially, in putting the wishes expressed at the end of the NESC texts together with the intentions foregrounded at the outset of the first agreement document, we can see the social partnership agreement (and social partnership itself) acting from the outset as precisely this institutional mechanism or ‘arrangement’ sought by NESC (and as expressed at the end of its two documents), designed to embed consensus and deliver the necessary remedy.

In this way we can see not just how the Key Points text condenses and simplifies exposition, argument, and assumption developed in the full NESC report, but how the first social partnership agreement document translates a particular way of assessing what is the case and what must be done emerging from both the 1986 NESC text, through the post-election NESC Key Points document, and structurally encoded into the Programme for National Recovery. In recalling Connolly’s (2008) observations on the institutionalisation of policy over the lifetime of the partnership process, this is a clear example of how such ideas move from being a set of new imaginaries into concrete discourses and practices through subsequent arrangements and programmes into the next century. If we view such discursive processes as a moment of emergence – as seen clearly in the Key Points document’s ideational presentation of the depth of the crisis, a (re)definition of the ‘economic’ nature of
the problem, and a suggestion for action (NESC 1987: 4-5) – this is not simply a case of the transposing of text from one social practice into another (through the different social functions of these different texts), but of the translation of sets of complex realities into discourses. I therefore want to devote the rest of this analytical section on the NESC texts by looking at some of these realities in their discursive formation, in their state of emergence.

**Emergent Practices**

In terms of this process, all of the first half of the full NESC report from 1986 plays a part in developing the positions on which subsequent policy prescriptions are based. This explains why the text is so long and detailed. If we move past Parts I - Review, and into Part II - Outlook, it is here that he central assumptions on which Part III’s policies and based. Simply put, the report sees two interlinked problems, namely; the chronic state of the public finances and the rate of growth (GNP) on the one hand, and the relationship between employment/unemployment and the rate of growth on the other. The bullet points at the start of the ‘Outlook’ section in the Key Points text capture this assessment. They claim that even modest growth in the international economy under present polices, would leave Ireland in a weak position with public finances unlikely to improve, and no likely increase in employment, and that in fact, the situation would probably deteriorate (*ibid.* 9), (see pages 146-7 in the full report).12 Essentially, the position being established is that the current set of policies, the normal thinking that is the basis of the current cognitive lock, is not sufficient to improve the situation and must be broken. This is the starting point for the report’s Part III – Polices, and I will now address how precisely it emerges.

The introduction to Chapter 7 states:

The analysis in the first three chapters of this report paints a picture of the current state of the Irish economy which is almost unremittingly grim. The projections set out in chapters 5 and 6 […] indicate that there is no self-correcting mechanism at work in the public finances, rather that the position of chronic imbalance is likely to continue […] unless there is a radical change in policy. (NESC 1986: 145)

By so the beginning Part III’s first chapter the document has succeeded in setting up a state of affairs that borders on the cataclysmic. Stark realities in relation to economic growth, unemployment, and the national balance of payments deficit have been constructed, externalised and agentised as fact, whilst simultaneously the reader is informed there is no corrective agent. Textually, via the use of ‘unless’ the marked theme of change, or rather, ‘radical change’ in governmental policy is introduced and foregrounded, the implicit

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12 All of the examples I am providing from this point forwards come from the original 1986 text; (NESC/83).
unmarked theme being that to avoid pursuing radical change, to continue to work within the prevailing cognitive lock, would spell disaster. But precisely because of the way in which agreement among contributors is celebrated in the NESC texts, other voices and perspectives are absent. The text proceeds on the assumption that there are no valid contrary readings of the national situation that remain to be taken on board, and therefore no assessment of other options is ever put before the government and the social partners. In this way, the NESC position is formalised the consensual view, and with not alternatives acknowledged, as the only view.

The need for action is further underlined in relation to the costs of servicing the national department. With debt approaching 140% of gross national product (GNP) and costing 12% of GNP nationally to service, the time for indecision is past, or as the report sates ‘the future has now arrived’ (ibid. 145). Yet a causal link to dealing with the issue of the national debt is made not with the unsustainability of the public finances nor with the level of unemployment, but rather, with the poor level of national output and the low rate of growth in output which ‘has for the last several years been insufficient’, (ibid. 146). By setting up this analysis as the precise cause of the economy’s (and the nation’s) problem with categorical modality, the NESC document ideationally sets up the focus of where radical action is needed and, by extension, as we shall see, the policies that are required as a remedy. That the level of national output is too low for NESC means that ‘two fundamental questions then arise’. NESC economists present these questions as being the relationship between ‘growth in GNP and the state of the public finances’ on the one hand, and the relationship between ‘the evolution of employment and unemployment’ and GNP growth on the other, that is, the two positions presented above in the Key Points summary text.

In other words, the reader is left in no doubt that the ‘fix’ for the economy is centred on the maximisation of growth in national output, (manufacturing and services, etc.), which by default, will have a positive impact on the more visible issues of high unemployment and soaring national debt. Yet the rationale for identifying these two ‘questions’, absent in the Key Points text, though elaborated in the full report, is discursively construed through subjective assessment and prescription. By setting up an interpretation of what exists externally in the national economic landscape and by then linking the causality of one desired approach around an output in industrial growth alone, NESC sets up a reality between what exists and what is required, between what ‘is’ and what ‘must be’ that it then uses to frame its policy recommendations. For example, in section 2 of Chapter 7, the report moves on to defining the characteristics of the economic growth process in a small open economy. The report states, ‘The model which informs the analysis throughout this report is based on a
distinction between the exposed internationally trading sectors, and the rest of the economy’,
(ibid. 147). It is noteworthy that we have to read almost one hundred and fifty pages into the
report to find explicit reference to ‘the model’ being adopted by NESC. But the real
significance here is that there is an acknowledgement that a set of ideas, a blueprint (of one
amongst perhaps many ‘models’), is informing this representation of causes and
consequences, of symptoms and diagnosis.

Yet even here no rationale as to why this model is being chosen is provided, no
justification is given for its adoption, nor are any alternative models referenced. Here we can
clearly see how assumptions, once construed, allow for other assumptions to be introduced
and normalised, and then for this process to continually repeat itself unchallenged.
Essentially, assumptions are being made as to the long-term viability of a particular approach
to the structure of the national economy, but in a more matter-of-fact way, ideological
assumptions are also being made about the nature of Irish society, and of how and by whom it
needs to be shaped. If this general economic strategy appears benign, some of the
implications spelled out in the report make plain that this is not the case. For example, the
report states that ‘those sectors of the economy which exclusively or predominantly serve the
domestic market cannot be regarded as an independent source of sustained economic
growth’, and, ‘domestic demand cannot be regarded as an independent source of sustainable
economic growth’ (ibid.). In fact, the implication for such a strategy choice is captured by
the categorical modality which opens the final paragraph of this section, a particular
consequential assumption:

What is crucial for the attainment of sustained economic growth is an economy such as
Ireland’s is the capacity of the internationally trading sectors to produce goods and services
and to sell them competitively on export markets. (ibid. 148)

The paragraph continues by stating that ‘In the short-term this can be achieved by
securing the maximum degree of cost-competitiveness and in the medium-term by defending
competitive advantage’. In ways such as this, subsequent and now perennial pressures on
worker security through, for example, ever-increasing drives to enhance ‘flexibility’ become
the everyday reality of policies developed on the back of unanalysed sets of ideas such as
these, as they emerge from NESC as ideas, and become encoded in social partnership
agreements as practices. The report’s desire to push home the prescriptive nature of its
assessment is clearly see in the next section, ‘Implications for Policy’. The argumentation
structure of assumption – fact – assumption, etc. is continued at the beginning where we read:
‘Given this simple model…’ (ibid. 148). The third paragraph moreover, begins with a clear ideational structure of causality:

Failure to halt the increase in the National Debt-GNP ratio will inevitably lead to a situation whereby the problems of debt servicing become so acute that public spending cuts so deep so as to curtail the provision of those services. (ibid.)

Another example follows where, through the use of the present participle of the verb ‘to be’, the subsequent relational process, incorporating a crucial deontic modality, acts almost as a threat to decision makers:

Moreover, there is a danger that in such circumstances a rescheduling of Ireland’s external debt repayments would be necessary, with discretion in design of fiscal policy being moved from the Irish government to external agencies. (ibid.)

And in the paragraph’s final sentence, another deontic modality appears, ‘In effect the authorities have no option but to stabilise the ratio’ (ibid. 149).

It is in paragraphs such as this, with the use of conjunctions like ‘moreover’, that the textual metafunction is operationalised such that a marked theme of even greater calamity ahead directs the reader to attend to the unmarked theme of the need to take the medicine outlined by the report and accept the ideas (as discourses) and adopt the ways of being and acting (as voices and genres) inherent in these emergent practices. In this way the general NESC prescription (with its ‘new’ set of ideas) can be constructed and repeated such that it loses all sense of its inherent arbitrariness, and exemplifying what Hall (1993) would call radical or ‘third order’ policy paradigm change, subverting and wholly replacing the preceding template and its very logic. I now want to move on from this archaeological work and the ideological critique to look at how these emergent sets of impacted upon social policy development through the social partnership processes institutionalising mechanism some two decades after the NESC texts were produced.
Stage 2(b): Obstacles to resolving the social problem:  
Recontextualisation of the Social Agenda

Step 1(b). Analysing the dialectical relations between semiosis and other social elements:

‘Social Capital’

The Value of the Imaginary: What we mean by Social Capital

A variety of conceptualisations of social capital emerge from the different theoretical perspectives where the concept has been articulated, which naturally affect its definition. In short, the point of agreement seems to be that ‘relationships matter’ (Field, 2003). Essentially, social connectedness and associated reciprocity is to be viewed as a positive resource, both for individuals and their communities, as well as for society at large. For its advocates, the level of social connectedness is seen as a resource, almost as a commodity akin to traditional (economic) capital or human capital, and as something that therefore has a material impact of its own. There is however, no universal agreement on this general thesis on social capital.

The traditional conception of the term comes from Coleman’s work (1990) on educational attainment and advancement, where he sees social capital as an individual asset, and maintains that those students with good levels of social capital do better educationally. Possibly the most influential voice on social capital, especially in the areas of public debate and policy, as well as on empirical research, is that of Putnam. In his focus on increased levels of individualism and the decline in-group affiliation in the mid-to-late 1960s USA, Putnam (2000) developed two dimensions of social capital; Bridging Capital related to inclusive social networks that cut across social lines and hierarchies (such as class, ethnicity, age etc.); and Bonding Capital that accrues through membership of exclusive social networks that are bounded within a given social category (geography, age, gender, ethnicity, occupation, hobby etc.). Although Putnam has acknowledged that in-group membership and high levels of in-group bonding can be devoted to anti-social purposes (2000: 22), as Farrell (2007: 30-1) points out, the emphasis in policy debates and on Putnam’s emphasis on social capital as a public good, is always on the positive dimensions of social capital where it is seen exclusively as a normative force.
It should be clear from this very brief reflection on the theoretical origins of social capital and their relation to its understanding in contemporary policy debates, that the contribution of Pierre Bourdieu remains absent, (see Bourdieu 1986). Bourdieu’s particular perspective on social capital emerges from the broader theoretical distinction between his position and those of Coleman and Putnam; that is, his fundamental interest is in how social classes reproduce themselves, (the basis of his theory of practice). This interest necessarily places an emphasis on how different forms of capital – economic, cultural, linguistic, and social – interact with each other. Specifically, Bourdieu’s work on social capital is interested in the historical and contingent nature of the production or reproduction of capitals, and therefore in the issue of power. In contrast, these are issues now largely absent from engagements with the topic in Putnam-inspired social policy debates. Like Bourdieu however, Coleman’s functionalist perspective sees social capital embedded within social relationships, but realised by individuals. Putnam by contrast (Farrell 2007: 33 and 40), views social capital as stocks held by the individual which he equates to levels of ‘civicness’, placing greater emphasis on the public good aspect of such civic activity, seeing it as essentially integrative, and conducive to social cohesion.

The affinity with ideas on social capital for policy makers is manifold. Farrell references the simplicity of its ideas, where social capital can be seen almost as a ‘wonder drug’ for social ills. But its apparent ‘revenue neutrality’ is obviously also an attractive feature. In any event, Farrell (2007) and Murphy (2009) both remark on the influence of Putnam’s ideas on both the former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, as well as on Ireland’s Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern. In 2005, Ahern invited Putnam to speak at a Fianna Fáil event to sell the benefits of social capital to the major party of the 2002-2007 Government. The Taoiseach went so far as to call the Harvard professor his ‘guru’ in a newspaper interview at the time.13 The OECD and the World Bank both have their own definitions of social capital, with the latter seeing it as the potential ‘missing link’ in promoting development (see Grootaert 1998, and Harriss and De Renzio 1997 for contrasting views). From the neoliberal perspective therefore, social capital is fundamentally instrumentalist in promoting economic growth since it can appear to take up the slack of privatised or reduced public services.

I would contend that this is essentially the position of the Conservative Party’s approach to ‘The Big Society’ as advocated the Prime Minister, David Cameron in the British General Election campaign of 2010. And in terms of discourse, in being ‘social’, promoting social capital affords states and institutions a valuable opportunity to emphasise the ‘social’ as opposed to the economic in speeches and in reports, and in rolling out new initiatives,

indicating that governments do take on board the unmarked theme of the limitations of markets to deliver what individuals and communities might need (see Labonte 1999). Significantly however, one of the strengths of social capital as a policy tool, and a discourse in itself, is its apparent benign nature. Whether civil society actors agree with the essentially conservative underpinnings of Putnam’s view, social capital initiatives do not directly challenge critical perspectives of the left since they inherently and consistently stress the need for a strong and inclusive society.

The Translation of Hegemonic Practices: Archaeology of Social Capital in Irish Polity

Social capital appears on the official policy landscape in 2002 in the new coalition Government’s ‘Programme for Government’ document (Government of Ireland 2002). Here it features as the primary element in that document’s fourth section ‘Building A Caring Society’, under the sub-section ‘Promoting Inclusion’ (2002: 21). Though centrally positioned in this equality strategy, the reference to action actually relates to a fact-finding mission only, as the document highlights the plans to gather data on ‘social capital’ and then to ‘promote’ and ‘develop’ such capital, particularly at a community level. The fact that thinking has gone on elsewhere to push the concept of social capital to the fore however, is clearly revealed in the previous Government’s White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity, from 2000. In this 186-page text tasked with setting out the ‘formal interaction’ between the state and the community and voluntary sector, and designed to influence new legislation; the term ‘social capital’ appears twice. In both instances it is collocated with ‘volunteering’ or ‘voluntary activity’, through the phrase ‘development of social capital and the encouragement of voluntarism’, which appears twice (2000: 55 and 125). Yet even in these instances it goes unelaborated. It is here too that social capital is directly linked to the social partnership process, with a reference to provisions made in The Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (2000) for the setting up of a national committee on volunteering, on which the White Paper has a direct bearing.

As to why such a shift in the formal relationship between the state and civil society might rise up the political agenda at this point can be at least be surmised from other sections in the introductory pages of the White Paper. For example, in Chapter 2 ‘Context and Background’, under the section ‘Re-thinking Our Vision’ the text reads:

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14 The full title of the White Paper is ‘White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector’.
The rapidly changing economic and social situation in Ireland requires serious consideration on how to influence society to make it socially and economically inclusive, to make it a place where equality of treatment, opportunity and access, and respect for the autonomy of the individual are the norm. There is a need to create a more participatory democracy where active citizenship is fostered. Paragraph 2.18, (2000: 14)

And in the section on ‘The Changing Face of the Statutory Sector’ from Chapter 3, the paper informs us that:

The Public Service is undergoing major changes. The Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) requires each Government Department to examine and review its performance under three main headings:

- The contribution it could make to national development
- The quality of services provided to the public
- The provision of value for money to the taxpayer.

Paragraphs 3.8 to 3.12. (ibid. 22)

By reflecting on these elements of the introductory pages of the White Paper in parallel, we can see that the Government is trying to initiate a radical restructuring of planning and implementation processes, where the community and voluntary sector can be given a more prominent role in essentially taking over the running of specific tasks currently undertaken by government departments, to effectively make the latter leaner and offer ‘value-for-money’. Significantly for the sector however, their role is to be an implementation role only and not a political role. In Chapter 3, ‘Structures Underpinning the Relationship’, for example, on the relationship between government, the state, and the sector; the document states in bold text that ‘It is the Government that is ultimately solely responsible for making key decisions on social and economic policy issues – no matter how extensive a process of prior consultation that may have taken place’, (para. 3.6, ibid. 22). Indeed as Gaynor points out (2011: 30), since entering into the social partnership process in 1996 and particularly post-2000, this arrangement has received support from many of these community and voluntary sector actors through their active participation in state-initiated partnership arrangements for ‘the reward’ of steady sources of funding. This agenda of devolving elements of social policy to non-state actors, of establishing partnerships, is in keeping with a neoliberal ethos of reducing the reach of the state, its structural reach, its areas of full responsibility, and its levels of expenditure.

As a consequence of this work within the broad social partnership project, social capital arrives almost fully formed in the publication of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) report of 2003. Entitled ‘The Policy Implications of Social Capital’; the bulk
of the NESF document is concerned with recommendations for future action, such as measuring and mainstreaming social capital, and enhancing active citizenship and community development (sections VI and VII). Its primary function however is in codifying how social capital is to be understood and the intended relationship between the concept and social policy development from 2003 onwards. After this point we therefore see a programmatic shift to the elaboration of the concept of ‘active citizenship’ through the establishing of a ‘Task Force on Active Citizenship’ by the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, consistently one of social capital’s most ardent cheerleaders.\textsuperscript{15} As a consequence of this relationship social capital ultimately becomes central to the initiatives on ‘active citizenship’ that followed from the work of the Task Force on Active Citizenship and their 2007 report. Indeed, over time the concepts of social capital, citizenship, and community development become almost interchangeable, with all terms being stressed within the NESF document.

