

**Transforming Participation?:
A Comparative Study of State and Civil Society Agency within
National Development Processes in Malawi and Ireland**



A Thesis presented for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy
at
National University of Ireland Maynooth

By

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February 2008

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Summary

In the context of growing economic, social and political polarisation between and within countries both North and South, this study addresses the question as to whether new forms of participatory governance, in the form of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme (PRSP) process in Malawi, and Social Partnership in Ireland, have the potential to engage multiple development discourses, and if so, under what conditions.

Developing a theoretical framework to uncover the structures and dynamics underpinning both processes over time, the study highlights the interaction of domestic and global political cultures within both processes. It is argued that state actors, focused on ‘spinning’ participation to attract foreign investment, while simultaneously contracting civil society ‘partners’ in managing the fallout of the state’s economic globalisation project, are not seeking to engage multiple development discourses. The potential for such transformative participation within both processes therefore rests with civil society actors¹ responding to the mandates of their constituents.

The study identifies a key enabler in this regard as being ‘communication without’ or public awareness raising, with this enhancing visibility and public debate on both the developmental outcomes of the respective processes and the agency and actions of actors therein. While both processes are characterised by many similarities, a key difference in the area of communication is identified. While in Ireland, where domestic

¹ While civil society encompasses a wide sphere of civic actors, the term is narrowly employed in this study to refer to organisations engaged in both processes under investigation – MEJN and its member organisations in Malawi, and members of Social Partnership’s Community and Voluntary Pillar in Ireland.

legacies of a hierarchical, authoritarian political culture facilitate state and civil society actors in disciplining participants within the Irish process and stifling public debate, in Malawi, these national disciplining legacies have been challenged. The study demonstrates how, in Malawi, global influences, in particular as mediated through global informational networks, have played a significant part in stimulating critical public debate, thereby transforming cultural legacies. These influences have resulted in the dominant organisation within the Malawian process tapping into the diversity of Malawian civic life, thereby raising challenges to its own form of leadership, and potentially transforming participation within its national development process.

Acknowledgements

While the final process of putting findings and analysis to paper is necessarily a solitary one, this study would neither have gotten off the ground nor progressed, and would certainly never have reached completion without the support and assistance of a wide range of people. First, I would like to acknowledge the intellectual stimulus provided by colleagues, both here in Ireland and further afield, over the years. The seeds of this study were sown in the shared reflections and discussions with many committed individuals who have never allowed themselves to become complacent about their work or its context. In particular, I would like to thank Jean Somers and Eilish Dillon who, when the seeds were still haphazardly strewn, helped organise and transform them into a research proposal.

Second, I would like to thank the staff and students within the Sociology Department in NUI Maynooth. My thanks go to the Head of Department, Professor Seán O’Riain, who initially, in offering me a place in the post-graduate programme, saw potential in what, to some, seemed a rather unlikely research project. As my second supervisor, Seán also provided invaluable ongoing practical support and encouragement. I am especially grateful to Dr Honor Fagan, my first supervisor, who has been a pleasure to work with, and whose enthusiasm, encouragement and support, at all levels, have been critical to the project. Honor’s genuine interest in, and commitment to the underlying issues helped sustain the energy needed to bring the thesis to completion, particularly through the final months. I am also grateful to students within the Sociology Department who, in particular through exchanges within the research workshops

facilitated by Seán O’Riain, broadened my thinking on a range of sociological themes. My thanks in particular to Anne O’Brien and Fergal Rhatigan for their useful comments on drafts of some Chapters, together with caffeine-fuelled discussions more broadly.

Third, I am extremely grateful to all who participated in the research. The willingness of research ‘participants’ to give freely of their time, and their honesty and frankness in interviews, is very much appreciated. While the resultant analysis will undoubtedly prove challenging and provocative to some participants, it is my sincere hope that it also proves relevant and useful to ongoing work. I would like to thank Trócaire in Ireland, in particular Caoimhe de Barra and Niall O’Keefe, and MEJN in Malawi, in particular Mavuto Bamusi, for facilitating the first phase of field research in Malawi during the summer of 2005. My thanks also to Britta Krueger in Lilongwe, whose generosity and hospitality not only made the two field trips logistically less daunting, but also vastly more enjoyable.

Finally, my thanks go to my family and friends who, while dubious as to the merits of so much time and so much paper, have endured the ups and downs, the rants and raves, with forbearance, if not a little amusement. I am ever grateful to my parents, Máire and Brendan, who have provided unfailing moral support in this, as in many other seemingly errant projects, over the years. My thanks also to Trish, Jon, Mandy and Paul for the food, the shelter, the laughter and much more.

I also wish to acknowledge the financial support received from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS).

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List of Abbreviations

CAN	Community Action Network (Ireland)
CCJP	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (Malawi)
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CONGOMA	Congress of NGOs in Malawi
CORI	Conference of Religious in Ireland
CSO	Central Statistics Office (Ireland)
CV pillar	Community and Voluntary pillar (Ireland)
CWC	Community Workers Cooperative (Ireland)
DAIRU	Drug and Alcohol Information and Research Unit (Ireland)
DED	Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst – German development agency
DfID	Department for International Development (UK)
EAPN	European Anti-Poverty Network (Ireland)
EEC	European Economic Community
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
G7	Group of seven industrialised countries
GLEN	Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (Ireland)
GNP	Gross National Product
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit – German state development agency
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative
HSE	Health Service Executive (Ireland)
IBEC	Irish Business and Employers Confederation
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
ICTUCU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions Centres for the Unemployed
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INO	Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed
InWENT	Capacity Building International Germany
IRCHSS	Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences
IRL	Irish Rural Link
ITM	Irish Traveller Movement
MCTU	Malawi Congress of Trade Unions
MEGS	Malawi Economic Growth Strategy
MEJN	Malawi Economic Justice Network
MEPD	Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (Malawi)
MGDS	Malawi Growth and Development Strategy
MIPA	Malawi Investment and Procurement Agency
MoFEP	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (Malawi)
MP	Member of Parliament (Malawi)
NACD	National Advisory Committee on Drugs (Ireland)
NAG	National Action Group (Malawi)
NDI	National Democratic Institute (US)
NEC	National Economic Council (Malawi)

NESC	National Economic and Social Council (Ireland)
NESF	National Economic and Social Forum (Ireland)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NICE	National Initiative for Civic Education (Malawi)
NUIM	National University of Ireland Maynooth
NWCI	National Women's Council of Ireland
NYCI	National Youth Council of Ireland
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
ODI	Overseas Development Institute (UK)
OPEN	One Parent Exchange Network (Ireland)
OSISA	Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (South Africa)
P2000	Partnership 2000 – Social Partnership Agreement of 1997
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PPF	Programme for Prosperity and Fairness – Social Partnership Agreement of 2000
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme
SDSS	Service Delivery Satisfaction Survey (Malawi)
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
SVP	Society of the Vincent de Paul (Ireland)
SWAP	Sectoral Wide Approach Programme
TA	Traditional Authority / Chief – hereditary leader forming part of local government structure (Malawi)
TD	Teachta Dála – Deputy to the Dáil / Member of Parliament (Ireland)
TWG	Thematic Working group within PRSP/MGDS (Malawi)
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United National Development Programme
US	United States of America
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Participatory governance: Moving beyond the development impasse

Development is in trouble. Successive waves of ideas, policies, programmes and financial transfers¹ over the past fifty years have yielded meagre results for many of the world's most marginalised peoples. Much of Asia is said to have been hit by 'crisis', Latin America has experienced a 'lost decade of development', Russia and Eastern Europe are experiencing the 'travails of transition', while Africa has been completely 'marginalised' from the global development process (Payne, 2001). While living conditions, prospects and opportunities have improved for some people within these regions, many others have been cut off – economically, socially and politically. Many of these marginalised people, communities and groups are to be found in Africa, where poverty – in all its dimensions – continues to rise. Over fifty years on from the self-proclaimed 'golden age of development' (Singer, 1989, Kohler, 1995) some 300 million African people, almost half the continent's population, survive on less than \$1 a day (UNDP, 2006: 269). With the growing marginalisation and sense of powerlessness this engenders, global development thinking and practice has come to be characterised more by 'impasse' (Schuurman, 1993, Booth, 1994) than sustainable achievement.

While, in Ireland, exuberant accounts of the 'Celtic Tiger' phenomenon paint a somewhat different picture, their triumphalist brush-strokes mask an underlying canvas of more complex hues. The rapid rise in economic growth since the 1990s has been accompanied by a rise in both income inequality and social exclusion (NESC, 2005a,

¹ An estimated US\$ 100 billion in aid was invested worldwide in 2005 alone (World Bank, 2007).

Hardiman, 2004, Kirby, 2003, 2002, Allen, 2000). Accounts of growing levels of drug and alcohol addiction (NACD/DAIRU, 2007), rising crime and violence (CSO, 2007)², homelessness (Dublin Simon Community, 2007), stress and mental health problems (HSE, 2007) reveal a society where all is certainly not well, and where the underlying model of development, while undoubtedly bringing substantial benefits to some, has failed, and badly failed, many others.

That something is wrong is widely acknowledged in the global context. The relevance of development studies to the everyday lived realities of people on the ground has been questioned and debated by practitioners and theorists alike (see for example Edwards, 1989, 1994, Booth, 1994) and the concept of development itself, as privileging particular forms of knowledge and notions of progress, has come under critique from a diverse range of post-development theorists (for example Sachs, 1992, Escobar, 1995, and Rahnema, 1997). In Ireland however, while the gap between rich and poor widens and social exclusion deepens, the holy grail of development – economic growth – remains largely uncontested within public discourse. Whereas globally since the 1970s, although analyses certainly vary, development has moved from a narrowly economic conception to one which embodies also social, political, cultural and environmental dimensions, in Ireland thinking on development remains largely unchanged since the Whitaker report of 1958, with the concept remaining largely synonymous with export-led economic growth. It would appear that the global consensus on the inadequacy of the ‘trickle down’ model (see Todaro, 1994: 154-158) has failed to trickle through to Ireland.

² See also O’Halloran, Marie, “Last Year ‘bloodiest and most violent’ in State’s history”, *The Irish Times*, Thursday, October 4th, 2007

What is to be done? Accepting what both experience and post-development theorists have taught us – that a universal model of development does not translate effectively to specific political, social and cultural conditions – where do we turn to from here? There is an urgency to this question. While we debate and theorise, critique and counter-critique, life for many people around the world, including Ireland, is characterised by growing marginalisation, immiseration and, for some, despair.

Given what we now know, that universal models do not work for all – indeed they deepen social and political exclusion for many – there is clearly a need for spaces wherein visions and aspirations of development which befit specific times, peoples and places may be imagined, articulated and debated, and wherein the people most adversely affected by development models promulgated to date might be afforded a voice. Where might such spaces be found? While some analysts point to the need for deliberative spaces away from proponents of the dominant paradigms of development – for example the World Social Forum – arguably more direct and immediate results are likely to be obtained through direct engagement with state authorities and traditional decision makers. Spaces for such direct engagement may be found in the range of new participatory institutions of governance which have come to characterise contemporary governance globally. Variously described as participatory governance (Newman, 2005), multi-governance (Bang, 2004), joined-up governance (Reddel, 2004), co-governance (Kooiman, 2003, Dean, 2007) or network governance (Bogason and Musso, 2006, Sorenson, 2006, 2002, Sorenson and Torfing, 2005, Triantafillou, 2004), within such arrangements the role of the state is described as shifting from that of 'governing' through direct forms of control, to that of 'governance', in which it collaborates with a wide range of civil actors in networks that cut across the public, private and voluntary

sectors, and operate across different levels of decision-making (Kooiman, 2003). Underpinning these governance arrangements is the by now ubiquitous concept of participation, together with its equally ubiquitous sister concept, partnership. The idea is that, through state-led ‘partnership’ with citizen groups, more voices might be brought to the development table in an effort to jointly identify, discuss and address specific developmental challenges.

Since the mid-1990s, such processes have increasingly come to characterise Irish political life, both nationally, through Social Partnership – a national development process initially designed as primarily a capital-labour agreement, but now with a greatly broadened remit covering an ever widening range of development policy, and locally, through area-based partnerships and other partnership-based arrangements (Hardiman, 2002a, Larkin, 2004b, Forde, 2004). More globally, participatory governance has a longer history and has, over the decades, emerged as a central concept underpinning development practice and theory in many post-colonial countries (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999, Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001, Cooke and Kothari, 2001, Hickey and Mohan, 2004). Claims have even been made that participatory processes constitute a ‘new paradigm’ within global development (Chambers, 1997), and the concept of participation underpins the national development Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme (PRSP) process introduced by the World Bank in 1999 as a condition of debt relief and continued funding to over seventy countries worldwide.

Participatory governance processes, in theory therefore, seem to offer potential spaces where multiple conceptions and discourses of development, representing the experiences, analyses and aspirations of a wide range of citizens, including the most

marginalised, may be debated and discussed. However, as will be seen in the following Section (1.2), participation means very different things to different people, and the prospect of participatory governance arrangements, in practice, offering such a space for competing development discourses is by no means guaranteed. It is entirely dependent on the understanding and use of participation by actors engaged in and around participatory processes. Therefore, in order to examine whether participatory institutions of governance do offer spaces to engage developmental alternatives – the central preoccupation of this thesis – it is necessary to explore the understanding and use of participation by actors engaged in and around these institutions. How exactly this may be done is explored in Section 1.2 below.

1.2 Participation contested

Despite its global ubiquity, participation remains a contested concept between and within disciplines, meaning different things to different actors, often including those examining or engaged in the same ‘participatory’ processes. Historically, the concept has been used in a range of ways, from enabling people to gain political agency and wield influence over the context and direction of their lives, to its employment as a means of maintaining social control and neutralising political opposition (Cornwall and Brock, 2005). These competing currents continue within contemporary discourses and practices of participation. While some understand participation to mean consultation with a select constituency, others harbour expectations of engaging a range of different perspectives moving toward a system of joint decision-making with a wide range of ‘partners’. While some see it as an instrumental tool for gaining legitimacy and material support for particular interventions, others see it as a political mechanism which, affording agency to heretofore marginalised groups, offers the potential to

transform societal relations and developmental direction. Definitionally defiant and politically ambiguous, participation, its ‘partner’ concept, partnership, and the governance processes they underpin, offer spaces into which a range of meanings can be invested, frameworks of development explored, and agendas and forms of agency pursued. This ambiguity has formed the basis for a growing literature on the subject which, polarised between rejecting participation as “*the new tyranny*” (Cooke and Kothari, 2001) and exploring its transformative potential (Hickey and Mohan, 2004), highlights the need for further research and theorisation into the structural dynamics of, and actor’s agency within, such processes.

Perhaps a useful starting point in exploring these contested conceptions of participation and participatory processes is the distinction which emerges within the literature between concepts of participation focused on outcome, and concepts focused on process. While the former perspective focuses largely on issues of efficiency and effectiveness of particular policy interventions, the latter engages with issues of power and inclusion, seeing empowerment of heretofore marginalised groups and peoples as an end in itself within participatory processes. These different perspectives correspond to the different agendas and interests of participating agents, thereby drawing attention to the salience of agency in determining the form of participation which takes place. This distinction is captured neatly in a typology developed by White (1996 – in Cornwall, 2002a) as outlined in Table 1.2 below. Four different forms of participation are presented, from nominal through to transformative, together with the benefits these confer on the different actors. In addition, the objective for policy makers of invoking particular forms of participation is also presented. The typology is as follows:

Table 1.2: A Typology of Participation (White, 1996, after Cornwall 2002a)

Form of Participation	What ‘participation’ means to the implementing agency	What ‘participation’ means for those on the receiving end	What ‘participation’ is for
Nominal	Legitimisation – to show they are doing something	Inclusion – to retain some access to potential benefits	Display
Instrumental	Efficiency – to limit funder’s input, draw on community contributions and make projects more cost-effective	Cost – of time spent on project-related labour and other activities	As a means to achieving cost effectiveness and local facilities
Representative	Sustainability – to avoid creating dependency	Leverage – to influence the shape the project takes and its management	To give people a voice in determining their own development
Transformative	Empowerment – to strengthen people’s capabilities to take decisions and act for themselves	Empowerment – to be able to decide and act for themselves	Both as a means and an end, a continuing dynamic

Within this typology *nominal* participation is presented as representing little more than a display of action on the part of policy-makers. Participants stand to gain by possibly retaining access to some services or benefits of particular policy actions. Such a form is seen as legitimising the action of policy makers. *Instrumental* participation aims at reducing costs of specific policy initiatives by drawing on participants’ own resources. This form of participation represents a potential gain to participants in the hope of obtaining new and/or improved services and facilities. This form, although sometimes characterised as ‘partnership’, does not necessarily confer on participants the right to negotiate. In White’s typology the focus is on harnessing participants’ own resources. *Representative* participation moves on to a more political level whereby participants begin to find a space to influence the design and outcomes of policy initiatives. The benefits to participants are clear in that they gain some power and influence over the

final outcomes. This form also benefits policy makers as increasing involvement of participants in the design, as well as in the implementation of policy initiatives, offers more likelihood of higher levels of effectiveness in policy action together with sustainability in outcome. Finally within White's typology, *transformative* participation takes the concept and practice to another level whereby participation is seen as an end in itself, as well as a means towards policy design and implementation. The focus of participation at this level is on participants themselves, consolidating and enhancing their own capacities and abilities to be active agents in their own development, ultimately leading to their own empowerment.

White's typology, although deriving from localised project-based contexts, is useful to an analysis of participation within broader governance processes in two principal respects. First, it highlights a distinction between participation focused on policy outcomes – be that enhancing legitimacy (nominal), efficiency (instrumental), and/or sustainability (representative), and participation focused on the outcome of the process itself (transformation) whereby the focus is on empowering the actors involved to plan their own futures and scope is provided for multiple discourses of development. Second, it highlights the importance of agency, drawing attention to the different agendas of different actors. White's typology is perhaps a little misleading in one respect however. The horizontal alignment of the different forms of participation with specific agendas of different actors suggests agreement on each between all actors. This is certainly not always the case, with the form of, and anticipated outcome of participation often contested by different actors within the same process. While the typology presented perhaps misses this important point, it nonetheless proves useful in highlighting a number of different forms of participation, and drawing attention to the

competing outcomes and agendas of different actors involved. The potential of participatory governance institutions and arrangements to engage multiple discourses therefore lies in the form of participation pursued in each case. Employing White's typology, only representative and transformative forms of participation offer potential for engaging multiple discourses.

Debates on the practice and potential of participation have developed in tandem with its gradual incursion into developmental governance within two disparate bodies of literature, development studies and political science/public administration respectively. Although pursuing their debates in isolation (no cross referencing is apparent across the two literatures), both highlight a number of common themes and have independently arrived at a common point, placing participation at the centre of evolving governance arrangements and shifting relationships between state and civil society globally. Both literatures are examined below.

1.2.1 Participation and development studies: 'Tyranny' or 'transformation'?

Early forms of participation in countries of the global South post-independence tended to mirror early forms within community development in Ireland (see for example Collins, 2002, Kellagher and Whelan, 1992 for models of community development in Ireland) in that they focused on community participation in local self-help development initiatives which were largely unconnected to the wider policy environment (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999, Cornwall and Gaventa, 2001). Through strengthened participation of the communities it was hoped that agencies and service providers would be better able to understand their needs and perspectives, thereby contributing towards more effective and responsive services more finely attuned to local needs. The

perceived benefits of participation at this level went beyond increased service efficiencies however. Cornwall (2002), noting how in many ex-colonies the templates for many of these local institutions were already in place through the decentralised governance structures set up to administer indirect rule during the colonial period, describes how the colonial strategy was that of fostering participation in self-help initiatives as a way to save government money, stave off demands for services, and counter opposition to the regime. Cornwall claims that this strategy continues in many of the same countries today. This view is echoed by Ackerman (2004) who claims *“participation is usually seen to be important insofar as it reduces government costs and responsibilities”* (2004: 447). And so, concepts of participation were, and in many cases continue to be, in White’s terms, instrumental, focused on the off-loading of service delivery and management to NGOs and community groups, or on convincing local residents to donate voluntary labour or materials.

In more recent decades however, coinciding with an enhanced focus on Western agendas of ‘good governance’ and accountability, it is argued that a shift has occurred towards a more political model, broadening participation to include searches for more direct ways through which citizens may influence governments and hold them accountable (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999). The principal elements of this shift from what may be characterised as a largely instrumental model to a more political and transformative one have been outlined as follows:

From	To
Beneficiary	Citizen
Project	Policy
Consultation	Decision-making
Appraisal	Implementation
Micro	Macro

Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999

According to Gaventa and Valderrama's analysis, participants have moved from being passive beneficiaries of development interventions, being informed and consulted at the outset, to playing a more active role, engaging as citizens in the process. The shift has seen participants share in decision-making and become involved in implementation and, in many cases, in monitoring, of the agreed intervention. In tandem with this shift in participation, localised micro-projects have been replaced with an emphasis on wider, macro policy-based interventions, what are known in development circles as SWAPs (sectoral wide approach programmes). While Gaventa and Valderrama (1999) rather optimistically point toward the transformative potential of this shift, the degree to which participants influence policymakers remains unclear, and the shift, if in fact representing a shift at all, may in fact constitute a move more towards a representative form of participation as outlined by White (1996) rather than a transformative one. Any conclusive characterisation of this development requires a closer examination of the processes, and levels of influence of the different actors within the different processes involved, such as that carried out in this study.

