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## Working Paper of Reflections in the Eyes of a Dying Tiger: Looking Back on Ireland's 1987 Economic Crisis

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# REFLECTIONS IN THE EYES OF A DYING TIGER: LOOKING BACK ON IRELAND'S 1987 ECONOMIC CRISIS

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## 1. Introduction

After centuries of strife, Ireland gained its independence from the United Kingdom (UK) in 1921. The new state was born violently into a world recovering from the ravages of the Great War and the subsequent flu pandemic. Since its birth in crisis, Ireland has had its fair share of subsequent crises, all of which are well-documented elsewhere (for example, Lee, 1989). In this chapter, in the context of the current economic crisis, we examine talk that reflects on, and creates representations of, an Irish economic crisis from a quarter century ago.

The discourse analysed is taken from two episodes of a popular radio chat show, which featured 30-minute interviews with its individual guests. This is different from the post-crisis representations examined elsewhere in this volume in that we focus upon interactional spoken discourse, thus availing ourselves of the speaker's 'own ability to artfully (and very helpfully) poke holes in each others' positions to reveal their constructed nature' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 162). Another feature of the discourse studied is that this radio show's chat show format allows a calmer type of discourse to emerge as, although issue-based questions are asked, it has a more biographical and personal style than a news interview. The analysis of this chapter therefore complements the work of other chapters in this volume which look at the more immediate responses to a crisis.

There are many discourse-analytical approaches and many issues that could be analysed in the data presented here. For example, Phelan's (2007) valuable critical discourse-analytical work on neoliberal hegemony in constructions of the Irish economy might have been fruitfully followed. Instead, we chose to focus on how, in 2008, two right-

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of-centre public personae in Ireland constructed, as the period of Irish economic prosperity known as the Celtic Tiger faded, the previous economic crisis of 1987. Unlike most of the other contributions to this volume, the interpretative perspective that we provide is the institutional 'context of situation' of the radio chat show, as well as the broader sociopolitical and historical background, aligning our study with some of the principles of the Discourse-Historical Approach (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009: 93). In analyzing the interviewees' constructions of the 1987 crisis, we have also been inspired by Potter and Wetherell's framework (1987), which stresses the importance of variation, as much as similarities in discourse.

To provide a macro-context for this analysis, the next section presents a brief and reasonably conventional description of relevant Irish economic history. We then focus on the micro-context of the chat show programme from which the interview data comes. Our main research focus is on the specific contents or topics of the discourse, rather than lexical or syntactic realizations. In addition to sensitising the reader to the nature of such chat show data, we also provide brief biographies of the interviewer and the two interviewees as their personae are so essential to the chat show. An analysis of the interview talk is then offered in a manner designed to allow readers to explore, to some degree, the validity of our interpretations. We then draw some lessons from our work in the concluding section.

## **2. The context of Ireland's economy: A tale of two crises**

In this section we provide a background to the crisis that is the topic of discussion in the talk we analyse, as well as the context in which that talk took place. This requires us to tell a tale of two crises and so a story of Ireland stretching from 1973 to 2008. This tale faces not only the difficulty of having to be told within the constraints of a short chapter, but it is also a narrative that faces some more subtle challenges.

As Jacobs (1996: 1246) points out an 'event does not become a public crisis automatically or instantaneously'. Furthermore, constructions of a crisis take significant work as Mårtenson and Lindhoff (1998) show, and the resulting shaping of 'the popular imagination about the crisis... is highly contested' (Thompson, 2009: 520). Rather than trying to engage in that contestation here, we attempt to represent the conventional story of that crisis. We do this both to provide some sense of empirical context, but also to give a textual background against which the analysed speech is set. Such a conventional story cannot, of course, be told in a completely neutral manner, but by using canonical sources and conventional statistical measures, the main thrust of the conventional story should be communicated.

### **2 (a) The Origins of the Crisis**

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In 1973, Ireland joined the then European Economic Community as Western economies were emerging from the long post-World War II boom and facing into the dramatically increased energy prices of the first oil crisis. Both the outgoing Fianna Fáil and incoming coalition government of Fine Gael and Labour responded to the economic troubles with current budget deficit spending. This was the first time Ireland adopted such a Keynesian response (Haughton, 2011: 15). As the economy began to recover, the coalition government acted in a Keynesian counter-cyclical fashion by raising taxes (Ó'Gráda, 1997). Whether these attempts to restrain government debt would have been successful, we will never know, as the 1977 election saw Ireland vote for 'Fianna Fáil's extravagant and irresponsible 1977 election programme' (Ó'Gráda, 1997: 30). This newly elected government implemented an expansionary fiscal policy when the economy was already growing at an unsustainable rate (OECD, 1982: 10). The good times rolled, but soon 'it was plain to all that the rising national debt produced by tax reductions and big increases in public spending failed to produce the growth and revenue to sustain it' (Ó'Gráda, 1997: 30). In January 1980 Charles Haughey, who had become the Fianna Fáil leader and Taoiseach (or Prime Minister) in late 1979 addressed the nation in a television broadcast and gravely delivered the following message:

As a community we are living away beyond our means. I do not mean that everyone in the community is living too well. Clearly many are not and have barely enough to get by. But taking us all together, we have been living at a rate which is simply not justified by the amount of goods and services we are producing. (Aldous, 2007: 144)

## 2 (b) Policy Drift and the Deepening Crisis

Despite this analysis of the problem, Haughey's 1979-1981 government did not make much progress toward austerity before the election of June, 1981 replaced it with a short-lived, tax-raising, Fine Gael/Labour coalition led by Garret FitzGerald. Haughey returned as Taoiseach after an indecisive election in February 1982 by *inter alia* managing to 'outbid FitzGerald for the support of a new independent ... [representative of ] one of the most deprived areas of the country' and with a finance minister, Ray MacSharry, who promised 'boom and bloom' (Lee, 1989: 508). Despite this rhetoric at the start of the administration, it seemed that MacSharry and Haughey were committed from about July, 1982, to cut spending to address the worsening budgetary situation and this determination was probably the main reason they lost the confidence of parliament in October, 1982.