\textit{Remaking the Citizen}

The level of framing of the issue of active citizenship may not be so surprising, but what remains important in analytical terms is the construction of the concept of ‘citizenship’ itself. With social capital and active citizenship’s stated interest in advancing the public good, the notion of citizenship is not the classic liberal notion of individual rights, but in minimising the political aspect of identity negotiations and collective action in its broadest sense, neither is it in the camp of communitarian conceptions of citizenship (Gaynor 2011: 32-33). Instead, as is declared in the Task Force’s concept paper, the notion is that of ‘civic republicanism’ (2007a: 2-3). That is, less of an emphasis on universal rights alone but a strong sense that rights and responsibilities are secured in the obligation of the individual to participate in communal business, or in social, economic, and political affairs. Unlike the liberal view and in keeping with the communitarian perspective, civic republicanism is an active form of citizenship, but one which uniquely prioritises individual and community agency. And this political dimension is significant since such civic notions are close to contemporary notions of an active civil society, and by extension of a healthy public sphere. There is therefore a thematic consistency across the years of Bertie Ahern’s premiership. Where the Government White Paper from 2000 on cooperation with the community and voluntary sector highlighted the issue of the ‘public good’, and how it might be advanced by the state taking a step back and facilitating a greater role for civil society, we can see the active citizenship campaign as a programmatic manifestation of this official aspiration.

\textsuperscript{15} In 2005 Putman claimed that no world leader was a better advocate of social capital than Ireland’s Prime Minister. \textit{The Irish Times}: 8. Sep 06 2005.
In effect, by 2007 the Task Force on active citizenship is promoting a form of citizenship, theoretically at least, that anticipates or even compels people and their local associations to take on a greater role in the work of building a better, a healthier, and more inclusive society. Of course what happens in practice is of most significance, and as Gaynor notes, where much of the writings on civic republicanism (see Cohen 1989 and Habermas 1990) highlight the centrality of deliberative forms of democracy, with the right to have real and direct input in planning and decision-making processes; in the Irish case, and in the area of active citizenship in particular, the scope is limited to volunteering, ‘helping out’ and exercising one’s franchise in the traditional way, (Gaynor 2011: 33). Essentially, that which is political becomes depoliticised, and that which promotes civil society embroils the community and voluntary sector in partnerships that though funded, are designed never to be able to challenge underlying structural conditions that seriously impact upon issues of exclusion and disadvantage. And that which theoretically opens up the prospect of genuinely deliberative forms of democracy, of supporting a healthy public sphere, in reality entrenches the form of representational politics, with the same programmatic blueprint that has held sway since the mid-1980s, and now spilling out into the community development sector.

**Mainstreaming the Ideology: the Task Force on Active Citizenship**

As with the NESF report on social capital, a large portion of the Task Force’s work from 2006 is to assess levels of active citizenship nationally through a consultation process, but also to engage with civil society the public through a series of public seminars on deploying its understanding of the term and of its significance. Indeed over the two year period leading up to 2007 the Task Force produces a public consultation paper titled ‘Together, We’re Better’; circulates a questionnaire to gather information; draws up a concept paper on active citizenship (analysed below); summaries the statistical evidence for levels of active citizenship through its fact-finding mission; establishes an office for active citizenship under Minister of State, Pat Carey (Fianna Fáil); and, circulates a glossy 40-page report on active citizenship, highlighting the Task Force’s guiding principles and recommendations (also analysed here).

The ideological limitations of the concept however are obvious from the outset. As Gaynor elaborates, even from the first engagement with the public the consultation process ‘constituted a very efficient mechanism of disseminating a particular, and highly selective view, of the concept throughout society’ (2011: 30-31), and:

In a strategy that made a mockery of the notion of open consultation, seminars were held nationwide to ‘explain’ the concept, while the questionnaire […] was accompanied by a
‘public consultation paper’ which neatly and succinctly equated active citizenship with volunteering. (ibid. 31)

Moreover, the paper’s notion of ‘active participation’, she adds, is restricted to ‘engagement with the institutions of formal politics’ (ibid.). Thus, the Task Force’s job has been to promote a depoliticised notion of social capital and active citizenship, while its research is primarily focused on assessing levels of formal volunteering, voting, and the frequency of public consultations with elected politicians only. This is in essence a manifestation of the ‘relationship’ between civil society actors and the state envisaged in the original Government White Paper.

All of these concepts are concerned with civil society, which in Ireland incorporates the community and voluntary sector, and therefore includes the members of the social pillar embraced by social partnership from the 1996s onwards. At a benign level then the emergence of a discourse of social capital can be seen as the first structured attempt by the state to orientate a set of policies to actively engage with this sector, in contrast to merely opening up channels of communication with representative voices from the social pillar on existing policies, over which the state maintains overall control (as with the case of the EWG on childcare). But the focus on social capital may also be seen as a concerted attempt to influence the way social policy is to be developed at the macro-level, and of how the role of civil society is expected to occupy or fit in with the state’s vision of social policy development. Or, more specifically, the official interest in social capital can been seen as a way of attending to the social agenda while ensuring a level of cohesion amongst actors in an effort to suppress and eradicate any potential dissent.

As an example of the unbroken ideological arc stretching back to the adoption of a neoliberal blueprint as expressed in the NESC texts above, the uncontentious phrase of ‘Together, We’re Better’ which heralds the promotion of Bertie Ahern’s active citizenship initiative from 2007 onwards, can be seen as a simple recontextualisation of the expert sentiment of two decades earlier. Where the NESC texts end by advising the government to advance cohesion and avoid conflict at all costs, the active citizenship strap-line can be seen as that very sentiment, that discourse of cohesion, that consensus entreaty, not just being recontextualised in another field, involving another set of social practices, but, with the setting up of the Office of Active Citizenship in 2008, then being operationalised and formally materialised, and entering the field of community relations and community development policy. Though by 2007 the phrase ‘social capital’ has receded from official discourse, being superseded by the more concrete and action-oriented ‘active citizenship’, the
operationalisation of both ideas by the state remained imbued with the Putnam-inspired view of social capital as 'stocks' of civic engagement, and of the active, responsible citizen, and therefore as an essentially apolitical idea.\(^\text{16}\)

In reflecting on Hall’s elaboration of Kuhn’s scientific paradigm as it relates to institutional learning and radical policy transformation (Hall 1993: 279-81); what the active citizenship case illustrates, possible even more clearly than the radical transformation conveyed in the NESC texts from the 1980s, are those characteristic features of radical paradigm shifting that Hall identifies. In terms of the general social policy agenda, for example, the official affinity with social capital is more sociological than scientific, being largely disseminated through political judgements (the Government White Paper, the NESF report on social capital, and the Task Force concept paper on the nature of the citizen). Also, although authority appears as if it is being devolved to the local level, as per the clear statement in the White Paper above, it firmly rests with the state. Moreover, the policy failures of social partnership on the equality agenda are being measured and adjusted through initiatives like active citizenship and its consultative information gathering phase, yet their new set of policy goals, which, by virtue of their ahistorical and idealist design, can never respond appropriately to the underlying issues. That is, in such initiatives as here, through redefining the issues and the powerful deployment of these ideas, the state has succeeded in recasting the problem (low levels of citizen engagements and activism at the local level), and the solutions (more and better connected actors), as well as the relationship between the state and the citizen, central among which is the shifting of responsibility for achieving solutions in terms of policy outcomes to the latter.

**Step 2(b): Selection of texts and categories of analysis**\(^\text{17}\)

- **The Social Capital texts:**
  - The Report of the Task Force on Active Citizenship (2007), and
  - The Task Force paper on The Concept of Active Citizenship (2007)

  **Contextualising Social Capital: Some critical observations**

An anomaly that emerges around the Task Force on Active Citizenship is why there is so much interest in the campaign. Since the mid-1990s the formal relationship between the state

\[^{16}\] In keeping with Robert Putnam’s conception of social capital, the notion of the citizen elaborated here is drawn from Civic Republicanism and the obligation on the individual to be an active participant in her community. See the Irish Government’s *Task Force on Active Citizenship* concept paper, (2007a: 2-3).

\[^{17}\] See attached CD-ROM; Chapter 7, documents 7.3 and 7.4.
and civil society organisations through social partnership have been strained at best, characterised by strict funding arrangements that restrict genuine political activity (Harvey 2008 and Kirby 2010), including any overt advocacy and lobbying (Ó Broin 2009: 118). This is particularly significant since by 2006 many civil society actors had already accumulated a decade of experience with government programmes through participation in social partnership’s community and voluntary sector pillar. My contention however, is that the long-serving groups involved in community development were not the focus of the post-2000 drive to measure and enhance social capital through the ‘citizenship’ initiative. Such groups, characterised by a more avowedly political and communitarian approach to citizenship, were either already tied into a relationship with the state through these more formal social partnership arrangements related to the delivery of services, or were reluctant to be so constrained that they had rejected the invitation or had endeavoured to extricate themselves from the partnership process altogether (see Meade 2005).  

The focus of the Government White Paper (2000) is in large part to tap into the potentially larger pool of associations, informal groups, and individuals who are active at a local level but who do not see their work as necessarily political in the sense that they do not see themselves as operating in an environment where they are pushing back against any ideological state project, or where that which they seek to do as local activists is not articulated in a way that embeds it in any macro-political paradigm. As Gaynor states, this is the ‘less visible cohort’ of community activism that sits neither within the semi-professional benevolent-provider sector, nor within the more critical, radical, and transformative sector. She identifies this group as;  

The local sports club leaders, the ‘new community’ leaders, the youth club co-ordinators etc…. and it is at these people […] that the active citizenship campaign, promoted on an ideological rather than financial basis – and all the more potent for that – appears specifically targeted. (Gaynor 2011: 35)

Where the government, through social partnership, has either co-opted the first group to take at least part of the responsibility for programme deliver, and has constrained the aspirations of the second, with this third group the state seeks not so much to formalise any linkages, but to maximise the level of activity of these new community leaders to essentially make them, as well as the civic republican concept of citizenship itself, more visible.

In doing so, in raising the profile of a discourse of active citizenship, it helps undermine any existing critique of the role of social partnership in the implementation of

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18 As an illustration of this point, as an act of protest 25 of the 30 community and voluntary sector organisations in the social pillar ‘walked out’ of the plenary session of the Sustaining Progress partnership talks in July, 2002 (Ó Broin 2009: 118).
social policy and its perennial inability to fundamentally challenge levels of inequality and to advance social inclusion. This serves the dual purpose of, on the one hand, ensuring that this group of activists remain essentially apolitical, focusing on the local and immediate, rather than on the larger structural picture, and significantly, of sowing the seeds of any potential future retreat of the state in the area of social policy. In this regard the construction of the network of practices of active citizenship emerges as an important analytical focus. As was the case with the analysis of the NESC position papers and their role in underwriting the social partnership process from the mid-1980s, the starting position therefore remains that depoliticisation is a central practice of the neoliberal social order. Furthermore, in this instance this political objective is being deployed through the legitimisation of a new social order, being a set of practices seeking a level of permanence, meaning that from an analytical perspective, this social order can be illustrated in the order of discourse of the active citizenship campaign, and through the related discourses of social capital and civic republicanism.

An order of discourse is of course not just the particular dominant discursive aspect of a configuration of social practices, it is also the way in which particular genres (as ways of doing work), discourses (as representations of reality), and styles (as identities) are combined. Issues of control and division, or in Bernstein’s terms, issues of framing and classification therefore remain significant. In terms of a strategic critique of social capital, of an assessment of aspects of recontextualisation and operationalisation of discourses (and practices) across separate fields, the focus has to start with an investigation of the dominant or hegemonic features of this ordering. In terms of analytical material I will confine myself to the two Task Force documents produced in 2007; the Active Citizenship Concept Paper (2007a), and the more publically disseminated report of the Task Force Report on Active Citizenship (2007b). As the focus here is on the order of discourse and on the dialectical elements of the recontextualisation and operationalisation of practices, the methodological focus is therefore predominantly on interdiscursive analysis.

**Content and Layout**

The thirty-page Active Citizenship Task Force report has the accessible format of contemporary public reports. It adopts a landscape page layout, is produced in full colour, employs large print, and features a logo. The text is laid out in two columns on each page and, as in the reports looked at earlier, summarising boxes are featured. There are actually two types of such boxes; darkly shaded ones comprising bullet-point summations of preceding points, and lighter shaded ones composed of individual report recommendations.
Immediately before the foreword a page of ten ‘guiding principles’ appears, but without any contextual information. The foreword is presented by the Taoiseach (with a photograph and signature) in which he makes clear that the report is a compilation of the Task Force’s findings following the ‘national conversation’ undertaken on the issue of active citizenship. This conversation is the combination of the public meetings, the disseminated questionnaires, and the published background papers of 2006, as referenced above. This is followed by a two-page introduction from the Task Force, followed by an ‘overview’ page that lists the report’s contents. In all there are nine chapters with Chapter 6 featuring the group’s recommendations (sorted under five topics). While Chapter 9 includes the report’s appendix, featuring the Task Forces’ terms of reference, as well as a list of its members, and the staff of its secretariat.

The Task Force’s Active Citizenship concept paper was issued contemporaneously with the Task Force report in March 2007. Unlike the latter however, though publically accessible, it was not aimed at the general public. Its target readership was members of the Government and public servants who would be responsible for supporting and implementing aspects of the Task Force’s agenda, and also civil and state actors with an interest in the development of the social capital agenda and the active citizenship initiative. Consequently, the fifteen-page black and white document is text-heavy and is published without any of the summarising text boxes, graphics, or charts found in the Task Force report. As the corollary to the summarising and promotional work of that report however, this text is genuinely explanatory and expository, referencing both the Government White Paper (2000) and the NESF report on social capital (2003). It concludes for example, with one and a half pages of bibliographic references related to the concepts and ideas contained in its seven chapters (including a title by Robert Putnam, and monographs on civil republicanism). These chapters or sections moreover, include ‘The Philosophical Roots of Active Citizenship in Civic Republicanism’ (section 2), ‘The Rise of Social Capital’ (section 4), and ‘Disentangling Active Citizenship, social capital and community development (section 5). In fact, as an indication of the text’s advocative nature and the incompleteness of the argumentation inherent in its role, the final section (section 7) is titled ‘Unresolved questions and further research’.

**Categories of Analysis**

The analysis of the Active Citizenship initiative’s semiosis (and of the issue of social capital more generally) is undertaken as a form of strategic critique. That is, an examination of the discursive strategies adopted by powerful groups designed to challenge and alter
conventional wisdom and to re-orient social practices in new directions. In this light, the inquiry is less on what the archaeological analysis tells us, but on assessing the ways in which contemporary practices, such as these new programmes, are genealogically composed of now hegemonic practices, through their discursive elements in the key texts. In attempting to identify a clear genealogical link between the discourse of social capital and active citizenship policy implementation in the period from 2000 to 2007 in particular, the task is therefore only possible as a result of the ideological critique of those places where the hegemonic practices have emerged, such as in the NESC texts. With the active citizenship documents the analytical interest is therefore less in the nature, form, and semiotic representation of these hegemonic practices, but rather, in their contemporary recontextualisation and operationalisation, as specific moments of a dialectics of discourse. The analysis is therefore primarily interdiscursive with a concentration on genres and discourses transposed from one field (neoliberal economics) onto the set of practices in another field (social policy). There are also however textual reflections on issues of pronoun use, mood, and argumentation.

As the focus in this part of the chapter is on how neoliberal ideation central to the blueprint and the cognitive lock that binds economic and political thought and action in Ireland has become institutionalised and therefore largely invisible through the social partnership process, the interest is also in social partnership’s order of discourse. As an official challenge to issues of poverty and social exclusion there is naturally therefore an interest in processes of the restructuring and rescaling of community development practices (through a campaign like active citizenship), as an example of how practices in one field, when strategically re-oriented in line with the prevailing hegemonic ideation, can be discursively reformulated and translated into new ways of acting, new ways of being, and new identities through new genres, discourse, and voices. In other words, the analytical focus is in the search for evidence of a novel order of discourse of social policy and community action. In terms of such restructuring, issues of control over actions and insulation of representations and their semiotic manifestations, that is to say, issues of framing and classification, also become significant categories of analysis.
Step 3(b): Analysis of the Texts

The Social Capital Texts:

The Report of the Task Force on Active Citizenship, (2007), and
The Task Force paper on The Concept of Active Citizenship, (2007)

The Report of the Task Force on Active Citizenship

As with the immigration consultation document and the EWG report on childcare examined earlier, the text is clearly symptomatic of a report that projects a logic of appearances. As a report whose task is to present an issue in a non-problematic way, in defining citizenship as ‘the rights and responsibilities we all have’ (foreword), and that ‘The Taskforce believes that Active Citizenship implies duties as well as rights’ (Chapter 1), (2007b: 2), the document is nevertheless clearly presenting a position (including an idea of citizenship) that goes unexplained or elaborated, facilitated in large measure through its reliance on description and summarising. The two-page report introduction that follows the Taoiseach’s foreword and precedes the contents pages usefully summaries not only what the report is trying to achieve (a set of recommendations in the non-contentious arena of voluntary engagement that seeks to be acted upon), and also the official understanding of the concepts of citizenship and its role in Irish social and political life.

The first paragraph lays out ‘rights and responsibilities’ that we all have (2007b: vi), while the research undertaken by the Task Force is highlighted in the third paragraph where the text speaks of the group’s travel around the country. The introduction then contrasts its first main area of interest, ‘volunteering’, with its second, ‘voting participation’ in the next paragraph, where we read; ‘While there is little evidence, therefore, of a decline in the quantity of voluntary activity, there has been a strong and worrying decline in voting in elections, a key indicator of civic engagement’ (ibid.). The document then introduces its first main aspiration through this work, to maximise that ‘untapped potential […] to improve the quality of life in Ireland through more, and better quality engagement by citizens’ (ibid.). The Introduction concludes by reminding the reader that the Task Force is presenting its ‘vision’ of what it means to be an active citizen, which has informed the recommendations that this document presents. This general drift or slippage from informing and promoting to leading a call to action is repeated in the report as a whole.

