

**PART II.**

**MICRO- AND MACRO-SOCIAL IMPACTS  
ON EUROZONE COUNTRIES  
UNDER AUSTERITY REGIMES**

## CHAPTER SIX

# COPING WITH THE THREAT OF HUMILIATION: CONTRASTING RESPONSES TO THE EUROZONE CRISIS IN GREECE AND IRELAND<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract**

The paper begins by briefly locating the Greek and Irish bailouts during the current Eurozone crisis in a larger European and global context. The paper then considers how humiliation and the responses made by those it hurts or threatens can feed back into the political arena. The paper compares the historical development of Greece and Ireland, and their citizens' responses to episodes of actual or threatened humiliation, including the recent bailouts. Finally, some wider implications of the analysis for the European Union are explored.

### **I. Introduction**

Humiliation can be a weapon or a wound, depending on whether one is the initiator or at the receiving end. So it is with national governments. Take the case of the reluctant bailout requests made during the Eurozone crisis by the so-called “PIIGS”—hardly an innocent acronym—and the cuts in government spending forced on them by the European Union.

Requests for help often followed several days of denial and were normally treated by the politicians who made them, or at least by their domestic parliamentary opponents, as admissions of weakness and failure. There was a strong implication in some foreign media comments, especially in North Europe, that the “PIIGS” had been exposed as unworthy and deserved to be taken down a peg or two as the price for being reckless and irresponsible.

Such comments were deeply unfair, as was the demeaning suggestion made on *Newsnight* by Jeremy Paxman, just before greeting his Greek guest, that Greece might be “vomited” out of the Euro like a “bad kebab.”<sup>2</sup> However, two common features of humiliation are a deep sense of unfairness and inappropriateness in the eyes of the recipient, and great confidence on the part of the perpetrators that what they are doing is justified.

Humiliation cannot be reduced to sets of feelings within individuals or groups. It is an iterative social process entailing mutual engagement between perpetrators and victims. Feelings such as anger, fear and sorrow, and acts of self-defense and revenge, are interwoven with rational calculations and actions relating to material interests. The battle is on two fronts: the scramble for survival or advantage and the struggle to maintain dignity and self-respect.

When the emotional temperature is raised and fierce engagements are being fought, it can be difficult to see the bigger picture. With those considerations in mind, this paper begins by briefly locating the Greek and Irish bailouts in a wider context, noting that they have put into reverse the progress made by the EU in establishing itself as a post-humiliation regime, a kind of European “city on the hill.”<sup>3</sup> The paper then considers how humiliation and the responses made by those it hurts or threatens can feed back into the political arena. The paper then compares the historical development of Greece and Ireland, and their responses to episodes of actual or threatened humiliation, including the recent bailouts. Finally, some wider implications of this analysis for the European Union are explored.

### **Protest or acquiescence?**

Current transformations in the EU stem from a global crisis in the workings of capitalism. This has resulted, in large part, from the collapse of confidence in debt creation as a means of managing market transactions. To summarize, the deliberate creation of risky sub-prime debt during recent years has weakened the credit and credibility of many large banks, leading to a widespread unwillingness of banks to lend to each other. This has contributed to a double-dip recession.

Government debt levels have risen, partly so they can help their countries’ banks maintain their own balance sheets. This has created an unsustainable gap between some governments’ outgoings and their income. Some of the worst affected governments have sought financial

help from multinational bodies such as the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank.

The credit crunch and the sovereign debt crisis have acted as a catalyst for increased centralization within the EU, which has long been planned, and the emergence of a more overt hierarchy of European governments, a move that has occurred with much less political preparation. A dominant coalition of “central” or “northern” powers has been able to impose its will to an increased extent upon “peripheral” or “southern” powers through the so-called fiscal treaty “on stability, coordination and governance.”<sup>4</sup>

The EU leadership in Brussels, Berlin, and Paris evidently believe that a further consolidation of the EU’s structures is needed at a time when competition between global regions is intensifying. Easier said than done. Extensions of the EU’s powers over the European citizenry were easier to enact in the past when people felt more secure in their jobs, homes and futures. However, the recession has created a climate of insecurity in national electorates. It has become easier to arouse suspicion of interventions “from above” and “outside”, especially when “Eurocrats” are imposing restrictions that make matters worse for many ordinary people, certainly for the foreseeable future, as they see it.

In response to this new situation, the people of Greece have protested violently, demanding the withdrawal of “the memorandum”.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, in Ireland, abruptly deprived of its booming economic micro-climate as the “Celtic Tiger”, the people have not revolted. Instead, they have voted by a large margin in favour of the new European treaty making strict fiscal discipline according to externally imposed rules a condition for membership of the Euro.

How do we make sense of the different ways the Greek and Irish political and business establishments and Greek and Irish citizens in general have responded to the threat of humiliation imposed upon them by the credit crunch, the bailouts, and the conditions imposed upon them from outside?<sup>6</sup> How will these responses feedback into the politics of the Eurozone crisis and the debate over the future of the Euro and the EU itself?

### **Consolidation or break-up?**

The EU is hovering uncertainly between two trajectories: consolidation and break-up. The consolidation trajectory leads towards the creation of a stronger political centre. This will have increased authority over the economic policies of those member states that belong to the Euro and a greater capacity to project abroad a consolidated “European will” in

matters of diplomacy and foreign affairs. The end point of that road is a kind of United States of Europe.

By contrast, the break-up trajectory leads towards the voluntary or forced disentanglement of a growing number of member states from the constraints imposed by belonging to the Euro, perhaps resulting in the abolition of the Euro as a distinct currency. The momentum generated by such a trajectory might encourage some weaker member states to raise tariff barriers that interfere with European-wide free trade. Some of the stronger members might look for long-lasting political alliances with partners outside the EU. The end point of this road is the disintegration of the European Union.

