Collective responses in Latin America and Ireland to neoliberalization in a time of crisis: Where are the pots and pans?

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- Paper presented at NUIM 14 June 2104
Introduction

- Seeks to assess nature, extent and depth of popular response in Ireland to the current financial crisis and its possible political impact in the medium to long term.
- Uses Silva’s (2009) framework on popular responses in Latin America to that region’s debt crisis of the 1980s and 1990s.
Using Polanyi’s (1949) theory of “double movement”:
- imposition of market society disrupts people’s ability to fulfil vital needs;
- multiple social groups seek protection from the state to insulate them from market forces;

Need to assess if there is sufficient:
- motivation for a double movement to occur
  - i.e. the imposition of market society, leading to economic crisis and causing stark socioeconomic inequalities.
- capacity among anti-neoliberal forces to force change away from neoliberal precepts.
Silva (2009) - Motivation

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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| Long-term market society project          | 1. First stage reforms: balanced budgets, restrictive monetary policies, liberalization policies in finance, investment, trade and agriculture, emphasis on foreign private investment, privatization, labour reforms;  
                                          | 2. Second stage reforms: privatization, decentralization, retraction of universal access to services, expansion of powers of finance ministers and central banks etc.  
                                          | 3. Political reforms: insulating economics from politics.                                                                                                                                                  |
| Stark political and socioeconomic exclusion | 1. Increased levels of unemployment, informality, underemployment, inequality and poverty with lower incomes per capita.  
                                               | 2. political exclusion: reduction of institutional channels for popular sector demands; use of facilities to stifle debate and expedite reform; weakened legislature; consensus among major parties in favour of neoliberalism; dismissal of the legitimacy of popular sector grievances, claims and demands; betrayal of election and other promises by political parties. |
| Economic volatility and crisis            | 1. Wide swings in growth.  
                                               | 2. State and government seeming incapable of fulfilling its economic and welfare functions;  
                                               | 3. Persistence “with procyclical, deflationary economic policies” which reinforce “the logic of the market”                                                                                          |
Silva (2009) - Capacity

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<td>1. Associational political space,</td>
<td>• Existence of a democratic system of government.</td>
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</table>
| 2. Constructing associational power and forging collective power | • Creating new organizations and recasting existing ones;  
• Coalition building across new, recast and traditional movement organizations and across clusters of power;  
• Issue framing and brokerage mechanisms to link protest groups; |
| 3. Reformist thrust to major protest groups or significant armed conflict | • Advocacy for reform of neoliberalism not the replacement of capitalism. |
Silva (2009) Latin America

• Argues that there was an attempt to impose market society in the region in 1980s/90s
• This caused a “double movement” in some Latin American countries leading to end of neoliberalism;
  – Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela
• Did not happen in Chile and Peru as one or the other, or both, conditions were not met;
• Do the conditions exist in Ireland? If so what prospects for a turn away from neoliberalism?
Ireland: Motivation

- Ireland displays some indicators that satisfy Silva’s conditions for a “double movement” to occur.
- A “long term market society project” is taking place, from the 1980s, to the 2008 crisis and right through to the present.
- There has been economic volatility and there is evidence of social and political exclusion.
  - Less extreme in form than in Latin America or even in Spain and Greece,
  - May not be sufficient to provoke a determined counter-reaction from popular sectors that may force a change of course.
- Such a reaction would at any rate be dependent on capacity of popular sectors to launch and sustain such a reaction.
Ireland: Capacity

- There have been a wide range of national and local protest in Ireland over the last six years
  - these have not coalesced into a determined, united counter movement;
- Trade unions key mobilizing role:
  - has adopted a largely defensive strategy which limits its capacity for narrative and alliance building with others.
- Contemporary Irish civil society “passive”:
  - dominance by state and market – co-option, funding pressures etc.
  - Limits its ability to represent popular sectors, form narratives and build alliances.
- Indigenous Irish pro-neoliberal forces remain far stronger than contending forces:
  - Powerful international allies (troika, corporations);
  - Internalization of neoliberalism and free market ideology by Irish society;
  - Largely right wing media makes it difficult for progressive groups to popularise ideas about alternatives to austerity.
- Course of events in Ireland will depend much on those overseas, especially in Europe, both at elite and grassroots level.
## Ireland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Ireland 2007-2013</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Long-term market society project creating stark political and</td>
<td>No. Market economy with significant, but lessening, political and socioeconomic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>socioeconomic exclusion (Yes/No)</td>
<td>inclusion.</td>
</tr>
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<td>1. Economic volatility and crisis (Yes/No)</td>
<td>Yes. Less so in latter years but with potential for more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Associational political space, favourable/not-favourable</td>
<td>Favourable, democratic regime but with some closing down of associational space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Reformist thrust to major protest groups (Yes/No)</td>
<td>Yes, insofar as protest exists but anti austerity not the same frame as</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reforming neoliberalism – life for all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Issue framing and brokerage mechanisms to link protest groups</td>
<td>No. There have been attempts at this but mostly unsuccessful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Yes/No)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome</strong></td>
<td><strong>To be continued</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions: Learning from Latin America? (Tentative!)

- Develop reformist agendas framed in clearer anti neoliberal terms but bringing together popular and middle class demands;
  - Need for Irish left to work in a complementary rather than antagonistic way and to organise popular campaigns that unite rather than divide.
- Irish NGOs need to avoid mediating or filtering popular protest and framing demands in sectoral and micro fashion.
- Irish academics have to take more seriously the challenge of contributing to public discourse.
- Irish citizens have to challenge the assumption of stoicism and passivity that has so far characterised their response to crisis.
- Need to link with European campaigns, longer term issues (water);
  - Framing water liberalization in context of environmentalism and anti-neoliberalism;
- Eurozone still volatile: long time frame
- International
THANK YOU!