Governing Austerity in Dublin:

Rationalisation, Resilience and Resistance[1]

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Abstract

Often hailed as "the poster child of Europe" for its discipline and compliance in managing austerity despite the severity of the cuts meted on its population, Dublin presents an interesting case in austerity governance. This article focuses on the specific mechanisms whereby such compliance and public acquiescence has been achieved. Drawing on field research conducted from 2015 to 2017, it identifies three key practices of austerity governance – a collectivisation of blame and shame; a cutting, shaping and disciplining of civil society; and a reconstruction of the citizen-subject. It then goes on to uncover a diverse range of public responses to these practices which, oscillating between resistance and resilience, are playing a key role in rebuilding solidarity and community across neighbourhoods throughout the city. The findings presented here respond to recent calls for a re-insertion of the political into contemporary urban research and highlight the importance of dispersed networks of resistance and resilience in contemporary urban political struggle and transformation.

Introduction

Ireland has often been hailed as "the poster child of Europe" for its discipline and compliance in managing austerity[3]. The Irish Finance Minister's repeated mantra that "Ireland is not Greece" serves to reinforce this image of social cohesion and stability so crucial to the attraction of foreign investment. Despite a difficult number of years where unemployment, poverty and inequality have risen significantly, the dominant narrative remains one of social as well as fiscal discipline as Irish citizens quietly get on with their daily lives in a context of harsh cuts and severe retrenchment.

For policy makers and broader commentators alike, this begs the question: how has such compliance been achieved, most notably in Dublin – a traditional site of activism and resistance? How have city authorities managed to contain and control potential anger and dissent and apparently steer the city back on course to the current much-touted recovery? Why, to paraphrase the Irish Finance Minister, is Ireland not Greece, Dublin not Athens?

Drawing on the findings from the Dublin study of an international research project entitled "Collaborative Governance under Austerity", this paper identifies three practices whereby this has been achieved. These are, respectively, a collectivisation of blame and shame; a cutting, shaping and disciplining of civil society; and a reconstruction of the dutiful, respectable and restrained citizen-subject. While, as we will see, the roots of each of these predate the era of austerity itself, the promotion of austerity as a social and political ideology requiring specific comportments and behaviour from individuals and groups alike, rather than as simply an economic policy has greatly assisted in the expansion and consolidation of these practices.

However, contrary to the dominant narratives espoused, the research reveals that austerity measures have not been passively internalized by a relatively compliant citizenry. On the contrary, reflecting the dispersed yet networked nature of power across the city, the reactions and responses of Dublin's residents have been varied and novel. The findings suggest that public reactions to and the micropolitics surrounding austerity bear more in common with those in Athens than is often suggested. Uncovering diverse and varied acts of oppositions to a range of subjectifications, they serve to highlight the importance of dispersed networks of resistance and resilience in contemporary urban political struggle and transformation. The paper is structured as follows.

In the following section I outline the methodology employed in the research. This is then followed by an outline of the theoretical approach employed in the paper. This draws on the literature on governance and subjectification to elucidate the different levels and mechanisms of subject-formation. The background to the financial crisis and the subsequent introduction and impact of austerity forms the basis for the fourth section. Sections Five to Seven inclusive explore the state's three key practices of austerity governance, from their pre-austerity beginnings to their consolidation through the austerity years. In Section Eight I go on to examine the diversity of public responses to these practices. These include a variety of activities, strategies and tactics which sway between resistance and resilience as diverse actors struggle to both contain and contest the worst of austerity's fallout. I conclude with some thoughts on the implications of the Dublin case for contemporary urban struggles and transformations, as well as for urban research more broadly.

Methodology

This article draws from fieldwork conducted from 2015 to the present in Dublin as part of an international project entitled "Collaborative Governance under Austerity". The project explores the central question of what happens to institutions, structures and cultures of collaborative governance under conditions of austerity in eight cities[4]. The methodology draws on a common approach which combines documentary analysis with qualitative field research with informants drawn from state and civic sectors through a targeted key informant approach combined with snowballing. Fieldwork in Dublin was conducted over four phases and comprised, in total, 45 interviews, two focus groups and one observation. Interviews were conducted, using a semi-structured questionnaire schedule, by either the author or one of her Research Assistants. The two focus groups were made up of 5 community activists and 6 residents respectively. Discussions within these focused on local community's experiences of and reactions to austerity. Interview participants were drawn from state and civic sectors through a targeted selection of key informants, followed by snowballing. Attempts were made to test, develop and triangulate the findings in the fieldwork of phases 2-4 across the different categories of respondents.

All interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded with the written consent of interviewees. They were then fully transcribed and all the data were coded and analysed through NVivo by the author – a full-time academic. Cases were created for all interviews and focus groups. Attributes called "gender" and "participant category" were created and linked to the cases. This facilitated comparative analysis across different categories of respondents, capturing points of both commonality and difference in positions and views across these categories.

Respondents were coded as follows: Community Activist: CA; Community Based Organisation: CBO; Charitable Foundation: CF; Elected Politician: EP; Government Official: O; Other = Oth; Voluntary sector employer or employee: VO. These are presented in this article in the chronological order in which they were interviewed– i.e. CA1 is the first community activist interviewed, CA2 the second, and so forth. Female interviewees are denoted F, and male M.

Governing austerity: Governance technologies and subjectifications

The central problematic of this article is the question of how governing authorities in Dublin have managed to secure public compliance for a wide range of dislocating policies and spending cuts. The emphasis is on the specific mechanisms and strategies employed in securing this compliance and the power dynamics underpinning and circulating around these. Drawing from Nikolas Rose's assertion that "Analytics of government are concerned with truth, with power and with subjectification" (Rose, 1999, p.29, footnote 26), I draw here on the literature on subject-formation and governance in elucidating and unpacking these mechanisms, together with the varied public reactions to them.