While quietly expanding its reach within development practice since the mid-1980s, it is only in recent years (with the possible exception of the Participation Working Group in the Institute for Development Studies in Sussex) that a growing debate on the merits or otherwise of participation as a broad approach to policy making has begun to emerge in the development studies literature. A provocatively entitled 2001 collection (the first main publication devoted to the theme) *Participation – The New Tyranny?* (Cooke and Kothari, 2001), focusing on participation as practised in participatory rural appraisals (PRAs), has captured much of the critical debate in the area. *Tyranny's* critique focuses on the criticism that so-called participatory approaches have often failed to engage with

issues of power and politics and have instead become largely technical approaches to development, in the process depoliticising what the authors assert to be an explicitly political process. More specific charges within the collection include the assertion that so-called participatory approaches are carried out with an insufficiently sophisticated understanding of how power operates and is constituted, and of how empowerment can occur (Kothari, 2001, Mosse, 2001), an inadequate understanding of the role of structure and agency in social change (Cleaver, 2001), and a dominance of methodological individualism which obscures an analysis of what makes participation difficult for marginalised groups in the first place (Francis, 2001).

Provocative in both title and content, the *Tyranny* collection crystallised many of the issues of concern to commentators and practitioners alike, re-igniting debate in the area, and providing the impetus for a more optimistic collection published in 2004.

Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation (Hickey and Mohan, 2004) agrees with *Tyranny's* central charge that participatory development has often failed to engage with issues of power and politics, but contends that work needs to be done in this area with a view to transforming practices and approaches. “...*understanding the ways in which participation relates to existing power structures and political systems provides the basis for moving towards a more transformatory approach to development, one which is rooted in the exercise of broadly defined citizenship*” (2004: 5). Noting that much commentary, both laudatory and critical, on the issue of participation to date has tended to focus on Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs), treating them as the definitive form of participation (2004: 5), the collection argues that the real debates should now be situated more widely in the area of governance and the attendant division of labour between public and civic spheres. “... *real contests remain concerning the form that*

development and democracy, state and civil society, can and should take, concerning how to theorise the role of agency within debates over development and governance”

(2004: 10). The empirical findings of this study make a direct contribution to these real debates.

Specifically, the *Tyranny to Transformation* collection argues that participatory approaches must engage with development as an underlying process rather than a series of technical approaches, thereby broadening the discourse on participation by building on existing forms of agency (Masaki, 2004, Waddington and Mohan, 2004). Masaki's contribution to the volume, combining structural and post-structural accounts of power, draws attention to how individuals may (re)make rules and (re)constitute institutions and conversely, how institutions can shape individual actions (Masaki, 2004). Both Bebbington's and Vincent's contributions problematise the issue of agency, taking issue with Escobar (1995, 2000) and other post-development theorist's insistence on localities or local communities as unproblematised sites of resistance. The writers argue that this view fails to take into account issues of inequality of power and wealth, and the forms of political action these engender within these sites (Bebbington, 2004, Vincent, 2004). Other contributions to the volume explore understandings of space as a social construct (Cornwall, 2004), as well as examining the issue of representation (Mitlin, 2004, Gaventa 2004, and Browne, 2004 (in relation to PRSPs)).

Both the *Tyranny* and the *Tyranny to Transformation* collections have re-inserted issues of power, politics, structure and agency into the debate, lifting theories and conceptions of participation out of the narrow methodologically parametered confines of PRAs and placing them within a wider theoretical context of governance and democracy. In doing

so, both collections explicitly draw from a transformative framework. Many of these theoretical advances within international development literature converge with recent advances within Western political science/public administration literature on emerging forms of governance, which have also begun to engage with issues of participation and agency. It is to this literature that we now turn.

1.2.2 Participation and political science: Governing participation

Recently, theoretical consideration has been given to the issue of participation within a range of political science literature focusing broadly on emerging forms of governance and, more specifically, within the UK, on such forms of governance associated with the ‘third sector’. The roots of this literature lie in a number of areas. Reddel (2004) traces its origins within both theories of public sector reform through the 1990’s in many Western countries wherein “*the euphemism that ‘governments should steer and not row’ became the mantra of public choice proponents*” (2004: 133), in tandem with the re-emergence of ‘community’ as a critical space for policy formulation and political activity. A series of studies in the 1980s and 1990s demonstrated how different social and political actors interacted in public policy formulation, moving towards the articulation of new forms of governance (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992, Kooiman, 1993, Rhodes, 1996). Studies since this time have largely been instrumentally focused - describing these emerging processes in terms of their impact on policy outcomes. While many commentators (e.g. Sorenson, 2002, Kooiman, 2003, Bang, 2004) put forward a more instrumental relationship between government and citizens within the context of these emerging forms of governance, where the focus is on enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of policy and services, Reddel’s analysis (2004) posits a more active citizen engagement in policy formulation and implementation through the

agency of ‘community’, from which more innovative responses (than those traditionally put forward by both state and market) to social policy and programmes might come. Interestingly Reddel’s proposals, coming from Australia and influenced by developments in joined-up governance in the UK, strongly resonate with those of Powell and Geoghegan (2006) who, discussing the emergent and future roles of the community sector in Ireland, also posit an active role for communities in the country’s future development policy. It should be noted however that, while Reddel’s proposals are located within the frame of emerging forms of governance, positing a role for “...*an active state and engaged civil society comprising a mixture of democratic institutions and networks...*” (Reddel, 2004: 138), Powell and Geoghegan explicitly reject institutions of partnership and those of joined up governance in the UK, advocating instead that communities serve as an alternative political site for the development of a social left and a space where counter-publics may flourish.

While public administration literature on new forms of governance draws from the area of public sector reform, political scientists employ the term as a descriptor of the increasingly diverse polity that they observe at a broader level. Within political science circles where, since the 1980s, it has been recognised that political decision-making is not confined to the formal structures of government (Rhodes, 1994, 1996), concerns have been raised about the democratic legitimacy of such arrangements (Held, 1989). This is a concern which has also been raised in the context of Ireland’s Social Partnership (O’ Cinnéide, 1999). Given the fact that, in diverse forms, such governance arrangements abound, these concerns highlight the need to examine in more detail how they relate to, and interact with, existing political institutions.

Looking at the potential of these new forms of governance for transformatory participation, the contributions of a number of post-development theorists have also something to offer. Commentators on the post-development debate have argued that it presents an opportunity to bring politics back into development, (Pieterse 1998, Munck, 2000, Gibson- Graham, 2004). Ziai (2004) explicitly argues that “...*sceptical post-development could be seen as a manifesto of radical democracy in the field of ‘development’ policy and theory*” (2004: 1057). And so, perhaps a somewhat unlikely alignment of post development theory with political science literature may be discerned.

An important point to note is that questions of difference, dissent and conflict highlighted in some of the development literature discussed above, as well as within Gramscian theory and social movement literature, are rarely addressed in the public administration literature on new forms of governance. Newman et al (2004), in an empirical examination of new forms of governance in the UK, argue that such questions have much to contribute to the development of governance theory, and to the development of new, and perhaps more challenging forms of collaborative governance appropriate to complex and diverse societies. This point is also made by Reddel (2004) who highlights the dangers in an overly generalised account of the place of networks in social governance, noting that power differentials, differences between state and civil society networks, and the diversity of networks require careful attention (2004: 137).

Surveying the literature from the field of public administration, it becomes clear that much writing on participatory or networked forms of governance to date has been of a descriptive nature, with the focus on identifying and demonstrating co-governance arrangements within different (Northern) countries and within different policy fields.

Sorenson (2005), asserting that “*network politics is here to stay*” (2005: 198) calls for “*a second generation of governance network research*” (2005: 206) to focus more explicitly on how such participatory processes may be governed. Specific issues requiring further research highlighted in the literature include the processes / norms which underlie new governance processes (Triantafillou, 2004, Bogason and Musso, 2006), the diversity and power differentials between groups (Reddel, 2004), the diversity of discourses and how these might be negotiated (Rosell, 2004, Sorenson, 2006), and the linkages between these processes and existing political institutions (Sorenson, 2005).

Notwithstanding the apparent fact that both literatures have developed in isolation from each other, it is clear that the burgeoning political science / public administration literature on new, potentially more participative forms of governance converges with that of development studies in a way that places participation firmly within the context of evolving governance arrangements and shifting relationships between state and civil society globally. Having identified this broad situational context, both literatures highlight a range of areas requiring more in-depth study and examination in order to advance the debate from the abstract to the more concrete, exploring conditions and enablers for more transformatory participation.

Contributions from development studies highlight the need for further work within the areas of power, politics, and the links between structure and popular agency, with particular emphasis on how more marginalised groups might be involved in such processes (representation). Empirical lacunae on the effects of participatory processes have been highlighted and studies in this area are called for. Contributions from the

field of public administration focus more closely on both institutional arrangements for such processes and the role of the state therein. A second generation of governance research has been called for, with topics including further work on the norms and processes underpinning new forms of governance taking into account power differentials and diversity, the implications of such processes for state agency, and the linkages between such processes and existing political institutions. Taken together, both literatures, focusing on new forms of governance as potential sites of participation, highlight the interaction between structure and agency and the importance of power, drawing attention to a number of issues requiring further examination. These may be summarised as follows:

- Institutional frameworks, norms and processes at play within new forms of governance
- Power and discourse
- Communications and decision making
- Representation and agency
- Linkages to broader political institutions, practices and cultures

Combined in this manner, the issues raised within both literatures provide a framework from which we can proceed to examine the tyrannical dangers and/or transformatory potentials of participatory processes. Employing such a framework, this study analyses two national development processes – the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process (PRSP) in Malawi and Social Partnership in Ireland. Both processes involve non-governmental organisations (NGOs) whose mandate is to represent specific marginalised groups within Malawian and Irish society, thereby potentially transforming participation within the two processes through the introduction of multiple development discourses. This study explores the extent to which this has occurred and the factors contributing to this.

1.3 Malawi's PRSP/MGDS and Ireland's Social Partnership

1.3.1 Malawi's PRSP

The immediate context for the development of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), which constitute mid to long-term national development plans aligned to national budgets, was the decision by international creditors to grant debt relief to a number of indebted countries. This necessitated a mechanism for the disbursement of released funds. PRSPs were devised by the World Bank and IMF in September 1999 as a condition of qualification for their debt relief package, the Highly Indebted Poor Country Initiative (HIPC). PRSPs were also developed in the context of plans within the World Bank for greater coordination of donor interventions (Thin, 2001, Booth, 2003), and the idea of the PRSP came rapidly to be seen (by the Boards of the IMF and the World Bank) as having the potential to serve as the overarching country-level policy document to serve as a framework for all aid flows (ODI, 2004). PRSPs are now a precondition of aid from the IMF and World Bank for all countries, and are relevant to over seventy low-income countries with around one-third of the world's population (IMF/World Bank, 2002).

According to the IMF and the World Bank, PRSPs are based on six core principles.

They should be:

- Results-oriented, including targets for poverty reduction
- Comprehensive, integrating macro-economic, structural, sectoral and social elements
- Country-driven, representing a consensual view
- Participatory, with all relevant stakeholders participating in formulation and implementation
- Based on partnerships between government and other actors
- Long-term, focusing on reforming institutions and building capacity, as well as short-term goals

(World Bank, 2002)

And so, PRSPs are, in principle, consensus agreements developed in participatory, partnership-type arrangements between the state and a range of other actors, including local NGOs. In this context the World Bank defines participation as follows:

Participation is the process through which stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making, resource allocations and access to public goods and services. (2001: 3).

According to the World Bank's formulation therefore, participation constitutes a mechanism of 'shared control' and hence, presumably, power over policy formulation and implementation among a different range of actors, including international donors. How precisely this control or power is to be shared remains unclear however, with the Bank's *PRSP Sourcebook* (a set of guidelines produced by the World Bank for PRSP formulation, see World Bank, 2004) making no reference to differentials in power or influence between actors, and paying little attention to how competing and/or conflicting discourses might be negotiated.

Malawi's PRSP formulation process began in late 2000, following IMF and World Bank approval of an interim PRSP strategy in December 2000. The principal civil society group involved in the process was a self-formed network known as the Malawi Economic Justice Network, MEJN. The MEJN network was made up of a range of NGOs, religious associations, trade unions, business associations, academics and community groups. The resultant three year strategy was formally launched in April of 2002 (Jenkins and Tsoka, 2003). Following its completion work began, in mid-2005, developing a follow-on strategy. This five-year strategy, known as the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS) brings together elements of the PRSP and an

economic growth strategy, the Malawi Economic Growth Strategy (MEGS). It was completed in 2006 and launched in early 2007.

The literature on PRSPs to date may be divided into two principal categories. Much of it takes the form of externally commissioned technical reviews, often by Northern NGOs, as well as World Bank and IMF literature (see for example Driscoll and Evans, 2005, Bwalya et al, 2004, Lucas et al, 2004, ODI, 2004, Booth, 2003, Ellis et al, 2003, Ellis and Mdoe, 2003, Jenkins and Tsoka, 2003, McGee et al, 2003, Trócaire, 2003, Panos, 2002, IMF 2002). With a focus on enhancing aid effectiveness, such reviews often cover the experiences of a range of PRSP countries, and focus on technical aspects of the process rather than on wider theoretical considerations. Analyses of participation tend to be limited to accounts of numbers of ‘participants’ consulted, although some contributions also point to a widening of discourses (for example McGee et al, 2003). Largely eschewing wider debates on the nature of development, its historical and contextual situation, and the role of states and national and international civil society therein, these studies generally lack any in-depth account of power relations and the broader political context within which these processes take place. Focusing on aid effectiveness, they provide little insight into the potential of PRSP processes to explore and engage multiple frameworks of development.

A second body of literature represents a more critical stream and brings a more overtly political analysis to the processes. Three main areas of focus emerge within this literature. First, commentators such as Stewart and Wang (2003), Gould (2005), and Cheru (2006), pointing to the ongoing influence of international donors on PRSP processes, highlight the contradiction between the principle of country ownership and

donor influence. Second, commentators including Craig and Porter (2002), Weber (2004, 2006), Cheru (2006), Sumner (2006), and Zack-Williams and Mohan (2006) focus on policy outcomes and argue, to varying degrees, that PRSPs represent a refinement of the liberal political project. Craig and Porter (2002), Weber (2004, 2006), and Zack-Williams and Mohan (2006) are most strident in their criticism in this regard, with Craig and Porter (2002) describing the process as a mode of “*inclusive liberalism*” in which the disciplined inclusion of the poor is the central task. Weber (2004) argues that the PRSP approach represents a form of governance that attempts to foreclose social and political alternatives, while Zack-Williams and Mohan (2006) argue that PRSPs constitute, by and large, replicas of the old structural adjustment prescriptions. Sumner (2006), comparing policy content across fifty strategy documents, is less conclusive as to the degree to which strategies represent “*more of the same*”, while Cheru (2006), acknowledging the neo-liberal bias of African PRSP documents, argues less critically that, with the aid of strong states, such policies can succeed in alleviating poverty. Third, the impact of PRSP processes on social relations constitutes an area of concern for both Weber (2006) and Cornwall and Brock (2005). Cornwall and Brock (2005), asserting that only a small group of elites are involved in PRSP processes, argue that the processes reinforce inequitable status relations and increase exclusion. Weber (2006) is of a similar view. Asserting that participatory processes do not necessarily result in progressive social and political relations, she argues that the PRSP process represents an attempt to further entrench dominant social power relations. Both of these latter contributions implicitly draw attention to the issues of civil society representation – specifically, who are ‘participants’, and do they afford a voice to more marginalised groups?

While the second body of literature opens up the debate on the PRSP process to include issues of power and politics, it remains limited in a number of respects. First, while a number of studies focus on policy outcomes, they contain limited detail on the process wherein these are achieved – i.e. the actual dynamics of participation. Second, even in studies focusing on the institutional frameworks and processes (in particular the first body of literature), details are limited to technical points such as the dates of meetings, lists of participants etc. Little detail is furnished on what exactly happens inside the doors of the processes, how rules are decided, how competing discourses are negotiated, what communication norms predominate, which participants prove most influential and why, etc. Third, beyond technicalities of how resultant strategies do or do not link to existing policy and national budgets, no account is provided on how the processes link to existing political institutions and practices or to the broader political context in which they are (or are not) embedded. Fourth, the focus on the role of donors, together with assertions of elitism and exclusion engendered by the processes, appears to leave little room for agency among national state and civil society actors. Studies include no accounts of how national civil society participants represent their constituents, from whom they derive their mandate, or how their participation is informed. And finally, all studies to date take either PRSP strategies or their formulation as their point of focus, in doing so drawing conclusions from a snapshot view of what is, in fact, an ongoing governance process with implications for evolving state-civil society relations. This study addresses these gaps by employing the conceptual framework outlined towards the end of the previous Section (1.2) and theorised more deeply in Chapter Four to go behind the doors of Malawi’s ongoing PRSP/MGDS process. It examines in detail the evolving dynamics of the process, including actor’s engagement with each other within the process, and with their constituents without.

1.3.2 Social Partnership

O'Carroll (2002) traces the roots of Social Partnership back to the post-civil war period when, he argues, a sense of community, harmony and consensus was actively fostered by both government policy (under De Valera) and the Catholic church. This context was institutionalised through strategies of cooperation between employers, trade unions, and other interest groups. The first Social Partnership agreement was signed in 1987. Although principally a pay agreement between capital and labour designed to promote industrial stability and a climate attractive to foreign investment, as McSharry (2000), Laffan and O'Donnell (1998), and Hardiman (2002a, 2004) point out, the agreement also embodied non-pay aspects, including a wide range of economic and social policies such as tax reform, the evolution of welfare payments, trends in health spending, and structural adjustments. The five subsequent agreements have had a broadly similar form. Each covers a three-year period and sets out pay increases for the public and private sectors as well as commitments on tax reform and social equality. Like PRSPs, Social Partnership is a consensus-based process developed in participatory, partnership type arrangements between the state and a range of social actors. This is reflected in the wording of the process – the principle of partnership is embodied in the title, while the characterisation of the resultant strategies as 'agreements' reflects the consensus driven nature of the process. The invitation, in 1996, to eight organisations from the community and voluntary sector to become involved was heralded as widening and deepening participation within the process (Partnership 2000, 1996).

Ireland's Social Partnership has been heralded as a possible model for PRSPs worldwide within two specific studies (World Bank, 2003a, Connolly, 2007). While the

World Bank (2003a), in a short paper on Ireland's process, appears to see significant potential in its application as a model for participation within PRSPs, Connolly (2007) is more circumspect. She argues that significant differences exist between the range of actors engaged in both processes, emphasising in particular the power and capacity of economic interest groups in Ireland versus those in Southern countries. However, with her paper largely focused on an analysis of Social Partnership itself, little substantiation is provided for the claim of weak power and capacity within Southern civil society. This area is explored in depth, in the Malawian context, in this study and a markedly different conclusion is reached.

With regard to the other literature on Social Partnership, in contrast to the PRSP literature, much of this is produced domestically, although recently it has attracted interest from scholars further afield (for example Ornston, 2003, House and McGrath, 2004, Baccarro and Simoni, 2004, Nicolls, 2006). Literature on Social Partnership tends to be divided between commentators who focus on the concurrence of the country's economic success with the process (Ornston, 2003, Hardiman 2004, 2002a, 2002b, House and McGrath, 2004, O'Donnell and Thomas, 2002, O'Donnell, 2001, McSharry, 2000), and more critical analysts who adopt a more political approach to variously argue that the process co-opts the community and voluntary sector, silences dissent through an illusion of consensus, and is inherently anti-democratic (Meade, 2005, Meade and O'Donovan, 2002, O'Carroll, 2002, Murphy, 2002, Allen, 2000, O'Cinnéide, 1999). A smaller body of literature (Nicholls, 2006, Larragy, 2006) focuses on the social policy outcomes of the process and the community and voluntary pillar's role therein.

The first body of literature, which tends to focus on union-employer-state relations within the process, has revolved around corporatist paradigms, highlighting the role of the Irish state in shaping both the institutions (McSharry, 2000, O'Donnell, 2000, O'Donnell and Thomas, 2004, Baccarro and Simoni, 2004, Hardiman, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, House and McGrath, 2004) and even the social partners themselves (Ornston, 2003, arguably also perhaps O'Donnell and Thomas, 2004).