The November 1982 election saw the return of the Fine Gael and Labour coalition, led again by FitzGerald. This government again focussed on raising taxes in an effort to address the problem of a rising national debt. Some improvements in Ireland's fortunes can be found in lower inflation, improvements in the current account of the balance of payments and the slowed rate of increase in the national debt (Lee, 1989: 520). However, by the end of

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FitzGerald's five-year term, in '1987 the Irish economy was universally seen to have reached nadir' (Economist Intelligence Unit, 1992: 6).

## 2 (c) Policy Consensus and Economic Revival

Fianna Fáil won the February 1987 general election and, although only able to form a minority administration, its first budget sought much greater fiscal adjustment than had been achieved previously (OECD, 1989: 16). The current budget deficit was reduced 'to 1.7 per cent of GDP through reductions in real government spending that made Margaret Thatcher's efforts look gentle' (Haughton, 2011: 23). From the opposition benches Fine Gael supported Haughey and MacSharry's austerity efforts. The Fianna Fáil government, in concert with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the Irish Business Employer's Confederation (referred to subsequently as the social partners) implemented the Programme for National Recovery. This was the first in a series of national agreements encompassing pay, taxation and broad social goals. These measures, together with a global economic recovery, a devaluation of the currency in 1986 under the previous Fine Gael/Labour coalition, the influx of foreign direct investment in anticipation of the Single European Market, an educated, but relatively low-wage, workforce and a low corporation tax rate facilitated economic revival (Haughton, 2011; O'Hearn, 1998). Over the subsequent two decades the country transformed from one of the poorest in the European Union (EU) to one of the richest (IMF, 2010a).

However, some aspects of economic growth in Ireland between 1987 and 2007 were not equally healthy and as Timoney (2010) points out, by 2000 economists were expressing concern over the sustainability of Ireland's economic expansion. Despite the forebodings of economists, domestic and international agencies and even 'clear warnings on the risks of pro-cyclical fiscal action' from the Department of Finance (Wright, 2010: 21), government spending grew during the boom years, particularly from 2006. The Fianna Fáil led coalition government's attitude to counter-cyclical policy was captured by the Minister for Finance, Charlie McCreevy (1997-2004), who 'mocked economists' warnings of the dangers of this stance with his widely publicised dictum: "When I have money I spent it; when I don't, I don't" (Barry, 2010: 38). Due to a heavy reliance on taxes levied on property transactions, the state's finances became closely tied to the property and construction sectors, particularly as activity in those sectors grew.

A significant proportion of economic activity became concentrated in the construction industry, with that sector tripling in size between 1995 and 2005 (Timoney, 2010). Though initially rapid property price inflation was driven by other factors, it was further facilitated by Ireland's membership of the Euro zone in 1999, with historically low interest rates, and by cash-rich international financial markets. From 2003, the banks began adding fuel to the fire with 100 per cent mortgages, together with a more relaxed approach to assessing credit worthiness (Honohan, 2010: 25). Like its government, Ireland's banks became highly exposed to property and construction with the 'share of bank assets in property-related

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lending growing from less than 40 per cent before 2002 to over 60 per cent by 2006' (Honohan, 2010: 26).

## 2 (d) Death of the Celtic Tiger

In September, 2007 there was a run on a British bank, Northern Rock, which resulted in a state rescue and subsequent nationalisation (Reinhart and Rogoff, 2009: 2). The following year, United States authorities refused to rescue one of America's top five banks, Lehman Brothers. In 2008, as the global economic crisis took hold, international trade volumes collapsed and the large economies of Europe slipped into recession. A sharp decline in house prices affected Ireland's entire economy with the associated fall in residential investment 'estimated to have directly reduced the level of real GDP by 8 percent' (Ahearne, 2010: 4). By late September 2008 share values in Irish banks collapsed, with the biggest loser being Anglo-Irish Bank (Murphy and Devlin, 2009: 4). Anglo is now notorious, considered by some to be 'the world's worst bank' (Lewis, 2011). The banks, now reliant on short-term international loans, faced a liquidity crisis. In response, the government provided a full guarantee for all monies lent to Irish banks - effectively socializing their losses. Thus, 20 years of economic expansion came to a jarring halt in the late 2000s as the economy plunged into recession (Timoney, 2010).