At the moment, political leaders in Brussels and Berlin, along with Paris, are mounting a strong resistance to break-up while at the same time creating the legal framework for consolidation. Others, including some within the City of London and on Wall Street, are keen to see break-up.<sup>7</sup>

### **Brussels vision or Washington vision?**

If the fiscal treaty proves to be unenforceable, that will be a major reversal for the long-term game plan that took shape during the decade following the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989.<sup>8</sup> When the Euro project was agreed in 1999, the ambition was to create a stronger Europe, not just economically but politically, and harness the energy of newly reunited Germany to that task.<sup>9</sup> French president Jacques Chirac declared in 1999 that “The European Union itself [must] become a major pole of international equilibrium, endowing itself with the instruments of a true power.” The following year Tony Blair said that “Europe’s citizens need Europe to be strong and united. They need it to be a power in the world. Whatever its origin, Europe today is no longer just about peace. It is about projecting collective power.”<sup>10</sup>

That European “collective power” was clearly intended to project globally the influence of a powerful European quasi-state in close alliance with its central bank, both of them sustained by, but also in command of, a strong European currency and a flourishing European economy. This vision is a direct challenge to the neo-liberal vision, favoured by corporate business and strongly associated with Washington DC, which wants to put multinational corporations in the driving seat where they can set the agenda of politicians and civil servants, both at home and abroad. The credit crunch and sovereign debt crisis have made it more difficult to implement either of these two visions, from Brussels and Washington respectively.

### **Government or private enterprise?**

Meanwhile, on both sides of the Atlantic, the crisis has intensified the struggle for dominance between two interests, which have both been damaged by the current crisis: on the one hand private enterprise with its focus on profit-making, including transactional opportunities such as major currency shifts; on the other hand, government with its focus on regulation, especially the imposition of standards and procedures that enhance the state's capacity to deliver.

One very active front in this battle is the field of taxation. The European Commission has proposed a Tobin-like scheme to generate direct revenue from the EU's financial sector while, at the same time, reducing the levies paid by member states, a clear attempt to shift the burden away from governments to corporations.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, tax avoidance by business corporations is a very large-scale operation involving multiple transfers of funds through offshore tax havens. This has the overall effect of increasing corporate profits while at the same time depriving governments of revenue, thus systematically weakening states while strengthening corporations. Both Ireland and Greece (partly through its links with Cyprus) are part of the global offshore road map, on which the City of London is even more prominent.<sup>12</sup>

Humiliation is a weapon available to both sides in the struggle between government and private enterprise. Take the British case. Opponents of corporate power scored a substantial hit with the public grilling in the British House of Commons of Rupert Murdoch, a neo-liberal icon. Also subjected to ordeal by parliamentary committee were misbehaving senior executives of Barclays, a bank that had chosen to spurn the offer of assistance from the British government during the height of the credit crunch crisis. Meanwhile, on the other side, there is a constant stream of advocacy and speculation from the City of London about the possible collapse of the Euro. Such a collapse, perhaps precipitated by a Greek exit, would not only be a substantial profit opportunity for City traders. It would also be a major humiliation of the European Union and greatly diminish the authority of its leaders in Brussels, Berlin and Paris.

### **Humiliation or post-humiliation?**

The European Union has always presented itself as a post-humiliation regime, a polity that respects and enforces the peaceful enjoyment of human rights within the societies and between the states that constitute it.<sup>13</sup> The EU's creation ended a century and a half of vengeful warfare between

France and Germany. The Union imposes high standards with respect to democracy, justice and citizenship rights upon new entrants. Liberty and equality are highly valued as well as the spirit of fraternity. For example, the principles of equality and fraternity are given institutional form in arrangements such as the EU's structural funds, which organize transfers to poorer and less developed areas.

For many national populations, joining the EU was an act of emancipation by a welcoming host, a way to put behind them a history of colonial subjection, or dictatorship, or both.<sup>14</sup> This was the case for post-Ascendancy Ireland<sup>15</sup>, post-Hitler West Germany, post-Mussolini Italy, post-Salazar Portugal, post-Franco Spain and post-Junta Greece. More recently, ex-members of the old "Eastern Bloc" joined the EU following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. However, over recent years there has been a lack of fatted calves to slaughter for returning prodigal children.

In fact, humiliation has returned to Europe on a large scale during the past few years. The credit crunch and the Eurozone crisis have produced a considerable amount of forced social displacement: loss of jobs, income, status, reputation, credit and so on, not least in Greece and Ireland, our case studies. Furthermore, when, in their hour of need, the Greeks and the Irish were forced with great reluctance to ask for bailout loans to meet debt repayments falling due, they received not fraternal encouragement but paternal chastisement.

During the Eurozone crisis the EU has proved to be a heavy-handed parent, easily portrayed as a wicked stepmother. As everybody knows, the so-called *troika*—consisting of the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—has imposed draconian and unprecedented cuts in government spending upon the Irish and Greek governments, especially the latter.

Take another case: Slovenia. In late August 2012 there were signs that the government in Ljubljana might be forced to ask for a bailout from the EU. It is clear from the cases of Greece, Ireland and other governments that this would not be a pleasant experience. *The Economist* neatly summarized what is at stake in this case when it commented that "If Slovenia succumbs, ... once again the badge of honour of joining the zone would have become a mark of humiliation" (*The Economist*, 2012; 59-60)

## II. Humiliation coping tactics and response strategies

### Subjection, relegation and exclusion

This is a good point to delve a little more deeply into the nature of humiliation. Stated briefly, it is forced social displacement that challenges and undermines the social identity of the displaced ones. The root cause of the distress caused to the victims is their awareness that an inferior social location and less worthy social identity are being imposed upon them, and they cannot prevent this.<sup>16</sup>

Humiliation is different from shame. When people feel shame, this is a mental and bodily acknowledgement that they themselves have transgressed norms that they accept. Shame feelings arise from contemplating the gap between those normative requirements and their own inadequate performance, as well as from the knowledge that others may be aware of their failings. Shame merges with guilt feelings as transgressors also acknowledge their own responsibility as authors of the shame-producing acts or characteristics.