Specific attention is paid to the role of the community and voluntary pillar within the process in a number of other contributions. Focusing on the process's policy implications, Nicholls (2006) rather confusingly, citing community and voluntary pillar representatives' scepticism on outcomes in relation to family friendly work policies, argues that Social Partnership has brought about specific policy commitments in this area, thereby concluding, as reflected in the title of her article, that "*Social Partnership Matters*". Larragy (2006), on the other hand, is less convinced, arguing that the influence wielded by the community and voluntary pillar in the 1990s has waned considerably in recent times, in line with changing external circumstances. Both Murphy (2002) and Meade and O'Donovan (2002) put forward images of a somewhat emasculated community and voluntary pillar which, although conscious of the limited impact of its involvement with the process, feels there is nothing to be gained by leaving. In a more recent article, Meade (2005) argues that community development organisations within the process "*have been sold recognition within national and local partnership processes as a cheaper alternative to redistributive justice.*" (2005: 353).

Again, a number of gaps appear in the literature on Social Partnership, many of which interestingly mirror those in the literature reviewed above on PRSPs. First, with the

exception of the characterisation of the communication process as a mixture of bargaining, negotiation and deliberation (and this applies to just one institution of Social Partnership, the NESC – see O’Donnell, 1999, O’Donnell and Thomas, 2002), little is known about what goes on inside the doors of the process. Second, although the process has been charged with being inherently anti-democratic (O’Cinnéide, 1999) as it takes place outside the national parliament, the linkages to existing political institutions, and its place within broader political culture, remain unexplored. And third, the charges of co-optation and silencing of dissent, again appear to negate the agency of the community and voluntary sector, and underestimate the interaction between structure and agency. Although the accounts of Murphy (2002), and Meade (2005) in her tellingly titled article “*We hate it here, please let us stay!*” suggest conflicted experiences within the community and voluntary pillar, the experiences and motivations of different members remain largely unexplored.

In the absence of detailed empirically based evidence on the dynamics and power relations underpinning both Malawi and Ireland’s processes, the jury remains out, therefore, on whether or not members of Ireland’s community and voluntary pillar and members of MEJN’s network have been co-opted into processes which entrench dominant power relations and foreclose alternatives to the dominant development discourse – a ‘tyranny’ in Cooke and Kothari’s (2001) terms, or whether, in fact, their participation has opened up a deliberative space where multiple development discourses may be articulated and considered – a ‘transformation’ in Hickey and Mohan’s (2004) terms. Some ten years on from both groups’ initial involvement in their respective processes, in countries where economic inequalities continue to rise, a key question

remains as to whether their involvement has widened debates on the form of development appropriate to each place and its peoples.

One way in which this question may be examined is through an analysis of the participatory claims of each process. What does participation mean to participating groups? Does it merely offer a place at the respective policy tables or does it afford a deeper, more substantive engagement? What are the factors which determine the consequent level of engagement? And what are the implications of this engagement for participating groups? These questions form the basis for this study which examines MEJN's participation within Malawi's PRSP/MGDS and the community and voluntary pillar's participation within Ireland's Social Partnership process in the context of evolving relations between state and civil society in both settings.

1.4 'Us' and 'Them' in a globalised world: A comparative approach

The comparative case study approach between processes in Malawi and Ireland chosen for this research initially reflected my own interests and experiences working with groups in, or on the margins of participatory processes both overseas and in Ireland. I was struck by both the similarities in the concepts underpinning participatory processes in Ireland and other countries (participation, partnership, consensus, capacity building (always a one way process targeted at civil society!)) and the experiences, as recounted anecdotally, by participants. While Malawi's PRSP and Ireland's Social Partnership processes, embedded in countries which clearly differ in economic, social, political, and cultural terms, might seem to offer little to a comparative analysis of national governance processes, a number of common features are immediately apparent. Both are national development strategy processes; both are underpinned by concepts of

participation and partnership; both involve a wide range of actors; both result in consensus-based agreements; and the attraction of international finance, in the form of aid and investment, was core to the establishment of both. Moreover, as the above brief review reveals, broad similarities exist in the areas of focus and arguments of the literature on both although each have developed in isolation from each other. These commonalities offer some points of departure for an empirically derived comparative analysis. While comparative studies to date of PRSPs have been limited to PRSPs in other countries, and comparative studies of Social Partnership have looked to processes no further than Europe, a comparative account of Malawi and Ireland's respective processes, uncovering similarities and differences between both, can help elucidate to what extent the global context exerts an influence within both processes *vis à vis* the national context. In this manner, further light may be shed on the engagement of both the community and voluntary pillar and MEJN within their respective processes.

An underlying contention of this study is that the dichotomy of 'the West and the Rest' is outdated and unsuited to contemporary times. The global development map is messier than the simple dichotomies of First World/Third World, Developed/Undeveloped (or more optimistically 'Developing'), North/South suggest. As a stroll through the leafy suburbs of Lilongwe (Areas Three or Ten for instance) or the council estates of Jobstown in West Dublin or Southill in Limerick will quickly attest, the North is to be found in the South and *vice versa*. These binary categorisations are not only outdated, but they are also unhelpful in that they obscure our understanding of countries such as Malawi, with its diverse social structures, politics and culture. Moreover, they mask the growing inequalities at home. In the contemporary world it is necessary to consider different sorts of social actors and to contemplate different forms

of social organisation. How do people ‘do’ politics in a globalised world? On what basis do people make alliances and enter into conflicts? How do internal interests, ideologies and traditions combine with external interests, ideologies and influences to produce political action? These are some of the underlying questions which inform the main objective of this research – to explore the potential for transformative participation within the two development processes under investigation.

The underpinning of both development processes by the same concepts is testament to the globalisation of the networked or participatory governance phenomenon. An underlying question in this context is this – can processes underpinned by similar concepts result in similar outcomes in such different socio-economic contexts? Or if they result in different outcomes what are the explanatory factors for these differences? Such a study has not yet been conducted. While a number of cross-national comparative studies have previously been carried out on national PRSP processes and Ireland’s Social Partnership, in both cases these have been geographically limited. National PRSP processes have been compared with those of other Southern countries, while comparative studies of Ireland’s Social Partnership have been limited to national processes within other European countries. A South-North comparison was chosen in this instance because it was felt that the distinct socio-political contexts within which each process is embedded may reveal interesting, and informative, differences in their respective transformatory potentials. In other words, while both processes appear to be products of a globalised discourse of governance and participation, they sit within distinct contexts. Does this make a difference?

Comparative studies do require some elements of commonality however, and for this reason Malawi was chosen. Malawi, a relatively small, ex-British colony, with a high dependence on external aid, and a strong religious tradition, bears many superficial contextual similarities to Ireland. Malawi's PRSP process proves a useful comparator to Ireland's Social Partnership in two further ways. First, Malawi was one of the first African countries to undertake the PRSP process and so provided more material for the processual approach taken in this study, examining not only the formulation process itself but its ongoing impact over the years. And second, the principal civil society group involved in Malawi's PRSP, MEJN, appeared comparable to Ireland's Community Platform which is involved in Social Partnership. Both constitute an amalgam of diverse groups comprising, principally in MEJN's case, and exclusively in the case of the Community Platform, NGOs and community activist groups, and both were formed with the intent of inputting to their respective processes (although in the case of the Community Platform this is disputed by some members – see Chapter Eight for more on this). And so Malawi was chosen as a country which had some history of (and hence data from) the process, and which, while socio-economically markedly different to Ireland's (post) 'Celtic Tiger', nonetheless appeared to offer some significant contextual comparators, thereby hopefully making the analysis more relevant and meaningful to the actors involved, as well as to the broader academic community.

The research approach employed in the study is that of critical social theory. Although understandings of this approach are contested, critical theory is understood for the purposes of this study to mean employing theory to seek self-understanding, and from this self-understanding to find a place in which to stand outside existing knowledge practices, in order to critique them. In this, the approach employed is influenced

primarily by Habermas (1984), and, building on Habermas, Fraser (1984). The employment of a critical social theory approach in this study carries with it some degree of discomfort for the researcher in two respects. First, I am acutely aware that both state and civil society actors in the global South have received more than their fair share of critical analyses from Western researchers operating out of vastly different ontological, epistemological and historical contexts (see Section 5.3.2 in Chapter Five for more on this). And second, at a time when, arguably, the community and voluntary / NGO sector is being challenged and weakened (see Chapter Two), it is not my intention to fuel politically motivated charges against it. Rather, from the standpoint of, as advocated by Fraser (2004: 97) “*a partisan though not uncritical identification*”, my wish is to critically analyse both the respective processes and actors’ engagement within them in a constructive, reflexive manner – a manner which, I hope, serves to highlight, challenge, and inform the actions and experiences of actors in both processes, while addressing the central preoccupation of the research – do participatory forms of governance offer the potential to engage multiple and competing conceptions of development in a way which helps us to move beyond the current development ‘impasse’?.

1.5 Research questions

So far I have argued that development, as a universal model applied to specific places and peoples, is failing. It is failing because it fails to engage with the lived realities of a significant cross-section of the world’s population, increasing their marginalisation from economic, social and political life. I have argued that this is as true in Ireland’s ‘Celtic Tiger’ as it is elsewhere. Following on from this, I have argued that attention needs to move from the universal ‘what’ of development to the disparate ‘who’. People

who are going to be affected by development policies and programmes need to be involved in their formulation. I have posited that participatory forms of governance may provide a vehicle for this to take place.

However, we have seen that this is not so simple. The concept of participation which underpins these networked forms of governance is very much contested. Participatory processes may indeed offer the potential for transformatory participation, but they may also co-opt actors and end up 'tyrannical'. The key lies in actors' own understandings of participation and their subsequent agency within these processes. To analyse this, it is necessary to go 'behind the doors' of ostensibly participatory processes, and to uncover the dynamics of participation and power relations within them. As we have seen however, to date, there is little detailed empirical data at this level. This is the task of this research. Taking two national development processes, this research investigates the power relations and dynamics within and around both processes. The overall question framing the research aims at moving beyond more generalised characterisations of 'participation as tyranny', or 'participation as co-option', or, more optimistically, 'participation as transformation' to specifics which may inform actors both inside and outside both processes. It does this by identifying the enablers and constraints to transformative participation in both processes.

Merely identifying the enablers and constraints on their own is of limited use however if the factors that give rise to these are not understood. In deliberately sampling for a 'North/South' comparison, additional valuable information is potentially available on the extent to which domestic versus global factors account for similarities and/or differences between both processes. In this way, we may begin to discern to what

extent both processes constitute cases of a more globalised phenomenon and/or to what extent domestic factors influence the respective outcomes. Building on the first research question, a second question therefore aims at identifying and interpreting the factors that give rise to the enablers and constraints identified through the first. It examines how internal interests, ideologies and influences combine with external factors to produce these enablers and constraints.

1.6 The Thesis

Exploring these two questions by employing the theoretical framework set out in Chapter Four and going ‘behind the doors’ of both processes over time, this study finds that participation within both Malawi’s PRSP/MGDS and Ireland’s Social Partnership is dynamic rather than fixed. In a pendular fashion, at various times within both processes, participation has swung from nominal to instrumental to transformatory, and from there back again. In this manner, as the title of this study indicates, participation is not, as suggested within more structuralist critical accounts of both processes, a constant. It is something which is continually being transformed over time. At times it is indeed a ‘tyranny’, but at times it moves to ‘transformation’. This occurs through the agency of participants in both processes, where agency determines structure, and thereby the potential for transformative participation.

My central argument is that, with state actors in both cases focused on nominal and instrumental forms of participation – ‘spinning’ the processes to attract inward investment, while contracting social ‘partners’ to assist in managing the social costs accruing from global insertion – the power, capacity and resources to transform participation within both processes to the transformative end of the spectrum, turning

constraints into enablers, necessarily rests with NGO actors in both cases. A key variable identified in this regard is their communicative role – both within and without the respective processes.

The findings presented in Chapters Six and Seven draw on the theorisation of the network state discussed in Chapter Two to argue that state actors, embedded within global economic networks in both cases, are focused on maintaining a spin of participation for international onlookers. They achieve this by drawing on internal governance traditions, as discussed in Chapter Three, to contract ‘partners’ domestically to manage the social fallout of development, thereby facilitating the state in maintaining social control. Through their actions, severe constraints are placed on transformative participation, and the pendular arc swings narrowly between nominal and instrumental forms.

NGO actors however, deriving their legitimacy from their constituents, are mandated to bring diverse development discourses to the respective policy tables. The findings presented in Chapters Six and Eight demonstrate broad similarities in their actions in this regard up to a point. In their initial involvement in both cases, emboldened by the support of global networks, and employing the media to raise public debate and focus a critical public eye on both processes, NGO actors succeeded in transforming a number of constraints into enablers for transformative participation. These actions were shortlived in both cases however. As Chapters Six and Eight demonstrate, as time evolved, domestic patterns of hierarchy, as discussed in Chapter Three, re-emerged and NGO participants, having been ‘disciplined’ (in a Foucauldian sense) by state actors, turned to disciplining their own constituents. The main focus of this disciplining was

behavioural and communicative norms, and the dual result was the foreclosing of space for multiple development discourses within both processes together with a restriction of public debate. The participatory pendulum had swung backward and participation had been effectively ‘professionalised’ and constrained. The principal reasons for this, I argue, were both economic and cultural in both cases. With regard to the former, I argue that NGO participants in both cases, most particularly in the Irish case, underestimated their own legitimising power within the process.

The parallels in outcome for both cases end here however. While, the findings presented in Chapter Eight suggest (although inconclusively) that NGO actors within the newly (post-2003) re-constituted community and voluntary pillar in Ireland are succeeding in this disciplining of members, findings presented in the same Chapter demonstrate that MEJN’s disciplining efforts are meeting with resistance from members. The principal reason for this difference, I argue, is the vibrant public debate on the role and legitimacy of political actors, including NGOs, which has come, often in the form of the ‘good governance’ discourse, to Malawi from abroad. This debate, and MEJN’s actions as a result, sees the participatory pendulum swinging, although somewhat haltingly so, forward once more in the direction of transformative participation.

1.7 Thesis contributions

The contributions of the study are three-fold. First, at a theoretical level, the study contributes to efforts to deepen debates on participation and participatory governance. In this respect it makes two principal contributions. First, the comparative study of Malawi’s PRSP/MGDS and Ireland’s Social Partnership situates both processes within

a global context. This is the first study to do so. By exploring the similarities and differences between the two processes, the study uncovers the extent to which globalised and national factors impact on each process. This makes a contribution to political globalisation theory where, despite a voluminous literature on globalised forms of governance, less work has been done to try to understand, or think about globalisation as a framework for evolutions in national governance. Second, drawing on a range of social and political theory, it offers an analytical framework wherein the political dimensions of participatory processes may be examined. This is set out in Chapter Four. Employing this framework, it moves beyond abstract diagnoses of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ levels of participation to identify enabling and constraining factors to transformative participation in the two governance processes under investigation.

Second, the study makes a contribution at an empirical level. While there is a growing body of literature on Social Partnership and other national and local governance processes in Ireland, much of it lacks an empirical account of the microprocesses involved, together with the experiences and implications for participant groups. Similarly, although some empirical work was carried out on the PRSP formulation process in Malawi which took place in 2000 (Jenkins and Tsoka, 2003, McGee et al, 2003), these studies were largely focused on the strategies themselves and no study has been carried out on the evolution of the process or the implications for groups involved over time. This study makes an empirical contribution to research on evolving governance and its implications for state-civil society relations in both contexts.

And finally, my hope is that this study also makes a practical contribution in stimulating reflection and public debate on the dynamics and implications of contemporary

governance arrangements in both Malawian and Irish contexts. The paucity of public debate, in particular in Ireland, in this regard, is discussed elsewhere in this study. In particular, I hope that the study proves useful to political actors at all levels, from villages to offices to state ministries / departments, when visioning their futures and contemplating their resultant strategies for political action.

Chapter 2

Participation and partnership in context: Globalisation, governance and participation

2.1 Introduction

In the previous Chapter we have seen that, while participation has been quietly extending its reach for decades in national and local governance practice throughout the world, it has eluded academic radars over much of this time. Although it has now come under scrutiny within the fields of both development studies and political science/public administration, the territorial boundaries of such contributions remain at the level of the nation state. In this Chapter I extend these boundaries and argue that, although underpinning national and/or local governance processes, the concepts of participation and partnership derive from the reconfigured social relations necessitated by the global embedding of nation states within a global polity. Re-situating this context for participatory governance, the motivations for and dynamics behind participant agency within them become clearer.

Specifically, within this Chapter I argue that participation and partnership constitute mechanisms through which nation states, facing challenges to their legitimacy as their role in maintaining existing levels of social protection is undermined, attempt to rebuild legitimacy and support, both domestically and internationally. The apparent paradox of how states manage to rebuild domestic legitimacy while apparently sharing power (i.e. surely power sharing and devolution result in reduced legitimacy?) is examined with reference to the works of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault on power relations wherein the ‘power-sharing’ theses of some globalisation theorists (for example Manuel

Castells) are interrogated. Finally, the Chapter turns to states' new 'partners' in governance, civil society. Drawing from debates within development studies, I argue that these new partners in governance constitute a normalised and idealised version of civil society, a 'manufactured' civil society as Hodgson (2004) terms it, rather than its diverse reality. The form of leadership exercised by the leaders of this manufactured civil society, the new partners in development, therefore becomes central to evolving power relations within these new governance configurations.

2.2 Globalisation and inequality: Challenging state legitimacy

During the last two decades the word 'globalisation' has come to dominate discourses on the world's political economy. Held et al (1999: 16) define globalisation as "*a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions... generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power*".

The work of Held (1995, 1999), McGrew (1997), Castells (2000, 2003), Carnoy and Castells (2001), and Held and McGrew (2003) argues that contemporary globalisation invites a significant rethinking of democratic theory, most especially in respect of traditional accounts of liberal democracy and the role and influence of the state therein. Held and McGrew's assertion that "*The state has become a fragmented policy-making arena, permeated by transnational networks (governmental and non-governmental) as well as by domestic agencies and forces*" (2003: 11) draws attention to the extension of contemporary state's field of action, in the form of complex webs of networks and political forces, which states mediate in their efforts to formulate policy and direct individual nations' development.

Two main implications arise from these developments. The first is that states' roles and agency have significantly altered. While once states exercised exclusive political authority within their national boundaries, delivering fundamental goods and services to their citizens, they now share this authority with networks of international agencies and institutions including bodies such as the European Union (EU), World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), transnational business corporations, and international aid agencies. The second implication arises inevitably from the first. With state authority declining within this widening web wherein the 'visible presence of rule' is replaced with the 'invisible government' of corporations, banks and international organisations (Held and McGrew, 2003: 10), it is argued that both state sovereignty and legitimacy are challenged. While there is some debate among commentators as to whether state sovereignty is challenged within this context³, there is little doubt that state legitimacy is in trouble. As Susan Strange puts it (2003: 127), "*Politicians everywhere talk as though they have the answers to economic and social problems, as if they really are in charge of their country's destiny. People no longer believe them*". With national governments now sharing power and authority with international agencies and forces, their ability to carry out their traditional functions is seriously compromised and undermined.

Sovereignty is challenged because the political authority of states is displaced and compromised by regional and global power systems, political, economic and cultural. State legitimacy is at issue because with greater regional and global interdependence, states cannot deliver fundamental goods and services to their citizens.

Held and McGrew (2003: 13)

³ See Held and McGrew, 2003: 19-23 for a discussion on this.

Both Malawi and Ireland correspond to this conceptualisation in similar ways. Malawi's high level of dependence on international aid⁴ sees donor agencies wielding significant power on policy and development directions in-country, a fact acknowledged by both commentators (Englund, 2002, Magolowondo, 2006) and donors alike (Booth et al, 2006). Furthermore, with an export base principally comprised of primary commodities, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is increasingly exposed to fluctuations in the global market. SSA has a higher export to GDP ratio than that of Latin America, (standing at 29 per cent and 15 per cent respectively in the 1990s), and has been classified as one of the regions paradoxically integrated into, yet left behind by, the global economy (UNDP, 1999). Similarly Ireland, sometimes referred to as a small open polity, is strongly embedded within both the EU and the global market (Kitchen and Bartley, 2007). Like donors in Malawi, the EU wields an ongoing influence within a range of domestic policy issues as exercised through its spending policies⁵, its agricultural and regional funds, the demands of a single currency, and through European regulation (Laffan and Tonra, 2005). This has given rise to questions on the role and legitimacy of member national states (MacCarthaigh, 2006). Moreover the country's high level of dependence on foreign direct investment leaves it highly exposed to the vagaries of global financial markets and mobile capital (O'Hearn, 1999, Kirby, 2003).