The changes in politics were equally dramatic. From 1997 a series of coalition governments had been led by Fianna Fáil. At the end of November 2010, in order to fully recapitalise the now effectively nationalised banks and to allow the state to meet its budgetary obligations, Ireland accepted an International Monetary Fund (IMF) and EU 'bailout' package valued at €85bn (Labanyi, 2010). In February 2011, a general election was held, which saw Fianna Fáil lose 72 percent of its seats in parliament – an historic reversal of fortune for the party that had dominated Irish politics since the 1930s. Thus, the problems in the Irish banking systems at the end of the 2000s, compounded by the international recession and the implosion of the Irish property bubble, brought the Irish economy to its knees and transformed its political landscape.

## 3. The context of the *Conversations with Eamon Dunphy* radio show

Both of the interactions analysed here were part of a Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) radio series entitled *Conversations with Eamon Dunphy*. RTÉ is the state-owned national broadcaster resourced by both a television licence fee and by advertising. This series ran between September, 2006 and April, 2009. Across its four series it comprised over 120 half-hour shows broadcast on Saturday mornings. Though called *Conversations with Eamon Dunphy*, the program was not the same as ordinary casual conversation because, as a media interaction, 'it knowingly takes place *in front of* rather than *beside* an audience', and in the context of the institutional framework of a radio broadcaster (O'Keeffe, 2006: Section 1.1).



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Although the news interview seems to be evolving (Hutchby, 2011; Patrona, 2011) *Conversations with Eamon Dunphy* does not have the features of a news interview such as being issue-focused, displaying interviewer neutralism, having adversarial nature or being of relatively short interactional duration (Clayman, 1992; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991; Hutchby, 2006; O'Keeffe, 2006). The broadcaster has described the show as involving 'Artists, politicians, writers, sports people, entrepreneurs, and stars of every kind' (RTÉ, 2012). While an academic economist and a European Commissioner are not what we usually classify as stars, their status as publicly known personae and the personality focus of the show (even if the focus in this analysis concerns chat about particular issues) means *Conversations with Eamon Dunphy* falls into the category of chat show (Ilie, 2001; O'Keeffe, 2006). Even so, the particular episodes examined in this study highlight the high degree of hybridity that can be achieved in this kind of program (Ekström, 2011; Eriksson, 2010).

The chat show and similar media interviews are under-researched compared to news interviews (Tolson, 2006: 57), so much so that the news interview has become the standard to which other media interviews are compared (Rama-Martinez, 2003). Given the chat show interview tends to be less adversarial/more conversational than the news interview, it is natural to describe such interviews as 'more relaxed and "feel good" alternatives' that are 'less challenging' (Clayman and Heritage, 2002: 341). Lauerbach (2007) shows how these type of more conversational interviews lack some of the features of news interviews, such as the critical doubt expected of the interviewer; yet, as Lauerbach's analysis also shows, there is still much (if different) work to be done by interviewees in talk shows. As Ekström (2011: 531) points out, at least in the case of active politicians, the 'talk show is not such a trouble-free method for self-presentation as is often assumed'.

Central to a chat show is the personae of the host (O'Keeffe, 2006) and *Conversation with Eamon Dunphy* is typical in this regard. Eamon Dunphy is a media personality who has worked for a number of newspapers, radio and television networks. His journalism initially focused on football, he had been a professional soccer player, before branching out to encompass current events. Dunphy has proved very controversial throughout his career as a journalist with his outspoken views on football and politics (Hudson and Rowlands, 2004: 224).

One of the interviewees, Charlie McCreevy, is a career politician who was, at the time of the interview, an EU Commissioner. The other interviewee, Brendan Walsh, is a well-regarded academic economist. In this regard, having a politician and an expert, the data for our cases is similar to Lauerbach's (2007), but, whereas her work focussed on issue-based shorter television talk-show interviews, we concentrate upon personality-focussed single-interviewee radio shows of over 30 minutes. While both interviewees share some attributes and are perhaps to the right of the Irish political centre of gravity, their different and

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contrasting perspectives should provide us with some interesting stereoscopic insights, if only from a particular point of view.

Charlie McCreevy was first elected to Dáil Éireann (lower house of parliament) in 1977, representing the Kildare constituency. During the early 1980s he supported the controversial Fianna Fáil leader Charles Haughey, before turning against him in 1982 (Coghlan, 1984: 1). After 15 years in the Dáil, McCreevy became Minister for Social Welfare in 1992, after Haughey was pushed out, and the following year, he was appointed Minister for Tourism and Trade. In the Fianna Fáil/Progressive Democrat government (1997-2002), McCreevy served as Minister for Finance. In this post he oversaw Ireland's entry into the Monetary Union and the adoption of the Euro as legal tender. This was the period during which the Irish economy came to be referred to as the Celtic Tiger – rapid economic expansion, a huge growth in the workforce, free third-level education and a fall in unemployment to its natural level. McCreevy implemented a low-tax and low-regulation environment. This approach earned McCreevy a 'strong reputation as a free marketeer who had delivered prosperity unprecedented in his country's history as an independent state' (Norman, 2011: 246). Phelan (2007: 38) goes even further, referring to McCreevy as 'avowedly neoliberal' in his outlook.