According to Rose and Miller (1992), following Foucault, governments exercise power in individuals by constructing and shaping their subject positions – i.e. their conduct, rather than by directly manipulating individual behaviours. This is achieved at both broad-based levels aimed at population control and manipulation (Rose & Miller, 1992) and through disciplinary techniques that aim to shape behaviours and identities at individual levels (McNay, 2009). The role of "expertise" and specific power-knowledge configurations are key in this regard. As Rose and Miller note (1992, p.188), "The complex of actors, powers, institutions and bodies of

knowledge that comprise expertise have come to play a crucial role in establishing the possibility and legitimacy of government.". Thus, what counts as knowledge and truth and whose knowledge and truth counts are important factors in constructing and consolidating subjectivities. Accordingly, *"By means of expertise, self-regulatory techniques can be instilled in citizens that will align their personal choices with the ends of government. The freedom and subjectivity of citizens can in such ways become an ally, and not a threat, to the orderly government of a polity and a society."* (1992, p.188-189). A key point here, as Rose also in a later publication points out (Rose, 1999), is that citizens possess the agency and freedom to be willing or unwilling allies in this "conduct of conducts" and control and management of their subjectivities and behaviours (see also Dean, 2007, p.82). Lemke's observation that this "conduct of conducts" extends beyond individuals to organs and structures of civil society, from, as he terms it "governing the self" to "governing others" (Lemke, 2000, p.2) is also instructive in the context of the Dublin case.

With such subject formations dependent on citizen agency and "buy in", they are not as stable or durable as one might think. As Foucault himself noted, power is not static or uniform but circulates constantly throughout society. This its mechanisms, "have been – and continue to be – invested, colonised, utlilsed, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended, etc…" (1980, p.99). Subjects can contest, resist and oppose governmental power and subjectivities. Importantly however, as Rose points out, for Foucault "the notion of resistance is too simple and flattening for analysing contestations" (Rose, 1999, p.280). Instead, social resistance to governmental subjectifications can often have modest ambitions, being "cautious, modest, pragmatic, experimental, stuttering and tentative… at time even 'refusing their designation as politics at

all'" (Rose, 1999, p.280). As we will later see, this certainly applies in the Dublin case and helps illuminate the diversity and range of resistance and resilience tactics and strategies animating the streets and neighbourhoods of Dublin and, indeed, more widely (see Mayer, 2013 for example).

Crisis and austerity in Dublin

From the late 1990s up to 2007, Ireland's booming "Celtic Tiger" economy, with its high growth rates and low levels of unemployment, emerged from relative obscurity to be heralded as one of the most successful economies within the EU. However, as the recession hit in mid-2008, it became apparent that the foundations of this success were extremely shaky and that the country's fortunes had come on the back of a massive property speculation bubble financed, via a spree of reckless lending by Irish banks, by the international bond markets. While an elite group of property developers - many in the Dublin area – prospered significantly, their fortunes came at the expense of many others. House prices in Dublin, rising an astonishing 511 per cent over the core Celtic Tiger years of 1994-2006 (O'Toole, 2009, p.101), became prohibitive for some while others, driven by the property mania infusing media and political discourse throughout the country, availed of the increasing laxity in lending regulations to mortgage themselves to unsustainable levels. The results are apparent in the ongoing high levels of mortgage arrears on privately owned residences[5] as well as in the city's acute housing crisis more broadly.

In a move which served to highlight the Irish state's subservience to national and international financial elites alike, the government's response to the global financial crisis was to sign off on a full government guarantee of not just public deposits in six ailing banks, but also of 80 billion

euros in bank bonds from international investors, thereby preventing the collapse of the Eurozone banking system (Donovan & Murphy, 2013, p.200). In the course of one fateful evening (September 29th, 2008), the private debts of international bondholders were transferred over to the Irish citizens who woke the next morning to find themselves in hock to the eventual tune of Euro 64 billion or 40 per cent of the country's GDP (Hardiman & Regan, 2013, p.10). Although the Irish Finance Minister at the time described this as "the cheapest bailout in the world", his words came to haunt him as the cost of the bailout continued to escalate in the months and years that followed. The Irish banking crisis is now considered, following Iceland, to be the costliest in the world since the crash of the 1930s (IMF, 2012). In privileging international bondholders over its own citizens by nationalising their private debt, the Irish government precipitated a national economic crisis which, as we will now see, ultimately led to further subservience to global financial interests with the adoption of an €85 billion package of financial assistance from the European Commission (EC) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in November 2010 on condition that the government commit to expenditure cuts for the period 2008-2015 of 20 per cent of GDP. This was accompanied by an increase in indirect taxes, and a range of new taxes and charges were introduced including a new universal social charge (in 2011), a new property tax (in 2014) and new water charges (in 2014).

Austerity's impacts have been sharp, deep and uneven. In the context of high emigration, there has been a significant rise in unemployment. The number of jobs has fallen by 14 per cent since the start of the crisis and long-term unemployment remains a significant problem (OECD, 2013). The overall percentage of people in poverty has risen to 15.8 per cent or 700,000 people with the poorest suffering the most (Hardiman & Regan, 2013, p.12). Consistent with this, Cannon and

Murphy (2015, pp. 8-9) draw on figures from the Central Statistics Office to report increased consistent poverty (4.2 per cent in 2008 to 7.7 per cent in 2012), higher inequality (30.7 on the Gini coefficient measure in 2008 to 31.2 in 2012) and worsened income distribution (4.6 in 2008 to 5.0 of income quintile in 2012). The significantly gendered nature of austerity's impacts has also been noted. As Murphy (2015, p.226-227) argues, "There are clear gendered implications from a government strategy that focuses on public expenditure cuts as the primary tool to manage fiscal correction. Simply put, more women are employed in the public sector, more women use public services and more women claim social welfare payments.". In Dublin, these differential impacts are reflected in the analyses and experiences of our respondents where there is broad agreement that the poorest have been hit the hardest. While the government constantly stresses that core welfare benefits have not been touched[6], the extensive cuts to supports and services across a wide range of sectors have indirectly affected many. As one of our Focus Group participants notes, "They don't hit you straight on the thing, but all the supports have been taken away" (FG1-F). Funding to the programme tackling the growing drug epidemic in the city is reported to be down by 44 per cent and many other funding lines have ceased altogether (Oth1-M).