Within this context, both the Malawian and Irish state's traditional role and source of legitimacy in maintaining existing levels of social protection in delivering fundamental goods and services to its citizens is challenged (see Kirby 2003, 2004 on Ireland). This

⁴ Of the 77.2 billion Malawi Kwacha required to finance the 2004/05 budget, 67 per cent came from domestic revenue while the balance (33 per cent) was solicited from donor funding. An increase in donor funding is being solicited for the 2005/06 budget which totals MK 116.2 billion (figures derived from those cited in EIU, 2006: 22).

⁵ For example, in 2002 Ireland received a net transfer of 1.6 billion Euro from the EU budget, a figure that amounted to 1.5 per cent of gross national income that year (Laffan and Tonra, 2005: 451).

is further exacerbated by the congruence of globalisation with growing levels of inequality both within and between national societies in both cases.

In 1999, the UNDP's annual *Human Development Report* focused on the issue of economic globalisation wherein the congruence of growing global inequalities with economic globalisation was highlighted.

Global integration is proceeding at breakneck speed and with amazing reach. But the process is uneven and unbalanced, with uneven participation of countries and people in the expanding opportunities of globalisation – in the global economy, in global technology, in the global spread of cultures and in global governance. The new rules of globalisation – and the players writing them – focus on integrating global markets, neglecting the needs of people that markets cannot meet. The process is concentrating power and marginalising the poor, both countries and people.

(UNDP, 1999: 30)

While globalisation commentators remain divided on whether this accelerating gap between rich and poor may be attributed primarily to economic globalisation⁶, there is little disagreement that the trend exists. Contemporary economic globalisation, with its central tenets of trade and investment liberalisation, is unquestionably associated with a growing gap between rich and poor peoples and societies. Moreover, the geographical situation of the gap has changed. Poverty and inequality are no longer confined to the global South but have arrived and are spreading also throughout the so-called 'developed' North also (Birdsall, 1998, UNDP, 1999, Castells, 2000). Three related patterns are evident. Globalisation brings about a segmentation in the global workforce into those who gain and those who lose, a growing marginalisation of the losers from the global economy, and the erosion of social protection within nations as states are unable or unwilling to bear the costs of protecting the most vulnerable (Castells, 2000).

⁶ For a discussion on both sides of the argument see Held and McGrew (2003: 28-32) and Wade (2004).

Globalisation commentators concerned by the apparent inevitability of this rising inequality consider that it remains a problem without any effective means of international resolution. And so it appears that it is at the level of the nation-state that this issue must be addressed.

It is only within the borders of the nation-state – the nation as a moral community of fate – that legitimate and effective solutions to the problem of global inequality can be realised. Such solutions will always be partial and limited since governments cannot realistically aspire to redress all the external sources of domestic inequality.

(Held and McGrew, 2003: 32)

Both Malawi and Ireland have experienced growing rates of inequality in recent years (see Chinsinga, 2002, Chirambo, 2002, and Ngwira et al, 2003 on Malawi; Hardiman, 2003, and Jacobson and Kirby, 2006 on Ireland), aligned with a growing disillusionment with representative forms of democracy as evidenced in falling voting rates in both countries (see Dulani, 2005 on Malawi; Laver, 2005 on Ireland). In Malawi, a growing disillusionment with the state as protector and guarantor of basic rights is evident within current public discourse (see the following Chapter) while, in Ireland, an *Irish Times* / *MRBI* poll indicates that the Irish public's primary consideration in the run up to the 2007 national elections was the deteriorating quality of life⁷. Within this context a key question becomes – what strategies do states employ to maintain and build legitimacy? This is examined in the following Section.

⁷ “Key Issues for the Electorate”, *The Irish Times*, May 20th, 2007.

2.3 Toward participatory governance: Legitimacy and the network state

In the second volume of his expansive three-volume study of the transformation of state-societal relations, Manuel Castells (2003) expounds on how states react to the legitimacy crisis engendered by globalisation. He posits that states react by re-configuring themselves along two axes in order to try to accommodate the new pressures and demands exacted by their insertion into the global political economy, thereby rebuilding legitimacy domestically. On the one hand, states work together with other states to build international, supra-national and co-national institutions, in order to try to manage together the process of globalisation that threatens to overwhelm individual states (2003: 323-332), (examples include states' involvements in the EU, the G-7, the IMF and World Bank, and the WTO). Also along this outward axis, states seek to attract international investment and foreign capital in order to foster growth and productivity domestically (2003: 364-366). State agency along this outward axis is therefore focused on the insertion of national economies into the global network in a manner which maximises the benefits offered, thereby increasing legitimacy for states among their own constituencies back home. To maximise these benefits, state agency is also focused on enhancing legitimacy internationally.

On the other hand, states attempt to regain legitimacy domestically and represent the increasing social diversity of their constituencies through processes of decentralisation and the devolution of power and resources nationally (Castells, 2003: 340) in attempts to improve the living standards for the large majority of the population. This is achieved through partnership arrangements with civil society groups. In a later paper with Martin Carnoy, Castells argues that “*the dramatic expansion of non-governmental*

organisations around the world, most of them subsidised or supported by the state, can be interpreted as the extension of the state into civil society in an attempt to diffuse conflict and increase legitimacy by shifting resources and responsibility to the grassroots.” (Carnoy and Castells, 2001: 13).

The result of this re-configuration, following Castells’ theorisation, is a new form of state, a ‘*network state*’ which, “*made up of shared institutions, and enacted by bargaining and interaction all along the chain of decision making... functions as a network, in which all nodes interact, and are equally necessary for the performance of the state’s functions.*” (2003: 14). This network state is characterised by outward and inward relations wherein nation-states find themselves integrated outward into global networks of accumulation and domination, while, at the same time, attempting to respond to pressures and demands from their national populaces.

2.4 Networking inward: Partnerships and participation

This inward axis finds institutional expression in the participatory forms of governance which have come to characterise national state-civil society relations in an increasing number of countries, both in the global North and South. Within these forms, in response to the domestic challenges posed by insertion into the global political economy, state agency has shifted from governing society directly to collaborating with a range of social actors which cut across public and private sectors. Underlying these new configurations are the core concepts of partnership and participation.

The first studies of such new forms within the global North, carried out in the early 1990s, were largely descriptive. Noting that public policy formulation and policy

decision making were no longer confined to formal structures of government, analysts set about demonstrating how different social and political actors interacted in public policy formulation (Marsh and Rhodes, 1992, Kooiman, 1993, Rhodes, 1996). A number of analysts (for example Kooiman, 2003, Reddel, 2004, Bang, 2004) trace the origins of these new governance forms to theories of public sector reform through the 1990s in many Western countries as governments sought collaboration with a wide range of strategic actors in formulating and implementing public policy. The principal characteristics of such new forms of governance are described as including dense networks of vertical and horizontal channels of representation and communication, a spread of decisional authority and autonomy, and a reliance on iterative dialogue for conflict resolution and policy consensus (Amin and Thomas, 1996: 257).

In tandem with these developments, new forms of governance also began to emerge in countries of the global South. Linked to the new international post-Cold War discourse of 'good governance' of the early 1990s, these also involved increased interaction between political and social actors in the national development policy arena. Promoted by international donor institutions, and linked to aid flows, these new arrangements were initially focused on the monitoring of aid investment, channelled through the new 'conditionalities' imposed on recipient states, and posited a role for local NGOs in this process (Doornbos, 2003, 2004). As time elapsed, and many countries failed to adhere to the conditionalities imposed, donor institutions began to investigate new methods of coordinating their interventions and improving policy implementation. The PRSP approach, advocating participation of a wide range of social actors in both policy formulation and implementation (World Bank, 2004), emerged as one of these methods. The principal characteristics of this new architecture of governance mirror those of the

global North – public participation, through horizontal networks, in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring, a spread of decision making and authority, and consensus-based policy outcomes (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999).

Following Castells' theorisation, the aim of public participation within these new governance processes is to enlist public support and activism in the state's traditional domain of social protection. Within Ireland, the state's motivations in networking inward through these governance structures may be discerned from a number of core documents together with some relevant public administration literature dealing with the issue. In accordance with the argument put forward by globalisation theorists, the Irish state sees a role for civil society (both in the form of the community and voluntary sector and more widely) in the area of social protection through service provision and the fostering of self-help initiatives within local communities. This is laid out in the government's White Paper published in 2000⁸ (Ireland, 2000: 23, paragraphs 3.13-3.14). Within this paper, the State is described as "*not the answer to every problem, but just one player among others*" (2000: 9), with the government's vision of society described as being "*one which encourages people and communities to look after their own needs – very often in partnership with statutory agencies – but without depending on the state to meet all needs*" (2000: 10).

This view is echoed within public administration literature where contributions celebrate the comparative advantage of voluntary organisations in reacting swiftly and effectively in addressing social needs through 'problem solving'. Echoing the features attributed to Southern NGOs in the early 1990s (see Section 2.6), community and

⁸ *White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector*

voluntary organisations are hailed as being closer to ‘the people’, flexible in their approaches and capable of innovation, and having access to a large ‘volunteer’ (unpaid or modestly paid) resource base (Faughnan and Kellegher, 1993, Boyle 2002a, O’Sullivan, 2005). New ‘participatory’ forms of governance in Ireland therefore, drawing social groups and individuals into either explicit or implicit partnership arrangements, involve a transfer of responsibility from the state to “*people and communities to look after their own needs*” (Ireland, 2000: 10).

Within the global South, as has been seen, such new arrangements are heavily promoted by international donors and focused on improving aid efficacy and management. Drawing on Castells’ work, Ankie Hoogvelt (2001) offers a more critical analysis as she discusses donor agency in relation to the growing marginalisation engendered by globalisation. In a Chapter exploring the implications of globalisation for the African continent, Hoogvelt argues that the donor community has moved from a programme of development and incorporation of Southern states into the global economy to one of containment, what she terms the “*management of exclusion*” (2001: 171). Thus

Previously, development was theorised as a process of societal convergence between hierarchically conceptualised state-societies (rich-poor, developed-underdeveloped). In this theorisation the state is seen the accepted engine of growth. The failure of modernisation in many parts of the Third World, however, brought criticism of ‘top-down’ approaches, and the disparagement of big government and the state, thus making way for ‘bottom-up’ interventions concerned with the vulnerability of the poor, which aim to strengthen local structures and empower local communities.

(2001: 193)

Noting that the social fall-out from structural adjustment programmes, and the associated emasculation of the state, has contributed directly to escalating violence and conflict in many African countries as societies respond angrily to the failure of modernity, Hoogvelt argues that “...*there is an emerging system of global governance*

with methods and instruments geared to containment and managing symptoms rather than removing causes.” (2001: 195). Hoogvelt’s argument appears to be borne out by the World Bank’s 2005 *World Development Report* which, focusing on the issue of equity, argues that policies aimed at increasing growth do not need to take equity into account individually. Rather, they should be accompanied by other policies aimed at management of possible downsides. As the Bank explains, *“for example, the best way to deal with inequitable effects of particular trade reform is not always through fine tuning trade policy itself... but through complementary policies for safety nets, labour mobility, and education”* (2006: 10). Hoogvelt, in turning the spotlight on the actions and motivations of international aid institutions, perhaps underestimates the agency of certain African states, in seeking incorporation into the global network. While there are indications that the current government in Malawi is intent on reversing its peripheral position within the global economy, as indicated in both the content of the recent MGDS and within many of the President’s public speeches (see, for example, Government of Malawi, 2004, Mutharika, 2005⁹), Hoogvelt’s argument in relation to the international donor community nonetheless rings true. This is evidenced in the recommendation of the recent ODI report on the future directions of donor assistance in Malawi. The ODI report, commissioned by DfID Malawi, the British High Commission (Malawi) and the Royal Norwegian Embassy (Malawi) argues that...

... current budget support in Malawi has to rest on the more limited ‘traditional’ rationale for programme aid, which is about mitigating the impact of a very bad macroeconomic situation (thereby improving the climate for a recovery of business performance) and/or creating space for specific reforms of a limited sort... (Booth et al, 2006: 63)

⁹ November 3rd, 2005, *Speech by HE Dr Bingu wa Mutharika, President of the Republic of Malawi delivered to the Scottish Parliament*, www.sarpn.org.za/documents/d0001742/index.php, accessed December 2nd, 2005.

While this donor view represents just one view of civil society's role in Malawi, it is arguably a very powerful view (see Gould, 2005), and one which is backed by significant finance. Unfortunately there is no literature exploring the Malawian state's view of civil society's role, either in general, or in relation to the PRSP. While official documents stress national ownership over governance processes such as the PRSP, much of the academic literature, focusing on the role of donors, gives little insight into the state's role or its view of the role of participant civil society groups. This is an area which is explored in this study (see Chapter Seven in particular).

In relation to donor agency, Hoogvelt's 'containment' thesis, or the national strategy of 'exclusion management' contextualises the problem-solving approach which has, for decades, underpinned the discipline of development studies, and which has, more recently, been used to characterise the approach of Social Partnership. At a more theoretical level it resonates with Foucault's theory on the regulation of populations through normalisation, or biopower (1981: 139) (see Section 2.5.2 on further).

Foreclosing opportunities for deliberation on the causes of these 'problems', this approach appears to limit the scope for more transformative agendas within national governance processes, pointing toward a more instrumental form of participation, as theorised in Chapter One. State agency in this context is examined within this study (see in particular Chapter Seven) to see if this is indeed the case.

2.5 Theorising social relations: Consolidating state power through dispersal?

Clearly these new governance configurations, with their underlying principles of participation and partnership, imply changes in power relations between state and civil society actors. While the blurring of traditional boundaries and the devolution of responsibility suggest shifts in power between traditional state and civil society actors, the issue of state legitimacy remains salient. This gives rise to some key questions. Do such new arrangements imply a sharing of state power across governance networks? If so, does this not further erode state legitimacy?

Some political scientists and globalisation theorists assert that participatory governance configurations involve a sharing of power across governance networks. Political scientist, Henrik Bang asserts that, within such networks, political authority no longer consists of relations of subordination and one-way control, but rather constitutes “*flatly operating networks of political communication, institutions and people interlocked in multiple, reciprocal relations of autonomy and dependence*” (2003: 9). Suggesting more transformative forms of participation, he describes successful governance as the “*empowering and ruling together with lay people and civil society in dialogical and co-operative relationships*” (2003: 9). Another political scientist, Janet Newman (2005), also contends that power is dispersed within and across governance networks. In line with globalisation theorists, she notes that power is dispersed outward towards transnational business corporations, while simultaneously flowing inwards towards local communities participating in policy formulation and implementation.

The view of globalisation theorist, Manuel Castells, is a little less clearcut on this issue. While he alludes to the transformation of power along networks within his theory of network states and network societies, his analysis of this shift is complex and, at times, appears somewhat ambiguous. While, on the one hand, Castells argues that power, being a function of an endless battle around the cultural codes of society, is diffused throughout global networks...

Power is no longer concentrated in institutions (the state), organisations (capitalist firms), or symbolic controllers (corporate media, churches). It is diffused in global networks of wealth, power, information, and images, which circulate and transmute in a system of variable geometry and dematerialised geography... whoever, or whatever, wins the battle of peoples' minds will rule...
(Castells, 2003: 424-425)

...on the other, implicitly accepting the dominance of the transnational business culture, he acknowledges the concentration of power within certain nodes within the network...

...the state can hardly refer to the representation of its constituency at large. It must assume the interests of the overall network state, and therefore it must respect the domination of the most powerful interests in this network, as a condition of being a node within it.
(Castells, 2003: 363)

Power, therefore, for Castells, is shared, though not evenly, across horizontal networks where different interests prevail.

As we have seen in Chapter One, in contrast to these various 'power sharing' theses, a Marxist view, that the state operates as an instrument of the capitalist class, imbues, either explicitly or implicitly, much of the critical literature on PRSPs and Social Partnership. Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci focuses on how social stability and order are maintained within such a system. His theorisation is useful in that it helps explain

how state legitimacy may be maintained, and consolidated, within instrumentally focused governance arrangements.

While Gramsci, writing in the 1930s, offers a macro account of how power relations are ordered within capitalist systems, the later work of post-structuralist theorist Michel Foucault is less concerned with macro-economistic, class-based analyses, focusing instead on the mechanisms whereby power is exercised. Foucault's theory of 'disciplining power' is also useful to this study therefore, in that it helps understand the micro-dynamics and mechanisms whereby power is exercised within both processes.

2.5.1 State-centred analyses: Hegemony and consent formation

Arguing that the state operated as an instrument in the hands of the capitalist class, Marxist theorist Gramsci focused his attention on how social stability and control could be accomplished within such an inherently divisive and exploitative system. Writing in the 1930s, Antonio Gramsci (1971) conceptualises the state as including both the traditional apparatus of governance (government, political parties, police and military) together with that of civil society (church, media, educational institutions etc). States, thus conceptualised, constitute a social relation between traditional state institutions and those of civil society (1971: 261). Through this social relation the state attempts to exercise its control over its populace. As well as exercising control through domination (physical coercion by the police and army), Gramsci theorises that states exercise control by actively seeking the consent of society by persuading its members to accept and internalise their values, attitudes, and norms, a process attained through control over knowledge and discourse, and known as "*hegemony*". This permeation throughout society of a particular system of values, attitudes and norms is achieved through social

relations between and within state and civil society institutions. In this manner, the ruling or dominant class attempts to maintain its dominance over civil society at large and constitutes, in effect, a hegemonic power bloc.

Gramsci notes (1971: 161) that this consent formation may have a material or non-material basis – this is an important point in the context of Malawian and Irish civil society. NGOs in Malawi are funded primarily by international NGOs and civil society groups. As outlined in Section 2.6, ‘NGOism’ is big business in Malawi, offering lucrative salaries and attractive working conditions. Malawian NGOs are, therefore, financially bound to international donors. Clearly this imposes some constraints on their activities, and highlights the importance of donor views of civil society’s role within the domestic political economy.

In Ireland, community and voluntary organisations receive a significant proportion of their funding from the state. Connolly (2006) documents how this proportion is increasing, with the community and voluntary sector receiving approximately 450 million Euro from public funds in 1995. State funding currently accounts for 74.5 per cent of non-profit organisational income (Connolly, 2006: 86). These figures demonstrate that the relations between state and civil society groups (community and voluntary sector) in Ireland go beyond the socio-political to embrace also a significant financial dimension, one which, as with NGOs in Malawi, may act to restrict or constrain their agency in certain areas. The implications of these financial relations for participant groups in both Malawi’s PRSP/MGDS and Ireland’s Social Partnership are analysed in the findings outlined in later Chapters.

It is important to note that Gramsci's analysis, although positing a hegemonic power bloc, does not read as a structuralist view of the haves (dominant, ruling classes), and have-nots (marginalised, subordinated groups) in society. Rather, it highlights the role of agency, with the process of consent formation presented as a dynamic process with the dominant group continually responding to challenges and conflicts from marginalised and subordinated groups within society.

...the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups, and the life of the State is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria... between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups – equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only up to a certain point...

(1971: 182)

And so, for Gramsci, power oscillates within social relations, and the object of study becomes the relations themselves together with the agency of different groups within them. Civil society's consent therefore, in responding to the pressures of inequalities engendered by economic globalisation or in "managing exclusion", in Hoogvelt's terms, is gained through a hegemonic process of consent formation involving civil society organisations.

2.5.2 Society-centred analyses: Disciplining and normalisation

While Gramscian conceptions of power relations sought to understand power in terms of the role it plays in the maintenance of relations of economic production and class domination, in a lecture delivered in early 1976, Michel Foucault declared an interest in moving away from economistic analyses of power, arguing that a focus on the mechanisms whereby it was exercised was required.

...is power always in a subordinate position relative to the economy? Is it always in the service of, and ultimately answerable to, the economy? Is its essential end and purpose to serve the economy? Is it destined to realise, consolidate, and reproduce the relations appropriate to the economy and essential to its functioning?... do we need to employ varying tools in its analysis – even, that is, when we allow that it effectively remains the case that the relations of power do indeed remain profoundly enmeshed in and with economic relations... if power is exercised, what sort of exercise does it involve? In what does it consist? What is its mechanism?

(1980: 89)

One such mechanism, or “*instrument of domination*” (1980: 95) proposed by Foucault, that of discourse, is discussed at length in Chapter Four. Of interest here in a relational context, is the mechanism whereby this is exercised. Foucault’s interest specifically lies with the agents – groups and individuals – of power and the mechanisms whereby they exercise this power. “*We need to identify the agents responsible for them (repressions and exclusions), their real agents... and not be content to lump them under the formula of a generalised bourgeoisie. We need to see how these mechanisms of power... have begun to become economically advantageous and politically useful*” (1980: 101).