Brendan Walsh has worked at the University of Massachusetts, Tufts University, the Irish Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and University College Dublin. He was elected to the Royal Irish Academy in 1980, and had held posts with National Planning Board, the Commission of the European Communities, the Harvard Institute for International Development, the European Parliament and the World Bank. He has published extensively on the Irish economy, and in recent years has written about the policies that led to the growth and development of the Celtic Tiger. During the early 1980s he advocated the introduction of a statutory limit on state borrowing and he subsequently argued for low income tax and a flexible labour market (Lysaght, 2008). Walsh has been categorised as a liberal – in the European, not American sense – by O'Donnell (2000: 188). In 2005, after 25 years, he retired from his position as Chair of Applied Economics and the National Economics of Ireland. At the time he was concerned that 'some things in the economy – such as deregulation and private sector in services such as health – are moving too slowly' (McCaffrey, 2004: 98). He is regarded as a scholar of international renown and 'the leading academic chronicler of the poor performance of the Irish economy in the late 1970s and 1980s' (Neary, 2006: 297). Thus, like McCreevy, Walsh is a most suitable producer of discourse on the 1987 Irish economic crisis, and an interesting 'point of entry' for examining the thematic representations of that crisis twenty years on.

#### **4. Interpreting the discourse of the Walsh and McCreevy interviews**



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The interview with Charlie McCreevy was first broadcast on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2008 and the interview with Brendan Walsh on 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2008 (RTÉ, 2012). Excluding breaks for music, selected by the interviewee, both interviews were composed of about 35 minutes of spoken interaction. Both interviews comprised about 170 turns each, with the interviewees, unsurprisingly, taking most of the talk time. Like the interview material analysed by Lauerbach (2007: 1388), it is clear that Dunphy and his guests tend to try to 'collaboratively produce a consensual point of view' compared to the more sceptical approach of a traditional news interview.

In both interviews the interviewees acknowledge 1987 as a crisis point, without using that word with reference to that year. McCreevy talks of how Charles Haughey became Taoiseach 'in 87 and turned the economy around' (RTÉ, 2012: McCreevy Interview, Turn 78). As we will see in Exhibit 6 below, Walsh accepts Dunphy's timing of the resolution of Ireland's problems as 1987, even if he sees important antecedents allowing the actions of that year to act as a turning point. That the interviews themselves are conducted at a troubled economic time is also acknowledged. McCreevy talks of the 'current financial turmoil' (RTÉ, 2012: McCreevy Interview, Turn 144), and Walsh, in one of the few uses of the word 'crisis' in the interview, states that 'we are undoubtedly facing a really big crisis' (RTÉ, 2012: Walsh Interview, Turn 170).

The Walsh interview contains just four mentions of the word 'crisis' all by the interviewee, with two referring to historic economic crises (the great depression of the 1930s and 1973 oil crisis) and two referring to the financial crisis starting in 2007. McCreevy's interview contains just two mentions of the word 'crisis', again both by the interviewee. In McCreevy's case both mentions refer to the non-economic Arms Crisis of 1970, when two government ministers, Charles Haughey and Neil Blaney, were dismissed from the cabinet by Taoiseach Jack Lynch over allegations that they had illegally aided the importation of arms for Irish nationalists in the then troubled UK-governed Northern Ireland.

This treatment of setting the economic crisis against other, perhaps even more dramatic, events, is indicative of a commonality we see in the way these interactions provide a historical context for discussion of crisis. This is the first of three interpretations of the discourse for which we provide a detailed interactional account (see 4(a) below), and is in contrast to the other detailed interpretations offered in 4(b) and 4(c), which reveal more of the differences between the two interactions.

#### 4 (a) Contextualising the crises in history

Both interviews provide a rather deep historic context. Walsh's talk stretches back to 1916, as he relates his mother's experience in her clothes shop during the 1916 rebellion that ultimately led to the Irish War of Independence and her retirement after the 1974 car bombings in Dublin damaged her shop (RTÉ, 2012: Walsh Interview Turns 9-12).

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McCreevy, tracing direct descent to canal workers of 1780, reflects on how secure a position his ancestors must have enjoyed given the economy of the era (RTÉ, 2012: McCreevy Interview, Turns 4-6). In addition to recalling the 1970 Arms Crisis noted above, McCreevy invokes the Irish Civil War (1922-1923) as formative in his own, much later, political career (RTÉ, 2012: McCreevy Interview, Turn 52) and the emigration and poverty of 1950s and 1960s as formative of his economic beliefs (RTÉ, 2012: McCreevy Interview, Turns 86-88). This invocation of past traumas and other bad times has a calming and reflective effect on the listener. This is perhaps best seen in Exhibit 1 below which is an extract from the Walsh interview.

Exhibit 1 Extract from the Walsh Interview

Turn Number	
58	Walsh: ... And then when the vacancy arose in the ESRI I applied for it and came back and eh was offered the post and decided to leave the United States in 1969
59	Dunphy: It was a <u>turbulent</u> time.
60	Walsh: <u>It was</u> and it was a time when you wondered about we'd had a child then our oldest boy was born there and it was a time when you wondered about bringing up a family in America and Ireland looked like a tranquil, safe place to come back to and the irony of it was I remember the first week we came back, I think it was September 1969 on a Sunday morning reading the headlines of the first RUC ((Royal Ulster Constabulary)) man to be killed in the troubles in Northern Ireland. His name was Victor Arbuckle and it's always stuck in my mind. And of course things got worse and worse as the years went by in the 70s here and in a way they'd settled down in America

Source: *Conversations with Eamon Dunphy*, 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2008 (RTÉ, 2012).