By contrast, victims of humiliation feel transgressed *against*. Like Job their rhetorical response is, to paraphrase: “why me? what did I do to deserve this?” When humiliation happens, it is experienced as an undeserved deprivation, involving a loss or reduction of one or all of the following: *agency*, the capacity to enact one’s will in the world; *autonomy*, the right to do what one wants; *security*, the expectation that one’s identity and interests will be safeguarded; and *recognition*, the acknowledgement by others that one’s social identity will be respected and taken into proper account.

At every level of societal existence, from an individual person to a national state, or a continental polity such as the European Union, the contours of the humiliation process are fundamentally the same. There are three “moments”, which are logically or structurally related in a specific sequence (see Figure 6-1).

The first moment is *subjection*, entailing loss of autonomy and a reduction of agency for the victims, who become subordinate participants in a newly imposed hierarchy. This establishes the conditions for the second moment, which is *relegation*, whereby humiliated subordinates are pushed down the hierarchy, signaling their diminishing importance in the sight of those who rule. Relegation prepares the ground for the third moment, *exclusion*, which turns the subordinate into an outsider, deprived of recognition and protection.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 6-1. Three “moments” of humiliation – subjection, relegation, exclusion

<p>I SUBJECTION</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>		
<p>Reduction of <i>autonomy</i> and <i>agency</i>; imposition of <i>hierarchy</i>.</p>	<p>II RELEGATION</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	
	<p>Demotion within social hierarchy; diminution of <i>recognition</i> (reduction of worthiness).</p>	<p>III EXCLUSION</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>
		<p>Denial of group membership, <i>recognition</i> and <i>security</i>; some <i>agency</i> and <i>autonomy</i> may be retained.</p>

For all its idealism, the post-war European movement was given life at a moment of humiliation. It was the overwhelming preponderance of US military power that forced arrogant enemies in Western Europe to enter into economic cooperation.<sup>18</sup> Ironically, it was their common subjection to American lordship, to their conquest by Washington that created a sense of equality, and later increasing fraternity, between French, German, Italian and Benelux diplomats and politicians. This spirit was given institutional form through the practice of distributing the positions of European Commissioner in Brussels on an egalitarian basis amongst member countries while insisting that each commissioner should represent the interests of the EU as a whole.

Since the beginning of the “common market”, as the EU was initially termed, some critics in all member countries have treated it as a transgression, an undemocratic imposition by an arrogant European Commission upon the citizens of sovereign nations, who are left relatively powerless. However, the present recession has reshaped the debate. For the first time the subterranean division, and sometimes, tension between

the northern and southern members of the EU has come to the surface and taken centre stage.<sup>19</sup>

It is common to present the current situation as *subjection* of the EU to German interests, and to see the imposition of austerity programmes on Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal as the *relegation* of the South to an inferior position within the EU. Greece is the object of a sustained attempt from at least some vocal commentators to implement the third moment of humiliation: *exclusion*, from the Euro and perhaps also the EU itself.

### Coping tactics

Those who suffer humiliation have no choice but to acquiesce in their enforced displacement, in the first instance. Since they have been unable to prevent it from happening, they have to cope with it, for a while at least. What can they do? They typically retain some degree of autonomy and agency, which can be exploited in coping tactics such as *reversal*, *separation*, *pragmatic accommodation* and *surrender*. People may move between these tactics and some may be combined.

*Reversal* seizes the initiative in a self-dramatizing way. This may take the form of defiant compliance. This tactic parades the supposedly demeaning identity as a kind of banner, with amusement or contempt, showing that carrying this label is quite bearable. One example occurred in June 2012 when a group of Irish fans about to fly off to the European football championship displayed an Irish flag with the words: “Angela Merkel Thinks We’re At Work.”<sup>20</sup>

Another, more complex variant of reversal is the politics of victimhood. In this case, the object is to make others, including the supposed perpetrators, feel guilty, sorry or afraid because of the victim’s condition. The victims may then manipulate these feelings for their own advantage. For example, they may demand help, compensation, indulgence, special understanding, privileged credence, or the right to take revenge.

A second set of coping tactics involves *separation*. By dividing themselves internally, individuals and groups are able to present a misleading persona to their masters, enemies or rivals. Behind that screen they can protect and deploy their other selves. This approach makes possible sabotage (minor acts of revenge), inner withdrawal (“The real me/us is not engaged here”) and denial (“this is not happening to me/us”). Reversal and separation both have the effect of blurring and disrupting the framing power of humiliation, interrupting its attempt to reassign social identity and social location in a demeaning way.

Turning to the other coping tactics, those who adopt the tactics of *pragmatic accommodation* and *surrender* shrug their shoulders and admit: “We lost out. They won.” Pragmatic accommodation means cooperating with new masters who command by right of conquest. Their new servants use the shreds of agency and autonomy they still retain to limit their chances of being hurt. They may make few demands or complaints (adopting stoicism), at least not openly (imposing self-censorship). They may go further and acknowledge the superiority of those who now command them (through real or pretended elevation of the master) and even minimize the significance of their own suffering (through real or pretended self-diminishment). By contrast, the tactic of surrender gives up the last shreds of autonomy and agency, through exhaustion and demoralization. It raises the white flag and says: “Do with us as you wish.”

These initial coping tactics, driven by forced acquiescence, can only be short term. Even the attitude of surrender may be abandoned if the initial exhaustion of defeat passes. All these tactics defer resolution of a large and pressing question, which is: how can the victims of humiliation get rid of the intense discomfort—what Cannetti calls “the sting” (see Cannetti 1973, 67, 355, 360)—that has been caused by contemplating the extent of their “fall”, the distance between, on the one hand, where they “really” belong and who they “really” are and, on the other hand, the social location and social identity that are being forced upon them? Coping tactics may alleviate the discomfort in the short term. Getting rid of the sting requires longer-term strategies of response.