Thus, while Dublin, and indeed Ireland more broadly, may well be heralded as a model in austerity governance replicable elsewhere, this has not come without a severe price to residents across the city, most particularly those in more marginalised and precarious situations. The key question is how consent and compliance for such damaging policies – designed to protect the interests of an elite few at the expense of the majority – have been crafted and maintained. This

is the subject of the following three sections which explore the mechanisms employed in attempting to secure consensus and engineer compliance.

"We all partied": Constructing and controlling the story

As detailed in the previous section, the prime benefactors of the Celtic Tiger's much celebrated largesse remained limited to an elite coterie of property developers and senior banking executives. However, a completely different narrative quickly rose to the fore with the introduction of austerity. This aimed at inventing and promulgating collective public blame (and indeed shame) for the crisis as a means of justifying the collective public sacrifice and pain to be endured. This was most neatly and glibly encapsulated by the Taoiseach [Irish Prime Minister] at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2012, when, following similar assertions in the national media by the Finance Minister two years previously, he confidently asserted to the international financial elite gathered that "we all partied… people simply went mad with borrowing"[7], meaning the origins of the crisis are communal and all of the Irish public shared in the benefits of the boom. Both Coulter (2015) and Kennedy (2015) detail the multiple and repeated use of the *"we"* tactic across the Irish political class over the austerity period. Variants of the "we all partied" trope, with its attendant undertones of collective shame and guilt are apparent in the much repeated phrases of "we all lost the run of ourselves" (Coulter, 2015, p.10; Donovan & Murphy, 2013, p.274) and the more fatalistic "we are where we are" which, Kennedy has noted (2015, p.98), was deployed in parliamentary debate by on no fewer than 270 occasions between the summer of 2008 and spring of 2014[8]. As Preston and Silke, 2015 and

Power, Devereux and Haynes, 2016 note, this collectivisation of guilt and shame has been internalised and unproblematically reproduced across the country's mainstream media which, in Ireland as elsewhere, plays a key role in constructing and consolidating what counts as, and becomes the accepted "truth". And as we will see in later sections, it also appears in the discourse of a number of our interviewees, most notably among government officials (O) and representatives of charitable foundations (CF). Reshaping and dispersing responsibility by transforming all citizens into guilty subjects, this clever discursive strategy has neatly re-packaged and re-historicised the origins of the crisis from one limited to the walls and hallowed vaults of the international banking sector to one arising from a collective frenzy where everybody went mad and ran amok with wild abandon. Echoes of traditional Catholicism abound as we are all exhorted to pay for our collective sins through the penury and penance of austerity. The ground was indeed well prepared for the roll out of austerity.

Allied to these attempts at a re-historicisation and re-invention of the origins of the crisis are state-driven attempts to limit and control research and the systematic documentation of the situation of poverty and marginalisation across the city. The lack of systematic data in relation to the precise scale and impact of austerity cuts and policies is something many of our respondents have noted. The reasons for this are two-fold. The first is rooted in the curtailment and ultimate closure of the principal agency responsible for poverty-related research (the Combat Poverty Agency – CPA), in tandem with moves to eliminate the research functions of other state-funded bodies. Abolished one year prior to the crash (in 2007), the reasons for the CPA's closure were clearly not financial. As one of our respondents noted "It [the closure of the CPA] was to take out this particular body, to disperse it, and to disperse its staff. To make sure the kind of work

that it had been doing - it had been documenting poverty, and issue-based poverty - didn't happen anymore." (Oth1-M). Moreover, around the same time, local Partnership agencies were instructed not to hire any more researchers and community development projects received warnings about the employment of social policy officers (Oth1-M). And, as we will see in the section to follow, the reconfiguration and reshaping of organised civil society groups (limiting their activities to service provision alone) has eliminated their research function also. In consequence, as many of our respondents have noted, there is a dearth of systematic socio-economic data available for the city since 2008, most notably in relation to trends in poverty and inequality across the city[9].

The one other principal research institution in receipt of state support – the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), although ostensibly independent, has been criticised for its decidedly neoliberal stance and reputed proximity to the state. As Coulter (2015, p.21) has observed "The institute spent the decade and a half of the economic boom not so much speaking truth to power as whispering sweet nothings in its ear". Indeed, one of its lead researchers resigned in January of 2012 noting that the institute was compromised in its autonomy and lacked independence[10]. In any case, as its Director at on the time has noted, on the occasional incidences when the institute did suggest an alternative narrative to that preferred by the state – for example when, in 2008, the institute suggested that Ireland might be in danger of going into recession - it was ignored and marginalised by the political establishment (Ruane, 2012).

The second reason for the lack of data on the scale of both the scale of austerity cutbacks and retrenchments and their differential and sectoral impacts is the simple refusal of Dublin City Council to document and publicise these. This is starkly evident from the response received by one of our respondents (a city councillor) to his request to Council officials for a breakdown of figures on expenditure and staffing cuts across council departments over the ten-year period from 2005-2015. Having approached one of the Council CEO's assistants, he was informed "that I could no longer be requesting information going back ten years. That it's putting too heavy a burden on the staff to gather that information because of the reduced number of staff… so because there's been reduction in the level of staffing, I'm no longer able to piece together just how bad the reductions have been to the council services, staff and budgets." (EP8 – M). This experience is echoed by a number of other councillors who also report difficulties in accessing specific figures and data. Indeed, the repeated inability of all City Council officials interviewed (including very senior figures) to detail the cuts – at either sectoral or spatial levels – is noteworthy as are our own efforts, through repeated email and phone contact, at obtaining sectoral and spatial budgetary breakdowns.

Whether deliberate or not (and the scale of developments appears to suggest the former[11]), these multiple cuts and limits to research within a range of institutions and agencies across the city, including the City Council itself, leave us with a dearth of systematic data on the scale and depth of the cuts across the city. It does not, however, mask the experiences, suffering and challenges of the city's residents and officials as uncovered by our research.