In using the first person plural possessive pronoun in the title of the first chapter ‘Our Vision for Active Citizenship’ however, a level of ambiguity emerges. Is the document
talking simply about the Task Force’s view, or the Taoiseach and the Government’s view, as well as that of the Task Force, or is the document, post-the national conversation, trying to impress upon the reader that this is also the public’s view of active citizenship? This is not necessarily a contentious point, but in eliding any explanation of other views on citizenship, and whether they are publically held and/or favoured, or indeed whether the national conversation addressed this point at all, the Task Force report is reconfiguring and disseminating the representation of positions expressed in other official texts such as the 2000 White Paper and the 2003 NESF report, as referenced. Discursively then, the Task Force report is attempting to disembed (neo)liberal notions of individual responsibility from areas of policy that have achieved a level of hegemony in other fields, to circulate these ideas, and then to embed these notions in the practices that form the relationship between the individual and community development. In doing the work of promoting such ‘official’ views on active citizenship in this way – what it means to be an ‘active citizen – the Task Force report is attempting a process of discursive recontextualisation, a point I shall return to below.

In condensing a potentially complex picture that a genuinely explanatory report would find problematic, and in working as partly a Governmental press release (taking ideas from the White Paper), as well as a sort of conference report (borrowing from the NESF report), the Task Force report sits discursively within a promotional genre. A significant aspect of the report is that although its view of active citizenship is very much that of civic republicanism (a point stressed in the concept paper, below) the phrase ‘civic republicanism’ is not used in the report by the task force. This may be because of the potential for confusion around the use of the word ‘republican’ itself – the concept paper spends a portion of text on just this point (2007a: 2-3). While the phrase ‘a ‘civic republican’ perspective (emphasis in original) appears once on page one, the report instead seems to favour what it presumably feels are less contentious constructions such as ‘civic engagement’, which appears seventeen times (not including headings or footnotes), or ‘civic participation’ appearing four times, or ‘civic activity’, which is presented twice.

The ideologically-infused nature of the essence of the document is clearly accessible simply from the issue of voices. Despite lauding the national conversation and the role of public input into the report and the active citizenship project generally, no other voices are quoted in the report. This is significant and underlines the transformational intent of the document, adding to the summary of ‘what we did’ to an opening up of a space for the presentation of what ‘we’ seek to do, which includes the possibility of curtailing of public service provision to be replaced by enhanced levels of local activism. The use of first person plural pronouns is especially useful in this regard as it helps conceal this absence of any other
voices. Yet even in Chapter 4; ‘What We Found’, which relates directly to the public consultation process; there are no direct quotes from the public, as individuals or as organisations. Neither are any annexes or appendices attached to the report that might summarise other voices. The chapter does summarise some statistical findings as well as general observations, but even here the observations collocate active citizenship with volunteering only (2007b: 7-8), thereby reinforcing the critical assessment that this is the focus of the programme, whether this has genuine public support or not.

To be useful and effective a promotional genre has to be working to promote something, and once we get past Chapter 4 we can clearly see this discursive aspect of the document. The report’s objective is to not only raise the profile of active citizenship and make it real in the minds of the public, it is, as the NESF report proposed (2003: 8-9, 73-74, and 80-82), to ‘mainstream’ active citizenship and to enhance the link between it and community development. That is, the report’s function is to move from presenting a ‘common’ position to proposing action based on such a position. This can be seen in the report’s subsequent layout and chapter headings. Chapter 5 is titled ‘Playing our Part Together’, with the strap-line in the contents’ page reading ‘We then pose a challenge – to individuals, organisations, businesses and the media – to enhance Active Citizenship in Ireland through a partnership approach’ (ibid. viii). Here we see the introduction of a problem – solution structure, with an objective plus a problem (the obstacles to achieving the objective, partly summarised in Chapter 4), followed by proposals for a solution, and an evaluation of that solution. The simple proposal is that people and organisations ‘engage’ civically at a local level, and, through voting, at a national level as well. Facilitated by the business sector and the media, this process it is proposed, will liberate that ‘untapped potential’ highlighted by the Task Force in its introduction, to improve the quality of life in Ireland (2007b: 16-23).

In terms of the promotional genre of the report, the bullet point boxes that feature in the earlier chapters are replaced here by individual and textually separate shaded bullet-point recommendation statements. These are quite specific and indicate a leap from the consultative dimension elaborated at the report’s outset, to this concluding chapter with its emphasis on policy change. Discursively, these signify a dialectical move from a recontextualisation of discourses to the operationalisation of a new discourse as an element of a new social ordering of citizenship and community development. Where the initial sets of bullet points can be seen as having a reader-directive function, and therefore part of the

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19 According to Murphy, this problem-solving ethos remained a significant difficulty for civil society interaction with the state generally, since it left no room or inclination to question the official approach to and interpretation of problems, and therefore to challenge the *status quo* (cited in Ó Broin 2009:119).
informational character of the document, these recommendations are a key part of the attempt to promote, to operationalise new processes and practices borne out of the recontextualised practices captured in the Task Force’s phrase ‘Together, We’re Better’. The final chapter is not therefore pre-structuring readers’ expectations anymore, it is attempting to operationalise a new set of social practices based on these new expectations, emanating from a set of practices that have themselves influenced the particular depoliticising view of ‘partnership’ that has become hegemonic in the period after 1987.

The problem-solution structure is also a primary aspect of the promotional character of the document, of the facilitation of the discourse dialectical process of recontextualisation, where alternatives are not presented and community voices are absent. But it also introduces an instrumentalist or ‘means-end’ character to the document. Where the NESF report from 2003 talks of the need to ‘mainstream’ active citizenship and of its potential to link with community development, here Chapter 6 of this report seeks to initiate just such a next step. In presenting recommendations to Government (2007b: 15-23), the chapter covers a number of separate areas including; ‘Participation in the Democratic Process’; ‘The Public Service and Citizens’; ‘Community Engagement and Promoting a Sense of Community’; and in terms of consolidating this ideological mainstreaming, the area of ‘Education for Citizenship’. Essentially, it is at this point that the Government reveals the detail of the blueprint for the broad discourse of social capital (including active citizenship) as it relates to the implementation of social policy. It is through the Task Force moreover, that it seeks to lay the groundwork for the operationalisation of a set of recontextualised social practices, to fundamentally impact on the existing network of practices that constitute social policy and to alter the social order of community development. Significantly, this process is seen as being facilitated through (social) partnership (2007b: 17-17, and 24), but critically, if effective it will also enhance, and entrench social partnership. The set of practices that combine to make social partnership what it is are therefore colonising the field of community development and influencing its order of discourse.

In attempting to legitimise the general representation of active citizenship and how and why it is to be developed, a significant benefit of producing this report over other texts (such as the Task Force’s concept paper) is the ambiguity over voice. The issue of who is speaking, of who is included and who is not, can directly confer legitimacy through authority. Moreover, in terms of the report’s specific mainstreaming objectives, legitimisation through authorisation is particularly significant since so much of what is summarised in the report above the micro-level local good works, and the general but vague notion of the public good, is potentially controversial. This element of legitimacy not only facilitates operationalisation
of the new, but also underscores the recontextualisation of existing practices into transformed new discourses, such that here a significant feat of the report is its deployment, after two decades of social partnership, of the non-controversial idea of partnership itself. Such operationalisation can only work when recontextualisation becomes commonplace and invisible. Rationalisations now need hardly any moral legitimation (save for elaboration of the meaning of civic republicanism found in the concept paper) making them seem almost logical. So logical and rational in fact, that when we move past the report’s Chapter 4, as noted, legitimation is conveyed simply through the authority invested in this unchallengeable official narrative.

The logic of appearance conveyed throughout the report is not so much a lie, but it is purposefully limited and leading, and yet in being political, the text seeks to produce a text that inhabits an apolitical space and a depoliticised set of social practices, and circulates a new order of discourse of citizenship and community development. Before addressing the problems of recontextualisation and operationalisation more specifically, I want to add to this assessment of the changing nature of the social order of social policy through the transformation of this particular order of discourse, with some brief references to the Task Force Concept Paper.

*The Task Force paper on The Concept of Active Citizenship*

As referenced, a central function of the Task Force’s concept paper is to advocate for a programme of active citizenship based on the promotion of a particular understanding of citizenship itself. As such, in distinguishing between strands of citizenship the paper therefore prioritises the sense of balance between citizen rights and citizen duties, highlighted above in the group’s public report. It states ‘A civic republican perspective on citizenship arises from the capacity for collective self-government and the individual’s sense of social concern as a member of a polity’ (2007a: 2). In explicitly naming liberal and communitarian approaches to citizenship, the paper clearly places the Task Force’s view of citizenship within the particular philosophical paradigm of civic republicanism.

In the next section on the different dimensions of active citizenship, the text presents the definition that comes from the Government White Paper (2000) and the NESF social capital report (2003). This paper however, proposes a summary definition as:

Active Citizenship refers to the voluntary capacity of citizens and communities working directly together, or through elected representatives, to exercise economic, social and political power in pursuit of shared goals. (2007a: 4)
This is a significant point since it foregrounds autonomous grassroots action but it is also ambiguous in stressing the route to power may be through the existing representational process. In stressing the ‘pursuit of shared goals’ the inference may also be that if the local goals are not ‘shared’ more widely, then such a route to the exercise of power is to be blocked, or at least deprioritised. A further indication of the potential for narrowing down genuine political aspirations for civil society actors (as opposed to opening them out), also follows in the same section.

In stressing the desirability of ‘deliberative engagement’, presumably in contrast to the problems and public frustration with a purely representational structure, the paper states:

Citizens form their own judgements, are prepared to explain their own positions, to listen to other points of view, and to revise their opinions in deliberation...They are prepared to raise, and support others who raise issues of concern in the public arena, and to defend the interests of fellow citizens subject to injustices as well as defending themselves. (ibid. 5)

This is noteworthy since the deliberation mentioned here is within and between individuals, local activists, and organizations, but not between them and the institutions of the state. In fact, as noted above, in the White Paper the Government has already indicated its desire to restrict the scope of civil society input into official policy when it states that it is to remain solely responsible for key decision-making on policy issues ‘no matter how extensive a process of prior consultation that may have taken place’ (2000: 22).

This reference to deliberative engagement is one of three points proposed as ‘desirable aspects’ of active citizenship contained in the concept paper. These points however, are not the views of the public, nor the Task Force members themselves, but are taken from an academic piece on ‘Active Citizenship in Contemporary Democracy’ which goes uncontextualised in the paper. This level of intertextuality underlines the explanatory genre of the concept paper, in contrast to the Task Force report. But even here, in presenting more context, but only through views that go unquestioned and unanalysed, the paper can be seen to be drawing together and recontextualising a set of views of a particular perspective that contribute to the summarising and informational work of the Task Force report, and the future work of the Task Force itself. This is underlined by the fact that the choices made with the concept paper, about what to include and what to leave out, are made after the benefit of the ‘national conversation’. The paper also indirectly raises another point reflected later in the Task Force report.

As noted previously in my research, it is a commonplace of the discourse of neoliberalism, and particularly of official reports that are more promotional than analytical, that the restructuring of social relations be predicated on an uninterrogated conception of
change. This is a useful strategy since the electorate may otherwise be left to wonder why a fundamental reorganising of polices needs to take place at all. From the public perspective, codifying such change can play a central role in ensuring a ‘buy-in’ from the electorate. This issue is explicitly raised in section 3 of the concept paper on the different dimensions of active citizenship, where the paper states:

In a fast-changing Ireland, individuals may be more inclined to choose their own roles and identities in communities, workplaces and families. It could be claimed that commitments and identities are more likely to be shaped ‘from below’ – by individuals themselves – than by some traditional and permanent community or group to which they belong. (2007a: 5)

It is following this point that the ‘desirable aspects’ of ‘deliberative engagement’, ‘awareness of interdependencies’ and ‘an attitude of civic self-restraint’ referenced above, are highlighted. This general point is not developed further in this paper, but the issue of implied social change is also intimated in the Task Force report. In the Taoiseach’s foreword, for example, we read:

In essence, Active Citizenship is about shared values and pride of place and country. In the past we took some of these things for granted, but in today’s World we need to invest more time and effort in articulating and nurturing these values. (2007b: 5)

And in the Task Force report’s introduction:

As Irish society matures, and experiences much greater diversity in terms of values, lifestyles and choices, we need to envision different pathways of Active Citizenship. (ibid. 6)

These specific references to change allow the Task Force report in particular, to move from a discussion about the way things currently are to the way things are heading. It is to this unelaborated future Ireland that the planning and implementation work of the text seeks to appeal (including allusions to a potential decoupling of welfare provision from state responsibility).

In discursively construing a new reality, in delimiting the topic and of essentially framing and classifying active citizenship in this apolitical way, the official position is that any contestation over definitions or understandings has since drawn to a close. This view of equating active citizenship with voting, and with notions of local self-reliance and neighbourliness – through documents like the Task Force’s report – becomes the dominant or hegemonic view. The process of depoliticising social policy, initiated in the formal arrangement of the creation of the space for the community and voluntary pillar within the social partnership process, and through initiatives like active citizenship, is being actively disseminated across the structural or institutional boundaries of economics and into social
policy and across the scalar boundaries of national level management to local community level activities. I now want to look in more detail at how this is being achieved discursively.

Classification and Framing, Recontextualisation and Operationalisation

To summarise and draw the analysis of the official texts on social capital and active citizenship to a conclusion, I want to reflect in more detail on the processes of textual framing and classification. As elaborated previously (Fairclough 2010: 398), framing is the control or regulation of work in a textual mode. For example, the absence of alternative voices in the two documents under review, especially given that such voices are directly referred to through the phrase the ‘national conversation’ that was the consultative process of 2006, is evidence of strong framing. Likewise, while omitting public input on the one hand, the concept paper does see fit to reproduce quotes from experts to reinforce the positions it wishes the Task Force to take forward in its report, on the other. This implies that where it had a choice, the Government, through the Task Force, decided to rigidly maintain control over what gets included and excluded from these key documents. This also allows for control over key positions such as the definition of active citizenship and the foregrounding of personal or group responsibility, so central to the programme being presented. Furthermore, when combined, the two texts inculcate the notion that citizenship is deliberative at a local level but must defer to official politics (and policies) at a national level. It is through such framing that citizenship (and therefore citizen voices and actions) is quickly construed as essentially apolitical and separate from notions of conflictual debate.

This point is underscored by the declarative mood used throughout the Task Force report in particular. There are no questions and no further request for contributions and submissions. The boxes used in the report also act as strong devices for framing where the first set, the summarising boxes, lead the reader to adopt the same position as the Task Force. This is an example of what Fairclough might call the ‘telling’ boxes (2010: 181). The second type of boxes, those that deal with recommendations, of what the Task Force now sees are necessary actions; can be seen as the ‘selling’ boxes. It is through such framing, manifest in the hybridisation of information or reporting genres, and promotional genres; a shifting between informing and persuading used in the Task Force’s report, that the link between civil society and community development is moulded and presented as an aspect of the politics of recognition, giving space to any and all groups of activists in whatever form they might take. This stands in stark contrast to the absence of any reflection on the politics of redistribution, and the centrality of redistributive processes in advancing community development, which
would necessarily involve a primary focus on issues of inequality, and on the underlying material conditions and their economic dimensions.

In terms of what is represented and how such representations are construed textually, classification is interested in the strength or weakness of the division or insulations between entities present. We see, for example, a strong division between the subject positions in the Task Force report. In spite of the heavy use of the first personal plural pronouns ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘our’; much of their usage is clearly related to the Task Force itself. In fact, it is really only in the Taoiseach’s foreword in iterations such as ‘we all have to ensure that we continue to develop and grow’ (2007b: 5), that the subject pronoun regularly includes the nation, the citizens, or the public involved in the consultation process. Yet even here, in the next paragraph where he states ‘we in the Government welcome their analysis’ and again, ‘we will endeavour to build on their analysis’ (ibid.), the slippage (as with the Minister’s foreword in the immigration consultation paper) between who precisely the subject is (the public – the Government – the Task Force with the Government, etc.) helps the text manufacture the consensual ethos of the Task Force’s ‘Together, We’re Better’ background paper and consultative questionnaire. Almost exclusively however, when the report uses these pronouns after the foreword, it is referring to the Task Force and its work and aspirations alone.

In this way the Government, through the Task Force, has assessed the landscape and now knows what it has to do; the reader, the public on the other hand, may have had their input but that moment has now passed. Setting up such boundaries, particularly in a process supposedly bourn of consultation and dialogue, is a key part of the recontextualisation of the practices of community development where it is transformed into a discourse with new features (such as the promotion of ‘group’ recognition over redistribution viewed from a national perspective), and imposes upon the new practices classifications and divisions absent in prior configurations of those practices. The non-controversial nature of the new vision of active citizenship, as it relates to community development, is just such a classification. As a result local level discussion, planning and action, meeting with politicians, and voting; or as Gaynor (2011: 36) puts it, the ‘apolitical, disembodied project of self-help and self-reliance’, becomes one side of this classification and is included. Yet while enhancing the capacity of community organisations in a material way, leading to genuine empowerment or access to local and national level decision-making, becomes excluded from this emergent discourse of community development. The transformed monological nature of the Task Force report, with its mix of professional, bureaucratic, and social policy discourses, is central to this shifting of the construal of the social relations of citizenship and community development to an issue of
management alone. The Task Force concept paper and report together both help win cultural support for such a process.

The regulatory dimension of this discourse practice can also be seen in terms of what is not present. The social policy of active citizenship as initially construed in the concept paper is supposed to be conducive to and reflective of civil society participation, and of facilitating a contribution to the public good. Non-compromised notions of civic republicanism would necessarily imply joint control of any discourse interaction, especially where the discourse, the representation of a set of social practices, is open to change. Such joint control would then normally be expected to be discursively visible in key texts around any change to or redefinition of social processes leading to policy change, through features such as weak insulation between representations. The fact that there is no mix of representations of the social process of active citizenship or community development, calls into question both the rigour of the consultative process and the authenticity of its findings as summarised by the Task Force. The conclusion is that the discourse practice of active citizenship, as managed by the Task Force and Government, is a regulative practice, where the semiotic element of practices regulates the combination of social practices that make up the emerging social order of community development. In this way the order of discourse becomes imbued with an ethos of management, where managerialism is foregrounded while governance is relegated. It is through a shift in practices of this type that the sector comes to be restructured, resulting in the ‘asphyxiating impact’ on civil society that Harvey (2008) maintains, (cited in Murphy 2009: 40).