### **Response strategies**

Over time, short-term coping tactics are likely to merge into longer-term response strategies (see Figure 6-2). For example, two types of yielding response may be identified. One of these is *escape*, in other words, removing the object of intended humiliation (i.e., the victim) to somewhere that is out of the perpetrator’s reach. Emigration is a classic instance of this strategy.

If it is to work, emigration must be more than exile, which continues the humiliation in the form of exclusion. Successful emigration must be to a better place, a promised land, a kind of paradise. So the escaping emigrants’ standards and expectations are high, and their fear of failure and renewed humiliation great. Such migrants are suspicious of all neighbours, and liable to engage in pre-emptive strikes against them,

repeatedly. Humiliation, for others and themselves, is liable to be renewed through such fear cycles.<sup>21</sup>

Another yielding response is *acceptance*, which attempts to remove the victim's objection to humiliation by agreeing that the distress and deprivation it caused was a deserved punishment. This turns humiliation into shame. But does this win the master's respect? If not, the danger is that acceptance is followed by further acts of humiliation: a victimization cycle.

There are also two challenging responses. One is *rejection*, which tries to eliminate the effects of humiliation on the capacity and morale of the victim. Rejection can take one or both of two forms. Revenge-rejection tries to "even up the score" by inflicting a counter-humiliation. The likely effect is to trigger more "incoming" humiliation and this has to be answered in turn, leading to a revenge cycle, which, like the fear cycle and the victimization cycle, perpetuates acts of humiliation into the future. Another approach is resistance-rejection, which maintains or builds up the victims' strength, reducing their vulnerability to humiliating attacks.

If resistance-rejection is successful, it may prepare the ground for the second challenging response, which is *conciliation/reform*. In this case, the intention is not to damage or destroy the humiliating person or group but to remove the causes of humiliation itself: to eliminate the condition by reforming the relationship between the parties concerned.

Conciliation/reform works best if there is a powerful third party respected and/or feared by both sides that can act as intermediary and guide, preferably with ample resources to help fund the creation of a new institutional order. So, it was after World War II when the United States made greater economic cooperation and exchange between France and Germany a precondition for Marshall Aid. The British and Irish governments played a similar role in bringing peace to Northern Ireland. In this fourth strategy, the chief danger is that truce and negotiation will not reduce distrust sufficiently to prevent the recurrence of conflict, and the renewal of humiliating acts of aggression.

Which of the coping tactics and strategic responses will be available or adopted in any particular case is likely to be greatly influenced by the practical opportunities available and the various parties' cultural resources, attitudes and habits of behaviour. Those factors are shaped by history to a great extent, and a brief historical comparison between Greece and Ireland will be useful, not only as a case study in the dynamics of humiliation but also as a stimulus to thinking about how the responses within national societies to the current Eurozone crisis may impact at the level of the EU as a whole. In the next section the object is not to produce fully-rounded

analytical portraits of two societies—which would be impossible in this presentation—but to draw attention to some key differences between them which help to account for their differing responses to the threat of humiliation during the Eurozone crisis.

Figure 6-2. Response strategies

	Type of Strategy	Object of Strategy	Downside Risk
Yielding Responses	ESCAPE	To remove the <b>object</b> of intended humiliation	Fear Cycle
	ACCEPTANCE	To remove the <b>objection</b> to humiliation	Victimization Cycle
Challenging Responses	REJECTION: Revenge- Rejection or Resistance- Rejection?	To eliminate the <b>effects</b> of humiliation	Revenge Cycle
	CONCILIATION- REFORM	To eliminate the <b>causes</b> of humiliation	Distrust Cycle

### III. Geo-history and geo-politics<sup>22</sup>

Geo-history and geo-politics have dealt very different hands to Ireland and Greece. Their monuments declare this difference. Athens has its hilltop citadel, the Acropolis, dominated by the Parthenon, which served as the fortified treasury of the ancient Athenian empire. These buildings say that Greeks have autonomy and agency, that they are not just a free people but also powerful, imperial, with a history of being leaders and

overlords.<sup>23</sup> Greek culture, the Greek language, and Greek churchmen, merchants and officials all dominated Byzantium, the Eastern Roman Empire, and retained an important position in its Islamic successor, the Ottoman Empire.

Historically, the Greek world from the Balkans to Asia Minor and beyond was a vast beehive whose main movers and shakers were traders, military men and diplomatic fixers. Their primary loyalty was to their good name, their extended families, and their localities. This way of thinking was widespread throughout Greek society at all levels. The main task of life was to pursue prosperity and honour through the market and, where possible, political bargaining. The values of the town seeped deep into the countryside along with commercialized agriculture.<sup>24</sup>

Many of the richest and most powerful Greeks made and invested their money outside the Greek mainland, both before and after 1832 when the sovereign Greek state came into existence. Traditionally, they had strong alliances with leading Orthodox churchmen, similarly cosmopolitan, who helped them keep their profits out of the hands of Ottoman tax-collectors, and do so with a good conscience. These tax-avoidance habits did not diminish after 1832. Nor were they confined to the rich.

By contrast, the main buildings in Ireland's capital, Dublin Castle, Trinity College and Leinster House are all symbols of past English rule, the so-called Protestant Ascendancy.<sup>25</sup> For centuries the "emerald isle" was trapped between the Atlantic Ocean and its much larger neighbour whose industrial strength and imperial possessions made it the most powerful in the world during the mid- and late nineteenth century. The feeling of being at the bottom of the heap entered deep into Irish popular culture. As Jimmy Rabbitts put it in the film *The Commitments* (1991), "Do you not get it lads? The Irish are the blacks of Europe" (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0101605/quotes> [16 June 2013]). However exaggerated, this very un-Greek statement expresses a common Irish attitude: proud resentment.