'Rationalising' civil society: Cutting, shaping and disciplining

A second key practice of austerity governance also has its origins in the period preceding austerity. Under the guise of a "rationalisation" of civil society in the drive for greater efficiencies and economies of scale, this practice has been consolidated and concentrated with austerity. This much touted rationalisation has taken three forms – a cutting, a shaping, and a disciplining of civil society respectively.

Organised civil society, or the "third sector" in Dublin, includes a wide range of organisations of varying sizes and degrees of activism. Many of these have been engaged in local collaborative governance in the past and a number continue to do so under the current SICAP programme[12], remaining dependent on state revenue for survival. While some (e.g. CWC, 2012) argue that the community development end of the community and voluntary spectrum remains politically active, their conflicted stance in relation to the state, its collaborative structures, and its rationalisation agenda is acknowledged by many (see, for example, Meade, 2005). Community development, as a social and political practice, remains contested in Ireland as elsewhere (Gaynor, 2013; Shaw, 2008). This contestation notwithstanding, there is a common view across our respondents that the state's recent rationalisation agenda has focused on cutting funding to more politically active and vocal groups.

Although, as a number of respondents note, moves to shut down more vocal community groups began with reduced state support to them around 2002, efforts to keep them going were dealt a major blow over the austerity period. Although overall government spending fell by 2.82 per

cent during the 2008-2012 period, cuts to the community and voluntary sector are reported to have amounted to 35 per cent over that same period (Oth1-M; see also Harvey, 2012). And, as we will see, the reshaping of civil society over this period has meant that the smaller, more politically active community organisations appear to have borne the brunt of these cuts. According to one respondent "there were about 55,000 people working in the community sector, and, after austerity, there were about 20,000 that were taken out of the mix. So, there was just a massive cull, if you like, at that level." (CA2-M). Many respondents are adamant that this represented a deliberate strategy on the part of the state. As one respondent notes, "It felt like the civil servants were waiting in the long grass…. It felt a bit like slash and burn… There was a bit, kind of, 'we'll teach you a lesson, and protect the core' - the core being themselves, you know?" (CBO2-F). This is confirmed by one of our political respondents who commented that this was indeed a government priority under austerity, "Certainly I think one of the priorities in the present government, they made no secret of the fact that when they came into power, the days of Partnerships and [community] Task Forces and this, that and the other would - I think the phrase that was often used – that 'they would clip their wings'. And they did." (EP1-M). Not only were these cuts disproportionate to the cuts meted out overall, they also focused on a reshaping of civil society groups away from policy and political engagement towards a "services only" function. As one of our state official respondents notes, "We're funding groups to deliver frontline services in the main, not to be there with megaphones leading." (O1-F). Recent reports of Dublin City Council's attempts to impose a "gagging order" on the city's homeless charities to prevent them from criticising government policy exemplifies this trend[13].

This attempted shaping and remoulding of more vocal, politically active community groups was consolidated in 2010 with the subsuming of 165 community development projects across the country into the larger Partnership structures which were focused on employment generation and service provision. As one community activist notes, austerity cuts provided the perfect opportunity to shape and reconfigure civil society into this format.

> There were a lot of people working in community development projects who were quite radical. So, what do you do with them? You give them over to Partnerships and say, 'You're no longer autonomous. You're no longer your own boss. You're no longer running your own projects. You're now part of this system'. And that's what happened. That's what happened on the North side of the city. That's what happened on the South side of the city.

(CA2-M)

The impact of this on those in the community sector is described by one of its members

> You felt your voice was…you felt as if you were strangled because you couldn't actually actively criticize if you were getting funding. You didn't have an independent voice. And most of the organisations were relying on government funding. And so in a way, you were, you know, muzzled really.

(CBO3-F)

This attempted remoulding and shaping has been further consolidated through a tight disciplining of civic groups whereby both the activities of the groups themselves and those of their "clients" are coming under what many of our respondents view as excessive and overly bureaucratised scrutiny. For example, one of our respondents discusses the near exclusive focus within the most recent iteration of a council-led community forum on the budgets and activities of relatively small local CBOs with little or no accountability for centralised services. While such a focus perhaps makes sense given the centralisation of policing, education and welfare services in Ireland, the point being made by the respondent is that there is a lack of scrutiny or

accountability of these services and their delivery at local levels, despite the existence of

structures to do so.

> From my experience around the table the only thing that gets looked at is the local development…it's the SICAP**,** that's the only thing. You have all these people around the table and they are talking about…in our case, say 1.2 million or 1.3 million Euro and the multimillion Euro organisations are not getting any kind of scrutiny… I think it's [the community forum] probably not a bad model, if they could make it work. But can you ever see a time where the Guards [police] or Department of Education, or [Department of] Social Welfare, or any of the large agencies will actually be answerable to the local authority? Can you see it?
>
> (CBO3-F)

Moreover, the new range of detailed reporting and monitoring systems required for each "client"

who engages with local civic groups is viewed as both unnecessarily invasive and authoritarian.

As one respondent notes, "death by bureaucracy has now replaced debt by economic austerity…

there's a new authoritarianism." (CA4-M). The excessive and invasive level of detail required by

the new IRIS[14] management system introduced as part of the SICAP programme is signalled

repeatedly in interviews. One respondent explains:

> IRIS is the bane of all of our lives. I'll give you an example of it. So, every single person that walks in this door that you work with, you have to fill out this individual registration form with them that is about six or seven pages long… So you fill out one of those and then, you have to fill out a personal action plan with them. And you have to get them to sign a consent form. And then, every time you have an interaction with them, you have to write it up…. My first two weeks back here all I did was sit in front of the computer and fill out IRIS forms.
>
> (CBO2-F)