Walsh is talking about his career and in particular his return to Ireland in 1969, when Dunphy comments that 'It was a turbulent time' (Turn 59, Walsh Interview). Walsh responds to this initially by talking about the turbulent time in the US observing that 'Ireland looked like a tranquil, safe place to come back to' before quickly acknowledging that due to the Northern Ireland conflict that soon 'things got worse and worse as the years went by in the 70s here and in a way they'd settled down in America' (Turn 60, Walsh Interview). This kind of historic reflection, exemplified here, but peppered throughout both interviews, gives a calmness, almost world weariness, to these discussions of crisis.

Both interviews share this tone of near world weariness, as well as other features including agreement on 1987 as a significant turning point, pro-market urgings, expressions of the benefit of lower taxes and lower government spending, disapproval of government regulation, a largely benign appraisal of controversial politician Charles Haughey and a noting of contemporary economic problems. Nevertheless, as the analysis below will make

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clear, the construction of the 1987 crisis is still an issue of contention even among these two right of centre advocates.

#### 4 (b) Genesis of the 1987 crisis

In both interviews, Dunphy, in common with conventional understandings (see Section 2), constructs 1977 as a key moment in creating the Irish economic crisis of 1980s. Although McCreevy and Walsh take a right-of-centre position on the economy, we can see that they construct the genesis of the earlier economic crisis very differently when confronted with the date of 1977. This can be seen in the extract from the McCreevy interview in Exhibit 2 below.

#### Exhibit 2 Extract from the McCreevy Interview

Turn Number	
29	Dunphy: Commissioner, you were elected in 19 eh 77. This was the landslide victory when Jack Lynch was eh the leader, it was funnily enough it was year I came home from England and I came home just at the start of the election and there were incredible things on offer: no more council tax, no more car tax, which suited me very well ((laughs)) it was a give-away and it was a landslide victory and you you came in
30	McCreevy: Others came at the time eh say for that Bertie Ahern, Albert Reynolds, myself, Joe Walsh, Rory O'Hanlon, Pádraig Flynn. All those people came that time. We got a majority 84 to 64. It was a 148 seat Dáil . It was the first time the swing manifested itself in Irish politics don't forget so we all, all those new fellas came to the Dáil at that time.
31	Dunphy: You went to UCD ((University College Dublin)) ?

Source: *Conversations with Eamon Dunphy*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2008 (RTÉ, 2012).

Dunphy's question at the beginning of the extract (Turn 29, McCreevy Interview) takes 1977 as a key year: it marks the election to parliament of his guest, Charlie McCreevy, the landslide victory of Jack Lynch (and so of McCreevy's party Fianna Fáil) and 'funnily enough it was year I came home from England and I came home just at the start of the election and there were incredible things on offer' (Turn 29, McCreevy Interview). By focussing on the 'incredible things on offer: no more council tax, no more car tax, which suited me very well ((laughs)) it was a give-away' (Turn 29, McCreevy Interview), Dunphy draws our attention to the economic aspects of this special year of 1977, before mentioning briefly the landslide victory that saw his guest elected to parliament.

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McCreevy's response talks only of 1977's political, rather than economic, aspects through all of Turn 30 (McCreevy Interview). He highlights that this was 'the first time the swing manifested itself in Irish politics' (Turn 30, McCreevy Interview): this apparently is something that it is imperative, as he urges that we 'don't forget' it (Turn 30, McCreevy Interview). Dunphy's response, perhaps to the interviewee's resistance to focus on the economics of 1977, is to switch topics and ask about McCreevy's university experience (Turn 31, McCreevy Interview).

The McCreevy interview does return, 40 turns later, to 1977, as can be seen in Exhibit 3 below.

Exhibit 3 Extract from the McCreevy Interview

Turn Number	
71	Dunphy: You were a <u>dissident</u> within the Fianna Fáil party even against that first government ah that was led by Jack Lynch?
72	McCreevy: <I <u>oppose</u> >I thought the manifesto in '77 that I was helped me get in was not <u>sensible</u> say in economics=
73	Dunphy: Yes
74	McCreevy: =because >from '73 to '77 there had been a downturn >we'd building up a lot of debt so I thought it was the exact opposite we needed<. Now (.) when it came in 1977 I alig- without Charlie Haughey asking me I didn't know the man very well I was on that side of the argument anyway. Why? I, we would had on the Haughey on account of the <u>1970</u> Arms Crisis, we were on that side of the argument ah and so, so. And then secondly I believed economics the economic situation of the country warranted something else. So for both those reasons I thought Haughey was the person to <u>lead</u> the Fianna Fáil party. And I was <u>right</u> , eh of course. But then when-so I supported lot of others and you can read books about what we did and did not do, a lot of it is nonsense but we definitely didn't help Jack Lynch between '77 to '79 and it undermined his his position, and then Jack retired-well he- Jack would still be there if he wanted to be he would have squatted us off he want to as I know that now but Haughey then won over the late George Colley by 44 to 38 and that then created the divisions in the party from then on.

Source: *Conversations with Eamon Dunphy*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2008 (RTÉ, 2012).