Reflections on issues of framing and classification also allow for clearer conclusions to be drawn on the discourse dialectic moments of recontextualisation and operationalisation. Recontextualisation is concerned with the imposition of dislocated, external discourses from one field into another and the ways in which they are reconfigured within that new field based on the particular logic of that field’s set of social practices. But in addressing the issue of the order of discourse of the field of activism and community development we must also reflect on the other constituents of the order, namely genres and styles. In doing so this brings us back to the problem of operationalisation, with its concern for the ways such new discourses are enacted in new ways of acting or interacting (in genres), and inculcated in new identities or ‘ways of being’ (in styles). Successful strategies are measured in their operational success but strategies can only be operationalised when they move beyond the imaginary for change and when they bring about real change. The successful embedding of new classification, of new discourses is also symptomatic of such processes. The elements of
the recontextualised discourse of individual responsibility emerging in the field of community development may then be enacted in ways new to the field in question.

The new ways public servants and local government are set to interact with citizens, (as laid out in the second set of recommendations in the Task Force report), can be seen as an example of such new forms of activity. So too can potentially some of the work of the proposed independent electoral commission, contained in the first set of recommendations on participation in the democratic process. These primary processes moreover, will also involve secondary and tertiary forms of activity such as meetings, interviews, and evaluations involving participants who would not otherwise have any interaction with local government or the offices of the state. If we take the examples of appraisals or project funding, we could say that their specific discourses emerge from the contemporary field of management practices and are reconfigured in community development as an imaginary. Once community-level programmes are agreed however, then the imaginary becomes real in the carrying out of a set of material, time-bound tasks. In this way elements of the management discourse are enacted through the dialectical transformation of discourse into genres, such as the community development project appraisal interview or the project funding application and reporting cycle.

Operationalisation also involves inculcation or the transformation of discourses into new identities. As in the engagement of the participants in the community and voluntary pillar in the social partnership programme; local activists in the framework of active citizenship will be called upon to do certain things but also to fulfil certain roles, and therefore to adopt new identities. That is, this new relationship in the implementation of social policy will not only involve changes to the roles of public servants and local government officials, but will also confer upon civil society activists new functions and new identities such as managers, auditors, trainers, facilitators, report writers, etc. The fourth set of recommendations in the Task Force’s report on ‘Education for Citizenship’ that calls for ‘the expansion of education for citizenship in the school system and in the youth and adult education sectors’ (2007b: 21), can be read as designed precisely to confer on school students just such an identity as advocates or ‘youth ambassadors’ for active citizenship, through the addition of courses on active citizenship to the curriculum. It is through the recontextualisation of discourses and their operationalisation by being enacted and inculcated in new ways that the order of discourse and the network of practices that make up civic engagement in community development came to be institutionally transformed, through the Government’s active citizenship initiative.
Summary

In terms of enacting, of the creation and circulation of these new ways of (inter)acting and inculcating these new ways of being, these new identities; the Task Force on active citizenship’s concept paper and report are part of doing exactly this. But the latter needs the former to be productive. The summarising of the landscape and the promotion of a set of policies contained in the Task Force report need the framing of positions and understandings that are elaborated and fixed in the concept paper. When we see the Task Force’s report recommendation on ‘Education for Citizenship’, for example, we can see evidence of how these two documents work together to formulate new identities based on the reconfigured and transplanted semiotic representations from other fields, where they have become hegemonic but which only emerged in post-1987 period of social partnership. As a result, these texts can relatively easily control, frame, divide, and classify the partnership-infused apolitical ethos of how active citizenship is to be understood, while the programme that takes up this position then actively aims to inculcate such a contingent view, and essentially normalise the unquestioning role of these new civil society actors in their partnership with the state.

In terms of what these texts do, in terms of control; all consultative processes are concluded in advance of 2007 before any strategic programmes on active citizenship are put in place. Even where there is public input this too is controlled to produce something desired by the state actors in advance. The public can critique pressures of volunteering, absence of free time, inflexible work patterns, etc. and even the frustration with repeated consultative processes (2007b: 6), but those voices that have a more politically-engaged view of citizenship are notably absent, and those that are included seem uninterested in such concerns. Moreover, the public whether as individuals or as members of organised groups, have no formal space or mechanism as part of the consultative process to discuss or debate with and learn from each other. The control of the flow of interaction is all in one direction. The process is essentially led from the beginning and tightly managed, as was the case with the Task Force membership itself, where all participants were hand-picked by the Taoiseach. In being discursively linked back to the Government White Paper on a new framework for engagement with the voluntary sector (2000), and the NESF report on social capital (2003), the representations of sets of social practices being disseminated in these two documents have already become ideologically dominant by the time they are produced. And in so being, the set of assumptions being recontextualised in the Task Force report in particular, becomes invisible allowing for the implementation and propagation of such polices, and their ideological basis, into the future.
Conclusion

My objective in this third and final analytical chapter was to assess to what degree the concertation process of national social partnership in Ireland actually permitted a healthy public sphere. Or more explicitly, and influenced by the findings of the previous chapter on the discourse of childcare, whether a healthy public sphere was really feasible where neoliberal ideation maintained a hegemonic position. This objective saw a desire to move away from a focus on instances of contamination of the public sphere through, for example, the colonising discourses of the market and its relationship to the national economy (as reviewed in the chapters on immigration and childcare), and an anticipation of a more structural basis for the diminution of the voice of civil society actors, particularly in the period 1997 to 2007. Though the methodological basis remained a critical analysis of aspects of discourse feeding into and emanating out of social partnership, the initial challenge was therefore to theorise the dynamic relationship between civil society and the Irish State, as mediated through social partnership, in a transdisciplinary way that both afforded a space for a critical engagement and crucially, facilitated a semiotic point of entry into the topic. That is, a theorisation of social partnership that was semiotically productive.

The theoretical approach adopted in Stage 1 of the explanatory critique framework here drew on political science and aspects of social learning, ideation theory, institutional change, and on policy paradigm transformation in particular. Applying Hall’s (1993) notion of radical or ‘third order’ change, and Blyth’s (2001) notion of a policy ‘blueprint’, once effectively deployed or ‘weaponised’ cementing a political and cultural ‘cognitive lock’; I proposed social partnership in Ireland as just such an ideological fix. Where the National Economic and Social Council’s (NESC) mid-term strategy report of 1986, with its emphasis on the need for consensus on the policy choices being made, can be seen as providing the content and form of the state’s new neoliberal blueprint, it is through the first social partnership agreement in 1987 that the state sought to secure that necessary political and social cohesion. Moreover, and drawing on Connolly’s work (2008) on the institutionalising aspect of successive social partnership agreements in the area of social policy in particular, I propose the unbroken sequence of social partnership agreements as the structure that successfully cemented the desired cognitive lock on thought and action. Or, to put it another way, as social partnership essentially established what Bourdieu might identify as a doxic situation. Semiotically, I contend that in this way the social order that is Irish social partnership, in being largely discursive, has essentially operated as a neoliberal order of discourse in Ireland.
Where Kirby (2010) stresses the inherent issue of the process’s ‘blinkered and obfuscating’ ideology as being responsible for taking a structural approach to resolving issues of poverty and exclusion off the table, and where Murphy (2009) highlights the programmatic revisioning of concepts and the role of discourse in allowing the state, through the partnership structure, to redefine issues and policy responses on terms that can be resolved within the state’s overarching neoliberal blueprint; my task here was to pursue the issue of semiosis in a way that other scholars have not attempted, or have left substantially unelaborated. That is, to take a critical analytical approach to discourse and ideation to see more clearly whether what authors critical of social partnership’s role in narrowing down dialogical spaces in the field of the equality agenda contended was happening was indeed the case. And also, if semiosis was centrally implicated in the cognitive locking that social partnership effected, to examine how precisely the state’s goal of operating within the blueprint – particularly in the area of social policy – was being achieved in a discursive sense.

In this chapter my analytical approach was two-fold; I engaged in a historical piece of archaeological work, essentially an ideological critique of the elements of the NESC neoliberal blueprint strategy report, to see how the later hegemonic practices (as ways of acting and as representations) emerged. I spent the majority of the analytical portion of this chapter however, on a strategic critique of the dialectical moments of recontextualisation and operationalisation of these emergent practices, in their discursive form, on the development of a specific area of social policy in the contemporary period. Adopting an ideological critique to the NESC texts produced before and after the February 1987 general election, and that underwrite the first social partnership document (and through institutionalisation, all future partnership documents), we see how symptoms of the crisis of the mid-1980s have been construed as causes giving rise to limited choices. Issues of a lack of economic growth and high unemployment are combined in a subjective fashion and presented as objective reality, leading to policy imperatives, such as deregulation, lowering taxation, and the cutting of social spending, while simultaneously removing any sense of arbitrariness about the nature of the ‘model’ being prioritised.

We have also seen how these particular ‘ideas’ and the ways in which they have been interlinked, produced a demand for action of a particular type that, in keeping with Hall and Blyth’s contentions, were not drawn up by elected politicians, but by a cohort of extra-political professionals, facilitated by the state through NESC and then materialised in the social partnership agreements. And in further reflecting the theoretical observations on radical policy paradigm change, this blueprint arises at a time of national economic ‘crisis’. In the Irish case moreover, ideationally we see NESC deploy the concept of economic
challenges deployed as ‘illness’, in need of immediate attention, being acknowledged directly within the preface of the report, where we read ‘the recent developments underline the necessity for immediate remedial action, (NESC 1986: xiii). The title of the first social partnership agreement ‘The Programme for National Recovery’ moreover, directly recontextualises this ideation within the partnership process. In directly referring to the presentation of principles ‘rather than […] a detailed blueprint’ the NESC text also raises the notion of a necessary blueprint as a marked theme, thereby indirectly positioning the unmarked theme of NESC ideation – as elaborated in the text – as the actual ideological blueprint.

In this light, and to use Blyth’s terminology, the centrality of NESC’s ‘non-blueprint’ blueprint document can therefore be seen as a weaponisation of the overarching blueprint being proposed, of partly crystallising its essential elements and of officially and publically disseminating them. In contrasting and comparing the prescription of the NESC texts with the first social partnership document from 1987 moreover, we see not only the same set of contributors, but a completely uncritical acceptance of the NESC blueprint in the first partnership text. That is, in 1987 a form of cognitive locking takes place, which is accomplished largely through a wholesale intertextual manoeuvre. Ultimately, where consensus and cohesion are emphasised, depoliticisation follows, with this depoliticising tendency given blanket legitimisation in perpetuity through the institutionalising nature of the social partnership process. A strong feature of the NESC prescription, stated explicitly, is that essentially since an increasing level of employment is seen as the route out of disadvantage and poverty, and as a primary economic objective of the blueprint is for growth with employment, the broader social agenda becomes fundamentally embedded within the economic agenda. This also implies that a non-prioritisation on the social agenda can be justified, but what is also being institutionalised is the idea, the implication that any investment in the social agenda that takes away from, challenges, or in any way undermines the economic plan will not be permitted.

It is in this context that a decade and a half later civil society actors, many of whom are now directly involved in social partnership through the community and social pillar, consistently begin to critique the whole social partnership arrangement, viewing it evermore as part of the problem in undermining their attempts to advance social inclusion and eradicate poverty. It is in response to the two challenges of trying to advance consensus for the neoliberal blueprint within the community and voluntary sector, and in seeking to respond to persistent levels of poverty in certain sectors of society that I contend that the government White Paper from 2000, on ‘formalising’ or institutionalising the relationship between the
state and the community and voluntary sector, was produced. That is, to challenge the potential emergence of a blueprint substantially different to the state-authorised one, and to suppress dissent through the co-option of ever greater numbers of civil society actors into ‘partnership’ initiatives as a proactive way of doing so. It is in laying out the nature of the relationship between what is ostensibly civil society in the Irish Republic and the state, and in clearly resisting moves to hand over any power to the sector while simultaneously encouraging the sector to be more ‘self-reliant’, that clear evidence of the process of depoliticising civil society can be seen in the contemporary period.

In the years that follow the NESF report on ‘social capital’ (2003), with its non-controversial concept of harnessing citizen and group action at a local level to do ‘good works’, that the resultant Active Citizenship initiative, overseen by Bertie Ahern’s Task Force, emerges as both a vehicle for visibly positioning state policy within community development, and for closing off more politically demanding approaches to the social agenda. Drawing on the critiques of social capital in Ireland (Gaynor 2011 and Murphy 2009), the benefit of a discourse-analytic focus on social capital and the active citizenship campaign is that in being underwritten by the controlling ethos of the White Paper (2000), and as analysed interdiscursively in the Task Force’s concept paper and their public report (2007a, 2007b), we can clearly see how hegemonic ideas that emerge within the NESC texts and which are disseminated and then institutionalised within the social partnership documents, now begin to recontextualise representations of sets of practices in the area of social policy. In fact, the title of the active citizenship alone ‘Together, We’re Better’ neatly recontextualises the consensus ethic prioritised in the NESC blueprint from two decades earlier, spreading out from the field of economics into the field of social policy, now embraced through processes of self-identification by active citizens. We find practices imbued with the same market-oriented ethos that place great emphasis on the role of the individual in taking responsibility for resolving their own challenges, whilst simultaneously intimating a future reduced role of the state and its level of responsibility in welfare provision generally.

Moreover, in the Task Force report’s recommendations we can see these transposed discourses now also perpetuating new forms of work and action, new sets of identities, and in new genres and voices as the active citizenship initiative seeks to put these ‘contaminated’ representations of community development practices into operation. Also, these terms of exchange ensure that without recourse to meaningful action by the community and voluntary sector, the active citizenship project is not emblematic of a public sphere, but it is illustrative of the way in which the state, through social partnership, can and does facilitate a space for input and policy development that is controlled from the outset, thereby remaining
perpetually apolitical. The space is not just controlled, but strategically manoeuvred to ensure that the ideological blueprint that underwrites the process is circulated and reconfigured in new ways in new policy areas. The consultative process that was the active citizenship initiative provides clear discursive evidence of the ways in which the social capital/social policy debate is indicative of a fundamentally compromised, or indeed of an infected public sphere.

In the largely discursive ways examined in the texts analysed here, we can see how the state effectively brings into being the broad cohesion and consensus imperative, demanded since the blueprint from the mid-1980s, even in those policy areas where it might seem more difficult, where the challenges do not lend themselves so easily to economic remedies and where the constituency’s scepticism of the ability of the blueprint to deliver what is really necessary is theoretically and empirically grounded, and consequently runs deep. But it is by being able to assess both the desire and relative success of the state, through the social partnership process, in identifying potential threats to the supremacy of the model cognitively locked in for a quarter of a century, and the ways in which it decides to respond semiotically, (through positions papers, consultative studies, task forces, reports, press releases and speeches, as well as through public initiatives and campaigns), that we can see how a crisis of the public sphere is not only a consequence of the general anti-democratic tendency but an ongoing cause of such a state of affairs, which the state is perpetually acting to maintain.

Despite the rhetoric of the ‘public good’ and the intention of involving civil society actors in enhancing the social life of the nation, this official obfuscating and controlling dynamic can possibly be best illustrated in the Government’s White Paper (2000) on reframing the relationship between the state and community and voluntary sector undercuts any optimism for radical change. On the one hand, decision-making power is set to rest in the hands of the elected government of the day, whilst the sector is simultaneously encouraged to take more responsibility for matters of community development on the other. Oddly however, the Task Force on active citizenship (the clear manifestation of the White Paper’s intent and the Taoiseach’s aspiration for progress in this restructured relationship), advocates a form of civic republicanism that is explicitly ‘political’. It talks of local civic engagement and participation, and of individuals and groups consulting with each other, planning, and taking control of programmes and initiatives that directly affect them, and of essentially cutting out the interference of the state. In practice however, there are no routes to local and national levels of decision-making, and what is possible often amounts to no more that promoting good neighbourliness, helping out, being busy, and voting.
Given the span of time since the neoliberal model’s adoption by the Irish state, its implementation by successive governments, the instigation of social partnership and its institutionalising role in delimiting the range of the possible, as well as the range of policy areas upon which the desire to prioritise a form of economic growth over all other considerations has impacted, the work I have been able to attempt in this chapter is necessarily limited. In devoting one part of my research to social partnership as a contribution to an assessment of how neoliberalism might be implicated in a crisis of the public sphere in the Irish Republic, the overarching sense is that what I have found here only prompts the need for a deeper investigation into the strategic ways in which civil society’s voice has been compromised through the social partnership process. Even in the small area of community development chosen other critiques could have formed the basis of my approach, not to mention other areas of concentration and other texts, indeed the Government White Paper (2000) itself seems ripe for further critical assessment.

Overall, and following on from the focus on childcare policy of the last chapter, I feel the particular theorisation of social partnership I have adopted, on which the semiotic analysis is based, is sound and remains a productively useful way of approaching the significance of the semiotic element in identifying the emergence of new sets of practices and tracing their movement across networks of practices. Specifically, through a combination of archaeological and genealogical inquiry, I have uncovered how types of classifications, or representations (in discourses) from the field of neoliberal economics, once hegemonic, infect and take hold in field of social policy, giving rise to new substantially reconfigured actions (in genres) and identities (in styles), ensuring they are only ever evaluated on their own terms permitted by the new sets of practices. In this way, I believe the analysis demonstrates how a critical approach to semiosis can be applied effectively in a transdisciplinary way to add something illuminating to critiques of social processes of social policy development that exhibit an under-elaborated approach to discourse. I also propose this broad theoretical and methodological approach is one that simultaneously opens the door to further examinations of phenomena such as the interrelationship between neoliberalism, Irish polity, and the crisis that is an undermined and ineffective public sphere, and to critiques of the Irish state’s republican credentials in the period of economic prosperity before the national banking crisis and recession that followed shortly after the 2007 general election.