Another respondent notes that many "clients" find this level of surveillance invasive and

demeaning, "A lot of people look at this document [IRIS form] and they say, 'I'm not telling you

that I live in a financially difficult household. I'm not going to tell you that. I only want to do

f***ing Tai Chi or Chair Aerobics', you know what I mean?" (FG2-M). In addition to its excessive invasion of people's privacy and dignity, another criticism of the IRIS system, together with other monitoring and reporting systems which have been introduced over the austerity period, is their overly mechanistic approach which reduces the complex work of community development to mere box ticking exercises. In failing to capture qualitative information on the success or otherwise of interventions, or indeed information on preventative measures, valuable and necessary learning is now lost. As one respondent explains, "There's a question on the form 'have you ever been discriminated by a service?'. Your answer is a Yes or No response. But there's no space to say how they were discriminated. So, while I understand what their arguments are, I don't see though how it's working, where the learning is…" (CBO2-F). Another articulates her frustration at this reductionism and meaningless bureaucracy, "the officials in the local authorities, they.... They didn't know what this was about. They were learning as well. They'd be saying, "Oh, that box hasn't been ticked", and that level of…it felt it was being reduced to that, you know? And it didn't actually really matter what you were doing as long you ticked the right box… that's incredibly frustrating when you've been doing something for a very long time, or you feel you're moving things on and, you know, kind of going deeper into the kind of preventative side and early intervention." (CBO3-F)

Overall therefore, the austerity period has consolidated the process of rationalisation, reconfiguration and disciplining of civil society groups that had already commenced in the pre-austerity period. While a number of respondents acknowledge the need for rationalisation, "it did focus on organisational structures in terms of how they can be more effectively managed with the limited set of resources. So, it did concentrate efforts and minds on that", (CF2-M), the

overall consensus is that this rationalisation has done far more damage than good and that it will be difficult to pull back from this over the short to medium term. While savings may well have been achieved with the cull of the sector, the inevitable upshot is that the geographic area and target populations that organisations are now expected to cover are completely unrealistic. To take just one example, one of the area-based Partnerships in the city has a target population increase of 15,500 people to 125,000 and is now operating with less staff (VO1-M and VO2-M). Asked how this will work out, an employee's response is "Well necessarily, it's going to have to be a superficial process." (VO2-M). Clearly the severity of the cuts and disciplining of formal civic and community groups leave them with little or no capacity for any meaningful engagement with the social and political challenges and struggles facing residents across the city. While this has succeeded in containing many of the traditional organising forces of dissent in communities across the city, as we will see later, the stresses and pressures it has generated have galvanised wider, more dispersed pockets of resistance and dissent. Before examining this development however, we turn to the third main practice of austerity governance – efforts at disciplining society more widely through a historicised reconstruction of the citizen-subject.

Reconstructing the citizen-subject

A preview of the final practice of austerity governance has already appeared in the ubiquitous deployment of the "we" discourse discussed previously which, reconstructing the crisis backstory and "truth", is aimed at shifting and distributing shame across society broadly. This discursive tactic forms part of a wider, more ambitious practice of social engineering at individual levels. What is involved here is no less than a reconstruction of the citizen-subject where talk of duties and responsibilities overshadows talk of rights; where strict parameters are

set on what constitutes acceptable and rational behaviour; and where the "we're all in this together" trope translates into "voluntary" engagement – both physical and financial – in managing the social fallout of austerity.   While, as previously noted, the promotion of civic duty, responsibility, obedience and respectability has long featured prominently in hegemonic discourse in Ireland[15], the internalisation of such norms has been consolidated through the austerity period where a renewed emphasis on personal responsibility and financial discipline (to the strains of "we all partied"*)*, community responsibility and duty (to the strains of "we're all in this together")*,* and behavioural restraint and discipline (to the strains of "we are where we are"*)* permeates official discourse. Some excerpts from our interviews provide a flavour of this. On personal responsibility and financial discipline, a hope is expressed that we have all learned something from our collective prolificacy. As one respondent notes:

> The aftershock and the effect of austerity is that it will change how <u>we</u> will...I think it will change <u>our</u> whole approach to, you know, to saving and to investment hopefully for the better. Without turning us into kind of robots, that <u>we</u> will be more reflective and more considerate, let's just say, in <u>our</u> approach.
>
> <div align="right">(O1-F-my emphasis)</div>

Another respondent, casting his mind back to a (fictional) time when "money was flying around" feels "I think <u>we</u> didn't pay enough attention and say stop. There's too much money flying around. Money was used to solve every problem." (O4-M-my emphasis)

On community responsibility and duty, the traditional emphasis on volunteering is now complemented with suggestions of financial self-reliance and support. "I would argue that actually, look, communities need to take control of things themselves… The idea of actually developing an income stream for certain services that actually, then go back into, they're

reinvested into delivery of services to communities by community organisations, I would argue that's really healthy.". (CF1-M). While the ethos and practice of volunteering has a long history in the Irish state, this has been given further support during the austerity period with the state directly intervening to direct and manage voluntary sectors throughout the country. As the state official responsible for this activity notes, "Voluntary activity was hugely important during the course of the austerity period." (O3-M). In his view, this constitutes a responsible and dutiful form of civic engagement, "it's those people who didn't sit in bed and moan or, you know, stare at daytime TV all day. They actually went out and did something else." (idem.).

Finally, regarding behavioural restraint and discipline, there appears room only for "rational", measured forms of communication. Anger is frowned upon and dissent eschewed. As with community responsibility and duty, and reflecting some degree of internalisation of dominant norms within organised civil society, this view appears to be shared by state officials and representatives from charitable foundations alike, as well as across much of the mainstream media. So while officials, predictably and, to some extent – in their unenviable position at the frontline of public frustration and anger – understandably, express little time for dissent or organised protest…

> The reality is that we want to deal with people who are reasonable and we are more likely to listen to them and take on board their views if they make their points reasonably and rationally rather than coming in, kind of thumping the table.
>
> (O1-F)

... this view is also expressed by one of the representatives from a Charitable Foundation interviewed who makes a clear distinction between what he views as effective (volunteering) and ineffective (protest) power.