Exploring these mechanisms, Foucault argues that power in modern society is comprised of both sovereign power and what he terms “*disciplinary power*”. This disciplinary power, which aims at (1980: 106-107) promoting order within society, is focused on the individual and comprises two parts. The first, what Foucault termed an “*anatomo-politics of the human body*” centres on the body as a machine, and the second, a set of “*regulatory controls : a biopolitics of the population*”, focuses on demography, the economy and social security (1981: 139). The aim of this disciplinary power is to “*normalise*” individuals and eliminate deviancy, thereby increasing the possible utility of individuals within society (1977: 210). In contrast to Marxist

thinkers, Foucault locates the nexus of this power, not within the state, but within society as a whole – its members, social groups and institutions.

For Foucault, power is something which circulates in society. Referring to this as the ‘capillary’ nature of power, he argues that “*Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain*” (1980: 98). Following this, disciplinary power may be exercised by individuals and institutions throughout society, with the norms underpinning this ‘disciplining’ being constantly remoulded and defined. For Foucault, the object of analysis thus becomes the mechanisms of disciplining, “...*discipline may be identified neither within an institution nor an apparatus, it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques and procedures, levels of application, targets, it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology*” (1977: 215).

These mechanisms, in particular disciplining through discourse and dominant norms of knowledge, are discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Here, what is of interest is the locus of power within institutions and among individuals in society at large, rather than solely within the state, its normalising focus, and its aim of increasing the utility of individuals. As will be seen in the following Chapter (Three), normalising tendencies towards conformism and an intolerance of dissent have been described as features of both Malawi and Ireland’s socio-political cultures. In contrast to Marxist theory, Foucault argues that this power may or may not be exercised to serve the interests of capitalist accumulation.

Although the contexts within which Gramsci and Foucault worked were somewhat different from today's, (in particular, as we have seen, the field of social forces constituting today's contemporary states extends beyond national boundaries), their analyses of states and societies as constellations of social forces remain pertinent today in the context of Malawi's PRSP/MGDS and Ireland's Social Partnership. A number of contemporary theorists variously draw from the work of both Gramsci and Foucault to explore evolving socio-political relations within a globalised context.

Ian Douglas (1999) explicitly draws from Foucault to argue that contemporary forms of governance constitute a "*disciplinary governance*" which is aimed at consolidating order. Governance, thus conceived, comprises two factors – "*spatialisation*" and "*deterritorialisation*" of state power (1999: 137). In the first, the government widens its reach, intervening in an ever greater number of spaces and locations. In the second, the government becomes integral, diffused at the level of society as a whole – e.g. in law, morality, customs, habits and social knowledge, and assumed within a social code of conduct. And so, according to Douglas (1999: 152), "*the age of visibility (institutions, governments) gives way to the age of disappearance (networks, dispersions), but not as reduction in power*". Following this analysis, authority in the modern period has to be traced beyond the state into the social unconscious and codes of a culture.

A more recent contribution to the view that contemporary forms of governance consolidate state power comes from sociologist Mitchell Dean who, in his book *Governing Societies* (2007), puts forward a theory of what he terms "*authoritarian liberalism*" to describe processes of contemporary governance. This argument, in its

essence, posits that state power is consolidated through its dispersion. This, Dean theorises (2007: 108-129), is achieved through a binary process which entails the ‘enfolding’ of certain norms and values of civil society onto the political, while, at the same time, ‘unfolding’ the political sphere into civil society through participatory processes, partnerships, and other new participatory forms of governance. The ‘enfolding’ involves the “*values, expectations, and conducts of civil society, real or ideal, form(ing) the means and objectives of government programmes*” (2007: 116). The ‘unfolding’ is exemplified in the linkages, networks, partnerships and joining up of state organisations with the commercial, non-governmental, voluntary and community organisations and associations found in civil society. Through this process, following Foucault’s theory of disciplinary power, Dean argues that (2007: 126-127), “*...the main objective of domestic policies is to reform those kinds of individual and institutional conduct that are considered likely to affect economic performance compared to that of members of other national, or even regional populations... this is often best achieved by contriving and constructing market systems of allocation in domains where they had not previously been in operation.*” While Dean’s analysis draws directly from Foucauldian theory, his contention that new forms of governance involve penetration of market mechanisms and logic into new domains, appears to resonate also with Marxist relational theories.

The contributions of these theorists are useful in helping us think about how legitimacy and consent may be obtained across horizontal governance networks. While Gramsci offers us an explanation for how legitimacy can be secured through instrumental participatory governance arrangements, Foucault focuses our attention on the micro-mechanisms whereby this takes place. Following these theorisations it appears possible

that participation may indeed constitute a ‘tyranny’, as state power is both dispersed and consolidated at the same time. However, attention needs to be paid to the agency of civil society in this regard. While so far within this Chapter I have focused on contemporary states as social relations among a range of political actors, including civil society, it is important to remember that civil society actors also mediate relations with constituent groups whom they represent. This latter relation tends to be that highlighted in literature on transformatory participatory processes where a common assumption is that participating groups enter with the intention of bringing alternative narratives and frameworks to the table, reflecting the experiences and analyses of the constituent groups they represent. This assumption is interrogated in the following Section.

2.6 Civil society as ‘partners’ – the idea versus the reality

The question of the ‘who’ and the ‘what’ of civil society has long occupied thinkers, with theories and concepts of civil society deriving from a rich tradition. Both Kaldor (2003) and Hall and Trentmann (2005) provide comprehensive overviews of the competing strands of thinking on the concept over the centuries, from its origins in Greek political philosophy where Aristotle talked about the “*politike koinona*” (political community / society), to its renaissance in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries where, re-emerging in the context of a crisis of social order and rooted in a religious vision, it was linked by John Locke and Scottish Enlightenment thinkers to theories of individual rights and the idea of a social contract. Hegel was the first to use the concept as something distinct from the state, employing the term “*Bürgerliche Gesellschaft*” (bourgeois society) to denote a distinct area of ethical life, in contrast to, and mediating between, the family and the state. This definition was later taken up by Marx and Engels in the nineteenth century to emphasise the role of the economy. Unlike Hegel,

Marx and Engels argued that the state was subordinate to civil society, viewing the state as an instrument in the hands of the dominant classes. In contrast, liberal thinker Alexis de Tocqueville celebrated all forms of associational activity for their own sake, independent of the state, and is sometimes regarded as having depoliticised the term. On into the twentieth century, the concept was further narrowed to forms of social interaction distinct from both the state and the market. Gramsci called into question the economism of the Marxist definition and posited that it was not economic structure as such that governs political action, but rather the interpretation of it. As has been discussed, for Gramsci social inequality and class domination were exercised by a variety of cultural institutions that enabled the dominant group to impose its sense of reality and values on the rest of society, a process he termed "*hegemony*". It was only through addressing the labyrinthine cultural complexity that the oppressed could liberate themselves and wrest control of civil society from the bourgeoisie, which had traditionally opposed popular participation. Through Gramscian theory, civil society came to be viewed as the site of ideological and cultural struggles within political society. This stands in marked contrast to de Tocqueville's society-centred model which operates independently of both political society and the state, and constitutes the private relationships between citizens and their non-political voluntary associations.

This brief historical journey through the history of the concept serves to demonstrate that civil society has long been, and continues to be, a highly contested concept with its popularity waning and waxing over time. This contestation notwithstanding, it is apparent that most debates and ideas about civil society have been developed within the context of debates and arguments on political society and socio-political relations more broadly. I now turn to contemporary debates and theories on the subject where it is seen

that the contributions of both nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers, in particular de Tocqueville and Gramsci, remain highly relevant.

2.6.1 Manufacturing civil society: Contemporary debates

A revival of academic interest in the concept of civil society within international development literature commenced in the aftermath of the Cold War, with Eastern European intellectuals such as Andrew Arato and Vaclav Havel highlighting the role of civil society in the downfall of authoritarian regimes. Throughout the 1980s authoritarian regimes collapsed and a wave of democratisation swept through Africa (and Latin America) with Malawi attaining democracy in 1994. The ‘lost decade’ of the 1980s also witnessed the failure of structural adjustment and its exacerbation of poverty and inequality for many people (see Clapham, 1996, Chossudovsky, 1997 on Africa in general; Chinsinga, 2002 on Malawi). With growing anti-statist sentiments and a reluctance to attribute rapidly deteriorating economic and social conditions to the inappropriate policy prescriptions of structural adjustment, a donor discourse of ‘good governance’ was borne. This posited a central role for civil society in the ‘democratisation’ of political relations, enhancing accountability, and opening a space for the participation of citizens in the development process (Doornbos, 2003, 2004). The discourse of good governance thereby gave birth to a new role for civil society.

The rise and fall of the NGO

Within the discourse of good governance which dominated the 1980s and early 1990s the concept of civil society became exclusively equated with NGOs, many of whom were newly established following ‘democratisation’ in their respective countries.

Although the concept of civil society incorporates a far wider array of associations and

networks, it is useful, given the prevalence of this discourse, to firstly examine debates around this narrow section of the rich tradition that is civil society within an African context. The rise of NGOs in this period coupled with the surge in aid flows toward this sector has been well documented (Hulme and Edwards 1997, Pearce, 2000). NGOs were seen to possess a ‘comparative advantage’ vis à vis ‘corrupt’ governments in both the more traditional arena of service delivery, as well as new areas of democracy building, human rights work, policy analysis and research. An exponential growth in both numbers of NGOs and the diversity of their actions characterises this period. By the mid 1990s however, as Pearce (2000) and Lewis and Opoku-Mensah (2006) recount, a growing cynicism with the inevitable mushrooming of NGOs among Southern professionals was becoming apparent. Southern NGOs were accused of uncritically swallowing the agendas of donors and turning development “*into just another ‘business’*” (Pearce, 2000: 4). By the end of the 1990s the tide appeared to have turned, with NGOs facing a barrage of criticisms neatly encapsulated by Holloway.

While people inside the NGO world still think of themselves as occupying the high moral ground, the reality is now that few people in the South outside the NGO world think of NGOs like this. The word in the street in the South is that NGOs are charlatans racking up large salaries... and many air-conditioned offices.
(Holloway, 1999 - cited in Pearce, 2000).

Also writing toward the end of the millennium, Edwards and Hulme (1997) in their tellingly titled publication *NGOs, States and Donors – Too Close for Comfort?*, argue that, in their rapprochements (both financial, but also in terms of values, interests, methods and priorities) with both donors and their own states, NGOs were losing their relationship with the poor, and with the radical alternatives to the orthodoxies of the rich

and powerful that they once espoused. Urging NGOs to “*return to their roots*” the authors asserted that “*their ultimate achievements are not their scale, budgets or reputation, but their capacity to support effective association at the local level*” (1997: 283). Pearce (2000) argued that NGOs had, by and large, failed to develop a critique of the global order, instead opting for a problem-solving approach underpinned by “*an intellectually lazy reliance on a handful of concepts and words as a substitute for thought*” (32: 2000). This charge was reiterated repeatedly as the years progressed with many commentators criticising NGOs for operating within a neo-liberal agenda and failing to offer any alternatives (Roy, 2003, Tembo, 2003, de Santisteban, 2005, Ayers, 2006).

In common with many other African countries, the period following ‘democratisation’ in Malawi (1994 onwards) saw a proliferation of new NGOs hailed as the new guardians of civil society. This brief honeymoon period was followed by public criticisms of elitism, lack of patriotism, succumbing to donor-driven agendas, and seeking personal enrichment. While some of this criticism emanated from the ruling elite unhappy with NGO opposition to the so-called ‘third term debate’¹⁰, more emanated from systematic empirical research as the growing international mood of cynicism reached Malawi Wiseman Chirwa (2000), examining the role played by Malawian NGOs in the 1990s, concludes that they have failed to shift public debate and discourse to wider socio-economic issues, while Harri Englund’s research on a national civic education programme demonstrates how an inherently political project is being implemented in a manner which negates both power inequalities and relevant political

¹⁰ Following his election for a second term of office in 1999 then President Muluzi began a campaign to alter constitutional provisions which prevented him from running for a third term when the time came again in 2004. The so-called ‘third term debate’ became a major political issue dominating political discourse for the next five years. It was vehemently opposed by church leaders and ultimately failed.

and historical specificities¹¹ (Englund, 2003). The findings of both pieces of research echo critiques of Southern NGOs more generally which charge them with unquestioningly adopting dominant frameworks and failing to operate critically within them. By 2006, surveying the global scene, Lewis and Opoku-Mensah, signalled a downturn in global enthusiasm for NGOs asserting that “*there are (nevertheless) signs that NGOs are no longer seen today as being in the mainstream of development*” (2006: 667). In tandem with these developments, donor aid had shifted more towards direct budget support (directly to governments) leading to a growing fragmentation within the sector, with NGOs compelled to compete with each other within a dwindling resource base.

From normative to empirically based research

As is apparent, much of the international debate and research on civil society throughout the 1980s and 1990s narrowly equates civil society with Southern NGOs. This has been criticised for its overly normative character, focusing on what civil society should be and do, rather than on its actual character and action (Pearce, 2000, Lewis 2002, Lewis and Opoku-Mensah, 2006). Three implications arise from this narrow conceptualisation. First, as seen above, a particular version of civil society has been reified and elevated through high levels of financial support provided in the 1980s and 1990s. Second, the complex and diverse nature of civil society within African contexts has been largely ignored. Indeed civil society is often described as weak or non-existent in many African countries. And third, normative approaches have provided no account of actual social relations within and between these civic associations, glossing over the

¹¹ The programme in question (NICE – National Initiative for Civic Education) is ongoing.

inherent contradictions that exist in communities and tending to treat them as ideal homogenous wholes (Roy, 2003).

A notable exception to this general trend is the work of Jean and John Comaroff who, in their 1999 publication *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa*, explicitly set out to uncover the “*social revisioning*” (1999: 3) they assert has taken place over the previous two decades. Arguing that there is a critical difference between the bourgeoisie and civil society within African society (1999: 17), their publication uncovers a diversity of civic associationalism inhabiting African public spheres, in the process drawing attention to ‘uncool’ forms of African civil society, forms often dubbed partisan, parochial or fundamentalist.

Few have considered the sorts of public sphere presumed by specifically African relations of production and exchange, codes of conduct, or styles of social intercourse, by African markets, credit associations, informal economies, collective rituals, modes of aesthetic expression, discourses of magic and reason; by the various strands, in other words, that ‘weave the fabric’ of the civil here beyond the official purview of governance.

(Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999: 23 – emphasis in original)

In this conceptualisation, civil society in Africa is seen to encompass a far more diverse range of associations underlain by complex webs of values, priorities and relations.

In Malawi, this diversity and complexity is also apparent. Lwanda (2005) draws attention to the wide variety of indigenous groups that existed in colonial times, including Bao societies, Malipenga groups, Beni troupes, and various ‘native’ associations. Minnis (1998) argues that these traditional associations in Malawi offered a buffer against the excesses of the colonial state. Although more politically assertive

groups were quashed during the highly oppressive Banda¹² regime, local associations are currently numerous and varied within the country despite frequent assertions of an ‘undeveloped’ civil society (Chirwa, 2000). Despite this diversity, the equation of professional groups with civil society is self-reinforcing, as professional civil society members repeatedly refer to themselves as ‘the civil society’, largely ignoring other forms. In Malawi, Lwanda (2005: 54) notes that “*most elements of articulate elite ‘civil society’ (represented by NGOs, churches and other urban organisations) ignore the various cultural, traditional and economic groups at village, community and district level...*”.

Recent research on civil society within Africa (although still focusing largely on NGOs) has begun to engage more with its reality rather than normative, idealised conceptions as heretofore. The ethnographic work of both Michael (2004) and Igoe and Kelsall (2005) are examples of this. While Michael’s contribution, following a presentation of the findings of her empirical work, falls back on a more normative set of prescriptions as to how NGOs may gain more power within the socio-political arena, in the process once again negating issues of power differentials and the complexity of social interactions involved, Igoe and Kelsall’s volume problematises the concept in more detail, in particular drawing attention to the interface between state and civil society, wherein it is argued that the line between both is increasingly blurred. This intermingling of civil society and state, a more Gramscian conceptualisation than the idealised Tocquevillian one conceived in much of the normative literature, is a recurring theme within the small body of empirically based literature. Karlstrom (1999), writing

¹² Dr Hastings Banda ruled Malawi from 1964 to 1994 under an increasingly brutal and oppressive regime. A vivid account of the violence and oppression of the time is provided by Jack Mapanje, a well-known Malawian poet, himself jailed for a number of months during the Banda era for his literary criticisms of the regime (Mapanje, 2002).

of civil society in Uganda, draws attention to the difficulty in attempting to distinguish neatly between it and the state wherein sometimes the same actors are engaged at both levels (1999: 105). The churches in Malawi (Catholic, Presbyterian and Muslim), often identified as significant actors within Malawian civil society (Minnis, 1998, Von Doepp, 2002, Jenkins and Tsoka, 2003, Ross, 2004), also exemplify this porosity between civil society and state, as highlighted in Von Doepp's 2002 research which demonstrates a prevalence of class interests among local clergy, with many of them forging links with strategic powerful interests, including state actors. In this vein, Lewis and Opoku-Mensah (2006) highlight the need for more empirical research in the area that will do justice to the complexity and diversity of civil society in all its forms and contexts. This study makes a contribution in this regard and moves beyond normalised conceptions of civil society through an ethnographic approach to the study of the principal NGO group involved in Malawi's PRSP/MGDS, the Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN) together with its diverse membership base.

In this Section I have traced the debates and theory on civil society in Africa and Malawi, from its waxing within a particular guise as a key element within the good governance discourse of the 1980s and early 1990s, to its waning, by the late 1990s, and on to current emerging debates and research. I have argued that the tendency within the literature of the 1990s to confuse a normative version with existing realities has had a number of implications for our understanding of the nature and potential agency of African and Malawian civil society. In reifying a particular normative variant, in the form of professional NGOs, much of the literature has ignored the rich diversity of civic life that inhabits African society, while at the same time playing a crucial role in shaping the environment it inhabits. Normative discourses have furthermore failed to

take account of the complexity of social relations that characterise African civic life, in particular operating out of a neo-Toquevillian framework which neatly separates civic life from that of the state and wider political society. I have concluded the Section by tracing recent shifts in this discourse where moves towards empirical research on civil society in Africa and Malawi have problematised the idealised neo-Tocquevillian view, highlighting both the diversity of civic associationalism and its embeddedness within wider socio-political relations and culture. And so, the reality appears to concur more with a Gramscian conception of civil society. I now turn to an examination of the literature on civil society in Ireland where, as I will show, much contemporary writing appears to follow the normative trend within the global literature, focusing more on what civil society should be and do, rather than exploring the complex reality of what it actually is.

Civil Society in Ireland – an empirical gap

Although the ‘good governance’ discourse of the 1980s and early 1990s, with its implicit polarised assumptions of ‘bad’ or ‘corrupt’ states and ‘good’ civil society, remained confined to debates on governance in the global South, it is clear that it also influenced thinking and developments within Ireland, in particular as mediated through the EU, then Ireland’s principal donor. In parallel with the African context, the late 1980s and 1990s was a period in Ireland where a particular segment of civil society, the professionalised community and voluntary sector, was heralded as an important actor within the country’s governance. In contrast to the role posited for NGOs in the South however, and, despite emerging reports of endemic corruption within the political sphere (see Chapter Three), the normative role ascribed to this sector in Ireland carried none of the attendant assumptions of ‘poor governance’. Thus the community and

voluntary sector in Ireland, unlike Southern NGOs, was not called upon to exercise a role in enhancing the state's accountability or in monitoring its actions. A further significant difference was that although, initially at least, donor support through EU structural funds formed the basis for this development (Payne 1999), this was channelled directly through the state, thereby arguably compromising the community and voluntary sector's autonomy through its financial dependence on the state. As I show in later Chapters, this financial dependence has come to play a significant role in relation to the evolution of NGOs' participation in Social Partnership.

As in the case of Africa, much writing on this sector takes a normative slant with three main strands discernible. The first strand encompasses a donor discourse – that of the EU, which, through a series of anti-poverty programmes, posited a role for the community and voluntary sector in partnership with the state in the arena of policy formulation, as well as within service provision (Kellegher and Whelan, 1992, Motherway 2005).

The second strand of literature emerges from both the Irish state and public administration writings on the topic. The state appears to view the role of the community and voluntary sector more narrowly than the EU, reducing it to the area of service provision, in tandem with the fostering of self-help initiatives within local communities, as discussed in the previous Chapter. This conception has recently re-emerged under the guise of 'active citizenship' (Ireland 2006a, 2006b), in an interesting re-morphing of the concept of citizenship where citizenship is now equated with local voluntary work and self-help initiatives rather than active political engagement.

A third strand within the literature on civil society in Ireland adopts a more political approach wherein, in line with critical contributions within the development field, community and voluntary groups are urged to uncover their critical voice and put forward a more radical social analysis (Powell and Geoghegan, 2004, 2005, Meade, 2005). Noticeably, negating the sector's own agency, its failure to do this is attributed to its compromised positions within partnership arrangements with the state, rather than any inherent failing on its own part.