* * *
Chapter Eight

Conclusion

The substantial element of this chapter is a return to the dual research themes of neoliberalism and semiosis, the structural approach to my analysis, the research question itself, and the reflection on what has been shown in this work. The first theme is neoliberalism as an economic, political (and as therefore a largely cultural) philosophy and its anti-democratic nature. The second theme is the dialectical nature of semiotic practices and their role in advancing the neoliberal agenda and the erosion of democracy in the case of the Irish Republic, and therefore to the role a critical approach to the analysis of semiosis can play in revealing this trend. Methods of semiotic analysis are central to my work, but as semiosis is understood to be simultaneously construing and being construed by social structures and bound up with other social practices, as an interdisciplinary exercise much of the content of this work has been of an extra-linguistic nature, required to both contextualise my approach to text analysis generally, and to each topic under review, explicitly. This fundamentally post-structuralist work has therefore drawn on a number of fields and social-scientific theories within the critical paradigm.

Where the specific thesis is that neoliberalism’s anti-democratic tendencies in the Irish Republic in late modernity can be identified in its impact on the changing social practices within the public sphere, and that a critical analysis of samples of official state discourse can reveal evidence of how this has happened in practice; attention necessarily falls on the four objectives underwriting the themes outlined above and the work’s research question itself. These objectives have been; to develop a critique of neoliberalism in practice that can be assessed semiotically; to reflect on neoliberalism in Irish polity in the contemporary period to facilitate an identification of appropriate topics for analysis; to advance an appropriate, rigorous, and applicable set of discourse-analytic tools for assessing relevant samples of discursive interaction; and to reflect on the public sphere in a conceptual and practical way to facilitate the location and analysis of text samples. This combination of elements are presented as the necessary steps required to respond to the over-arching research aim on the effects of the official embrace of the neoliberal project’s ideation and strategy on the health of democracy in Ireland and the role of semiosis is this dynamic. In so far as they assist in responding to the research question in this work, fulfilling these objectives means that all of these topics have been prominent throughout this research, featuring to some degree in almost every chapter.
In this concluding chapter I firstly want to highlight the positions adopted in the legacy chapters (numbers 2, 3 and 4) that produced the summary of research findings presented here. I then develop these analytical findings further by completing the explanatory critique framework in undertaking its Stages 3 and 4. Based on what the research has shown, in these steps I reflect on the twin issues of what it is about the social problem – the state colonisation of the practices of the public sphere – that makes it intractable and on possible ways past such obstacles, respectively. As noted, a strength of the combined analysis of three distinct topics in this work is that it has allowed for a keener theorisation of approach to the broader issue of neoliberal’s democratic limitations (and its semiotic aspect) because the analysis in each subsequent chapter is influenced by the previous chapter(s). I therefore also present the work on these stages of the framework in a combined fashion here drawing from the cumulative analytical findings, rather than in an isolated way at the end of each of Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

I follow this conclusion of the operationalisation of the framework with a return to the research question in light of these findings to summarise what essentially has been achieved in relation to my general thesis and the specific research question. This includes reflections on the usefulness of the methodological approach and on some of the limitations inherent in this work. I also address the issue of how my findings might contribute to advancing knowledge in the areas of critical approaches to the study of semiosis and also to the related theoretical issues that have informed my approach to neoliberalism. This latter consideration demands a stepping back from the detail of my work and an opening out, and in remaining informed by the themes of my research, I therefore conclude by relating the contribution of my work to higher order issues and to wider academic and professional debates and controversies. I end this conclusion by introducing a viable direction for future work, or a possible future area of research, that naturally follows from my advocacy of this thesis and its results. I continue however, by firstly summarising what has been found in each of the thesis chapters.

8.1 Summary of Findings

I start my work by focussing on neoliberalism as an object of research, positioning it within a critical paradigm as a robust and recognised intellectual position. In attempting a general semiotic critique of the topic I had to approach neoliberalism (and its relationship with the demos) as an object of research in a very specific way. Firstly, the review of neoliberalism identified the general distinction between its theoretically ideal and its real world
characteristics. Related to this is the recognition that there is no one form of neoliberalism, no evidence of any pattern of convergence to a common variety in either theoretical or practical terms. Moreover, the nation state, with its various institutions and publically funded structures, has become central to consolidating the project and its global spread. Also the signifier ‘neoliberalism’ is rarely employed explicitly by those institutions that advocate its economic philosophy, or by those states that embrace the various elements of the programme, as in the case of Ireland. This finding therefore called for a focus on labels of disidentification which placed a particular emphasis on ideas about and therefore on the language of neoliberalism.

I developed this understanding of neoliberalism and its impact on social practice and the resultant import of semiosis, by drawing heavily on Bourdieu’s conception of neoliberalism as doxa, the unacknowledged and therefore unchallengeable law of late modernity. I proposed this position as a way of grounding neoliberalism semiotically, viewing its discursive element as essentially an order of discourse. This position moreover, also afforded a direct connection between Bourdieu’s theoretical position and Fairclough’s contemporary approach to semiosis. It is by arguing for a particular conception of neoliberalism and the centrality of semiosis to the project’s success in its colonisation of new social spaces (of essentially recontextualising non-economic practices in market-friendly ways), that I maintained that any effective dialogical space of public-state interaction could be usefully interrogated to assess the non-democratic nature of the neoliberal project. In Chapter Three I then presented some necessary contextual detail in an attempt to foreground my later approach to text analysis, with a particular focus on the Irish state’s ‘neoliberal turn’ of the mid-1980s, and its transformational impact on the policy areas addressed in this work.

In the following chapter, Chapter Four I turned to the issue of my methodology and to critical discourse analysis and its scientific interest in the conjunction of language study and the notion of critique. In operationalising Fairclough’s dialectical-relational approach to CDA, language (semiosis) is understood as an element of social life, both constituting and being constituted by social practices, where the analytical interest is therefore largely on; orders of discourse (Foucault); the dialectics of discourse (Harvey); and on patterns of framing and classification (Bernstein). I also presented a specific way of approaching public sphere interactions to assess their level of genuine openness and inclusivity. Perhaps the primary issue which the methodological reflections stressed is not however to do with issues of ‘methods’, or even with the important issue of preserving the distinction between processes of analysis and interpretation, but rather, with the combined role of theory and method in the problematisation of the approach to neoliberal generally and to each individual
topic analysed explicitly. In short, this meant that theorisation remained a central part of each piece of analytical work, ultimately framing the approach to analysis and influencing the precise make-up of methods employed, right through to the end of Chapter Seven.

Where the broad research aim can be expressed as a critique of neoliberalism’s interest in advancing the role of ‘the market’; reducing the role and reach of the state; promoting notions of individual responsibility; and engendering political consensus around neoliberal ideation itself in the case of Ireland; my specific focus has been in addressing how such official objectives have been discursively operationalised in official interactions with the Republic’s citizens in the public sphere, through processes of depoliticisation and public-relations, with the latter element primarily concerned with consensus-generation and cohesion-management. Explicitly then, I analysed official texts on three broad topics;

- Immigration policy development (2005);
- National Childcare policy development process, (1997-1998, and 2006); and

In the first case, the analysis the Government’s consultation paper on immigration legislation reform; the linguistic and interdiscursive analysis identified this public discussion document as a contribution to a ‘debate’ which operated primarily as a public relations document, limiting the scope of how immigration was to be viewed, while simultaneously advancing a novel collocation of discourses of immigration with a set of market practices tied to issues of economic competitiveness and labour market flexibility. Essentially the document actively constructed an understanding of immigration as a key element of a national economic strategy that benefits ‘us’ all, and overall the analysis showed evidence of a text designed to close down avenues of debate with the public sphere in favour of advancing a consensus, and thereby acting as a modality of depoliticisation.

In terms of the national childcare strategy process and the childcare debate generally; the textual and interdiscursive analysis of a Ministerial speech relating to a novel childcare policy initiative highlighted its recontextualisation of pro-market imperatives and the official desire to devolve responsibility for childcare policy to the public. Moreover, in terms of the Expert Working Group (EWG) on childcare’s policy document (where I augment the interdiscursive analysis with Fairclough’s approach to public sphere discourse as potentially a regulative practice and as a principle of recontextualisation); the analysis revealed how the preferred practices (as discourses and genres) of the group’s civil society members came to be singled out and then sidelined by officially sanctioned labels and processes (as other discourses and genres) of the State’s official ‘experts’. Childcare was politicised in a
particular way, as a valid area of job growth, but primarily as a vehicle for facilitating entry of parents (that is to say, mothers) into the workforce as part of an effort to help maintain Ireland’s labour market flexibility. In this way childcare policy was in fact ‘actively’ depoliticised by formally placing the childcare debate – with its public sphere dimension – inside an officially controlled process, a process that was made possible at every stage through the broader social partnership programme.

In relation to social partnership itself; as a form of archaeological analysis I began by analysing the original National Economic and Social Council (NESC) background document from 1986 that informed the first social partnership programme (1987-1990). By constructing an approach to social partnership that sees it as a manifestation of a form of radical (neoliberal) policy change, and whose semiotic aspect can be viewed and as a neoliberal ‘order of discourse’ in Ireland – in effect a national socio-cultural nomos – as a form of ideological critique I assessed how the process might have acted as a major part of depoliticising debate through the active-promotion of ‘consensus’ on many fronts. Building on this historical analysis, the examination of the (inter)discursive aspect of partnership-related social policy on ‘social capital’ was undertaken as a form of strategic critique – of strategies employed to effect a desired change – and as a genealogical exercise designed to examine how dominant social policy practices (in their mix of discourses and genres) can be traced back to the emergent and then hegemonic practices (in their semiotic forms) that have come to be institutionalised in policy development through the partnership process. This interdiscursive analysis focused on the official ‘Active Citizenship’ initiative (2007), with the analysis providing evidence of the hegemonic set of ideas (originally circulated by NESC in 1986) being propagated (recontextualised and operationalised) in the present, through the active participation of civil society actors in that public space where the ideological prescription might otherwise have best been challenged.

In sum, the analysis of samples of official discourse, as circulated in governmental papers, reports, and speeches, demonstrated that in the case of immigration legislation reform, in uncovering a procedure that is evidently not what it purported to be, we see evidence of a ‘fake’ public sphere. With regard to childcare policy development and the role of the EWG, in being an engagement with civil society that by virtue of the process’s structure was destined never to fulfill its stated aspiration, we find an essentially ‘phantom’ public sphere. And in the case of social policy within the frame of the social partnership process, as a consequence of the state’s attempts to impact upon and adjust the public sphere for its own ideological ends (both economic and political/cultural), we see discursive evidence of a co-opted or even perhaps an ‘infected’ public sphere. More specifically, the
combined analysis sees the public sphere emerge not simply as a site of depoliticisation in advancing a political end, that is, of the operationalisation and management of a non-conflictual neoliberal socio-political agenda in its discursive form, but as a conscious official focus for precisely such a project. More explicitly, depoliticisation and public-relations processes in the Irish Republic did not just affect the operations of the public sphere, but analysis shows that this particular interactional space was officially identified and co-opted by the state as an integral element of just such a consensus-management process. As a contribution to critical social research in Ireland moreover, this discourse-analytic work provides textual evidence of how processes of socio-political change come to be managed by non-majoritarian, neoliberal interests in practice, whilst being presented officially and accepted publically (and therefore culturally) as the opposite; as open, as inclusive, and above all, as democratic.

I now want to develop this general point further, moving on from what the analysis has shown and conclude the operationalisation of the explanatory critique framework by addressing its Stages 3 and 4. With Stage 3 I want to draw out some concluding observations on these analytical findings by elaborating what it is about the social problem, the undermining of instances of public space dialogue, which made it a focus of official interventions. In short, what was (and is) it about the public sphere that might so keenly attract the attention of government and state actors in their grand ambition of successfully rolling out a novel ideological prescription? In terms of reflecting on each analytical chapter individually and in combination, I want to make a case for a particular reading of what it is that makes the transformation of an immigration reform consultation process into a public relations exercise so necessary, why it is that the moves to incorporate contrarian voices into a national childcare strategy as a way of exerting control over them emerges as the natural policy choice, and what devolving elements of community development policy to independent citizens and groups (through the ethos and mechanisms of the social partnership process) as a strategy for advancing the social agenda, might reveal about official attempts to infiltrate and compromise the public sphere. Finally, in Stage 4 I will reflect on what the results of this combined critical exercise can contribute to advancing a normative agenda of progressive and genuinely democratic social change by proposing responses to the various obstacles highlighted in this interrogation of official semiosis.
8.2 The Explanatory Critique framework; Stage 3: Considering whether the social order needs an intervention in the public sphere

Immigration
The energy invested in the immigration legislation’s discussion document by the Irish Government would suggest that the prospective legislation, being configured in a certain way, producing certain results, was important to the Government. Moreover, a reading of the document says exactly this. This public consultation procedure however, is not a common way of formulating a Bill for parliamentary discussion, and given the level of control the Government seemed to want to maintain, the ‘open’ procedure adopted can seem like an odd choice. As the analysis of the semiosis shows, far from opening up a debate on immigration, the document seems to be the very antithesis of dialogicality, narrowing the focus of any input away from the general to the very specific, in short, the matter of increasing the flexibility of the Irish workforce for the betterment of the national economy, and on a broader, structural level, of promoting a particular way of understanding the present and of responding to its opportunities and threats. In fact, this tension between opportunities and threats is mirrored in the Government’s own broader understanding of the tension it perceives in governance between the genuinely dialogical and the primarily promotional, that is, between openness and control.

Fundamental to this tension, to the perception of consensus, is an understanding amongst the complex (the Irish Government, industry, business, and financial interests) that as a small, open economy that does not manufacture anything on a large scale, and that cannot operate an exclusively ‘national’ trade or monetary policy due to constraints inherent in its EU membership, that to not get what the complex desires would be to risk too much. Coupled with this is an understanding that though contrary voices are not particularly active, and that during the period of the document’s production (2001-2005) they are not being mobilised to any serious degree, the complex is well aware that there are other perspectives that differ greatly from the consensual view and that any conflictual equilibrium that emerges in the future could shift this consensus away from the interests of the complex. The pervading consensus is always contingent and dependent on many interrelated factors, and so unsurprisingly there is fear. But there is also another, very specific fear, not held by the complex, but by Government, as the democratic face of the complex. This fear in short,
relates to the visible reality of increased levels of immigration in Irish towns and cities, and
the understanding that the effectiveness of this policy will be seen in a very literal sense by
everyone.

Otherwise, the question arises as to why it is this issue of immigration in particular
that is being approached through a protracted public consultation process (incorporating two
separate requests for public input on future legislation, one in 2001, followed by the one
analysed in this work from 2005). Specifically, why is it deemed necessary to so publically
present a rationale for increased immigration as a symmetrical response to the narrative of
national history, oddly welded to an analysis of Irish modernity, which is then followed by an
outline of the steps that need to be taken, by, in one section of the document by the Minister,
and then by the DJELR in another? The author would contend that the reason is not just
related to the perceived ‘loss’ that would accrue to the economy in the eyes of the complex if
this legislation were not to proceed, and these measures not to come into force. This would
be true of any policy or legislative change over the same period that relates to economic
activity, yet up to this point consultative documents have not been seen as the way to proceed
in these other policy areas. The rationale for this type of approach on this particular issue is
rather, directly related to the perceived potential for social unease as much as it is to do with
ensuring that levels of economic competitiveness remain high, since, as noted elsewhere,
particularly in the NESC documents of 1986 and 1987, processes of (de)politicisation are
largely about maintaining social cohesion and consensus.

We must remember that in order to improve competitiveness levels in the Irish economy
wages need to be held down and employment contracts need to afford employers as much
flexibility to ‘hire and fire’ as possible. The complex’s view is that immigrants are being
invited not just to fill ‘gaps’ in the workforce, but to fill them in a particular way, and in so
doing there is the potential for antagonism between the indigenous and immigrant labour
forces. So when in the Background section of Chapter 1 for example, we read that there will
be ‘bone fide visitors’ as well as ‘people traffickers with links to organised crime’ (third
paragraph); the Government is authenticating a narrative of its own choosing, arguing that
‘our’ system demands a ‘delicate balance’ that the new legislation ‘must try to achieve’. The
construal of these relational values gives a lot of authority to the Minister and his department,
allowing him to foreground issues of social relations and cultural values that ‘we’ are
understood to agree on, and that the reader can assume will influence the new legislation.

It is precisely because there is so much at stake for the Government and the state (and
in parallel, so many possibilities for the emergence of other voices and narratives) that a new
approach to policy formation and legislation has been chosen in this case. And in this way,
added to the points made above, in its anti-democratic nature, in trying to square this particularly tricky circle, we more clearly see why the social order that is the complex of Government, business, finance (and involving unaccountable, unelected, transnational entities like the IMF and the European Central Bank), really does need to go to great lengths to legitimate its views as universal views, to depoliticise the political field in this area, and to actively marginalise alternative voices by effectively colonising the public sphere. In this light, it is clear why the social order needs the problem of open public sphere dialogue that is never as ‘open’ as it purports to be. Essentially, the immigration legislation case demonstrates how an official intervention in the space of civil society interaction and its apparent willingness to engender civil society input can operate as something else entirely, as something ‘fake’.  

Childcare  
As the reflection of the consultative process around the issue of immigration legislation reform shows, there are a number of related reasons the Irish Government actively benefits from a proactive focus on the public sphere. The anomaly in that instance seems to be the discussion process itself. If the Government (together with certain public and private interests) knows what it wants and why, how immigration reform might assist it advance its economic objectives – and given that the state is not required to go beyond the template of representative democracy as characterised by national elections every four or five years – the question then emerges as to why it might engage in the pretence of wanting to encourage public debate and potential input of civil society into the legislative process. In highlighting the potentially sensitive nature of a relaxation of immigration controls in terms of social cohesion, I have offered an assessment of why they chose this path for that issue, but that assessment is not particularly relevant for the issue of childcare policy.  