In Ireland, unlike Greece, the values of the countryside dominated the town.<sup>26</sup> The larger tenant farmers set those values. This class had established its dominance locally after the Great Famine of the 1840s, which had dispersed the landless poor, many to the graveyard, and others to England or America. Above them were the Anglo-Irish gentry living on their estates or in England.<sup>27</sup> There had been a very serious Irish revolt against the English crown in 1798, and since then intermittent protests against specific injustices, but the main response to subjection was pragmatic accommodation.

Not till the 1950s did the world open up for the Irish Republic, when American big business and finance capital began to look overseas in a big way and the Atlantic Ocean became a bridge and not a barrier. By contrast, the new Kingdom of Greece, born in the early nineteenth century, had from its beginning the benefit of being on a busy global crossroads in the East Mediterranean, patrolling the frontier not only between East and West, but also between North and South. For centuries, the Greeks have had widespread trading and diplomatic links and it has been advantageous for foreigners with ambitions in this strategically significant area to make bargains with them. The new state's founders made the most of this.

### **Nation-building and ideology**

The leaders of the Greek War of Independence (1821-32) knew the Ottoman Empire was slowly crumbling and wanted a more secure political base, one under their control.<sup>28</sup> During the war massacres were common on both sides. The politics of victimhood were mobilized effectively by the Greek rebels and their friends, for example in several paintings made by Eugène Delacroix, one of which depicted Greece as a maiden threatened with humiliation at Ottoman hands.<sup>29</sup>

Then, as now, powerful business and political interests in Europe and America were ready to buy friends and influence in a territory that provided a valuable listening post in a highly sensitive region. Foreign loans flowed into Athens throughout the century, for distribution among competing factions and to pay for wars intended to detach more Greek territory from the Ottoman Empire.<sup>30</sup> Victorious politicians handed out positions in central government and local administration to their supporters. Patronage and clientelism ruled, a tradition that has continued. Loans were often not repaid but the foreign governments who made them, such as the French and English and, later, the Americans, were able to wield influence inside Greece. Occasionally, the government went bankrupt, most notoriously in 1893 after which an international commission moved into Athens to supervise the administration of the national budget.<sup>31</sup> These scenarios show that recent exchanges between Greece and the EU leadership have historical precedents.

In the early 1920s, the historical trajectories of Ireland and Greece briefly converged. At that point, each country was, for the first time, both independent and with stable territorial boundaries,<sup>32</sup> although both had troubled frontiers in the north.<sup>33</sup>

However, their national trajectories were very different. In the Greek case territorial stabilization coincided with the ejection of Hellenic forces

and populations from Asia Minor, a major defeat for *Megali* idea, the dream of a greater Greece.<sup>34</sup> By contrast, in Ireland's case, the early 1920s were a moment of success: the end of British rule and the establishment of a Free State. During those years the Greek state was humiliated while the Irish state triumphed over past humiliations.

There was another difference. By the late 1920s, the Irish Free state had not only got rid of its foreign monarchy but also established itself as a reasonably coherent and stable parliamentary democracy under civilian control, a condition Greece did not begin to achieve for another half-century. In Ireland, there was a brief civil war (1922-3) caused by disagreement within the nationalist movement over the terms of the treaty but after that the new state was able to spend two decades settling in and settling down. During the 1930s, it had to deal with an Anglo-Irish trade war and a short-lived proto-fascist movement but progress towards stability was helped by several factors. The focus of political militancy was transferred north outside the Free State. The conservatism of rural Ireland was reinforced by Eamon De Valera's support for small-scale farming and a protectionist tariff wall.<sup>35</sup> The Irish state was neutral in the Second World War. Above all, Ireland inherited a highly efficient and professional civil service from the British.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, in Greece the crown, military chiefs and political leaders such as Eleftherios Venizelos found it very difficult to make stable compromises with each other. The complexity and instability of government was increased when after 1923 it acquired an influential and discontented refugee population that soon organized itself both in commerce and politics, especially in the largest towns and in the north. The newcomers injected a new dimension of idealistic or ideological vision into Greek politics, partially filling the vacuum left by the collapse of hopes for a greater Greece. One consequence was to increase the ranks of Greek socialist and communist organizations.

By the mid-1930s, the Metaxas dictatorship had forced the Greek left underground, and it did not fully re-emerge in Greece's public arena for another four decades. That brief summary does not adequately convey the intense and prolonged trauma experienced by all Greeks during and after the Second World War from invasion through occupation to civil war. However, the main point here is that Greece's position on the frontier between East and West meant that for three decades after 1945 American influence was used to keep the left out of Greek politics while bringing prosperity to the Greek people. Marshall Aid and foreign direct investment produced a so-called "Greek miracle" during the 1950s and 1960s mainly focused on urban renewal and tourism.<sup>37</sup>



This state of affairs came to an end during the 1970s when the United States began looking for ways to reduce the economic burden of its overseas commitments. By that time, the European Union was beginning to seem like an alternative home for Greece, especially after that sensitive and volatile “frontier” state got rid of its military dictatorship.<sup>38</sup> For Greece, entry to the EU was the solution to a geo-political dilemma. For Ireland, it was the seizing of a geo-economic opportunity.

### **Europe and emancipation**

In 1958, shortly before the Treaty of Rome was signed, the Irish government finally abandoned protectionism and began to plan for economic expansion through free trade with a new emphasis on industry and services.<sup>39</sup> As part of this strategy, Ireland sought membership in the EU and finally succeeded in 1973. Stable and Anglophone, Ireland proved to be a highly convenient point of entry to that trading area for American business. By the 1990s, Ireland was having its own “economic miracle”, culminating in the “Celtic Tiger” years (1995-2007) during which very high levels of bank-lending to businesses and private individuals fed a property boom.