Dunphy does not mention 1977 explicitly, but recalls that McCreevy had been a 'dissident... against that first government ah that was led by Jack Lynch?' (Turn 71, McCreevy Interview). As can be recalled from the discussion above of Turns 29-31 of this interview, when Dunphy raised the issue, McCreevy did not seem keen to discuss the 1977 economic policy of his party. In contrast, McCreevy now seems frank and open enough to be the one to mention the year. He takes up the status of dissident bestowed by Dunphy,

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beginning his response with 'I oppose' before saying that his party's 'manifesto in '77 that I was helped me get in was not sensible say in economics' (Turn 72, McCreevy Interview). McCreevy in his next turn, which is really part of the same utterance, downplays the importance of 1977 by latching the 'not sensible' nature of the manifesto then produced to the fact that 'from '73 to '77 >there had been a downturn we'd building up a lot of debt so I thought it was the exact opposite we needed' (Turn 72, McCreevy Interview). This 'building up a lot of debt' had been under the Fine Gael/Labour administration of 1973-1977 and so his own party's (Fianna Fáil's) policy was mistaken because it was not 'the exact opposite' (Turn 74, McCreevy Interview).

McCreevy's persuasive skill is further illustrated by his quick quasi-prebittal, or quasi-procatalepsis, that mentions how his own party's manifesto, that he claims he considered 'not sensible', was the very one 'that I was helped me get in' (Turn 72, McCreevy Interview). While not a complete logical, or indeed grammatical refutation, of the charge that he was linked to the 1977 economic policy, it packs the punch of that most persuasive move of a full procatalepsis (Amjarso, 2010). From being something that might have discounted his credibility, McCreevy's 'that I was helped me get in' (Turn 72, McCreevy Interview) is a verbal wink to the keen listener that builds the sense that he is being authentic and honest.

In Exhibit 4 below we can see in an extract from the Walsh interview how 1977 is constructed as a key date by Dunphy and how that date is responded to by Walsh.

Exhibit 4 Extract from the Walsh Interview

Turn Number	
98	Dunphy: Brendan, let me come back to another <u>seminal</u> moment, particularly in the Irish Economy, the 1977 budget which was introduced by a Fianna Fáil government that had been elected on the promise of abolishing rates and abolishing car tax if I eh remember correctly because I came back from England myself that year I thought this was nirvana but eh
99	Walsh:((laughs))
100	Dunphy: it turned out to be pretty eh disastrous for the economy and you were very vocal in your criticism of it.
101	Walsh: I was. The abolition of rates by the way - there's kind of competition as to which party should get credit for that. They all claimed credit initially. So (.) you know the opposition wasn't that clear cut in its opposition to some of these daft policies but what did become clear I think as the government came in and began to implement its programme, the public finances were going to spiral out of control. And they <u>did</u> . The real difficulty back then was that it took a long while for the establishment and I suppose particularly within the Fianna Fáil party to accept that <u>was</u> a problem. There was the idea that we could <u>spend</u> our way out of the recession, that we as a small country <u>should</u> run deficits and try and bootstrap ourselves out of the world recession.



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102	Dunphy: That was a Keynesian idea ((laughs)).
103	Walsh: It was yes and of course we've refined this to recognise that in a small open economy the multipliers are very small, the leakages are <u>enormous</u> , the public debt poses burdens of its own, <u>high</u> levels of taxation eventually have to be imposed which cripple the economy and that's exactly what happened and a group of us, formally and informally, criticised the government in journals more than in serious economic analysis.

Source: *Conversations with Eamon Dunphy*, 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2008 (RTÉ, 2012).

In this phrasing of his question to Walsh about the '1977 budget which was introduced by a Fianna Fáil government' (Turn 98, Walsh Interview) Dunphy highlights both the role of Fianna Fáil and directly states that 'it turned out to be pretty eh disastrous for the economy' (Turn 100, Walsh Interview). Walsh is quick to agree, but points out how 'the opposition wasn't that clear cut in its opposition to some of these daft policies' (Turn 101, Walsh Interview). He then focusses on 'the idea that we could spend our way out of the recession, that we as a small country should run deficits and try and bootstrap ourselves out of the world recession'. This Dunphy helpfully categorises as a 'Keynesian idea' (Turn 102, Walsh Interview). This reference to the economist Keynes allows Walsh to further underline his credentials as an economist when he declares 'we've refined this'. His expertise and analytical stance are further evidenced by his use of technical terms such as 'small open economy', 'multipliers', and 'leakages' and his admittance that the group he belonged to 'criticised the government in journals [a rather formal description for newspapers and magazines] more than in serious economic analysis' [serious analysis that might be more expected of economists] (Turn 103, Walsh Interview).

#### 4 (c) Taxation

From Exhibit 4 above we can see that, as well as carefully positioning himself as the economist, Walsh switches from Dunphy's description of the problem as one of 'abolishing rates and abolishing car tax' (Turn 98, Walsh Interview) to one of spending 'our way out of the recession' (Turn 101, Walsh Interview). Indeed the problem has been converted from one of abolishing taxes to one of high taxes, as Walsh can now talk of 'high levels of taxation eventually have to be imposed which cripple the economy' (Turn 103, Walsh Interview).

The evils of taxation are also described by McCreevy, as can be seen in Exhibit 5 below.