Childcare provision and childcare policy development is not a particularly controversial matter, at least when we exclude the possibility, as expressed by some members of the EWG, that the reason the 1999 budget more or less ignored their report’s recommendations was on the grounds that many rank and file members of Government (and of the Fianna Fáil party in particular), were troubled by the potential social upheaval that would ensue if ‘mothers’ were actively facilitated in entering the labour market, *en masse* (Murphy-Lawless 2000: 93).1 As this concern has never been expressed officially and is not

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1 A more logistical or bureaucratic explanation might be the fact that the Minister for Finance, Charlie McCreevy, would have wanted to read the Goodbody report’s recommendations in advance of making any concessions to meeting demand-side issues of childcare provision in particular in his 1999 budget speech (2 December 1998). That this report was only published later in December 1998 made this impossible.
found in official childcare texts, and as there are other explanations for this, for my purposes here I shall put this argument to one side. Yet the governments of the period seem to have felt a need to develop, endorse, and materially support a consultative process over a period of more than a year-and-a-half which they ultimately seemed to be trying to adversely influence and restrict from the outset, or at least set it up in such a way that more easily enabled it to produce something in keeping with its own pre-existing objectives. That is, the Government spent a lot of time letting the genie out of the bottle and then a further eighteen months trying to get it back in.

The point to bear in mind in trying to understand a rationale for facilitating an ongoing weakening of genuinely inclusive debate at large in this case on the one hand, and establishing open and inclusive public consultative processes on the issue on the other, is that with childcare, unlike other issues like immigration, these governments have not been in control. Childcare as has been seen, was part of a discourse of healthcare going back over many years, likewise it was also central to discourses of education and of gender equality amongst others, across a range of fields long preceding the *Partnership2000* negotiations. In this light, childcare is ultimately part of a much broader but related set of discourses of welfare, family, and childhood development going back to the foundation of the state. The issue of childcare policy, when it emerges, therefore comes to governments in the form of existing legislation, programmes, and research, that is, in a dynamic way. Moreover, it necessarily involves the views and the work of a range of professionals, both public and private, without whom the state is essentially unable to operate in these interrelated fields. This has not been the case with a subject like immigration. Added to this is the social partnership process itself, since it was out of the third phase of social partnership (*The Programme for Employment and Competitiveness*, launched in 1994), that the agreed need for a concerted look at a national childcare strategy first emerged.

The Government of the day essentially finds itself in a bind. It wants to move forward on childcare provision for its own identified ends. These are primarily economic in nature and specifically a response to ‘expert’ fears about an inability of the Irish labour market to expand to the degree anticipated, thereby potentially putting a brake on national economic growth, the latter being the initial rationale for establishing the social partnership process in the mid-1980s. It is simultaneously busy working both on immigration and attempts to attract emigrants back to Ireland for the same reason, but these steps alone are projected to be insufficient (ESG, 2004). Yet having initiated and extended the partnership process, and being aware of the thematic and logistical reach of childcare as it exists, governments came to accept that they could not deal with the issue in perhaps the narrow way
that they might have liked. Hence the collective agreement to establish a working group of childcare experts, representing the full and now expanded partnership process, to engage in a joint process to incorporate public submissions as well. The genie analogy is apt since essentially this is what the Government has done, and having put childcare in the public domain with an expectation of a national strategy emerging, the challenge has always been to ensure that this strategy – which cannot now be completely ignored – will at the very least, include and ideally prioritise those steps, those approaches to childcare provision (meaning those practices and their discourses) that the complex of government, finance, business, and industry demands.

This brings us back to the issue of control. From the outset childcare policy is out of control, so to speak, or rather, seen from an official perspective, childcare debates and their mixture of networks of practices, were unsystematic and incoherent. And although the establishing of the EWG through the formal P2000 process might at first look like it further complicated the picture by actively giving control away, on the contrary, it allowed an opportunity for the state-business complex to take control back. By placing the historically hybridised set of discourses and practices of childcare policy inside an official process and then keeping them there, the Government was afforded the opportunity and the space to depoliticise the issue in its broadest sense by politicising it in a particular pro-market way, not in spite of the fact that the social partners were actively involved, but precisely because of this fact. The civil society voices that would normally be shouting from the sidelines and decrying aspects of a childcare debate that they consider are being overlooked, excluded, or where the discussion was being otherwise unreasonably restricted, that might then cry foul to the media, and organise and agitate for change, are now essentially silent, or better ‘silenced’, because they have been willingly subsumed into the official process.

In professionalising a childcare provision strategy of a certain order, in the image of the social order of the free market, experts are necessarily required to formulate the colour and the shape of the order of discourse of the policies being implemented. To manage this process effectively from the perspective of Government – as managers of market interests – necessitates making ‘experts’ of those subjects, of those voices that it cannot easily channel into a programme matching its aspiration. In the Foucauldian sense of the productive nature of power, of producing subjects, the subjecthood of the civil society actors within the EWG is essentially altered through their incorporation into a process that deploys and circulates particular discourses through particular generic networks reflective of those practices of the more dominant, official experts. Ultimately, through the EWG, the state accomplishes this task by effectively forcing civil society to work alongside the other cohort of experts, those of
different sets of practices normally operating in other fields, to neutralise whatever danger there might be to the priorities of this official, overarching project.

This ensures that the state’s expert cohort sees its practices and actions construed textually and embedded within – essentially colonising – the broader expert debate by producing a set of practices for a national childcare policy that is essentially a recontextualisation of a mix of pro-market practices from the field economic policy and planning. This does not mean that the experience, knowledges, and relations inherent in the civil society actors and the non-market-oriented voices are lost, that they disappear; but it does mean that their set of separate practices and their semiotic elements become less dynamic, less identifiable, and less substantive in the final document of the EWG’s national childcare strategy. In this assessment the public sphere exists and has or has had the potential to affect the childcare debate in a real way. That is, the opportunity presented by the Expert Working Group was not fake, but in terms of how the balance of power between experts shifted during the course of its work – through the very nature of the structuring of that process – over its lifetime, meant that what it produced, what is committed textually to history, shows that the space occupied by the group was at best a ‘phantom’ public sphere.

Social Partnership

In the final analytical chapter I contend that the social partnership process has acted as a significant part of the problem of the procedural undermining of genuine public sphere debate and action by the Irish state. The process has basically institutionalised an acceptance of the set of ideas and their related social practices of neoliberal governance, and in co-opting civil society actors, has effectively colonised spaces of public discourse with these now hegemonic practices which have taken root and become recontextualised and operationalised in all fields. To look at this from another perspective, if a governing entity wanted to create a gatekeeping infrastructure to depoliticise policy debates (and re-politicise them in an unthreatening, consensual, and pro-market way), Irish-style ‘social partnership’ is the kind of institutionalising arrangement that, if implemented, would be evaluated positively. Or, to summarise the theoretical position outlined earlier; in terms of effecting third order change or of ideational cognitive locking; where NESC provided the blueprint, and its crisis-era strategy documents formed the weapon, it has been the state, through the social partnership process, that has fixed the set of ideas and practices that have been institutionalised through successive partnership agreements up to and including the period under review. In attaining a hegemonic state moreover, this set of ideas has also proved remarkably resistant to evaluation and critique on terms not of partnership’s own making.
The reason the Irish state needs social partnership is indirectly referenced in the blueprint texts of the NESC reports from 1986 and 1987. The greatest threat to the ideas laid out in these prescriptive texts is that of an absence of ‘consensus’ on the content of the prescription itself. This is supported by the intimation that the blueprint contained in these documents sits within a particular ‘model’ (NESC 1987: 147), implying that other models exist that would presumably give rise to other blueprints. In other words, over and above its useful function in framing and controlling what can be done, how we might act, and of defining how issues are to be understood; these foundational texts diffuse contrarian perspectives and any calls for action that challenge the precise contents of the blueprint of the neoliberal project. It could be argued that the social order under review is not the emergent pro-market form of national governance, but social partnership itself. But the virtue of the theorisation of social partnership as elaborated in Chapter Seven is that it not only allows for a contextualisation of social partnership within strategies of national governance (and therefore an appropriate semiotic point of entry into the analysis of neoliberalism in the Irish Republic), but within this theorisation is an exposition of the work that social partnership has been doing on behalf of the state.

More explicitly, though social partnership may act as the cognitive lock that institutionalises practices, it is not itself the blueprint, this remains the policy prescription that materialised in 1986/1987. Social partnership is not itself the social order; it is rather, a manifestation of that order’s practices. Neoliberalism in Ireland is manifest in social partnership but social partnership is not itself the source of neoliberal ideation in the Republic. What this does mean however is that if forms of national governance benefit from an undermining of the functioning of the public sphere, then social partnership is likely to be centrally implicated in such a scenario. In other words, where the immigration chapter asks whether the social order needed an official intervention in the public sphere regarding the development of new legislation at a micro-level (to ensure a growing pool of workers, adding to the flexibility of the labour market); and where the childcare chapter asks whether the social order needed a formal co-opting of the public sphere through its dominant actors, in areas of social policy that it sees as impacting upon areas of economic policy (again regarding labour market flexibility and levels of national competitiveness); here the question is did the social order need to essentially prioritise control of the public sphere to such a degree that social partnership was devised (or evolved) to facilitate agreement and to eradicate dissent and opposition, and to be that sought for mechanism ‘for the achievement of consensus’ (ibid. 36)?
In terms of combining this stage of the analytical framework for the three analytical chapters as a whole, this still leaves a central question unanswered. That is, even though social partnership is well positioned to facilitate processes of influence and compromise within the public sphere since it is active in a sufficient number of policy areas and involves the key representatives of decision-makers and stakeholders (at least post-1996); why is there such a need for, or at least a concern with control of the public sphere? Just because there is a perceived need for a drive to agreement and cohesion from the top, it does not necessarily follow that there is a need to foment division amongst civil society stakeholders from below, even where this might produce a useful outcome for the government-industry-business complex. For example, macro-level concertation processes like social partnership that have been implemented in other jurisdictions have succeeded without seeing the smashing of dissent as a core objective, (see O’Donnell 2002, Schmidt 2002).

The key to understanding the need for the social problem of engendering some sort of crisis-intervention in the public sphere however, I would argue, lies in the combined revelations of the childcare chapter and this chapter on social partnership. With childcare the state had to deal with the issue of not just other voices, but of dissenting voices, at least if it wanted to present the national policy development process as inclusive. The breadth of participation in the Expert Working Group on childcare meant that there was a fundamental clash of ‘expert’ ideas about the context in which a policy of national childcare provision should be understood, including issues of what is or should be most important. To ensure that what was delivered prioritised the Government’s own objectives of getting more mothers into the workforce and of kick-starting a childcare employment sector, a large degree of control had to be asserted to rein in the demands of the equality dimension and its advocates in relation to this new national policy. As elaborated, this level of control over policy (apparently devised cooperatively by civil society actors as well as state actors) was only possible through the social partnership arrangement and its ability to muffle dissent and give the appearance of agreement due to the fact that ultimate control over the process remained in the hands of the state, through its link to traditional economic policy and strategy ‘experts’.

Unlike the case of childcare policy, with the issue of social capital and the work of the community and voluntary sector addressed, which sees structured and accountable groups and organisations oriented around individual visions with their own mission statements, the Government, on the contrary, did not have a need to engage in the same way. There was no specific or pressing single policy issue in the area of community development that demanded attention, other than a general desire (as expressed in most social partnership documents) to eradicate poverty and to improve levels of equality generally, where the imperative is not
national competitiveness *per se*, but a reduction in levels of welfare spending through drives to increase employment levels. Yet from the author’s perspective two factors combined in the lead up to the publication of the Government’s White Paper (2000) on the relationship between the state and the community and voluntary sector to help illustrate the state’s motivation for maintaining almost complete control. As has been noted, after almost a decade and a half of national belt-tightening, followed by slow but steady growth, where employment figures started to rise substantially by the late 1990s, levels of poverty were not really being reduced and the equality gap seemed to be growing (see Allen 2000, Millar 2008). That is, increased levels of employment, the state’s primary remedy for dealing with the social agenda envisaged in the blueprint, seemed to be failing to deliver the anticipated results.

Simultaneously, those civil society actors working on the equality and social inclusion agenda (as seen with childcare), began to demand more of the state in terms of coordinated responses to these policy areas, especially so given the buoyant nature of the national economy by the end of the millennium. But through experiences like that with the EWG, the Government realised that it could not respond to the requests coming from civil society actors from within the community and voluntary sector (a large proportion of the public sphere in Ireland) because what civil society was demanding existed outside that which could be delivered by the state, as it did not fall within the practices (and discourses) of the blueprint. That is, the remedies were exogenous to the nomos of neoliberal ideation and the preferred pattern of policy development. For example, a primary focus of the civil society actors in social partnership’s ‘social pillar’ post-1996 was wealth redistribution, which, for example, could have been accomplished by a more egalitarian taxation system. Since raising direct tax rates however, ran counter to the prevailing neoliberal economic orthodoxy, there was a clear ideological conflict between the voices of this pillar and those of the state actors on this major issue. This point is evidenced moreover, by the fact that taxation debates were an area of social partnership negotiations that the social pillar were formally excluded from (see Connolly 2008, Ó Broin 2009). Significantly then, the site of a prospective challenge to the prevailing orthodoxy was therefore both real and present post-1996, but in its emergence the state saw a way to challenge, or rather, to side-step it.

One straightforward way for the state to deal with the social agenda that would avoid the need for compromise would be to simply undercut the authority of such actors as ‘the voice’ of the sector by diluting their voices within the broader sector. Where another, larger layer of the community and voluntary sector actors could be enticed into the community development debate, but significantly, a cohort who were less political, or more specifically,
were less concerned with issues of ‘redistribution’ and more interested in matters of ‘recognition’ of their myriad different identities and their ‘official’ acknowledgement, then any historically antagonistic voices from within the social pillar would naturally be diminished and more easily ignored. This helps to explain the energy invested in and the profile afforded to Putnam’s essentially apolitical concept of ‘social capital’ which follows from the White Paper’s ethos of formalising a relationship with the community and voluntary sector, yet one that clearly maintains power within the hands of the state and one that ‘substitutes self-help for redistribution and self-reliance for state accountability’, (Gaynor 2009: 27). Significantly too, the state could then also be seen to be proactive in the arena of community development, which carried a certain value, garnering a level of cultural capital, allowing Government to both stress the benefits of the partnership process and to evaluate its own work (and its stumbling progress) on the social agenda in a positive way.

In short, national governance in the Irish Republic, which equates to management of the neoliberal project and facilitated largely through social partnership, required a development and maintenance of a formalised influence on the public sphere not only as a way to suppress contrary ideas and the potential for the emergence of a new set of ideas and practices that might gain momentum, but also as a way of justifying the state’s approach to civil society generally, keeping those voices active and useful, while essentially marginalising them politically. Where the cognitive lock ensured that the ideological blueprint could only be evaluated or critiqued on its own terms, any sector of society that sought to depart from such a position could therefore be identified as a part of the problem, and thus ignored. In this way the ‘crisis of the public sphere’, if it can be construed at all, could be viewed officially, and hence projected, not as the state’s fault but as civil society’s own fault. This engagement also allows for (de)politicising community development in an ongoing manner in a more controllable way, and in promoting a notion of civic republicanism, it can be seen to be responding to the supply-side restructuring needs of macro-bargaining processes (see O’Donnell 2008). Essentially, it construes the subject of the ‘individuated citizen’, as someone with obligations to be active, to be productive, and not to automatically look to the state for social support. This construal of a new kind of subjecthood also has the effect of simultaneously undermining civil society voices critical state policy

The energy devoted to this civic republican project also pays off in terms of issues of national sovereignty. Where the restructuring and the rescaling of global relations between the nation state and transnational entities such as the European Union can diminish any sense of sovereignty, especially in a period of economic recession, active engagement in social
service delivery through a range of ‘partnership’ initiatives involving formerly marginal associations of local activists, can make the state more visible in the eyes of its citizens, ‘bringing it home’ so to speak, in the lives of its citizens. This dynamic’s role in maintaining a level of engagement with the electorate when so much decision-making is taken out of the hands of the Government of a small open economy like Ireland’s, should not be underestimated. Indeed, in terms of social cohesion in particular, it is difficult to overstate the dividend that accrues to governments (and to all political parties invested in the parliamentary process), at a time where levels of national sovereignty are genuinely under threat – such as Ireland within the European Union. Viewed in this light, whatever their positives, the incorporation of community groups into partnership initiatives like ‘active citizenship’, at the very least, act as a tool for obfuscating reality and suppressing debate on the broader issues of democracy and accountability.

Finally, for the author however, there is another major reason why the Irish state needs the problem of undermining democracy through intervention in the public sphere, which is in keeping with its underlying ideological position, as expressed in the set of imaginaries that emerge from the post-1987 blueprint of acceptable ideas. The strategy (as initiated in the White Paper of 2000) simultaneously serves the dual neoliberal objectives of diminishing the role of the state in the area of social policy generally, but also – and here is why the issue of maintaining control, of avoiding any move to more genuinely deliberative forms of democracy is so important – in fomenting ‘partnerships’, it opens up a space for the market to play an ever greater role in service design and delivery. Social programmes will need to be run and services will need to be delivered, and significantly, someone will be paying for these services. This produces a space for investment, for the insertion of private equity, for speculation, and for wealth accumulation generally, and this is without considering the similar spaces that open up in exclusively insurance-related social programmes.