This last point highlights an important difference between the body of literature on the community and voluntary sector in Ireland, and that analysing the agency of the Southern NGO sector. The Irish literature remains largely uncritical of the community and voluntary sector, thereby largely negating its own agency in deciding its focus and direction. Any failures or shortcomings of groups within the community and voluntary sector are attributed to the consequences of state intervention (through funding and partnership arrangements) (see for example Murphy, 2002, Meade, 2005) and the sector itself and its constituent groups remain largely unproblematised. For example, following extensive research into the role and activism of the sector nationwide wherein a shift toward increasing professionalism in tandem with a move away from more radical agendas is identified, Powell and Geoghegan (2004) conclude that...

It is difficult not to conclude that the Irish state has been particularly adept at co-opting community development into a partnership governance of Irish society. The boundaries between state and civil society have become both porous and permeable. This is the Irish version of Third Way politics. The anxiety must be that this is a Faustian bargain in which a state that has embraced neo-liberalism and is replacing welfare policy by an enterprise culture is seeking to incorporate civil society into a project of governance that will fatally compromise its ethical legitimacy.

(Powell and Geoghegan, 2004: 260)

In contrast therefore, to critiques emerging in the development literature in the late 1990s, and indicating a more structuralist perspective coupled with an apparent resistance towards self-reflection, literature on the community and voluntary sector in Ireland is largely devoid of the charges of elitism, legitimacy, and efforts towards self-preservation which have assailed Southern NGOs. As later Chapters will reveal, this is a critical difference between the two cases under investigation with respect to the nature of civil society leadership exercised within the two processes, and their subsequent potential for transformatory participation.

Notwithstanding this absence of critical commentary on the direction and agency of the sector itself, in tandem with the situation of NGOs in Africa, support to the community and voluntary sector in Ireland has waned in recent years. Financial support began to fall in the early 2000s. Funding in 2003 was down 17 per cent, falling a further 7 per cent in 2004 (Harvey, 2004). Thus, in parallel with the African context, the community and voluntary sector in Ireland has become a very competitive environment with a multitude of groups competing for a dwindling pool of resources. Unfortunately, there has been no new phase in research on this sector to parallel that beginning at an international level, uncovering the reality of relations and contexts within the sector, and therefore leaving an important empirical gap in the context of its involvement in Social Partnership. While it is beyond the remit of this research to carry out detailed research at different organisational levels in the manner of Igoe and Kelsall's (2005) illuminating work, I hope that the documentation and analysis of the community and voluntary pillar's experiences of Social Partnership may shed some light, in a more limited manner, in this area.

From the idea to the reality

Again, in line with literature on Southern civil society, civic activism in Ireland encompasses a far wider array of associations and groupings than those falling under the umbrella of the community and voluntary sector. A number of commentators provide an account of the origins and development of civic associationalism throughout the decades (see for example Kellegher and Whelan, 1992, Varley and Curtin, 2002, Collins, 2002, Lee, 2003, Powell and Geoghegan, 2004, Motherway, 2005, and Daly, 2007). Two approaches to civic engagement emerge through this telling. The first, rooted in the rural cooperative movement, takes the form of traditional voluntary organisations (e.g. the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association), Muintir na Tíre) which are described as espousing virtues of neighbourliness, self-reliance and independence from the State. Close associations with the Catholic clergy, a fostering of a ‘self help’ approach, and a traditional conservatism are seen to characterise this period. In many respects, the government’s drive towards what it terms ‘active citizenship’ represents a return to this approach.

A second more radical wave of civic engagement, influenced by the US civil rights movement, began in urban areas in the 1970s, with the rise of tenant and housing groups, together with the rise of the women’s movement. Influenced by European anti-poverty programmes, these groups adopted a more radical social analysis aimed at challenging and transforming structural causes of poverty. It was many of these groups, and/or their successors, who later became involved in the partnership arrangements with the state that characterised the re-morphing of the sector in the late 1980s (Kellegher

and Whelan, 1992). And so many, although not all, of these groups have now been absorbed into the community and voluntary sector.

In addition to its role within local communities, and in tandem with the situation in Malawi, the Catholic church has also played a major role in Ireland's voluntary sector. Since the 1844 *Charitable Bequests Act* it had been a major provider of health and social care services and, for well over a century, the state funded the church to run a substantial component of health and social services throughout the country, leading to what has been described (O'Toole, 1998: 67) as a "cradle to grave" welfare system. The Catholic church's profound influence on affairs of the state in the past have been well documented (for example correspondence published by Dr Noel Browne on the church's opposition to his proposed public healthcare bill for mothers and children in the 1930s) with Powell and Geoghegan (2004) arguing that the country is left with a strong legacy of voluntary-statutory service provision, a situation which parallels directly with that in Malawi.

While no systematic mapping of the sector has ever taken place (although the Task Force on 'active citizenship' is charged with carrying out this task and the recent work of O'Donoghue et al (2006) provides a rich body of data from which such a map may begin to be constructed), it is clear that there is a richness and diversity to Irish civic life which parallels that in many African countries, including Malawi. Unfortunately, the empirical shift which has occurred within civil society research internationally, wherein the idealised analytical construct of civil society has been problematised and contrasted with civil society's diverse and complex reality, has not occurred in Ireland, where normative contributions continue to dominate debates in the field, leaving an important

empirical lacuna within a field which is acquiring greater importance in policy circles through partnership arrangements and exhortations towards greater civic engagement in the form of 'active citizenship'.

In parallel with civic life in Malawi, while many civic associations in Ireland may be characterised as politically inactive, this may be attributable more to lack of opportunity rather than lack of will. This question of opportunity is of central concern to this thesis and has direct bearing on the issues of representation and democracy theorised in detail in Chapter Four. The remainder of this Chapter will turn to a closer examination of this issue of opportunity, examining in particular the potential for political agency among the diversity of groups that represent actual, rather than normative, civil society in contemporary Malawi and Ireland, and theorising how this agency can be mediated by civil society representatives.

2.6.2 Social Capital: Missing link or instrument of exclusion?

The above literary journey through theories and realities of civil society in both Malawi and Ireland to date has uncovered a strongly normative slant which has privileged a particular conception of civil society which, paradoxically, is conceived of as operating independently of the state, yet, in practice, is centrally engaged in a range of processes of state building. Even more paradoxically, Ireland's community and voluntary sector is, for the most part, dependent on the state for financial support and hence survival, although the same argument might be made for Southern NGOs depending on how the state is defined (as we have seen in Section 2.4, donors may also be perceived as part of the state). This analytical construct, a product of what Comaroff and Comaroff characterise as a process of "*social revisioning*" (1999: 3), has been heavily influenced

by the work of Robert Putnam on social capital. Heralded by one World Bank expert as “*the missing link in development*” (Grootaert, 1998), and by Ireland’s current Taoiseach¹³ as “*hugely relevant to what’s going on here (in Ireland)*”¹⁴, social capital has become a hot topic, with the publication of Putnam’s influential publication *Bowling Alone* in 2000 re-igniting a keen interest among social science theorists and practitioners alike. The concept therefore merits some attention here in that it helps elucidate dominant analytical perceptions of civil society in Malawi and Ireland alike.

Social capital has been defined as the resource or asset resulting from voluntary associations and networks within society. Building on his study of development disparities between northern and southern Italy, wherein social capital is identified as the key to development (Putnam, 1993), Putnam transferred his analysis to the United States arguing that, as civic associational life declines (i.e. as people go bowling alone), so too does a stock of capital capable of addressing the nation’s economic and social malaise. Thus, for Putnam, the trust and well-being engendered by associational life constitutes an asset which can contribute to addressing economic and social issues.

Stocks of social capital such as trust, norms, and networks, tend to be self reinforcing and cumulative. Virtuous circles result in social equilibria with high levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civil engagement, and collective well-being...

(Putnam, 1993: 177)

Putnam’s work in this area has attracted considerable attention from academics and policy makers alike, most particularly in the US, but also in Ireland. The World Bank has a dedicated website on the topic where it is asserted that “...*social cohesion – social*

¹³ Prime Minister, Taoiseach literally translated means chieftain or leader

¹⁴ “*Meeting at the crossroads*” *The Irish Times*, September 3rd, 2005

capital – is critical for poverty alleviation and sustainable human and economic development.”¹⁵. The current Irish Taoiseach has described Putnam as “*an extraordinary genius*”¹⁶, and, in September 2005, Robert Putnam, who was invited to come and address the Irish parliamentary party on the topic, noted that “*there is no political leader anywhere in the world who has had the sustained interest in the issue of social capital as the Taoiseach*”¹⁷. Recent Social Partnership agreements¹⁸ make reference to the concept and it underlies the new state-driven, national campaign for ‘active citizenship’. While earlier Social Partnership agreements have not made explicit reference to the concept, as noted previously, the fostering of trust, community cohesion and solidarity through associational life has been a feature of Irish political life since the founding of the State.

Putnam’s concept of social capital has attracted some harsh critiques however. Theoretical critiques fall into two main groups. Firstly, it is argued that, in common with neo-Tocquevillian concepts of civil society as discussed above, and many conceptualisations of participation as discussed in Chapter One, the concept of social capital and the closely related idea of trust serve to de-politicise social relations and the development context. Harriss (2002), in particular, makes this case in relation to the adoption and use of the concept by the World Bank. He returns to Bourdieu’s earlier (and now largely ignored) work in this area which theorises social capital not as an attribute of society as a whole, but rather as an aspect of the differentiation of classes. Social capital thus, following Bourdieu’s theory, constitutes an instrument of power.

¹⁵ <http://www1.worldbank.org/prem/poverty/scapital/index.htm>, accessed 11th January, 2007.

¹⁶ “Harvard professor my guru since early 1990s, says Ahern”, Interview with Taoiseach Bertie Ahern *The Irish Times*, 3rd September, 2005.

¹⁷ Cited in Brennock, Mark, “Change in outlook to work and new citizens urged”, *The Irish Times*, 6th September, 2005.

¹⁸ *Sustaining Progress, 2003: Towards 2016*, 2006, see also NESC, 2005a, 2005b, and NESF 2003.

Social capital for one group of people may result in the exclusion of others. Developing this point, Harriss (2002: 10) cites the work of Mancur Olsen (*The Rise and Decline of Nations*, 1984) who argues that well-organised interest groups may well have no incentive to work towards the common good of society as posited by the Putnam view of social capital, instead possessing every incentive to engage in socially costly and inefficient, but privately profitable 'rent-seeking'. This argument is interesting in so far as it resonates strongly with charges fuelled against Southern NGOs within international development literature within recent years. Indeed Putnam, in describing social relations in the Italian South, emphasises the importance of patron-client relations, thereby reinforcing existing power relations. Yet Harriss notes that, in the *World Bank Development Report 2000/2001*, existing power structures are accepted as given.

The possibility that through political organisation and mass mobilisation – which can both draw upon and help construct 'social capital' (if you must) – poorer people might actually struggle against 'exclusion' and 'lack of resources', and so bring about change in the distribution of power and resources, does not even enter into consideration.

(Harriss, 2002: 11)

It appears therefore, that the World Bank's adoption of the concept is highly selective and resonates strongly with more instrumental forms of participation (as discussed in Chapter One) wherein issues of power are ignored, and initiatives within this conception may act to reinforce and exacerbate existing inequitable power relations.

The second main charge against popular conceptions of social capital resonates with critiques (in Ireland less trenchant) of Southern NGOs, and the Irish community and voluntary sector's failure to critically engage with dominant socio-economic norms. It is argued that introducing social capital as the solution to development ills draws

attention away from the economic and social policies that cause those ills, thereby leaving the underlying framework intact. Berner and Phillips argue that this approach, while having merits in creating respect for people's capability and creativity, nonetheless proves futile in bringing about social change...

The idea that poor communities can 'develop themselves' – if it means that they require no redistribution of resources, if it means that heterogeneity and inequity within communities can be glossed over, if it means that the macro structures of wealth and power distribution can be ignored – is flawed to the point of being harmful. (2005: 27).

Economist Ben Fine, bemoaning the incursion of economics into the social sciences¹⁹, argues that “*the reintroduction of the social has the troubling dual aspect both of rhetorically smoothing the acceptance of at most marginally altered economic policies and of broadening the scope of justifiable intervention from the economic to the social in order to ensure policies are successful*” (2001: 20). This same point is made within an Irish context by Powell and Geoghegan (2004) who argue that the term epitomises the colonisation of the social and political by the language of the market. The authors stress that it is important to connect civic engagement with democratic inclusion in the public sphere. They argue that, while democracy is the voice of society, social capital is conceptually disconnected from it.

Thus, Putnam's concept of social capital, in particular as adopted by both the World Bank and the Irish government, may be seen to underpin more normative, conceptualisations of civil society, what Hodgson (2004), in a British context, refers to as a 'manufactured civil society'. Theoretical critiques of the concept, highlighting its

¹⁹ Capital is itself an economic concept – Fine notes that all capital is social, thus the concept appears something of an oxymoron.

role in both de-politicising and de-contextualising social relations within a development context, and echoing the concerns of critics of normative versions of civil society, point the way towards thematic areas for future empirical research. With its implicit focus on social relations among and between state and NGO agents within the two processes under investigation, this research makes a contribution in this regard.

2.7 Popular agency within civil society: Theorising forms of leadership

So far we have seen that a normative conception of civil society has dominated literature, both globally, and within Ireland, paradoxically placing it distinct from the state, yet attributing to it a role wherein it is actively engaged in state affairs through roles in service provision, employment generation (and in the case of Africa monitoring and promoting ‘good governance’). As we have seen, this conception has been challenged within a smaller body of empirically based literature which uncovers the reality of a more diverse civil society engaged in a complex set of socio-political relationships with a range of different actors including the state. Central to the conception of participation is the issue of agency and, more specifically, in relation to the MPRS/MGDS and Social Partnership, the associated issues of representation and hence, democracy. In this Section I set out to theorise this issue more deeply, returning to the issues of representation and democracy, and focusing in particular on the issue of mediation, as highlighted by Young (2000) and discussed in further detail in Chapter Four. A key question in this regard is how do civil society representatives mediate the diverse voices of their constituent groups, thereby facilitating the articulation of their multiple discourses within the respective processes under examination? In this Section I argue that cultural attitudes and norms form the basis for this mediation, and I draw on

both Gramscian and Freirean theory to explore different forms this mediation might take.

Civil society's rich theoretical tradition, as explored at the beginning of Section 2.5, and within more recent empirical research discussed in Section 2.5.1, highlights the complex relations between civil society and the state (in Ireland this being manifest *inter alia* through both financially dependent relationship and a legitimising power). This factor, together with criticisms levelled against normative conceptualisations of civil society which charge them with failing to develop critiques of dominant frameworks, draws attention to the salience of Gramscian theory in exploring the relationship and its implications for civil society agency. Two aspects of Gramscian theory are particularly pertinent in this regard. The first is his theory of hegemony. This refers to the consensual aspects of political domination and involves dominant classes persuading others in society to accept and internalise their views, values and norms – what might be termed 'dominant discourses' according to a Foucauldian theorisation as discussed in Section 2.5. According to Gramsci...

... the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leadership'.

(1971: 57)

While many neo-Gramscians focus, in particular, on the economic dimension of the concept – how particular economic models and frameworks come to dominate – of particular interest here is the cultural dimension, in particular as it relates to attitudes and norms of leadership in mediating between different actors, i.e. the application of Gramscian theory to the issue of agency and its mediation. For Gramsci, hegemony is

achieved both through institutions of the state, and those of civil society. Thus he identifies one of the most important functions of the state...

... to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level (or type which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces of development), and hence to the interest of the ruling classes. The school as a positive educative function, and the courts as a repressive and negative educative function, are the most important State activities in this sense.

(1971: 258)

It is seen here that schools are identified as institutions wherein dominant cultural values and practices may be diffused to the wider society. And so, educational philosophy, as taught and practised, together with conceptions as to what constitutes knowledge, or, in Chambers terms, “*whose reality counts*” (1997), may constitute important components of the hegemonic apparatus. Other civil society institutions may be added to this such as churches and civil society groups themselves (NGOs / community and voluntary sector / other civic associations). Within this conception, institutions of civil society themselves may restrict the parameters of what is acceptable as ‘knowledge’ and what form this knowledge should take. Civil society is therefore, according to Gramsci’s conception, a site of constant ideological conflict between actors supportive of, and those challenging, aspects of the dominant hegemony (which itself is non-static). This is a key factor in the potential recognition and promotion of multiple discourses.

This leads on to the second aspect of Gramsci’s writings of particular relevance to the issue of civil society’s role in mediating popular agency, that of the nature of the ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ espoused by civil society representatives in leading elements of civil society in negotiating within, and through, the multiple complexity of institutions which reinforce this hegemonic order. Gramsci writes in some length about

different forms of intellectuals²⁰. Of interest to this study is his contribution on the nature of intellectuals required to lead people towards transformatory change. In this context, Gramsci's notion of the 'organic intellectual' (1971: 10), in leading people in challenging the hegemonic order, is highly relevant. Gramsci's 'organic intellectual' stands in contrast to what he terms the 'traditional intellectual' who, a product of the hegemonic order, acts (and leads) in a manner supportive of the dominant class. For Gramsci the 'organic intellectual' is key in the struggle to bring about transformatory change within a hegemonic order²¹.

One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer 'ideologically' the traditional intellectuals, but this assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals

(1971: 10)

Gramsci's conception of the 'organic intellectual' has much to offer contemporary civil society leaders as they mediate with constituent groups within participatory processes and lead groups and peoples towards an understanding of their position within the hegemonic order. So what constitutes an 'organic intellectual'? It is here that Gramsci's writings on the topic resonate strongly with the later work of Freire (1972), whose writings from the perspective of community education have influenced many civil society leaders in Africa and Ireland alike. For Gramsci, an 'organic intellectual', or, in our terms, 'civil society leader', first and foremost understands the potential of 'ordinary people' to effect change themselves. Thus while "...*traditional leaders don't even expect that the subaltern will become directive and responsible... In fact,*

²⁰ See in particular "The Intellectuals", Chapter 1, Section 1 (1971: 3-23)

²¹ While Gramsci's end goal of revolution with subalterns gaining dominance may seem a little radical in the context of Malawi's PRSP/MGDS and Ireland's Social Partnership it is felt that his ideas on the role of the '*organic intellectual*' – here employed in the context of civil society representatives – retain much relevance within the context of the two processes being examined.

however, some part of even a subaltern mass is always directive and responsible”
(1971: 337). The role of the ‘organic intellectual’ is to bring marginalised people (the ‘subaltern’ in Gramsci’s terms, ‘oppressed’ in Freire’s) to a point where they understand their position within the hegemonic order and are so in a position to begin to articulate alternatives.

Consciousness of being part of a hegemonic force (that is to say, political consciousness) is the first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one.

(1971: 333)

This allies with Freire’s concept of “*conscientisation*” wherein civil society leaders play a role in bringing marginalised people and groups to an understanding and awareness of the contextual conditions of their situation.

Freire, also emphatic about the capacity of people to be authors of their own destinies, has much to say about the process whereby this is to be achieved. This is of direct relevance to civil society groups engaged in participatory processes such as the MPRS/MGDS and Social Partnership in that it theorises how civil society representatives might mediate with their constituent groups. Freire underlines the importance of working with, and not for, people towards their own self-development.

... a pedagogy which must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (be they individuals or whole peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation

(1971: 25 - emphasis in the original)

This is important in that it highlights a distinct approach which sees civil society representatives working with and not merely on behalf of their constituents (the latter being an approach often attributed to church leaders, and one which negates the potential and capacity of popular agency, while the former more closely correlates to Young's (2000) '*perspective based representation*' as discussed in Chapter Four). The importance of dialogue, communication and understanding in this context is underscored by both theorists. And so, for Gramsci

...the intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned (not only for knowledge itself but also for the object of knowledge).

(1971: 418)

while for Freire

...the more radical he (the radical / civil society leader) is, the more fully he enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he can better transform it. He is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. He is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them.

(1972: 18-19)

This highlights the importance of multiple forms of communication (including emotion and passion, Gramsci, 1971: 418) as discussed in Chapter Four.

Drawing from both Gramsci and Freire's contributions, and applying them to civil society agency in mediating diverse voices within participatory processes, a number of points emerge. First, the importance of understanding and challenging one's own place within the hegemonic order is highlighted. Civil society participants within Malawi's PRSP/MGDS and Ireland's Social Partnership must firstly be aware of their position within the hegemonic order and be capable of stepping outside of this to analyse it objectively. Second, both Gramscian and Freirean theory highlight the importance of communication and dialogue with constituent groups in a way which a) brings civil

society leaders to a greater consciousness of their constituents' situations and lived realities, and b) facilitates group members themselves in also understanding their place within the hegemonic order, critically analysing it, and conceptualising and articulating alternative realities and futures. Third, the relevance and importance of constituent groups' own knowledge, perceptions and analysis in this context is highlighted.