#### Exhibit 5 Extract from the McCreevy Interview

Turn Number	
81	Dunphy: You are, despite the reason you came into politics, the north and republicanism and all that, you are in the public mind and indeed in fact you have been associated with <u>beliefs</u> about

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82	McCreevy: Well
83	Dunphy: the economy I mean you are
84	McCreevy: My belief fundamentally is that people do better when they get the chances to do better, that you don't have the tyranny of say higher taxation, you don't have the tyranny of overregulation, you don't try to control everything from the centre and it's-because I believe you will create- people will be better off, they'll be better off in their own minds, they'll have a better lifestyle and the whole of society will be better off and that you will create more wealth and by creating more wealth you have more wealth to redistribute.
85	Dunphy: Your deep convictions single you out in that regard, tell me where they come from?

Source: *Conversations with Eamon Dunphy*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2008 (RTÉ, 2012).

Dunphy, in a flattering manner, characteristic of this type of interview, as opposed to a news interview, observes that McCreevy is associated 'with beliefs about... .. the economy' (Turns 81 and 83, McCreevy Interview). McCreevy replies to this observation with a statement about his fundamental beliefs that 'people do better' without 'the tyranny of say higher taxation' or 'tyranny of overregulation' or the attempt 'to control everything from the centre' (Turn 84, McCreevy Interview). Tyranny is a strong word and its choice triggers intertextual associations: McCreevy's phrasing echoes the American colonists' popular plea against English injustice that is said to date from pre-revolutionary Boston, where 'this position, that taxation without representation is tyranny, it came to be a common maxim in the mouth of every one' (Tudor, 1823: 77). McCreevy does not mention representation, but strengthens his argument by talking of 'higher' rather than just any taxation, and applies an even stronger logical qualifier to regulation with his objection to the 'tyranny of overregulation' (Turn 84, McCreevy Interview). McCreevy also attributes opposition to his view on centralised control to the weak position of those who 'try to control everything from the centre' (Turn 84, McCreevy Interview). McCreevy finishes off this turn stating his fundamental belief that without excessive taxation, regulation and centralisation, 'the whole of society will be better off and that you will create more wealth and by creating more wealth you have more wealth to redistribute' (Turn 84, McCreevy Interview). Logically, apart from an opposition to higher taxation (whatever 'higher' may mean), McCreevy has hardly committed himself to anything. However, emotionally, by his focussing on these issues as the fundamental ones, by talking of tyranny and by invoking the American Revolution, McCreevy establishes himself as a conviction politician of the neoliberal persuasion.

Walsh also takes time to talk of the evils of excessive taxation as can be seen from Exhibit 5 below.

#### Exhibit 6 Extract from the Walsh Interview

112	Dunphy: Yes it was 1987 when Haughey=
113	Walsh: Eh

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114	Dunphy: =returned to power with [Ray=
115	Walsh: Ray]
116	Dunphy: =MacSharry as the [Minister for Finance
117	Walsh: Yes, yes. ]
118	Dunphy: =that the real tough medicine was administered.
119	Walsh: True I mean in the earlier years the coalition government and with Alan Dukes in particular as Minister for Finance they implemented some extraordinarily tough budgets I eh but they were relying heavily on tax increases and some of the tax increases they implemented in those budgets, '83, '84 were really swingeing but what they did was they crushed the economy. It meant that people devoted far too much energy to tax evasion, tax avoidance, it meant that people left the country, money left the country, capital was not attracted into the country and there seemed to be no prospect for the burden of taxation to cease growing and no economy has thrived under those conditions.

Source: *Conversations with Eamon Dunphy*, 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2008 (RTÉ, 2012).

Exhibit 6 begins with Dunphy making the point that it was in 1987, with Charles Haughey as Taoiseach and Ray MacSharry as Minister for Finance, 'that the real tough medicine was administered' (Turn 118, Walsh Interview) to the Irish economy. It takes seven overlapping turns for Dunphy to complete this utterance. Both the usual conversational norm of non-overlapping turns and the convention of an interviewee waiting for a question to be asked before responding (Hutchby, 2006) are violated by apparent interruptions from Walsh (Turn 112-118, Walsh Interview). While interruptions can serve many functions (James and Clarke, 1993) in this context it would seem to hint at some disagreement. Furthermore, Walsh revises Dunphy's chronology somewhat by pointing to 'some extraordinarily tough budgets' and how 'some of the tax increases they implemented in those budgets, '83, '84 were really swingeing'(Turn 119, Walsh Interview). This may serve to switch some of the heroic action away from Fianna Fáil's Charles Haughey and Ray MacSharry, as it might have been construed from Dunphy's phrasing (Turn 112-118, Walsh Interview), to Fine Gael's Alan Dukes, but, more importantly it seems for Walsh, it allows him to show that it was not the toughness, but rather the nature of the intervention, that counted. Walsh observes that 'relying heavily on tax increases' and implementing taxes that 'were really swingeing' was tough, but not of help to the economy, rather 'what they did was they crushed the economy' (Turn 119, Walsh Interview). Rather than stressing the toughness, and perhaps thus some sort of moral lesson to the situation, Walsh is stressing the technical appropriateness of the measures of 1987. Walsh can draw on his expert knowledge as an economist to conclude that such a high level of taxation

meant that people devoted far too much energy to tax evasion, tax avoidance, it meant that people left the country, money left the country, capital was not attracted into the country and there seemed to be no prospect for the burden of taxation to cease growing and no economy has thrived under those conditions.