The economic story of Ireland’s boom and bust is well known. Less appreciated is the change that occurred in Irish culture. For half a century, before joining the EU, Ireland had been free yet still half-trapped in the restrained postures imposed by centuries of pragmatic accommodation with British rule. Entry into Europe increased the self-esteem of the Irish, especially their professional and business elites. It also opened up popular culture to outside influences to a greater extent than before, and gave people, especially women, encouragement to stand up for their rights.

By the time the Celtic Tiger years arrived, there was a rough balance between the new expansive optimism and the defensive caution and cynicism of the old days. The Celtic Tiger years lasted a little over a decade.<sup>40</sup> Ten years is enough time for a family to accumulate a large number of debts and get a taste for high living, while enjoying the contrast between present luxuries and the tighter budgets of earlier years. But a decade is not long enough for old habits and attitudes to die out, so long-established Irish reactions to the threat of humiliation have sprung into life. Both of the yielding responses mentioned earlier have come into play. Escape has taken the form of emigration as young people resume the practice of looking for opportunities overseas, in Canada, Australia, South Africa and elsewhere. Acceptance is also rife. Many people feel a little ashamed of being swept up by the temptation to go deeply into debt to

fulfill dreams of individual happiness they now realize were unrealistic. The boom, it now seems, was a party that got out of hand, so now, it is widely accepted, everyone must put up with a very big hangover and abide by the rules in the future.

The Greek case is very different. The demise of the military regime and the turn towards Europe provided a large political opportunity for Andreas Papandreou, the charismatic left-wing son of a formidable centrist politician. Using the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) as his vehicle, Andreas, as he was commonly known, was able to capture the electoral initiative. He had the skills needed to win mass votes from a rapidly urbanizing population that wanted to maintain and, if possible, improve its living standards. This was a difficult challenge since growth was lower and prices higher for several years after the mid-70s.

Going into the EU gave the PASOK government access to a large amount of funding. Following Greek political practice established over the previous century and a half, these funds, bolstered by the additional financial leverage they made possible, were channeled into government contracts, financing the expansion of central and local government, and generally oiling the wheels of political influence.

The money provided incomes for thousands of people, many of them PASOK supporters, young and old adherents of left-wing politics who had a collective memory of half a century of being abused, persecuted, and excluded. Some of them had fought against the Nazis, and later the British, during the period of occupation and civil war. For such people, and their friends and relatives, the largesse supplied through PASOK was a just and long-delayed form of recompense for prolonged suffering, one to which they felt fully entitled.

This could not be said too openly. The vast expansion of the public sector was presented as the building of a modernizing technocratic and professional elite whose task was to bring about the change (*allage*) that Greece so badly needed.<sup>41</sup> PASOK's conservative opponents, New Democracy, criticized this rationale but maintained the system, extending it to their own supporters. The consequences of this approach for Greece's public finances are now very well known.

Comparing the Irish and Greek cases in these years, some differences stand out. One is that the system established by PASOK in the early 1980s had a quarter of a century to take root. That is long enough to implant a specific *habitus* in a whole generation, to instill a style of life and a set of perceptions. After twenty-five years of prosperity, many Greek citizens had been rescued by the expansion of the public sector, either as employees or recipients of benefits. They had buried the painful past in

forgetfulness and become used to the more comfortable present (now the recent past). Axing the public sector, as is now being done, feels to them more like an amputation than a hangover.

As in Ireland, there is some evidence of acceptance and the desire to escape. For example, some Greeks are returning from the cities to the countryside (“Greek crisis forces thousands of Athenians into rural migration” (Smith, 2011: 18). However, desire for revenge is a much more prominent response in Greece than in Ireland. Politicians are physically attacked in the streets. Major public buildings are set on fire. German politicians are caricatured as Nazis in the press, a reminder of old wounds. Immigrants are beaten up. The radical right and the radical left are both resurgent. This is very different from Dublin.

The main political beneficiary seems to be SYRIZA, which may have a good chance of displacing PASOK as the main party of the left in Greece.<sup>42</sup> SYRIZA’s insistence that the spending cuts and repayments demanded by the *troika* are impossible to make seems highly realistic, irrespective of whether or not one accepts that they are completely unjustified. It would mean reversing at a stroke political and economic practices that have been embedded in Greece for nearly two centuries, as well as expropriating a generation of articulate and well-organised citizens who have only recently come into what they see as their well-deserved and much-delayed inheritance.

#### **IV. Where do we go from here?**

A well-known Irish joke tells of an old man who was asked the question: how do I get to the city of Cork? His answer was, of course: I would not start from here. In other political and economic circumstances, one possible answer to the question of how we alleviate the pressures being placed upon Greek citizens might be: provide the external financial support needed and, at the same time, monitor the implementation of an agreed plan, over a time period that is feasible, for reforming the public sector (including the system of tax collection), promoting industrial growth, and educating a new generation in the satisfactions of genuine public service.

When this is proposed the normal reply is: not enough time, not enough money. Why are the necessary time and money not being made available? The reasons are certainly complex but seem to stem in part from lack of trust and good will on many sides, a condition made worse by the playing out of humiliation dynamics. Another factor seems to be speculation

that there may be benefits to certain special interests if Greece exits from the Euro.

Presumably, those possible benefits are being calculated not just by financial speculators but also by political speculators on both the left and the right. Second-guessing those calculations and evaluating them would require another paper. However, anyone who is still interested in the prospects for the European Union as a post-humiliation project advancing equality and human rights might take a deeper look at the basic roots of the crisis.

Constant complaining in the media about the failings of national politicians in the so-called PIIGS, especially in Greece, has drawn attention away from the origins of the present crisis. These lie in the neglectful and sometimes fraudulent behaviour of bankers and allied professions in and around the finance industry. This has included the practice of maximizing their returns by leveraging assets through the creation of mountains of dubious debt.<sup>43</sup> The result of this activity has been to throw huge extra burdens on the treasuries of those governments who came to the banks' rescue.