2.8 Conclusion

Examining the contexts for the emergence of participatory forms of governance, in this Chapter I have argued that the concepts of participation and partnership derive from the reconfigured social relations necessitated by the global embedding of nation states within a global polity. Drawing from Castells' theory of the network state, I have argued that participation and partnership constitute mechanisms through which nation states, facing challenges to their legitimacy as their role in maintaining existing levels of social protection is undermined, attempt to rebuild legitimacy and support both domestically, and internationally. Their 'partners' in this endeavour, I have argued, constitute a normalised or manufactured subsection of civil society.

The form of leadership exercised by the leaders of this manufactured civil society, the new partners in development, therefore becomes central to evolving power relations within these new governance configurations. As 'partners' in development, how effectively do they represent the interests, views and ideals of their constituents? Do they sit within or without the hegemonic bloc, and what mechanisms do they use to secure this position? These questions throw a spotlight on civil society leadership, a spotlight which, as we have seen, shines more brightly and with more critical intensity, on civil society leaders in Africa than those in Ireland. As we will see in later Chapters,

this public spotlight has played an important role in the differential forms of leadership exercised by the main civil society participant organisations in the two processes under investigation.

While this Chapter has explored the global context for the emergence of participatory governance, the question remains to what extent these global theories hold true for the specific cases of Malawi and Ireland. We turn to this question in the following Chapter.

Chapter 3

Partnership and participation in context: Malawi and Ireland

3.1 Introduction

In the previous Chapter I examined the global context within which both development processes under investigation are embedded. However, neither the PRSP/MGDS nor Social Partnership emerged from or operate within a national socio-political vacuum. An analysis of both processes therefore must necessarily engage with the socio-political contexts and cultures from which they emerged, and within which they are embedded. I set out to do this in this Chapter through an examination of both countries' governance legacies, together with their broader socio-political cultural contexts.

It should be noted at the outset that this, in particular the exploration of political culture in the two countries, is a rather ambitious undertaking. Socio-political contexts and cultures are highly complex and in a state of constant flux. It is widely argued that culture and society in Ireland have experienced enormous changes over the last two decades (Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin, 2002, Coulter and Coleman, 2003, Coakley, 2005, Kitchin and Bartley, 2007) so any effort at analysis risks appearing dated and out of touch with contemporary developments. As to Malawi, any attempt (by this Irish writer) to analyse or understand the evolving political culture and norms may appear at best, inadequate, and at worst, an arrogance. These limitations notwithstanding, drawing from both Berger and Weber's argument that "*the focus (of studies on states and state building) needs to shift from quantitative approaches... which either ignore*

the wider historical context or assume that the right set of strategies can succeed regardless of the particular context” (2006: 201) and the ODI’s recent tacit acknowledgement of same within a Malawian context, as presented in their recent *Drivers of Change* report which constitutes “...an effort to adopt a more historically-informed, less technocratic approach to aid policy focusing on the way change happens, and how economic, social and political factors interact over the long-term” (Booth et al, 2006: 1), I feel that an attempted contextualisation is critical in efforts to analyse and understand the dynamics of, and the constraints and enablers to, transformative participation within the two processes. To this end, in this Chapter I draw on a range of secondary sources to present a number of features of Malawian and Irish governance histories and political cultures pertinent to the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership processes respectively. As I note in Chapter Five, cognisant of the limitations to achieving a comprehensive understanding of the Malawian context, I made specific efforts during the two periods of field research in Malawi to source commentators on the country’s socio-political history and culture.

I begin the Chapter with a brief historical socio-political overview of both countries where I show that, although macro-economically distinct, both countries exemplify the globalisation theories explored in the previous Chapter (Two) and share a common trend of growing inequality in wealth and income distribution. Exploring the reasons for this, I turn to the governance histories of both countries and examine some key characteristics of, and influences on, policy-making arenas within both contexts. Turning then to the broader political context, I present and compare a number of key features of socio-political culture drawn from the respective literatures. I then go on to discuss their implications for participatory governance. Finally, I examine some recent

trends in socio-political culture, and suggest that the media's increasing investigative depth and geographic scope, which is informing and enlivening public debate, may (although the evidence on this is somewhat ambiguous) be challenging and transforming dominant socio-political cultural norms in both countries. As we will see in later Chapters, the governance legacies and evolving political cultures in both Malawi and Ireland emerge as significant factors in interpreting the evolution of the national development processes under investigation over time in both countries.

3.2 Malawi and Ireland: Divergent paths towards global embeddedness

Although sharing a British colonial heritage, the post-colonial trajectories of Malawi and Ireland differ in some important respects. Malawi, a landlocked country located within the southern part of the African continent, attained its independence in 1963 when the Central African Federation of Nyasaland and Northern and Southern Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe respectively), created in 1953, was dissolved in 1963, with Hastings Banda becoming Prime Minister of self-governing Nyasaland. In 1964, Banda went on to become Prime Minister of independent Malawi and, two years later, Malawi became a republic with Banda as its President. Security forces intervened decisively to quell an early challenge to Banda's rule by a coalition of younger politicians. This set a precedent and the Banda regime quickly grew more authoritarian and dictatorial. In 1970, Banda declared himself 'President for Life' (EIU, 2005). While dissent was routinely quashed by the Banda regime²², by the end of the 1980s popular dissent with growing economic inequalities and political repression had mounted and, in 1992, Banda gave in to growing pressure and announced a referendum proposing changes to

²² Jack Mapanje, a well-known Malawian poet, himself jailed for a number of months during the Banda era, provides a vivid account of the violence and repression of the time (Mapanje, 2002).

the political system. The referendum, held in 1993, resulted in a 63 per cent vote for multiparty democracy and, in 1994, following thirty years of one-party rule, the country's first multiparty elections were held and the leader of the United Democratic Front (UDF), Bakili Muluzi, ousted Banda from the Presidency and went on to serve two terms until 2004. Although Muluzi attempted to alter the constitutional provisions which prevented him from running for a third five-year term (see Ross, 2004), he failed in this campaign, and Bingu Mutharika, initially also of the UDF, but subsequently leaving the party to form his own, was elected President in 2004.

Ireland, an island on the Western periphery of the European continent, attained independence in 1922 with the signing of the Anglo-Irish treaty which divided the island North and South and led to a bitter and divisive Civil War (Garvin, 1981). The dominant political presence of the post-independence decades was Eamon de Valera who served as President of the Executive Council from 1932-1937, Taoiseach (Prime Minister) from 1937-1948, 1951-1954 and 1957-1959, and President from 1959-1975 (Crotty, 2002). Nine other men have served as Taoisigh since 1922.

While Malawi under Banda was modernist from the outset, Ireland under de Valera was a traditional, culturally conservative, inward-looking nation. Banda, educated from 1925 to 1937 in the US, and a mature student and medical practitioner between 1938 and 1953 in the UK, brought back to Malawi a modernist developmental vision which he paradoxically combined with a strong ethnic (Chewa) cultural traditionalism (Phiri, 1998). In Ireland, the "*Age of de Valera*" (Crotty, 2002) has been noted for its emphasis on a rural economy and rural virtues, its sectarianism (with acknowledgement in the 1937 Constitution of the special place of the Catholic church), its antipathy

towards England, its social solidarity and cultural traditionalism, and its subordination of women (Moynihan, 1980, Crotty, 2002). A dramatic change took place in Ireland in 1958 with Sean Lemass succeeding De Valera as Taoiseach and opening Ireland to the international economy. Although suffering a serious recession in the 1980s, the ‘Celtic Tiger’ emerged triumphantly in the 1990s.

The initial development paths followed by both states, following Ireland’s brief attempt at self-reliance through an import substitution strategy, bear many similarities. In Malawi, economic growth formed the basis of the country’s development policy from independence (1964) to the late 1970s. Fuelled by high levels of borrowing on the international market, this yielded relative success in macroeconomic terms. GDP rose by about 5.8 per cent (in real terms), and exports also grew (Chinsinga, 2002).

Following its shift from import substitution to export-led growth in 1958, economic growth also formed the basis of Ireland’s development policy. In parallel with development trajectories pursued by countries such as Malawi, this strategy was financed by high levels of borrowing. As Raymond Crotty put it, “...*the policy depended absolutely on the state’s ability to borrow, which permitted the benefits of the policy to be enjoyed immediately, while its costs could be deferred to a future when, in the Keynesian aphorism, ‘we are all dead’*” (1986: 89). However, despite the economic benefits accrued from accession to the EEC in 1973, Ireland’s strategy did not yield the same macroeconomic successes enjoyed by Malawi and, despite determined attempts by the state to pursue a strategy of industrialisation, the country’s economic performance up until the late 1980s lagged far behind that of all other western European countries (except Greece and Portugal), together with a number of those of the so-called developing world (Venezuela, Argentina and Chile) (Kirby, 2003).

Behind Malawi's macroeconomic success during this period lay growing inequalities and a deterioration in social and living conditions for the majority of the population. The agricultural growth strategy pursued by the state favoured an elite minority, with smallholders exploited to drive estate-led growth. There were poor levels of social investment, and, by the late 1960s, the Gini coefficient was at 0.448 and rapidly rising (Banda et al, 1998). By the 1980s, life in Ireland was characterised by mass unemployment and emigration. The country's debt to GNP ratio stood at 124 per cent with unemployment coming close to 20 per cent at that time (Hardiman, 2004). Burdened by high levels of debt and rising inequalities²³, the development strategies pursued in both countries were clearly unsustainable and something had to give. It is at this point that the development trajectories of both states diverge.

A combination of the 1978-1979 oil shock, the 1980-1981 drought, declining terms of trade, rising interest rates, the influx of refugees from war-torn Mozambique, and declining aid led to a sharp decline in development fortunes in Malawi and, in common with many indebted countries, by 1980 the state was forced to turn to the IMF and World Bank for assistance. Malawi was the first African country to adopt the World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programmes, the first of which began in 1981 (Chinsinga, 2002). Development policy in Malawi has been premised on structural adjustment from that time to the present, and the devastating social consequences (as

²³ Of interest to this study is Crotty's observation that high levels of emigration allowed for the removal of virtually every element of discontent in Irish society thereby making it possible for Ireland's declining population to achieve relatively high living standards. He argues that "*partly because of improving living standards and partly because of the removal of discontent through emigration, a 'fat cat' Irish society has experienced more political stability than other former capitalist colonies and even most metropolises*" (1986: 102).

well as economic failings) have been well documented (see for example Chinsinga, 2002, Muula and Chanika, 2004 specifically on Malawi).

Ireland's faltering development also suffered from the oil crises and associated rising interest rates. By the 1980s Ireland too was facing the prospect of rolling over its debts to the IMF and pursuing the structural adjustment route. However, the state opted for a different strategy and, through Social Partnership, which commenced in 1987, managed to obtain the cooperation of employers and trade unions for a recovery strategy aimed at stabilising the economy, paving the way for rapid economic growth and job creation through foreign direct investment (FDI) from 1994 onwards (Hardiman, 2004). From the late 1980s through to today, the Irish state has consciously adopted policies and developed institutions to aid the insertion of the Irish economy into the global market. Measures for this include favourable rates of corporation tax targeting FDI, in particular through the creation of the Industrial Development Authority, which consciously sought to focus investment in particular sectors (Hardiman, 2003). And so, in different ways, and with radically different economic consequences, by the 1990s both states had consolidated their insertion into the global political economy. However, in both cases, this has occurred at the expense of social equity (Hardiman 2004, Kirby, 2004).

Today Ireland and Malawi stand at polar ends of the socio-economic spectrum as exemplified in the data presented in Table 3.2 below. While GDP per capita in Ireland in 2004 stood at US\$ 44,644, in Malawi it stood at just US\$ 646. Average life expectancy in Malawi, at just under 40 years, is far lower than that in Ireland, at just under 78 years, in part due to the AIDS crisis, and in part due to poverty.

Notwithstanding these extreme differences in wealth, it is noteworthy that social

spending (on health and education – in percentage GDP terms) in both countries is quite similar, with Malawi spending a higher proportion of its national income on education than Ireland.

Table 3.2: Some comparative socio-economic indicators for Malawi and Ireland

	<i>Malawi</i>	Ireland
Area (km ²)	118,484	70,283
Population (2004) (millions)	12.6	4.1
Human Development Index Rank*	166	4
GDP per capita (PPP US\$) (2004)	646	44,644
Life expectancy at birth (years)	39.8	77.9
Public expenditure on health (% of GDP) 2003-04	3.3	5.8
Public expenditure on education (% of GDP) 2002-04	6.0	4.3
Share of income or consumption (%) poorest 10%	1.9 (1997)	2.9 (2000)
Share of income or consumption (%) richest 10%	42.4	27.2
Gini index**	50.3 (1997)	34.3 (2000)

* The HDI is a composite indicator which includes measures of life expectancy, literacy/formal education and income per capita, each weighted equally. The rankings here are out of a total of 177 countries.

** The Gini index is a measure of income equality. A score of 0 implies perfect equality (where everyone has exactly the same income) while a score of 100 implies perfect inequality (where one person has all the income, and everyone else has zero income).

Data derived from the UNDP *Human Development Report*, 2006.

The data presented in Table 3.2 also illustrate another important aspect – the depth of income inequality within both countries. This is greater in Malawi than in Ireland, with 1994 figures revealing Malawi to be the third most unequal society in the world (Mkandawire, 2003). Rising inequalities in both countries (see Kirby, 2002, Hardiman, McCashin and Payne, 2004 on Ireland; Mkandawire, 2003 on Malawi) raise questions as to the nature and thrust of developmental policy in both countries and the interest groups represented by these policies. These questions form the basis of the following Section.

This Section has served to provide a broad socio-political backdrop to both countries. We have seen that both countries have, over the decades, combined legacies of traditional conservatism with modernism. In Ireland, these followed a linear progression, the first up until the late 1950s, and the second from then to the present day. In Malawi, both traditions were paradoxically combined into a socio-economically modernist / culturally traditionalist vision which characterised the Banda period from 1963 to 1994. The socio-economic fortunes of both countries are seen to differ significantly, yet both correspond to the globalisation theories discussed in the previous Chapter (Two) whereby both, in different ways (through international aid assistance in Malawi, and through both accession to the EU (then EEC) and an increasing reliance on FDI in Ireland) have become embedded into the global polity. Both also share a common trend of growing inequality, this being more severe in the Malawian case. This suggests that development policies in both countries, while privileging one section of the population, have done so at the cost of growing marginalisation and disenfranchisement of another. A key factor underlying these outcomes, and one of immediate relevance to this study, is the style of governance which has developed and evolved in both countries over the decades. This is explored in the following Section.

3.3 Governance legacies underlying the emergence of the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership

Although, on the surface, governance regimes in Malawi and Ireland in the early decades of independence appear to differ significantly – dictatorship on the one hand, and a democratic regime on the other – closer examination of both regimes reveals some important similarities. Among these are strong tendencies towards centralised political power and decision making. Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, though as discussed in the previous Chapter (Two), necessarily, to ensure legitimacy, centralised decision making has been combined over the decades with a number of consultative (albeit selective) governance initiatives. I explore these legacies below.

3.3.1 Centralising power

In common with many other African countries, the Banda dictatorship in Malawi resulted in a legacy of centralised authority. As noted by Mkandawire (2003), again in common with many other African one-party regimes, this proved expedient to the international community who found it easier to deal with one individual than a more broad-based polity. This is evidenced within a 1991 World Bank report which notes:

...a commitment of an extraordinary kind which did not require consensus building of the nature normally encountered... it is sufficient in Malawi if the (World Bank) reforms are pragmatic and presented convincingly enough to appeal to and obtain the consent of Life President.

(World Bank, 1991 quoted in Mkandawire, 2003: 16)

Within Ireland also, the centralised authority of the Irish state from the outset has been noted (Coakley, 2005). This ongoing centralisation within both Malawi and Ireland is evidenced in the relative powerlessness of local authorities in both states (see Meinhardt and Patel, 2003 on Malawi; Forde, 2004 on Ireland). In Malawi, although a new

Constitution Act, introduced in 1995, provided for the creation of local government, with this being enshrined in a *Local Government Act* in 1998, leading to the creation of local assemblies, it has been argued (Meinhardt and Patel, 2003: 48) that the central government has no interest in decentralisation (a project of the donor community in the post-cold war ‘democratic’ era). The delaying of recent (2006) local government elections, leaving local councils without councillors for over a year, appears to bear out this view. In Ireland also, this centralisation is evidenced in the willingness of post-independent governments to suspend local authorities and replace them with appointed commissioners in the 1920s, and, in later years (the 1960s to the 1990s), to postpone council elections on a regular basis (Coakley, 2005).

3.3.2 Securing legitimacy: policies, people and power

While these centralising tendencies suggest a governance culture antithetical to consultative processes, both Malawian and Irish regimes found themselves faced with issues of legitimacy from the outset. In Malawi, as previously noted, Banda, facing a number of early challenges from opposition leaders, quickly adopted a repressive system of governance, surrounding himself with his own personal security force (Ihonvbere, 1997, Ross, 1998). Although political opposition was often violently repressed, Banda sought elite support for his development policies by employing a governance style which has been characterised by Chazan et al (1988: 133) as “*administrative hegemonic*”. This, Chazan et al (1998) explain, involved developing ordered relationships with key social interests, thereby nurturing elite cohesion. The assumption was that, to the extent that key interest group leaders were part of the policymaking process, they would be more likely to cooperate with government institutions and their regulations. Through this bargaining regime, Banda pursued a

development strategy promoting growth based on commercial agriculture. Later analyses of the economic legacy of Banda's regime would appear to bear out the elitist charges of Chazan et al's (1998) analysis. Economic analyses demonstrate that, through these policies, commercial farmers prospered while other groups (including small farmers and workers) were increasingly marginalised (Banda et al, 1998, Chinsinga, 2002).

This governance legacy of the Banda era is important because it appears it continued on into the Muluzi period (1994-2004) and, from there, into the current governance regime. As one commentator notes, "*a large number of our politicians learned their politics at the feet of Banda – and many literally*" (Mkandawire, 2003: 21). With the advent of multipartyism, and the new donor emphasis on human rights and 'good governance', the more repressive and violent underpinnings of strategies of social control proved no longer acceptable (to the international community – naturally they were never acceptable to large elements of the national community)²⁴. While Muluzi's relations with a wider grouping of entrepreneurial elites is reported to have operated more on a financial than a political plane (Lwanda, 2005), current President Mutharika's widely publicised 'zero tolerance on corruption'²⁵ sees his nurturing of elites once again acquiring a political dimension as he seeks support for his economic policies of export promotion and investment generation.

In, Ireland too, following the difficult birth of the new 'Free State', the new government found itself faced with a formidable challenge to its legitimacy as it attempted to

²⁴ Although political violence and intimidation are no longer officially tolerated, the legacy and, to a degree, practice, of this era reportedly continues (see Englund, 2002, Mkandawire, 2003).

²⁵ see, for example "Malawi President rules 'his way'", BBC News, Wednesday, September 1st, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3618948.stm>, accessed April 28th, 2007.

mediate between the British government and disaffected Republicans in Ireland. In an attempt to claim legitimacy in the eyes of both Irish republicans and British politicians, an anomalous political arrangement was devised whereby, for several months of 1922, a President of the Dáil coexisted with a Chairman of the Provisional government (Coakley, 2005). Fostering a close relationship with the Catholic church which supported the new government's nationalist policies of austerity and self-reliance, the state is reported to have incorporated vocationalist elements into its governance from its earliest days (Broderick, 1999, O'Leary, 2000, Powell and Geoghegan, 2004: 53-57). Vocationalism differed from Malawi's 'administrative hegemony' in that, promoted by the social teachings of the Catholic church which emphasised the principle of subsidiarity, it involved proposals to limit the powers of central government through the establishment of vocational councils in which members, both workers and employers, of each industry and profession would be organised (O'Leary, 2000). Of particular relevance to this study is the fact that vocationalism failed to make any significant impact on the political system. This is attributed by Whyte (1979: 74-76) to the influence of entrenched political and civil service structures.

The second phase in Ireland's policy trajectory, the shift from import substitution to export-led growth in 1958, led by senior civil servants and the new Taoiseach, Seán Lemass, necessitated the development of a second consultative initiative. Focused on the field of industrial relations, bargaining arrangements within this initiative took the form of a series of tripartite national wage agreements which dominated the field of industrial relations from the early 1970s. These are often cited as precursors to the current Social Partnership process in that a precedent of consultation and deal making with key interests had been set (Hardiman, 1992a, 1992b, Laffan and O'Donnell, 1998,

Mc Sharry, 2000, O'Donnell and Thomas, 2002). Significantly, as in the Malawian case, these mechanisms may also be characterised as elitist in that the resultant policies benefited (and continue to do so²⁶) capital rather than labour, thereby inevitably resulting in the growing economic inequalities within Irish society.