> So it's one thing saying ye've the power to…but people actually need to know, 'Okay, well, how do we use it? How do we use it effectively as opposed to shouting and roaring?'. There is another way which is about using it effectively to develop and give something to my community where I'm from.
>
> (CF2-M)

This is particularly noticeable in the mainstream framing of the so called "water protest" where the diversity of protestors and tactics (see below) is ignored and resistance is labelled "ugly", "nasty", "unpatriotic" and "dangerous". The contrasting views of two respondents give a flavour of this framing. While the first respondent feels that protest organisers have gone too far, the second bemoans the mainstream homogenous framing of protesters.

> What worries me here actually, is that the rules of the game are out. We have, we have brought something very ugly on to the street. And the people who've done it don't know what to do with it…. What do you do with that? Because you enter a whole space of sort of, it's bordering…, a lot of the behaviour, it's bordering on criminality.
>
> (CF1-M)

> We were unpatriotic. That was a big spin… We were a rag bag of Troskyists. There was a discrediting of people and just a refusal to accept…. Politically, we live in a very authoritarian state in lots of ways. Like the window for dissent is very small. Like it's so frustrating, in some ways, to see.
>
> (CA2-M)

While much effort has been expended on softer discursive approaches to this disciplining, the severity of austerian cuts and policies has also forced the state to go further and to resort to harder, more coercive measures in building consent and compliance. Both the legislative and security apparatus have been deployed in instilling pressure and fear in the populace and forcing consent in relation to more unpopular measures. For example, as a number of our respondents note, public compliance for both newly introduced property taxes and bin charges were secured through forced collection (pay deductions for state employees) as well as through the court system. Meanwhile, the police response to protests over the introduction of water charges in 2014 and 2015 is widely reported by many of our respondents (together with commentators more broadly – see Finn, 2015; Coulter, 2015) as wildly disproportionate.

> The level of Garda[16] mobilisation of some of the localised water protest served as an eye opener for people where they felt that the Guards were policing austerity over…they prioritise that over the policing of crime and stuff… So, people draw conclusions from that, in terms of how the state has an oppressive apparatus which it uses as a means of containing anger and opposition.
>
> (EP3-M)

The state's overly coercive approach in this regard may ultimately prove its Achilles heel however as, as we will now see, dispersed "networks of outrage and hope" (Castells, 2012) across the city have found their voice and are proving difficult to silence.

Resistance and Resilience: Public responses

> What strikes me with austerity is that it's hugely unjust. It's hugely unfair. And that we're being forced to carry burdens for a class of people who basically are financial speculators. And they speculated and lost. Instead of carrying their losses, they put them onto us.

> People are just incensed. Not because they are the left-wing. Not because they are radical revolutionaries. It's because they've been shafted. They can see that they do not have pensions. They see no future for the kids.

<div align="right">(EP2-M)</div>

I open this section with just two of the many expressions of public frustration and anger we encountered over the course of this research. These help explain the depth and scope of the public response which finally found voice and action following moves to introduce a final additional charge – this time on water – in 2014[17]. The origins of this move stem back to 2013 where, in line with the conditions set out in the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the IMF in 2010, the government transferred responsibility for water provision from local councils to a newly established body called *"Irish Water"*. In 2014, a set of new water charges was introduced. As Finn (2015, p.44) points out, from the state's point of view, the move appeared to have several merits. In the short term, it would produce a new revenue stream. Further down the line, it would transform a public asset into a profit-making firm that could be sold off to private interests. Most importantly however, the establishment of *"Irish Water"* as a formally independent company allowed the state to reduce the national debt, as its borrowings would not be kept on the state's books.

While the move certainly had its merits therefore for the state, it was ultimately to prove its undoing. In what respondents repeatedly referred to as "the straw that broke the camel's back", the new tax and public furore that surrounded the establishment of "Irish Water"[18] signalled the

end of any illusion of compliance and discipline on the part of the country's citizens, notably within the Dublin area. Pockets of localised resistance – to bill payment and to the installation of new water meters – grew across Dublin, together with a number of other cities, towns and villages, as neighbourhoods organised in opposition. Building on these pockets of resistance, a series of public protest marches led by a number of Trade Union movements were organised from October 2014 forward and what became known as "The Anti-Water movement", a national movement, was borne. However, as our respondents repeatedly emphasise, this was never just a single-issue movement and it was never just about water. It was simply the final straw for a frustrated, tired, angry populace who decided enough was enough. As one of our respondents notes, "What people wanted, people wanted something to voice their concern. People wanted something to voice their anger. And they saw this as mechanism. But it's not in any sense just about water." (CF2-M). Another makes explicit reference to the timing of the protests, "I don't think it was an anti-tax movement. I think it was an anti-austerity movement really. That's what it was. Water was a very important medium. But it was the mechanism that carried all of the frustration. And it actually gave people the lever. It gave you the lever because the bill came in the front door... Had water charges been introduced 10 years ago, they probably would have been passed. The timing of the water charges was like, 'let's kick people and continue to kick them for as long as we like and they'll never do anything'." (CA2-M).

Nor was this ever a single-tactic movement. While the public marches caught the media headlines, there was much internal differentiation within the movement. A wide variety of tactics and strategies characterised resistance across the city and a wide diversity of people became involved. For example, a survey carried out in 2015 of 2,556 people involved in the

"water protests" found that 54 per cent were what I call "new activists" – i.e. people who had never protested about anything in their lives before. The reasons cited by 60 per cent of these was that "austerity has gone too far", Hearne (2015). Moreover, many of our respondents observe that a high proportion of those involved in local acts of solidarity and resistance are women. Thus, rather than mobilising what one might regard as 'the usual suspects' – the "angry mob" as the mainstream media chose to present it (see Finn, 2015; and Power, Devereux & Haynes, 2016 on the mediatisation of protest, and Preston & Silke, 2014 on the mediatisation of the crisis more broadly), resistance to austerity has cut across classes and neighbourhoods throughout the city. As one of our respondents notes,

> …mainly women with children will be totally anti-austerity because they see it for… there has been nothing progressive for their children. And most working men and women who find that they're paying the massive Universal Social Charge. Their wages have been cut. They have no pension to speak of. And they say 'well, that's austerity'.
>
> (EP2-M)

Others emphasise the grassroots, non-politically aligned nature of the movement, "Very quickly – and this was the strength of the movement – huge numbers of ordinary people who'd never been involved in politics came forward. And in many cases, you know, came right to the sort of centre of organising stuff, and played leading roles in organising stuff. So that was a new development.", (EP11-F). "They would have had no interaction with the councillor or council-based structures or maybe no prior Resident's Association even… People have improvised their own ways. They've organised themselves through social media and so on and so forth.", (EP3-M).