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(Turn 118, Walsh Interview)

Walsh makes little appeal to emotion and indeed his observation that 'people devoted far too much energy to tax evasion' seems to actively exclude any appeal to outrage by constructing tax evasion as an inevitable outcome, rather than a moral, or immoral, act. By cataloguing further inevitable consequences of the increased taxes, including the loss of people, money, attraction of capital and any 'prospect for the burden of taxation to cease growing', Walsh can arrive at a general lesson, presumably drawn from his expertise, that 'no economy has thrived under those conditions' (Turn 118, Walsh Interview).

## 5. Conclusions

What is clear from examining the discourse of these interviews is that the construction of the 1987 Irish economic crisis is of importance over 20 years later. If this were not the case, that event might have been mentioned in passing, but would not have featured so prominently in the talk of the interviews. Our analysis also shows the great skill and discursive work that goes in to specifying the particular nature of how that crisis was constructed in each interview. The importance of particular constructions of the crisis for the identity of each interviewee can be seen from our explication of the talk, but it is also clear that, representations of the crisis are important in themselves. As one of the interviewees says in relation to the present economic crisis, 'there are lessons to be learned ... .. and I am fearful that we may learn the wrong bits of the lesson' (RTÉ, 2012: Walsh Interview, Turn 176). What are the right lessons is, of course, an issue of which there is much dispute.

Particular constructions of past crises conclude more easily in particular lessons. McCreevy's construction of the 1987 crisis teaches us again about the soundness of his belief that overregulation and high taxation is tyranny. Walsh arrives at the same conclusion about high levels of taxation as McCreevy but, in contrast to McCreevy, he does so without talking about fundamental beliefs in freedom or tyranny. Rather, Walsh relies on persuasiveness of economics and the lessons its technology has garnered. The observation that such a set of conclusions 'is hegemonically constituted through a plurality of (inter)discursive forms and rhetorical strategies that are typically articulated through a euphemized, national accent' (Phelan, 2007: 42-43) is certainly reinforced in this exploration of chat show discourse. However, our more close-range examination stresses that while the overall thrust is hegemonic there are real differences in details.

Indeed, it is the genuine difference between McCreevy's conviction-based approach and Walsh's economic-analytical perspective that aids in persuading one of the robustness of their common conclusions concerning the dangers of over-regulation and over-taxation. If two, very different arguments triangulate to the same point, that point is harder to dismiss. While much critical discourse analysis reveals how implicit propositions (Fairclough, 1995:

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23) in different texts support opposing positions, our work here points to the strengthening of common conclusions by their constructions from different positions. Systematic analysis of our interviewees' talk has shown that they are also similar in two other respects. Apparently, when revisiting a past crisis twenty years later, key figures of the time seem to have adopted a much wider perspective, linking the 1987 Irish crisis interdiscursively with other crises (see also Matus-Mendoza, this volume). Secondly, and perhaps causally related to the former, both interviewees generally display, in their construction of the 1987 crisis, a calm acceptance of the critical events and economic hardship of the time.

That there are alternative constructions of Ireland's economic crises to those examined in the above interviews is evident in the large vote achieved by the recently elected President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, a left-wing politician and intellectual. In a characteristic construction of the crisis the President argued that

... in more recent years, we saw the rise of a different kind of individualism – closer to an egotism based on purely material considerations – that tended to value the worth of a person in terms of the accumulation of wealth rather than their fundamental dignity. That was our loss, the source in part, of our present difficulties. Now it is time to turn to an older wisdom that, while respecting material comfort and security as a basic right of all, also recognises that many of the most valuable things in life cannot be measured (Higgins, 2011).

Finally, it is hoped that our study will help promote the chat show as a relevant site for the analysis of political discourse. The persuasive power of the intimacy and authenticity that can be achieved in the more collaborative chat show style of interaction demonstrates that those interested in the role played by the media in hegemonic discourses need to pay more attention to this relatively neglected format (O'Keeffe, 2006: Section 3.4). Despite showing a calmer, though quite contested, discussion of a crisis in this chat show format, our findings are similar to those of Lauerbach (2007). She found that politicians and expert commentators have as much, if very different, work to do, as in the more researched and better understood traditional news interview. Still, if the arguments that the news interview itself is subject to increasing hybridisation are correct (Hutchby, 2011), then understanding the chat show style of interaction becomes even more important.

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#### **APPENDIX A: THE JEFFERSON-STYLE TRANSCRIPTION NOTATION USED**

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
.	A stopping fall in tone firmly understood as a full stop
,	A brief pause understood as a comma
-	Indicates a sudden stop understood as breaking with previous sense
(.)	A brief but noticeable pause.
(#)	A timed pause where # is the number of seconds
↓	A falling tone
?	A rising inflection understood as a question
↑	A rising inflection not understood as a question
>text<	enclosed speech was delivered more quickly than usual
<text>	enclosed speech was delivered more slowly than usual
...	Deliberated excluded talk within a turn
[text]	Square brackets enclose overlapping speech
=	the break or subsequent continuation of a single interrupted utterance
CAPS	Shouted or increased-volume speech
°text°	Enclosed speech is noticeably softer than surrounding
<u>text</u>	Speaker is stressing the underlined speech.
( text )	Enclosed is transcriber's best guess of unclear speech.
(( text ))	Enclosed is a report of non-verbal activity, deliberate replacement of speech, or an inserted clarification.

Note This transcription notation is based on the notation developed by Gail Jefferson as described in Atkinson and Heritage (1984).