It is therefore difficult to accept with equanimity another very extensive activity of finance professionals. This has been to build up a massive apparatus for tax avoidance crossing national and continental borders, thus depriving those same governments of the income they need to replenish the treasuries they have emptied on the banks' behalf.

Set beside this huge attack on the public purse throughout the European Union and beyond, the failings of the Greek tax-payer come into their proper perspective. There is surely a case for giving the regulation and reduction of tax avoidance by business corporations throughout Europe a much higher prominence on the EU's agenda. It may be an even more important task than punishing the Greeks and praising the Irish.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In preparing this paper I made visits to both Athens and Dublin. I am grateful for help and comments to Michael Spourdalakis, Nicolas Demertsiz, Costas Eleftheriou, and many colleagues in the Hellenic Political Science Association (whose kind invitation to speak in March 2012 gave me the chance to try out, and correct, some early thoughts), Teresa Whitaker, Mike Fitzgerald, James Wickham, Colm O'Regan, and (beyond Dublin) to many participants at the 2012 Kilkenny Comedy Festival (which I attended through the kind invitation of Ed Smith and Tami Hoffman). I would also like to thank colleagues in the European Sociological Association Research Network on Disaster, Conflict and Social Crisis for their comments on earlier versions of this paper which was initially presented at a

conference in Mytilene on the social impacts of the Eurozone debt crisis organised by Dr Nicolas Petropoulos, 13-14<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>2</sup> The discussion on Newsnight (31<sup>st</sup> May 2012) was between, Jeremy Paxman, BBC presenter, Paul Krugman, Nobel prize winner in economics and Giorgos Papakonstantinou, a PhD from LSE, one-time senior economist at the OECD, and an ex-finance minister in the PASOK government. Paxman's distinguished guests "swiftly slapped him down", to borrow the phrase used in the next day's *Daily Mail*. Paxman did not try to defend himself, then or later. Demeaning and diminishing others is a common tactic in political debate and all forms of power struggle, including contests over authority, legitimacy and competence. Stereotyping is one form of intended humiliation, used here by Paxman. Replying, Papakonstantinou let it be seen that he was angry but completely under control. He took issue with the analogy and said: "the Greek people are going through a lot, and deserve some respect, and I really did not find that very appropriate." Krugman followed this up by telling Paxman: "I think that was, actually, quite inappropriate, to say that the Greeks have done something terribly wrong."

<sup>3</sup> The reference is to the early American pioneer, John Winthrop who used this phrase in 1630, see, for example, <http://www.historytools.org/sources/winthrop-charity.pdf> [17 June 2013].

<sup>4</sup> The draft treaty text may be found at

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financialcrisis/9026142/The-EU-fiscal-draft-treaty-in-full.html> [17 June 2013].

<sup>5</sup> A copy of the memorandum may be found at

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/81046399/Memorandum-of-Economic-and-Financial-Policies-February-8> [18 June 2013].

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, "Irish treat pain of crisis like a hangover," Gillian Tett of the *Financial Times* on May 10<sup>th</sup> 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Two examples of many:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/financialcrisis/9345635/Hedge-fund-manager-says-that-Greece-must-leave-euro-or-it-will-fail.html>;

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2149193/Greece-WILL-leave-eurozone-January-1-2013-Citigroup-boss-predicts-exit-date-warns-massive-wave-contagion-Europe.html> [ 19 June 2013]

<sup>8</sup> Before that date the EU was held within the embrace of the transatlantic alliance, alongside NATO. It "borrowed" the prestige and aura of strength enjoyed by its powerful ally, the United States. However, after 1989 the EU became more independent of the United States and built up its institutional apparatus, for example through the Maastricht Treaty.

<sup>9</sup> For one version of the historical context, see Smith and Wright, 1999a.

<sup>10</sup> From a speech at Elysee Palace, 4<sup>th</sup> November 1999. See [www.delegfrance-cd-geneve.org/chirac041199.htm](http://www.delegfrance-cd-geneve.org/chirac041199.htm) (30<sup>th</sup> May 2005; consulted 19 June 2013). "Prime Minister's speech to the Polish Stock Exchange", October 6<sup>th</sup> 2000. See [www.number-10.gov.uk/news.asp?NewsId=1341&SectionId=32](http://www.number-10.gov.uk/news.asp?NewsId=1341&SectionId=32) [18 June 2013] Quoted in Kupchan 2002, 151.

<sup>11</sup> See Ian Traynor, "EU calls for Tobin tax in a move to raise direct revenue", *The Guardian*, 29 June 2011.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Hellener, 1994; Palan, 2003; Shaxson, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> This was formalised in 2009 with the accession of the EU to the European Convention of Human Rights, which originally came into force under the auspices of the Council of Europe in 1953. See <http://hub.coe.int/what-we-do/human-rights/eu-accession-to-the-convention> [18 June 2013]

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Jauregui 1999.

<sup>15</sup> The reference is to the so-called "Protestant Ascendancy", the domination of Irish society and politics by the British crown until the early twentieth century.

<sup>16</sup> Humiliation may be deliberate, or it may be an unintended occurrence. It may be experienced by an individual, in some cases marked out as a member of a specific social category, or by a group, for example an occupational or ethnic group, or a group sharing leadership responsibilities within an institution (such as an army, a church, or a national state apparatus). It may also occur within a crowd, since crowds may both impose and be subjected to humiliation.