In mirroring Peck’s (2000: 394) observations on the expanding neoliberal state and the emergence of a new breed of ‘neoliberal technocrats’, and Adshead et al’s (2008: 19) highlighting of the dominance of forms of ‘new public management’, essentially, the neoliberal state is not planning to do less, but merely to do things differently than before. It deploys its expertise as a first order manager for the broader neoliberal project, where social policy (including community development) is now positioned on the frontline, facing the advance of market imperatives. It is this managerial expertise, with its cohesion and consensus ethos, that is being reproduced and mainstreamed through the community and voluntary sector, and ultimately infecting, and being replicated and multiplied within the
discourses and practices of civil society actors in Ireland. This is all the while happening at the expense of any genuinely critical reflection on the possibilities for progressive change. The fundamental issue of democracy and debates about its relative health can therefore never be on the table in any meaningful way so long as a vibrant and conflictual politics has itself evaporated. Having arrived at this position through the combined reflection on the analytical findings of Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, I now want to bring the work within the explanatory critique framework to a close by undertaking its Stage 4. In advancing the positive ethos of critical discourse analysis, here I reflect on potential ways past the obstacles identified and, as above, I will combine observations on the three analytical chapters, presenting each topic addressed in sequence.

8.3 The Explanatory Critique framework; Stage 4: Identifying possible ways past the obstacles demonstrated in the official co-option of the public sphere

In the analysis of immigration legislation reform, the transdisciplinary reflection on the level of authenticity of debate raised another issue in addition to that of corrupted public sphere interaction. In the sections analysed the discussion document always limited its representation of immigrants as ‘workers’ only, which, as I have pointed out, raises issues of classification and of the prioritisation of particular discourses over other possible ones. Workers generally were being sought to fill existing and projected future positions in the workforce of the expanding economy, yet post the EU-enlargement of May 2004, most of these new workers – who were immigrants – came from Central and Eastern Europe. In other words, these are people for whom any overhauling of the immigration legislation was in the end, totally unnecessary. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the Government’s fixation on the DETE preoccupation with the issue of a potential shortfall in workers that emerged in the mid-to-late 1990s (culminating in these public consultation processes of 2001 and 2005), as the responsible department, the DJELR could still have led with a more transparent and rights-based approach to immigration reform, seeing immigrants as people first, people who have families and who are fully invested with their own social and cultural identities.

The fact that the Government sought not to approach these interrelated issues in such a way, indirectly points to its unwillingness to tackle deep-rooted, often historically contingent obstacles to, for example, enabling more mothers to enter the workforce in ways they have been prevented from doing heretofore. Beyond observations revealed through the
semiotic analysis, in essence, what the legislative process on immigration reform shows is that in keeping with the characteristic pattern of contemporary neoliberalism; far from the project wanting to dismantle the nation state, the Irish Government’s choices in this area are a clear example of a national government attempting to put the offices and structures of the state at the service of the neoliberal project itself. The immigration legislation and its faux consultation process were not about immigrants, or workers (or women or mothers), but about the best ways, the simplest, resistance-free ways to maximise growth in the international marketplace.

On the basis of observations like these, ways past these obstacles would appear to be self-evident. The assumptions that infuse the official texts need to be unpicked and acknowledged as points of leverage for real progress. For example, we could say that, as a minimum, all stakeholder voices need to be heard in a genuinely open and open-ended debate that does not preclude certain conclusions from the outset. In terms of semiosis we could add that there needs to be a dismantling of the generic chains of public relations to be replaced by ones of real exposition and explanation that embrace the contingent nature of processes and practices, including recognition of their historical dimensions. On a more concrete level citizens could insist on the need for a move away from the devolution of the provision of Government services that remove them from any decision-making and participatory role as citizens, (as opposed to employees or as managers of ‘partner’ organisations, for example).

At the level of the network of social practices moreover, and in semiotic terms of the orders of discourse, civil society could go further and call for an investigation of the role played by ‘focus groups’ in the official formulation of strategy and policy. These unnamed and therefore unaccountable groups are ultimately controlled by those who run them in delimiting the scope of discussion and debate on any issue, yet they are used to feed into and justify government policy as evidence of ‘open government’ and inclusive practices, creating a tension around what can be understood as genuine consensus in contrast to partisan opinion. More specifically, we could insist that problematic discourses such as that of ‘immigrant-as-worker’ need to be identified and replaced by more informed and egalitarian discourses and practices of social inclusion. Yet although strategies such as these seem obvious, following from the reflections on public sphere dialogue and on civil society and state interaction examined in the work of the Expert Working Group (EWG) in the chapter on childcare, such steps as these did not prove sufficient to allow members of social partnership’s ‘social pillar’ move past the prevailing obstacles to upholding and advancing democratic policy interventions.
On the contrary, in the case of the EWG’s work, the overarching problem remained the collective governmental efforts to restrict citizenship from active participation in dialogue and debates on aspects of social, cultural, and political life. In the case of the childcare debate and the drafting of a first national strategy, definitive moves in these co-operative directions did take place. The working group was established in part because officialdom recognised that the issue was ‘multi-faceted’ (EWG 1999: xxiv). Moreover, rather than removing citizens from participatory roles (as took place with the discussion on immigration), this process saw a direct drive at including individuals and organisations, from within the social partnership fold and beyond. Also, at the level of networks of social practices and semiosis, the potentially problematic historical discourses that confined childcare to geographical areas of disadvantage only, or similarly to a discourse of childhood cognitive development, were surmounted as a direct result of the agreement on the need to bring appropriate actors together during and since the EWG process. It is unlikely therefore that the sets of social practices would ever again be reduced to essential principles – such as labour force considerations – in any future official action or representation of the issue of childcare.

The point that this happened because governments felt that they had no real option is not insignificant. The ultimate issue with this debate however was how it came to be colonised during the process, and the particular way in which certain expert voices came to drown out other expert voices and dominate the discussion, investing the national strategy text with the imprint of discourses of a particular set of social practices, and eliding other ‘problematic’ sets of practices. Ultimately however, points of leverage emerged, and did so clearly, and in this sense the process as a whole can be evaluated as being a progressive step in comparison to that seen in the case of immigration legislation development. That the state was learning is clear in the way government recognised that it was essentially now being forced to work in new and more open ways in order to maintain any sense of legitimacy in decision-making matters. This recognition moreover now actively incorporated an internal as well as an external dimension, which necessarily brought civil society and the public sphere into sharp relief.

The challenge then for civil society and for the citizenry of the Republic more generally is to identify the dynamics of the lessons from the mid-1980s to the present – as evidenced in an assessment of issues like immigration and childcare reform – to anticipate economic encroachment across all fields, and to address significant points of leverage with a collective weight, for example, to essentially undermine the power of the professional expert, and the rationale for a reliance on them. And also to proactively conflict with, contaminate,
and appropriate ‘official’ practice with the imprint of a broader, more democratically invested set of social practices and their discursive dimension. Through the establishment of social partnership’s ‘social pillar’ and its activities in areas like the EWG, we can clearly see that the partnership process had the potential to act on behalf of its civil society membership, whilst simultaneously having the power to operate in the separate interests of the state to control alternative views. In being implicated in the lessons to be drawn from the case of the EWG, the assessment of social partnership itself was therefore an attempt to examine to what degree this has been happening elsewhere, across other fields of practice, in other processes, and what lessons might be drawn from any difficulty or failure in this regard that might help reorient the challenge for asserting a deliberative as well as a genuinely representative democracy.

Tellingly however, the findings of Chapter Six on the points of leverage that emerged in the case of the childcare debate (the sets of practices that the community and voluntary sector sought to have incorporated in any new discourse on childcare, coupled with their attempt to root out practices drawn from an economic field), seem only to have served to remind the state that it needed to develop a way to dismantle such points of leverage in any or all areas of future social policy development. In Chapter Seven we have essentially seen how the state actively sought to embrace and then promote a form of openness and a sense of inclusivity, but on its own terms. Through a discourse of social capital, as materialised in the active citizenship initiative, it managed to do to active citizens and civil society generally what it did with the civil society experts in the case of the EWG on childcare policy. In this way, it refashioned civil society in its own image, or more accurately, it facilitated a contamination of the constituency of civil society practice in Ireland by colonising the debate around community development and the role of the citizen within a neoliberal order of discourse, as expressed in social partnership through the historical nature of its institutionalising process.

By essentially construing the apolitical liberal conception of citizenship (where the citizen’s universal rights are protected by the state), as a ‘civic republican’ tradition (with its inherent political dimension of the ‘active citizen’ and its notions of the ‘public good’), those buying-in to this apparently political dynamic were in reality, engaging with an apolitical form of community action. This engagement moreover, then both reinforced the essentially pro-market ideology of the neoliberal blueprint and simultaneously helped to dilute the influence of the more political nature of the communitarian citizenship cohort of civil society that rejects notions of the ‘self-interested’ citizen (Gaynor 2011: 32-33). The lessons from the period of social partnership therefore make grim reading for civil society activists who do
not want to operate within the available blueprint that sets the limits of the possible by reducing the political, the social, and the cultural to an issue of economic metrics alone. The primary lesson from the examination of social partnership and the discourse of active citizenship is that in the two decades after 1987 the Irish state has been keen to shore up any questioning of the model being pursued, and that it will go to great lengths to silence any challenge to the content of the blueprint and its hegemonic status. Where any rupture in the cognitive lock seems possible, the state will formulate and, as has been seen, at considerably expense if necessary, deploy conceptions such as ‘social capital’ and related policy initiatives like ‘active citizenship’, to deliver ideationally what it cannot deliver materially, in terms of appropriate responses to poverty and social exclusion.

In terms of ways past any form of a crisis of the public sphere, the analysis on social partnership at least clarifies the nature of the task at hand in trying to construe a different, non-market oriented politics. Critiquing promotional processes, as in the case of my analysis of immigration legislation debate, is only ever a part of the work of examining this colonisation-recontextualisation dialectic. Likewise, as with community development, a focus on the encroachment of economics into other fields is often a rather blunt analytical tool as it can miss revisioning strategies such as those that redefine or relexicalise and make space for the recontextualisation of new representations, and their operationalisation in new ways of being, and new identities. The foremost task has to be to identify and then to resist processes of depoliticisation wherever they occur, knowing that they are often occurring within processes that outwardly – as with active citizenship – appear political and inclusive. That is, a highlighting of the role that critical social science can play in unmasking that which is not what it appears to be, by focusing on the sets of ideas, the political representations of issues, and their relationships to evolving policy, and by tracing their origin in other fields as they come to be disseminated through strategies of legitimation and appeals to an apparently unquestionable common historical narrative.

Resistance of the type offered by the politically-engaged elements of social partnership’s community and voluntary pillar, as well as those civil society activists working outside of the process, has a significant role to play in ensuring a vibrant public sphere no matter how marginal their collective voices can seem to the state and to society at large. But successful resistance requires a type of engagement with the state which benefits from this focus on ideation and the ways in which a dominant model can be reduced to a blueprint which can be politically and culturally absorbed almost by a process of osmosis. This engagement must therefore prioritise a focus on ideas and how and in what ways sets of ideas incorporate or reject the interests of macro-level power structures. In the immediate sense
such an exercise can quickly undermine the power of the professional expert allowing space for a re-evaluation of the power of the civil society activist. To seek to re-order the debate is therefore a necessary step in challenging the lock that keeps the current blueprint in place.

In this light it is worth recalling Hall’s conceptualisation of ‘third order’ or ‘radical’ policy change and its three tenets (1993: 279-80): namely, that the content of the dominant paradigm’s blueprint is usually more sociological than scientific; that it is based on a specific attribution of authority; and that apparent policy and/or outcome anomalies are likely to be responded to by increased levels of policy experimentation. As such, critical interventions must seek to cast light on the nature of the ‘judgements’ that underwrite conventional wisdom and their political (and ideological) underpinnings; they must also highlight questions of legitimacy, especially where decision-makers seek to avoid or subvert the democratic process; and they must challenge contradictory policies and/or outcomes and developments that produce unanticipated negative consequences, seeking to link such a state of affairs to their intellectual incoherence and the likely long-term failure of the paradigm’s prescriptions. Practically, this means civil society itself must initiate debate on the relationship between ideas and semiosis (on discourse generally) and their historical and contingent essence, which translates into a focus on issues of classification and control. This means that there is a need for a deeper analysis of discourses (in the plural, count-noun form), as well as on genres, and voices. In other words, critical approaches to de-democratisation tendencies in late modernity must go beyond discourse as a cipher for ‘ideas’ as seen in much critical social research.

Since cognitive locking is more easily accomplished in a time of crisis (as seen with the role of social partnership in fixing the NESC neoliberal blueprint from the mid-nineteen eighties onwards), radical policy paradigm change in the Irish Republic is always feasible in periods of economic and political upheaval. Critical social research will only ever be a part of any successful move in overcoming a crisis of legitimacy at the heart of democracy in the Irish Republic, and critical discourse analysis only ever a part of such research, but a focus on semiosis does have an important role to play in placing ideation and processes of ideational change in the open, and of facilitating an ideological and strategic critique of the contemporary limits to democracy, as semiotically constituted.
8.4 Reflections on the research question, on some limitations of this work, and on what has been achieved

Where the main themes of my work are a critique of neoliberalism and its democratic deficit and of how a concentration on semiosis can advance the challenge of providing evidence for this position, with a focus on Ireland, I have constructed an object of research, incorporating samples of official discourse in a number of areas, to provide a semiotically productive point of entry into the topic. Moreover, I have proposed the notion of the public sphere as an area in which the semiotic component of this critique of neoliberalism can usefully be assessed in this case. Adopting a dialectical approach to semiosis as a social practice bound up with other sets of practices, I have sought to demonstrate how the essentially market-oriented logic of the neoliberal philosophy, as a social order, emerged within Irish polity, and became hegemonic, recontextualising the orders of discourse of non-economic fields. Moreover, through textual analysis I have provided evidence of the ways in which this ideological fix has succeeded in materially affecting the social order within the fields reviewed, and, as a self-perpetuating set of ideas and practices, how it went on to have a significant impact upon issues of cultural governance more broadly. The rather consensual fashion in which all of this has taken place is also noted as a significant part of this dynamic.

Based on these two central themes, my explicit research question was whether a semiotic critique of iterations of public sphere interventions between the state and its citizens could provide evidence for the contention that the broad neoliberal project is actively eroding democracy through an unarticulated process of depoliticisation through an overarching drive for cohesion and consensus. Furthermore, my interest was in to what extent this process was not only revealed but was also advanced through semiosis itself as a particularly significant social practice amongst all social practices. The engagement of the Irish state with spaces of public deliberation and its active infiltration, colonisation, and undermining of the very sphere from which conflicting and contrarian perspectives to neoliberal ideation might be expected to originate, therefore gave rise to a number of key verifiable objectives within my work.

The primary objective was to approach neoliberalism as a philosophical programme and a practical project in such a way that not only afforded a semiotic point to entry for analytical purposes; but one that clearly showed why a focus on neoliberalism’s semiotic aspect could be a particularly valuable form of critique. In terms of approaching a critique of neoliberalism, and the value of ideas and the role of semiosis in the life of the neoliberal project, I would point to Bourdieu’s concept of doxa as having proved particularly helpful.
here. That is, in so far as it provides an understanding of neoliberal discourse(s) as an unacknowledged and therefore unchallengeable law of the possible. Consequently, seeing the neoliberal order of discourse as a central element of an ostensibly contingent social order, yet disseminated and embraced as fixed, without any sense of its arbitrary configuration, allowed for the construction of a way to approach instantiations of text as modalities of perpetual neoliberal truth-telling and history making, of an involution of the contemporary period.

The second key objective was to focus on the Irish Republic and Irish polity during the period of the economic boom. Taking in the lifespan of two Fianna Fáil-led coalition governments from 1997 to 2007, I sought to focus on ostensibly non-economic issues as a way of assessing the hegemonic reach of neoliberal ideation in national social policy and in Ireland’s cultural life. Obviously, I could have selected different topics and texts for analysis, but I maintain that as immigration and childcare legislation were significant emerging social issues during the historical period under review, and as social partnership has had a unique influence on the national socio-political landscape, the topics chosen and the texts analysed, combined with the way I have sequenced them in this work, with each issue being contextualised in relation to the findings of the previous one, ensured that the value-added work that my semiotic analysis provides worked better when taken as a whole, providing a more substantial response to the original research question.

The third objective, without the completion of which my task would have proved impossible, was to identify a linguistically applicable and theoretically appropriate method of critical discourse analysis. The particular way I have constructed neoliberalism and its semiotic element as the focus of research made the contemporary historically-materialist basis of Fairclough’s methodologies a natural starting point for this work, the central benefits of this approach therefore being its understanding of semiosis as a social practice, discrete but not separate from other practices, and its implied role in the construal of reality. There is not necessarily anything new in my use of these methodologies, neither in the particular mix of elements at different points in my work, nor in their application to discourse samples. But the key point is that it is Fairclough’s dialectical-relation approach to CDA that has allowed me to formulate my research question as it stands, and in affording scope to the refine the approach to later analyses based on what has gone before, has also made it possible to provide an answer to that research question.
Limitations

It is in relation to the fourth objective within this work, the operationalisation of the concept of the public sphere itself however, where other approaches may have been adopted which may have added to the depth and breadth of the research enterprise. The approach to analysis employed in this work, with its two levels of explanation related to the two thematic elements of the research question – the problematisation of each research topic and the formulation and application of a method of linguistic analysis – have meant that the public sphere, as a concept, is somewhat underdeveloped here. In responding to the research question, I have concentrated on identifying situations where the state directly engaged with the public (or with public and civil society bodies) in the development and implementation of legislation and policy. And in as much as my interest in the public sphere has primarily been concerned with this conjuncture of discursive interaction from which appropriate samples of official discourse could be found, the concept could perhaps have benefitted from a more nuanced and detailed treatment than I have been able to provide here.

For example, a parallel or related work of critical inquiry might have prioritised analytically assessing the health of iterations of the public sphere at a particular time in a particular socio-political space in and of themselves, against some set of metrics drawn from Habermas’s work in this area, or from Bourdieu’s interest in sites of systematically distorted communication. One reason for not pursuing this route is that as a sociolinguist, my interest is in a linguistic approach to transdisciplinary work and to improving such work through discourse-analytical ideas and methods. To take specific theoretical positions as a starting point (such as Habermas, Arendt and possibly Bourdieu) would be to begin my research from a different location, one which would also require a more detailed engagement with their ideas and the scholarly work that has been undertaken in those areas than I can claim to possess, and for which I would not have been able to provide appropriate space here.