A final notable feature of the activism welling up across the city is the diversity of strategies and actions employed. While much commentary has focused on the public marches, our interviews with these "new activists" reveal a wide range of activities and tactics. As one respondent notes, while not everyone could or chose to join the marches, many other tactics were also employed, "As a tactic, not everybody can come on the marches. Not everybody thinks it's a great way to do things." (EP2-M). Other activities that some of our respondents were (and continue to be) involved in sway between resilience and resistance. Some, such as water meter blockades, demonstrate overt dissent and resistance. Others, such as local fundraising and soup kitchen volunteerism, might be regarded as more pragmatic and modest in intent and indicative of an ongoing resilience across neighbourhoods and communities. Activities outlined by respondents range from neighbourhood blockades of water meter installations; community support to protestors (food, tents, childcare, advice and counselling in the aftermath of police confrontation); organisation of and involvement in public meetings and online discussion groups; establishment and management of food banks; volunteering in food kitchens; fundraising drives; and of course, in the specific instance of water, simple non-payment of bills. By May 2016, according to "Irish Water's" own figures, less than 50 per cent of the population had paid their bills and there was an overall revenue shortfall of over 50 per cent. In July 2016, the government finally capitulated to popular resistance and scrapped the new water charges scheme. At the time of writing (January, 2018), it remains unclear what will replace it.

Possibly a more significant outcome of these developments however, and the one most consistently highlighted by respondents, is the way in which diverse and variegated acts of collective resistance, solidarity and support have contributed to the healing and rebuilding of

fractured and atomised communities. As one of our respondents notes "The anti-water charges campaign is kind of...Like first of all, incredibly hopeful… it has been very useful in places like [neighbourhood X] where there is a diversity of people living, in bringing together new residents with older residents around a common cause.". (EP4-F). Another of our respondents describes the impacts and outflows of different acts of solidarity following her involvement in local water meter protests …

> So the people themselves, which I thought was really fantastic… people would allow us in their garden to set tents up, you know?... Such kindness. So that people could gather in that space, you know? And people would donate say a kettle or a radio. And then what started to happen was people started to kind of just talk to each other, you know? People got to know each other. People that would have only nodded to each other [in the past] who are now actually sharing stories, you know… And I thought to myself, of all of the memories that I have - and I hope to live to a very old age – that for me was the absolute most amazing thing that I witnessed.
>
> (CA3-F)

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this community building aspect of the movement, it certainly merits greater study and consideration – notably in the light of David Imbroscio's compelling critique in this journal of the dominant "meritocratic paradigm" imbuing most urban critique and policy which focuses on the urban poor's lack of opportunity for social mobility as the key driver of disadvantage (Imbroscio, 2016). Critiquing this meritocratic approach on both empirical and normative grounds, Imbroscio argues instead for a "community paradigm" – the aim being "to promote not just the well-being of individual employees but rather a more generalized stabilization of the broader urban community" (2016, p. 94). While Imbroscio's focus is more on community-based economic structures and processes or "solidarity economies" – e.g. worker co-ops, community finance institutions (like credit unions and

community-owned banks), community land trusts, consumer co-ops etc. which will "possibly provide the means to provide disadvantaged urbanites a better life – a life marked by… a greater ability to more fully exercise a greater array of capabilities" (ibid), a necessary prerequisite to these is the rebuilding of trust and solidarity within communities. In the context of a significantly depleted formal community development sector, these dispersed and diverse sites of solidarity and resilience may well serve as incubators for such transformations.

Conclusion: Rationalisation, resistance and resilience – some implications

Austerity governance in Dublin is at a critical juncture. Embedded in, and highly dependent on, powerful networks of national and global capital, the privileging of these networks over the interests and welfare of the city's residents has come at a significant price for all involved, most particularly its ruling elite. Although globally, the "poster child" moniker persists, and internally, the state and its allies have enjoyed some success in controlling the narrative and in shaping and moulding a reluctant, weary and somewhat disgruntled hegemonic elite of municipal authorities and civil society groups, the period of weary compliance and acquiescence among the wider public appears to be over. Something very significant has taken place in neighbourhoods and communities throughout Dublin. As one of our respondents notes, "I think there's something fundamentally that's changed in terms of people's psyche in terms of how they see the world. Where previously they would have accepted it, a bit like the [Catholic] Church. They would have accepted it. Now they say, 'Hold on', you know? 'The emperor has no clothes'. And once you switch that on in people, they start to see other things.", (CF2-M). Another sees no turning back, "It's a feeling that people have been hoodwinked. And there's nothing worse

than making a fool of a person. There's a whole load of emotional issues that come in to it then. We were fooled with the whole Celtic Tiger business and the fact that the poor people were made disproportionately to carry the costs, I don't think anybody would argue with that, right? And, you know, we were duped. And 'We won't be fooled again', as 'The Who' said.". (VO2-M).