<sup>17</sup> Take the case of an individual who is suffering symptoms of dementia or some other form of mental ill-health, either temporary or irreversible, but who remains perfectly capable of perceiving changes in the attitudes and behaviour of others. Their decreased ability to manage important aspects of their lives is likely to mean they fall increasingly under the control of others, some of them strangers. They lose agency and autonomy. They experience subjection. As they become less powerful and more dependent within their relationships, this may lead to increased demoralization and depression, and a worsening of their symptoms. If they become institutionalized, and increasingly under the control of strangers, the danger is that they become regarded as chronic sufferers, less interesting, and less worthy of personal attention and respect. They may suffer relegation in the pecking order. This would make them more vulnerable to denial of proper human consideration, to neglect and even abuse. Only the strongest of such victims may retain sufficient agency to exploit their remaining autonomy and complain or even rebel.

<sup>18</sup> See Smith 1999.

<sup>19</sup> For a relevant recent discussion see Thompson 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Later they were invited to tea in Dublin by the German Ambassador who commented: "It was such a great joke, such a perfect example of Irish humour," he said, adding "We put a lot of hope in the Irish people... they are determined to succeed, and they will recover." (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-18371142>; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-18582740> [18 June 2013]. The ambassador, perhaps sensibly, chose to see the episode as an example of humour without acknowledging the undercurrent of derision.

<sup>21</sup> See Smith 2006, especially chapters 8-10

<sup>22</sup> By a happy chance, Ireland and Greece were both case studies in a collection edited by Margaret Scotford Archer and Salvador Giner, entitled *Contemporary Europe. Class, Status and Power*, published in 1971. Comparing the chapter on Greece with the Ireland chapter, certain similarities can be seen. In the early 1970s, in both countries manufacturing was on small-scale and agriculture remained the predominant activity. Tertiary occupations connected with the professions, tourism, shopkeeping and office work were more widely developed than manufacturing. The Church was a powerful conservative force. Political life at a

local level was to a great extent based upon patronage and the exchange of favours. Property ownership and kinship links were the main basis of inequality and social ranking, although educational qualifications were interwoven with these particularistic structures. The editors comment that “In countries where tertiary development has outstripped the emergence of a strong industrial sector (such as Ireland and Greece) there is an analogous, though less marked, tendency for open competition to follow the possession of certain status characteristics” (Archer and Giner, 1971: 48).

<sup>23</sup>The Roman monuments, symbols of Greek military defeat, are liable to be dismissed by Athenians as “the new stuff.”

<sup>24</sup>The Greek small farmer’s characteristics included “imitation of urban styles of life and increasing desire to migrate to the city...Rising aspirations and the development of a consumer’s mentality...[and] Chronic indebtedness to urban moneylenders and state banks, etc.” (Mouzelis and Attalides, 1971: 173).

<sup>25</sup>Leinster House, seat of the Irish national parliament, used to be the residence of the Dukes of Leinster, a branch of the Norman-Welsh Fitzwilliam dynasty.

<sup>26</sup>John Jackson reported that in Ireland in the early 1970s “the influence of the farm family and its dominant position of the country remain decisive”, being (for example) “responsible for the institutional character of [Irish] marriage and for status attributions which continue into the urban society of Dublin and provide the basic framework for analysis” (Jackson, 1971; 204).

<sup>27</sup>Or Scotland, Wales or other parts of the Empire. My mother, born in Limerick, used to quote an Irish saying, “The Devil is an absentee landlord”. Compare Al Pacino as the Devil in *The Devil’s Advocate*: “God...is an absentee landlord!” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2oq7sgBETE> [16 June 2013].

<sup>28</sup>The context is explained in Spourdalakis 1988, 13-14.

<sup>29</sup>The picture is entitled “Greece on the Ruins of Missologhi”. See, for example, <http://www.eugenedelacroix.org/Greece-on-the-Ruins-of-Missolonghi.html> [20 June 2013]

<sup>30</sup>Each new bit of new territory—the Ionian Islands in 1864, Thessaly in 1881, Crete, Epirus and Macedonia in 1913, and West Thrace in 1923—added to the nation-state’s complexity, bringing new dialects and regional cultures.

<sup>31</sup>For information on this and other episodes, see Dritsas 1993.

<sup>32</sup>The Dodecanese Islands were added later in 1947.

<sup>33</sup>There were issues relating to Ulster and Macedonia, respectively.

<sup>34</sup>On the “great idea”, see, for example, Peckham, chapter three.

<sup>35</sup>On St Patrick’s Day 1943, De Valera told his radio audience about “The ideal Ireland that we would have, the Ireland that we dreamed of, would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit—a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. The home, in short, of a people living the life that God desires that men should live.” See *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* 1999, 259.

<sup>36</sup>A useful survey of this period can be found in Lee, 1989, chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>37</sup>In 1971, Mouzelis and Attalides pointed out that “the urban prosperity achieved after the war is not an “economic miracle”—in the sense that the country develops along lines that aggravate rather than solve the social and economic problems of the country”. They quote UN figures showing that before the war “Greece was the most industrialized country in the Balkans” but by 1965 it had fallen below Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Rumania. Mouzelis and Attalides 1971, 177.

<sup>38</sup>The main advocate for Greek entry into Europe had been Constantine Karamalis. Papandreou had spoken against it though he subsequently swung round on the issue (Woodhouse, 1982: 104, 109; Spourdalakis, 1988: 164.

<sup>39</sup>A key intellectual, political and diplomatic role was played by the Irish civil servant T.K (Ken) Whitaker. Ireland’s Economic and Social Research Institute is located in Whitaker Square, named in his honour.

<sup>40</sup>For one view of the period, see Hourihane 2000. For other analytical surveys, see, for example, O’Hearn 1998; O’Hearn 2001; Inglis 2008; O’Sullivan 2006.

<sup>41</sup>See Spoudalakis, chapter 5.

<sup>42</sup>On Syriza’s rise, see Alex Doherty’s interview with Michael Spourdalakis on the New Left Project website at

[http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article\\_comments/syrizas\\_rise](http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/syrizas_rise) [20 June 2013]

<sup>43</sup>Some interesting insights are to be found in Gillian Tett’s highly readable *Fool’s gold* (Tett, 2010).

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