This of course does not mean that such an approach would not be possible and I completely accept therefore that this work could have been approached differently. The relative health of the public sphere, for example, could have been placed more centrally within the research question, or perhaps as part of constructing the object of research in a somewhat different way than I have done here. Indeed, evaluating the defining characteristics of a national public sphere or iterations of the public sphere around a number of discrete topics could well prove useful for both supporting and advancing the findings of my thesis. Likewise, my findings (together with other avenues leading from them), could also lead to novel ways to approach spaces of civil society and state interaction.
In terms of what has been achieved through this work, of what my engagement with official semiotic practices imbued with a neoliberal ethos can be said to have shown in relation to the broad diminution of democracy through the compromising of the public sphere in Ireland; the application of the methodology (in relation to the formulation of the research question) has clearly revealed evidence of just such a process in the Republic during the period under review. In all three research instances there is much to support the contention that the discursive practices of civil society, as analysed, are undermined by the official discourse practices employed by government (and the state structures more generally) in public sphere interactions. In the case of immigration reform, the level of control exerted by government ensures that the public consultation process it is seen to encourage was never actually engaged with by the state on terms that emerge out of any public sphere interaction. In practice, and on the contrary, the state actively stifled any potential for dialogue and public input into the proposed new legislation by restricting the frame into which contributions could be made and then directing the channels of input. In this instance we can say that the public sphere did not operate as a space of genuine action-oriented interaction.

In the case of childcare policy development there is evidence of a genuine space for the development of a civil society position on policy and its implementation to which the state has to some degree to respond. But the level of official control and significantly, the colonisation and recontextualisation of practices that took place over the life of the policy working group ensured that what was produced was very different to what was requested and anticipated by the civil society actors in their engagement with the state. Essentially, the public sphere functioned well in as much as it operated effectively in a programmatic sense, with a contribution being made to the legislative process. Yet with the marginalisation of the civil society participants’ voices within this process over time, due in large measure to the semiotic practices employed, its deliberative value was simultaneously eroded when it came to policy implementation. That is, we see a public sphere that was simultaneously proactive and reactive, both present and not present, being essentially an asymmetric encounter where power remained in the hands of the ‘traditional’ decision-makers.

The historical analysis of social partnership moreover, shows how the relationships and practices structured by the process have in fact been compromised by a neoliberal ethos from the start. The examination of social policy in the first years of the new millennium moreover, demonstrates how this ethos remained both a feature of partnership, which in turn helped ensure the reconfiguration of practices not simply in terms of service provision (as in the case of childcare), but also in the very fundamental ways in which family, community,
and society were encouraged to tackle the fundamental social problems facing the nation’s citizens and their communities. From the analysis of the concept of social capital and active citizenship in particular we can conclude that the public sphere in Ireland would seem to be compromised, or even infected by a neoliberal doxa for the very reason that Bourdieu highlights. That is, it seems incapable of challenging something, an argument, a law, whose presence is never acknowledged but which, at the same time, is self-propagating. Moreover, the experience with social partnership also helps explain in a more fundamental way, how the universalising law of the market central to neoliberalism, rose to prominence, and attained a relatively uncritiqued, hegemonic acceptance.

The usefulness of the research question

The research therefore shows that the particular way the object of research has been constructed here was appropriate and robust, and the analysis sufficiently rigorous since weaknesses in either pattern of explanation would not have been able to provide evidence to accurately support my general thesis. This also implies that such a construction of the research question can be employed again, and operationalised, for example, in other situations in terms of any examination of the erosion of spaces for genuinely open and participatory dialogue, but also more generally, where any examination of the encroachment of particular sets of ideas in new networks of practices might prove a useful contribution to any critical research agenda. My contribution moreover, has been in moving the methodological field along as a consequence of the explicit way in which the critical approach to the primary theme – Neoliberalism’s democratic deficit – has been formulated in a semiotic mode as a key element of sets of social practices. I have thereby illustrated the potential value of any critical discourse-oriented analysis of shifting power dynamics, as a contribution to an unmasking of the ideological nature of social change on any topic, at any scale, in Ireland or elsewhere.

More practically, as each topic of analysis in my work has been problematised in a specific way, following my approach to the work’s main themes, I believe that the particular formulation of my approach to the issue of social capital in the preceding chapter – akin to the approach to neoliberalism and semiosis generally – is particularly novel, and potentially useful for further work. In adding content to the critical consensus that the social partnership process acted as a modality of operationalising a neoliberal blueprint for cultural governance (as advanced in the second two analytical chapters), in identifying the emergence of the idea of social capital around the turn of the millennium, and in keeping with the objectives of all critical discourse analysts, I have been able to materially advance the existing work of
scholars in this area. Where others have critiqued the general absence of progress on the social agenda in Ireland, and the particular obfuscating role of social partnership in this regard, I have shown how, via a critical approach to semiotic analysis, a particular reading of social capital in Irish policy, situated within an understanding of the partnership process, acted as the key ideological tool in facilitating institutional change with its pro-market ideation, and actively limited any challenge to the structural problems preventing any material progress on an equality agenda.

Moreover, my work also illustrates how the discourse and practices associated with social capital actually retarded such an agenda, in an almost imperceptible way. In regenerating ideas that are seemingly benign and uncontentious, but significantly, by being set within the new set of material practices – identities, terminologies and classifications, and ways of acting and interacting – this official thesis helped to ensure that the rationale for the state’s unwillingness or its inability to challenge the fundamentals of, for example, poverty and exclusion, remained hidden from view and therefore free from scrutiny and challenge. This kind of theorisation, when coupled with an appropriate set of tools for semiotic analysis such as those used here, can be deployed in any area where hegemonic structures seek to limit the world of the possible, the achievable, to demonstrate ontologically both the nature, form, and content of the project (its ideology and strategy), and also to epistemologically illuminate the fact that there is a space that lies outside of any argument, any sanctioned paradigm, where the tools of normative change, of a potential ethical hegemony may be found.

**Concluding remarks**

In this work I have given voice to Fairclough’s expectation with a transdisciplinary approach to critical discourse analysis, where the non-linguistic element framing aspect of analysis always precedes the actual textual analysis. Specifically, I have shown how power structures like neoliberalism, can be productively analysed once an appropriate account is taken of their semiotic practices in the construction of an issue, or any issues, as an object of research. My work remains however, an exercise in discourse analysis, in CDA, otherwise the value-added nature of this research would be hard to identify, being limited to the reworking of existing ideas and theoretical positions on topics that are not particularly new or unaddressed elsewhere. Without my critical analytical methodologies I would have failed to show the role of semiosis in sustaining and propagating hegemonic neoliberal structures through their discursive impact on patterns of social practice. That is, the dual approach to this research
relying on the twin themes of constructing neoliberalism productively from a semiotic dimension, while also advancing a methodological approach to the actual analysis of discourse samples around the concept of the public sphere; an argumentative pattern of explanation added to a descriptive pattern of analytical linguistic explanation, are, by their nature, dialectically related. In other words, in order to be of any theoretical value the latter methodological approach to text samples, the focus of my specific contribution to the area of research occupying the majority of my thesis, has necessarily been predicated on the former theorisation of the central theme, as well as on the related way in which the individual topics have been theorised.

I have shown how CDA can work, but also why critical social research essentially needs critical approaches to the analysis of language if it is to advance understandings of the challenges to advocating normative change more generally. In this sense, wedding Fairclough’s dialectical-relational approach to the analysis of semiosis to Bourdieu’s critical, detailed, but non-analytical foregrounding of the role of discourse in neoliberalism’s colonisation of the cultural world, can be seen as a concrete example of how this work has moved professional discussion forward. Such a relational approach, if appropriately and diligently applied, naturally advances any CDA work in the area of critiques of neoliberalism, and hegemonic structures generally, but also, as with Fairclough’s ambition, as in this case, it materially advances Bourdieu’s position and the work of Bourdieu and Wacquant on the topic, by providing material evidence which supports their theoretical conclusions, thereby facilitating further theoretical advances in such work.

Also, though it was not my intention to engage in any discourse historical work, as an engagement with the issue of social partnership in Ireland has led me to do some analysis of this type, it is notable that my work also shows how CDA approaches can advance Foucauldian genealogical study, in terms of approaches to studies of the ‘histories of the present’. By unearthing and analysing official texts central to the state’s neoliberal turn and to the genesis of the state-brokered social partnership process in the mid-1980s, for example, I have been engaged in an exercise of excavating of the historical aspects of the state and the origin of social partnership, affording a richer comprehension of their contemporary conditions. In mapping political and cultural trajectories moreover, this genealogical perspective – apart from any detailed discursive analysis – has contributed greatly to showing how the neoliberal *pangloss* has come to attain the hegemonic position it occupies today.

The contingent nature of this contemporary fix, as underlined by this discourse-historical work, coupled with the investigation of what has been taking place between the state and civil society in spaces of common debate, also underscores Gramsci’s assertion that
hegemony and its social structures always exists in a state of perpetual tension, perennially in need of consolidation and reinforcement against any potential undermining of these structures. The observations on neoliberalism and in particular, the energies that the state needs to expend in meeting the requirement to inculcate cohesion and consensus by, as here, inducing the active participation of civil society to maintain its authority, coupled with the reflection on potential ways for moving past the social problem, highlighted in Stage 4 of the analytical framework presented in this final chapter; can now point to this contingent and fragile nature of the current settlement. This work therefore also points to those potential spaces – as well as the necessary methods for being effective in those spaces – for undermining the current order and of advancing a progressive orthodoxy more in keeping with the notion of a state with genuine republican aspirations.

Having shown what a critical, transdisciplinary methodology, grounded in an understanding of the dialectical nature of semiosis and discursive interaction can achieve, and of the potential it opens up for further productive work within linguistics as well as in other disciplines, my aspiration – following from the normative aspect within CDA and my combined reflections in the final stage of the explanatory critique methodological framework – must be to examine the possibilities for advancing a normative agenda, or in Gramsci’s phrase, an ethical hegemony. Though the critical analysis of discourse should always remain central to such a challenge, in understanding more precisely how power operates in a semiotic mode, following Gramsci’s position, the broad objective has to be the development of a semiotic antidote, so to speak, to the colonising power of a partisan, unaccountable, market hegemony. Specifically, this links to the concept of ‘vernacular materialism’, as advanced by Ives (1997, 2005) through his focus on power, hegemony, and Gramsci’s writings on language and linguistics, and on the concept of a normative grammar in particular. Like many of the broad theoretical positions that inform my work, this position has never engaged with methods of discourse analysis, but there is now a real opportunity through CDA’s dialectical potential to advance these new theoretical insights drawn from Gramsci’s largely overlooked contributions on language and power.

This is an understanding that, like Fairclough’s dialectical-relational approach to CDA, recognises language’s historically contingent essence, and its role in coercive processes and the drive to engender consent. Practically, this could mean a particular semiotically-grounded approach to the role and functioning of the official, professional expert as a kind of ideological interloper, or a focus on social and institutional arenas of apparent consensus as exercises in revitalising underlying antagonistic practices as a way of reasserting a more natural and holistic conflictual equilibrium. The normative position is an
understanding that spaces of deliberative debate can and must operate freely and inclusively, without the need to artificially narrow the parameters of discussion or, in Bernstein’s terms, to ensure that the framing of and classifications within debates should remain at all times maximally weak. Semiosis as social praxis can help identify where action is needed. In following Hall (1993), for example, this can be in challenging unscientific judgements, in contestations over authority, and in critiquing failing programmes and incoherent policies. And when a progressive shift does occur, it can itself be central to both the development of a normative set of social practices, and help to perpetually construe emerging practices by such a reality. In the case of Ireland, where the functioning of the state and the operations of its institutions can be seen to be transparent and to genuinely reflect the needs and aspirations of the majority of its citizens, a concentration on semiosis can play a central role in the overdue conferring a more genuinely inclusive republican ethos on the Republic.

* * *

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Note on Appendices

No. 1  Overview of analysed texts and other documents contained on the attached CD-ROM

No. 2  Detail of texts analysed re. Chapter 5: Immigration

No. 3  Detail of texts analysed re. Chapter 6: Childcare

No. 4  Detail of texts analysed re. Chapter 7: Social Partnership

No. 5  Glossary of abbreviated terms

***
Appendix 1

Overview of analysed texts and other documents on the attached CD-ROM

- All texts are presented digitally as PDF files, as per Appendices, 2, 3 & 4 that follow, meaning:

- The documents relating to each of the three analytical chapters within this work appear in their own folder on the CD-ROM. There are therefore three folders; ‘5. Immigration’, ‘6. Childcare’ & ‘7. Social Partnership’.

- Within each folder the individual texts are numbered in the same fashion as adopted in the subsequent appendices.

- The documents discursively analysed in each chapter are identified by numbers alone. The first order of classification refers to the chapter number, and the second relates to the sequence in which the text is analysed within that chapter. For example ‘9.7’ indicates the seventh text analysed in Chapter Nine.

- For the background documents I have used a number (again, to identify the chapter) followed by a letter, (again, relating to the order in which the text appears. For example, ‘9.f’ relates to the sixth background document referenced in Chapter Nine.

- For larger documents which are only available in two or more PDF files, a Roman numeral is used as a third order of classification. For example ‘9.7.i & 9.7.ii’.

- This appendix also appears as a separate ‘cover note’ on the CD-ROM.

***

1. Documents 6.b.i and 6.b.ii are non-consecutive parts of a document that is split into 4 PDF files, but as only two parts of that text are referenced directly in this work, I have only reproduced these two here.
### Appendix 2

**Immigration texts analysed and other important referenced texts (Ch. 5)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Text/Document</th>
<th>Date of issue</th>
<th>Department/ Office</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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## Appendix 3

### Childcare texts analysed and other significant referenced texts (Ch. 6)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
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<th>Topic</th>
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<td><strong>Primary texts being analysed:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Speech – Minister Brian Lenihan (Fianna Fáil) launches the <em>Early Childcare Supplement,</em> (ECS)</td>
<td>August 2006</td>
<td>Office of the Minister for Children (Dept. of Health &amp; Children)</td>
<td>New universal cash payment to parents for all children under 6 years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other documents:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.a</td>
<td>1999 Budget speech – Minister’s introduces tax allowances for employers</td>
<td>December 1998</td>
<td>Department of Finance</td>
<td>Deals with supply-side issues only. Departmental view on how to tackle social exclusion Child Benefit increased but no reference to Childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.b</td>
<td>Study on the Economics of Childcare in Ireland – Report by Goodbody Economic Consultants &amp; others</td>
<td>December 1998</td>
<td>Commissioned by the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform &amp; ADM Ltd. on behalf of the EWG</td>
<td>Provides comparative data from other jurisdictions on the costs and benefits of providing national childcare and recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.c</td>
<td>Tax Strategy Group (Civil servants, Department of Finance)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Department of Finance</td>
<td>Discussion document to summarise and aid development of taxation and fiscal policy re. childcare</td>
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### Appendix 4

**Social Partnership Texts analysed and other significant referenced texts (Ch. 7)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
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<td>7.2</td>
<td>NESC 83/1 – ‘Key Points’ Pamphlet</td>
<td>February 1987</td>
<td>Post-election summary version of NESC 83</td>
<td>Produced for the members of the new government and other decision makers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Report of the Task Force on Active Citizenship</td>
<td>March 2007</td>
<td>Secretariat of the Task Force on Active Citizenship (Department of the Taoiseach)</td>
<td>Promotional document designed to explain and promote the Active Citizenship initiative to the public.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>The Task Force on Active Citizenship’s Concept Paper</td>
<td>March 2007</td>
<td>Secretariat of the Task Force on Active Citizenship (Department of the Taoiseach)</td>
<td>Background Working Paper published by the Taskforce on Active Citizenship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other documents:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7.b</td>
<td>White Paper – <em>A Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary sector</em></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs</td>
<td>An explanation of the radical change being proposed by the Government in its relationship with the community and voluntary sector, including information on specific objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.c</td>
<td>NESF 28 – <em>The Policy Implications of Social Capital</em></td>
<td>June 2003</td>
<td>NESF</td>
<td>An exposition of the state’s understanding and embrace of the concept of ‘social capital’ as a central component of its realigned relationship with civil society.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 5

Glossary of Abbreviated Terms

CDA : Critical Discourse Analysis
CSO : The Central Statistics Office
CWC : The Community Workers’ Co-operative
DETE : The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment
DJELR : The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform
DSCFA : The Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs
DT : The Department of The Taoiseach
ECS : The Early Childcare Supplement
EEC : The European Economic Community
EGFSN : The Expert Group on Future Skill Needs
EOCP : The Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme
ESG : The Enterprise Strategy Group
ESRI : The Economic and Social Research Institute
EU : The European Union
EWG : The Expert Working Group on Childcare
FÁS : An Foras Áiseanna Saothair/The National Training & Employment Authority
IBEC : The Irish Business and Employers’ Confederation
ICI : The Immigrant Council of Ireland
ICTU : The Irish Congress of Trade Unions
IDA : The Industrial Development Authority
IMF : The International Monetary Fund
IMI : The Irish Management Institute
IOM : The International Organisation for Migration
NAPS : The National Anti-Poverty Strategy
NESC : The National Economic and Social Council
NESF : The National Economic and Social Forum
NWCI : The National Women’s Council of Ireland
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>OMC</td>
<td>Office of The Minister for Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNR</td>
<td>Programme for National Recovery (The First Social Partnership Agreement; 1987-1990)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFL</td>
<td>Systemic Functional Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIPTU</td>
<td>The Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TD</td>
<td>Teachta Dála (Member of Parliament, Lower Chamber)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNC</td>
<td>A Transnational Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSG</td>
<td>The Tax Strategy Group (The Department of Finance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>The United Nations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Bibliography and References


English language version retrieved from:
http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/staff/norman.doc


http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/staff/norman/paper2.doc


Murphy, M. (2002). ‘Social partnership – is it ‘the only game in town?’ *Community Development Journal, 37*(1), 80-90.


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