As the social and psychological costs of austerity have escalated, the city has experienced something of a political renaissance. A new and diverse political class has emerged, diffused throughout communities and neighbourhoods across the city. Enthused by their success on the water issue and buoyed up by their power in the face of a seemingly intractable elite, activists are confident that they effect broader transformations across the city. In the words of one of our respondents,

> We did this without burning anything or breaking anything or smashing anything. We did it through sheer grit, people power, civil disobedience, and being kind to each other, and listening to each other. And if we can do that for our water, we can definitely do that for education, and we can definitely do it for our health. We can do it for everything.
>
> (CA3-F)

These dispersed, heterogenous, non-aligned pockets of resistance and resilience strongly resonate with the depiction of contemporary urban movements more broadly as set out by Mayer (2013) *inter alia.* While some of Dublin's "new activists" have been persuaded to enter into municipal politics, the majority is choosing non-formal paths.   For many involved, the relative success of activities around the "water protests" has developed into activism on the city's acute housing crisis for example. According to one respondent (EP8-M), there are 19 different grassroots

housing groups across the city at present and activists are once again engaged in diverse acts. These range from defiant acts of resistance – for example, high profile media protests – to less openly defiant but nonetheless crucial acts of solidarity, support and resilience – for example, soup kitchens and fund raising drives for the city's new homeless (CA3-F, CA4-F). Their diverse trajectories thus bear more in common with those of activists in Athens and Baltimore (see Chronianopoulos et al and Pill this issue) than Barcelona (see Blanco et al this issue) and resonate with the more complex, variegated forms of resistance to subjectification outlined by Rose, 1999 and discussed earlier. Following MacLeod, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2014; and Dikeç and Swyngedouw, 2017, I argue that these diverse trajectories and choices, in tandem with the different levels of subjectification I have described here, present new challenges to urban critical theory in its definition as to what constitutes the "political" both theoretically and spatially. The Dublin case demonstrates that political activism extends far beyond strategically-organised overt acts of resistance and confrontation between the dominant and the dominated and far beyond the formal institutions of municipal politics. And while it remains far too early to determine if the political activism described here remains limited to an "evental moment" (Dikeç & Swyngedouw, 2017, p.8) or is, in fact, the beginning of an arduous journey towards a transformed, more egalitarian city, the recognition of dispersed acts of resilience and resistance as political is important for our understanding of the potential of political transformations within our cities.

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NOTES

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[3] "Ireland becomes poster child for implementing austerity programmes", *The Guardian, November 27th, 2011, available at https://www.theguardian.com/business/economics-blog/2011/nov/27/ireland-poster-child-for-austerity-programmes,* accessed March 26th, 2017*;* See also Roche, Prothero & O'Connell (2017).

[4] The eight cities are Athens, Baltimore, Barcelona, Dublin, Leicester, Nantes, Melbourne and Montreal. See the other articles in this special issue for more on these other cities.

[5] The latest Central Bank figures (December 2016) indicate that these stood at just over 10 per cent of all privately owned residences – see https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/statistics/data-and-analysis/credit-and-banking-statistics/mortgage-arrears/residential-mortgage-arrears-and-repossessions-statistics-december-2016.pdf?sfvrsn=9, accessed April 4th, 2017.

[6] See, for example, the Department of Social Welfare's press release – "Core welfare rates protected" – available at http://www.welfare.ie/en/pressoffice/Pages/pa051212.aspx, accessed April 4th, 2017.

[7] "Taoiseach blames crash on "mad borrowing" frenzy, *The Irish Times,* January 26th, 2012, available at http://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/ireland/taoiseach-blames-crash-on-mad-borrowing-frenzy-1.694880, accessed April 4th, 2017.

[8] It is noteworthy that this mantra articulates a classical "austerian realist" position as characterised by Davies et al (this issue).

[9] The one possible exception is the socio-economic mapping index – the Pobal HP Deprivation index – which is supported by the state funded agency Pobal – see

https://www.pobal.ie/Pages/New-Measures.aspx, accessed 30th March, 2017. However, as a number of respondents have noted, this mapping in places combines areas of extremely high and extremely low socio-economic advantage (for example the city's financial district and the North Inner City) thereby masking pockets of extreme deprivation and marginalisation across the city.

[10] See http://www.politicalworld.org/archive/index.php/t-10708.html and http://www.irisheconomy.ie/index.php/2012/01/02/richard-tol-leaves-the-esri/, accessed April 4th, 2017.

[11] While Dublin City Council has been subject to similar public sector retrenchment measures characterising austerity urbanism globally (Peck 2012), these can hardly explain the apparent lack of budgetary records across the cities five administrative districts. One of our Research Assistant's spent six months chasing these figures to no avail. We were informed by a senior accounting official that the local offices "do not have information on their overall area expenditures and they don't have control over those programmes" (O7-M).

[12] SICAP (The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme) is the current local and community development programme. It is administered by a number of civil society groups which were successful in a new public tendering process and is overseen by the LCDC committee.

[13] "Charities faced 'gag order'": Council proposed halting funds for critics of government", Michael Cogley, *The Times,* January 27th, 2018, available at https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/charities-faced-gag-order-pxzdhxk72, accessed January 28th, 2018.

[14] The Integrated Reporting and Information System (IRIS) is described by the OECD (2014: 56) as "an integrated caseload management tool for the LCDP". It was developed by Pobal in 2010 and rolled out in 2011. Pobal uses the data in IRIS to oversee the implementation of the LCDP. It includes the objectives, annual work plans, budgets and expenditure for each LDC detailed on a quarterly basis. According to the OECD (2014: 26), it includes the personal details for over 100,000 people who have participated in the programme.

[15] This has been, in no small part, aided by the historically close relationship between church and state. The state's "active citizenship" campaign represents a more recent manifestation of this – see Gaynor (2013).

[16] The Garda Síochána, or "Guards" are they are often known, is the Irish Police Force.

[17] Up to this point, water in Dublin and across the country was financed from general taxation.

[18] The government's attempt to introduce the new water charge was not helped by its ham-fisted implementation of the programme including legislation rushed through the parliament; cronyism on the board; over Euro 50 million awarded in consultant fees (initially denied by the Minister responsible); widespread confusion over and changes to charges; widespread billing errors; and a lack of any accountability for the ensuing mess – See for example, Kathy Sheridan, "The water

charges fiasco: a lesson in how not to do things", *The Irish Times,* December 13th, 2014, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/the-water-charges-fiasco-a-lesson-in-how-not-to-do-things-1.2035901, accessed 28th March, 2017.