Despite ostensibly very different political regimes in both Malawi and Ireland – dictatorship and representative democracy respectively – it therefore appears that governance regimes, in practice, incorporated elements of consultation from the outset in both instances. These governance strategies were avowedly elitist in orientation however, seeking selective support for development policies in both countries which, evidence now shows, result(ed) in increasing economic inequality and marginalisation for specific sections of each state's population. It may therefore be argued that the consultative ethos and practice underlying both the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership was not entirely new (in nature if not in scale, and in practice if not intent) to governance regimes within both countries. As will be seen, it was, however, international influence that led to the institutionalisation of such practices into the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership processes respectively. These international influences, in highlighting the social dimensions of development, also brought this added dimension to these practices.

3.3.3 National governance – international influences: The emergence of the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership

As outlined in Chapter One, the immediate context for the development of the PRSP process was the decision, taken in 1999, by international creditors to grant a degree of

²⁶ The relative consistency of Irish development policy since 1958 over successive regime changes has been noted (O'Riain and O'Connell, 2000; Hardiman, 2004).

debt relief to indebted countries. This necessitated a mechanism for the disbursement of released funds. Malawi was, therefore, obliged to undertake the PRSP process in order to qualify for debt relief. As we will see in the following Chapter, the MGDS, in contrast, emerged as an initiative of the Mutharika-led government and is focused as much (if not more) on securing private (international) investment and growth as on social development. With the MGDS therefore, a shift has taken place wherein the process is described by commentators as more 'nationally owned' (see Chapter Eight) than its predecessor, the PRSP, yet it is nonetheless motivated by external influences. As one Malawian commentator notes, in respect of these influences, image counts.

Malawi is a poor country, landlocked, not in possession of any known valuable mineral and of not much strategic importance. It is also a country which for many years to come will be in need of external support for its developmental efforts in the form of aid, investment and trade. With respect to two of these image is important.
(Mkandawire, 2003: 35)

Interestingly, Ireland's Social Partnership, although also developed with an eye toward the international arena, appears to have followed an inverted path to that of Malawi. As outlined by commentators such as Laffan and O'Donnell (1998), McSharry (2000), O'Donnell and Thomas (2002), and Hardiman (2002a, 2002b), objectives of economic stability and growth with a view to developing a stable and attractive investment climate underpinned the initial processes which were developed through the initiative of the Irish state. From the late 1980s, the EU also influenced the evolution of the process however, particularly following reform of the structural funds (disbursable through local partnership companies) (Payne, 1999). The EU was keen to have wider participation in decisions regarding the use of such aid and, in part to satisfy EU requirements and maximise the amount of structural funds attainable, Irish social policies and Social

Partnership programmes closely mirrored those of the EU throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Larraghy and Bartley, 2007: 206). Image, therefore, appears as important in Ireland as in Malawi.

In conclusion, some common governance features are apparent within both Malawi and Ireland since independence. Political power and authority appear highly centralised in both countries. While power within this centralised system appears to lie with elected leaders, in particular individual Ministers, in Ireland senior civil servants also appear to wield significant power, negotiating this with their Ministers. It appears that, while external conditions necessitated the development of the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership processes in Malawi and Ireland respectively, governance legacies within both countries already included elements of consultation. These bargaining / consultation mechanisms were limited and selective however, and sought to obtain elite support for policies which resulted in growing inequality and marginalisation in both countries.

An examination of governance legacies alone provides just part of the contextual backdrop to the introduction and functioning of both processes however. As examined in Chapter Four, the broader political culture also has significant implications for the functioning of processes in both countries, in particular in relation to its impact on the agency of the different actors. It is to this broader context that the remainder of this Chapter turns.

3.4 Citizens or Subjects? – Some features of political culture in Malawi and Ireland

Within Malawi, debates on political culture often tend to be overshadowed by a narrower focus on institutional development in the post Cold-War ‘democratisation’ era. Analyses of legal and constitutional development, decentralisation, national elections, and civic education initiatives sit side by side with ongoing analyses of the country’s economic development (see for example articles compiled within Phiri and Ross, 1998, Immink et al, 2003, Ott et al, 2005). The contextualisation of some of these articles however (in particular those within Phiri and Ross, 1998 and also the work of John Lwanda, 2005) provides some understanding of the broader political context within which contemporary political developments occur. In Ireland, although the advent of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ appears to have promoted a shift in focus within the Irish literature from broader studies of Irish political culture to more focused explanatory analyses of the economy’s rapid growth, the broader issue of political culture in Ireland was the subject of much debate throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Although somewhat dated, this literature remains relevant in contextualising the legacy (and to a significant extent) ongoing practices which form the backdrop to Social Partnership and political activism within the contemporary state. Analysing these two bodies of literature some broad parallels in the distinctive features of Irish and Malawian political culture emerge which, as noted in Chapter Four, provide an important context within which both the PRSP/MGDS process and Social Partnership function.

In this Section I draw from secondary sources to explore some of the key features of political culture in both contexts. Noting many similarities (although to varying degrees within each country) in accounts of political culture within the two countries, a number

of interrelated features are examined. I go on within the Section to explore the implications of these cultures for the promotion and development of participatory forms of governance in each country. I suggest that the main legacies of political cultures in both countries may have combined to erode citizenship, leading to what has been characterised in the Malawian context as a “*subject culture*” (Patel 2005, Mamdani, 1996), and thereby limiting the potential for transformative engagement in participatory governance processes. There are, however, indications in both countries that this subject culture may be changing.

3.4.1 Political culture in Malawi and Ireland: Some key features

A recent overview of Malawi’s political culture (Booth et al, 2006: 13-20) reiterates many of the features outlined within African literature more broadly. Coakley (2005: 55-56) provides an overview of the key features of Irish political culture as reflected in the literature. The key features in both contexts are summarised in Table 3.4.1 below:

Table 3.4.1: Key features of Malawian and Irish political culture

Malawian political culture	Irish political culture
Authoritarianism – ‘big man’ politics	Authoritarianism – combining deference to the views of established leaders with intolerance of those who dissent from these views
Social relations characterised by inequality and a large power distance – hierarchy is expected, concentrated authority and dependency are the norms	Personalism and individualism – a pattern of relations in which people are valued for who they are and whom they know
Dr Banda’s four cornerstones – unity, obedience, discipline and loyalty – the legacy remains strong	Loyalty – to leaders in church ²⁷ and state
Collectivism leading to ‘in-group’ preferences – position and saving ‘face’ are important	Anti-intellectualism in which consensus on religious and political values was able to continue virtually unchallenged
Conformity – conflict is to be avoided	Strong pressure towards political conformism

Sources: Booth et al, 2006, Coakley, 2005

²⁷ Coakley (2005) argues that loyalty to church may be dwindling with what he describes as the increasing secularisation of Irish society.

This brief comparison of the main features of political culture within the two countries highlights many similarities between the two, drawing a picture of hierarchical, asymmetric systems, in both cases, in which loyalty and conformity to political leaders remains strong, and conflict and dissensus is not readily tolerated. In particular, a strongly hierarchical structure of social relations coupled with an authoritarian strain has been identified within both Malawian and Irish cultures. This is described as constituting not just a feature of political culture, but of society in both instances more broadly (in Malawi see Englund, 2002, 2003, Patel, 2005, Booth et al, 2006; in Ireland see Schmitt, 1973, Whyte, 1984, Hardiman and Whelan, 1994, and Coakley, 2005). Stemming from these hierarchical social relations and people's attendant deference to authority, a high degree of loyalty to political and church leaders has been noted in both contexts (although loyalty to the latter is purported to be waning in Ireland (Coakley, 2005)). Allied to this loyalty is a degree of conformism where dissent from the dominantly held views (of leaders) is not readily tolerated and a consensus culture prevails (Booth et al, 2006 on Malawi; Coakley, 2005 on Ireland).

Politics in both Malawi and Ireland has been characterised as being highly personalised, with an emphasis on individual personalities rather than issues or policies, resulting in a lack of any strong ideological opposition or debate within the country as a result (see Dzimbiri, 1998, Phiri, 2000, and Patel, 2005 on Malawi; Schmitt, 1973, and Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin, 2002 on Ireland). As Phiri (2000) notes in a Malawian context, this leaves the electorate with little choice but to engage in personality politics rather than with the issues.

Without clearly defined ideologies, however, political parties become rather redundant, and the electorate increasingly resorts to primordial or parochial criteria for the choices it has made.

(Phiri, 2000: 68)

A framework within which many of these features find expression is that of clientelism. Although the Constitutions of both Malawi and Ireland have adopted a citizen framework to characterise the relationship between the respective polities and their members, both countries have been described as displaying the essential features of a clientelist framework (see Dzimhiri, 1998 and Lwanda, 2005 on Malawi; Bax, 1976, Chubb, 1970, Collins, 1985, Higgins, 1982 and Komito, 1984, 1989, 1992 on Ireland) whereby patronage is bestowed on political representatives (MPs, councillors and Traditional Authorities in Malawi, TDs and councillors in Ireland) mediating between citizens and the administrative apparatus of the state. Detailed accounts of how this occurs are provided in the studies of Nkhoma (2003) (on Malawi) and Higgins (1982) (on Ireland). In many cases citizen rights are accorded through the mediation of a broker (TA/MP/TD/councillor), for example a bore hole / well or employment position in Malawi, housing or a medical card in Ireland. While some commentators in Ireland prefer the more neutral term 'brokerage' to the somewhat pejorative term 'clientelism' (see Komito, 1984, Gallagher and Komito, 2005), arguing that links between citizens and political leaders are not institutionalised in any way through these relationships, the implications for both political activism and policy, issues of particular relevance to this study, remain the same.

Although the origins of this culture have proved less a focus of study than its actual character, Mart Bax, writing on Irish political culture in 1976, suggested that it represents a follow-on from the colonial system of the nineteenth century where landlords functioned as patrons and brokers to the native Irish. With independence, the landlord was succeeded by professional politicians. Bax's analysis is interesting in that

it echoes the more detailed analysis in an African context carried out by Jean-François Bayart (1992, 2000). Bayart's "*politique du ventre*" (1992) postulates that political leaders make subjects of their citizens in a manner reproducing colonial forms of authority. This system of "*extraversion*" generates a culture of dependency wherein all political expression is mediated through the "*patron*" or broker. Thus

... at the heart (of extraversion) is the creation and the capture of a rent generated by dependency and which functions as a historical matrix of inequality, political centralisation and social struggle...

(2000: 222)

In recent decades globalisation has exposed this relationship to new social and economic pressures and, in Ireland, there is now some debate as to how these pressures will / are impinging upon the traditional patron / client relations (O'Halloran, 2004, Coakley, 2005). While new governance arrangements such as the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership have ostensibly brought about alternative frameworks for citizen engagement, traditional clientelist mechanisms remain firmly embedded within the political cultures of both countries. Their possible implications for emerging forms of governance in both countries, as exemplified by the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership, are discussed below.

3.4.2 Citizens or subjects?: Possible implications for participatory governance

Exploring the possible implications of these clientelist mechanisms, and the broader political cultures in which they are embedded, for participatory governance in both countries, a number of issues emerge. These potentially impact on the range of discourses, the depth of participation, and the policy effectiveness of both processes. On the issue of discourse, the equation, by a number of commentators, of the strongly hierarchical culture within both countries with internalised perceptions of inequality

wherein, it is asserted, concentrated authority and dependency become the norm (see Booth et al, 2006 on Malawi; Nic Ghiolla Phádraig, 1995: 598 on Ireland), suggests that transformative change may not be desirable to an elite. The quality of discourse and policy input to the respective processes may, therefore, be necessarily restricted. There are two main potential contributory factors. First, with concentrated authority the norm, local knowledge and forms of communication may be overlooked. The resultant tendency to speak on behalf of, rather than with ‘the people’, in opposition to Freire’s exhortations, and representing a more ‘traditional’ than ‘organic’ form of leadership, may result in further marginalisation, thereby narrowing the range of discourses and forms of communication available. Second, the loyalty and deference to authority prevalent within both cultures, limiting the space available for intellectual debate and exchange on relevant issues, may give rise to difficulties for participants seeking to promote public debate and discussion on issues which lie outside of, or risk challenging, the consensual framework and its proponents. A legacy of anti-intellectualism has been posited in the Irish case (see Coakley, 2005) while Malawian commentators have been keen to point out that the so-called ‘brain drain’ from the country in the direction of North American and European institutions owes as much, if not more, to the intellectually repressive political culture than to the usual charges of financial inducement (Mkandawire, 1997, 1999, Zelaza, 2004).

On participation, writing in an Irish context, O’Halloran (2004) argues that one consequence of the asymmetric power relations, in particular as practised through clientelist political practices, which have been described (again, in an Irish context) as “*coercive*”, and “*exploitative*” (Higgins, 1982), has been the erosion of a concept of citizenship, in particular for poor and marginalised groups within society. Writing in an

African context, Bayart goes one step further in controversially arguing that African political elites, in the face of weakening legitimacy, deliberately sought to foster such dependent relationships, thereby consolidating their power and position.

... the leading actors in sub-Saharan societies have tended to compensate for their difficulties in the autonomisation of the power and in intensifying the exploitation of their dependents by deliberate recourse to the strategies of extraversion...

Bayart, 1992: 21

The “*subject culture*” (Mamdani, 1996, Patel, 2005) thus engendered is antithetical to the proactive engagement promoted by proponents of participatory forms of governance.

Finally, on policy effectiveness, the dominance of ‘personality politics’ in both contexts, in particular as practised through clientelist relationships, renders efforts at long-term policy formulation difficult. With political leaders spending most of their time either, in the words of Basil Chubb describing the Irish situation, “*going about persecuting civil servants*” (Chubb, 1963 in Komito, 1984: 130), or going about convincing citizens of the efficacy of their interventions, their policy interests tend to be short-termist and driven by immediate political considerations such as upcoming elections, rather than forming part of a more long-term strategy. Furthermore, while a raft of policy announcements accompanies events such as elections, the record of policy implementation in both Malawi and Ireland is reported as being poor (Booth et al, 2006 on Malawi; NESC, 2005a on Ireland).

Taken together, these implications suggest that the main features of political cultures in both Malawi and Ireland lie somewhat at odds with the transformative potential and ethos of participatory forms of governance. In particular, the hierarchical, authoritative

nature of both societies characterised by asymmetric power relations, a paucity of pertinent intellectual debate, pressures toward conformism, and ongoing practices of clientelism, appear to leave leaders and citizens alike ill-prepared for engagement in participatory processes. As I have noted in Section 3.1 however, political cultures are neither static nor immutable. There are some signs in both countries that authoritarian influences may be weakening, with political and church leaders coming under some criticism (although the latter to a lesser degree in Malawi where religious loyalties remain strong). It is to these developments that the following sub-section turns.

3.4.3 From subjects to citizens?: Mass media as a growing political space

While evolving trends within political cultures are difficult to analyse, evidence from both recent attitudinal surveys (Afrobarometer (2003) and Eurobarometer (2001) data as analysed by Khaila and Chibwana (2005) and Coakley (2005) respectively), combined with popular discourse, as recorded in Malawian and Irish media, suggest that, although adherence to liberal values remains strong in both countries, trust in political leaders has fallen significantly (see Khaila and Chibwana, 2005: 20-24 and Coakley, 2005: 57-59 respectively). With the mass media increasing its role as “*the decisive space of politics*” (Carnoy and Castells, 2001: 12; see also Castells, 2000, Blumer and Gurevitch, 2005, Curran, 2005), the motivations and behaviour of political (and, in Ireland, religious) leaders have come under greater scrutiny in recent years in both countries. Post-multipartyism, the media in Malawi, in particular the liberalised press (Chimombo and Chimombo, 1996, Chipangula, 2003), and increasingly radio (Neale, 2005), which is popular in rural areas, enjoys relative freedom and political life dominates public discourse. While political reporting during the early years of press freedom was characterised by “*mud-slinging, muck-raking, character assassination*” (Chimombo

and Chimombo, 1996: 32), more in-depth investigative journalism is reported to be on the increase (Chipangula, 2003).

The media's exposure of abuses of public office in both countries may be argued to have had two consequences for political culture in both instances. First, as evidenced in both popular discourse and falling voter turnout (see Dulani, 2005 on Malawi; Laver, 2005 on Ireland), it has resulted in increasing public disillusionment with, and apathy towards, political institutions and their elites. Newspaper articles with headlines such as *Why our leaders fail*²⁸; *The State of Malawi*²⁹; *Political leaders need to consider cost of impasse*³⁰; and *Never trust politicians*³¹, to cite a few, exemplify the widespread disillusionment and distrust of political leaders. An excerpt from the latter article provides a flavour of public perceptions of politics in contemporary Malawi

*But then politics in Malawi is always seen as an all-important opening to social cachet and wealth... Avarice, jealousy, distrust and hate soon give birth to uncontrollable political maelstroms and fierce fighting erupts. More struggles, more defections, more noise and more change. And to bank my trust on people with inflated egos and bloated self-interest, politicians who can't make up their minds on one thing and stick to it? No thanks.*³²

While, in Ireland, the language of media commentators is generally more subdued, at times even somewhat conciliatory³³, headlines in the national daily, *The Irish Times*, such as *Rowing back on corruption*³⁴, *Devastating use of public trust*³⁵ and an obituary

²⁸ *The Sunday Times*, October 9th, 2005

²⁹ Opinion, Kamkwamba Kalea, *The Nation*, October 10th, 2005

³⁰ Editorial, *The Nation*, October 5th, 2005

³¹ Levi Kabwato, *The Sunday Times*, September 25th, 2005

³² Levi Kabwato, *The Sunday Times*, September 25th, 2005

³³ For example, "In Praise of our Politicians", *The Irish Times* editorial of January 5th, 2007

³⁴ Fintan O'Toole, *The Irish Times*, January 2nd, 2007

³⁵ Michael O'Regan, *The Irish Times*, February 15th, 2007

on the late Taoiseach Charles Haughey entitled *The most controversial of them all*³⁶ provide a flavour of political public discourse in the country.

Following on from this it would appear that loyalty and deference to authority, among ‘ordinary people’ at least, may be weakening within both countries, thereby potentially transforming the ‘subject culture’ as argued above. This conclusion is by no means clear-cut however, in particular in Ireland. While, on the one hand, a comparison of Eurobarometer attitudinal data reveals a significant drop in public confidence and trust in political leaders and parties between 1990 and 2001 (Coakley, 2005: 57), on the other, the Irish public continues to display a loyalty to disgraced leaders as evidenced in their recent re-election to the national parliament following evidence of corruption (Collins and Quinlivan, 2005).

With the inherent ambiguity in these trends, it is difficult to discern conclusively whether the stronghold of authoritarianism and attendant ‘subject culture’ is indeed weakening, and, if so, to what degree. While it appears that traditional loyalties run deep, in particular in Ireland, there is certainly evidence of a growing public call for accountability and propriety in public life, and, with it, a growing awareness among political leaders of the need to build public confidence and bolster a damaged legitimacy.

In an era where much politics is played out in the media, citizens in both Malawi and Ireland are far more aware of the motivations and interests of their political leaders. This is aptly encapsulated in the astute observation of a Malawian peasant to John

³⁶ *The Irish Times*, June 14th, 2006

Lwanda (recorded in Lwanda, 2005: 56) who noted that “*Politicians cannot buy my brain, just my hungry stomach* (referring to Muluzi’s practice of campaigning with hand-outs) *but in your case* (Lwanda perceived as a wealthy Malawian elite) *they buy both your stomach and your brain.*” It may well be that this growing political awareness translates into pressure for transformative developmental outcomes and greater transparency within the two processes under investigation.

3.5 Conclusion

Recognising the importance of history, culture and context to the dynamics underpinning both the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership processes, yet cognisant of the difficulties in capturing their complexity and evolving patterns, in this Chapter I have provided a broad overview of the governance and broader political contexts within which Malawi’s PRSP/MGDS and Ireland’s Social Partnership sit. While both country’s governance legacies and broader political cultures appear (to varying degrees) to have marginalised significant sections of their populations, both exacerbating economic inequality and, arguably, undermining liberal conceptions of citizenship, I suggest, (although the evidence is somewhat ambiguous), that this may be changing.

With the media playing an ever-increasing role in investigating and interpreting political life, public debate is increasingly informed and enlivened in both countries. This offers the potential for increased public discourse and citizen engagement, thereby challenging dominant norms and diversifying the range of voices and discourses participating in public life. It may well be that, despite legacies of elitism, authoritarianism, and conformism, things are changing in both Malawi and Ireland. The question of interest

to this study is how, and to what degree, these changes impact upon the two processes under examination. This is explored in Chapters Six to Eight inclusive.

Chapter Four

Transforming participation: A theoretical framework of analysis

4.1 Introduction

In Chapters Two and Three I have explored the global and national contexts respectively for the emergence and evolution of participatory governance structures and processes. While these provide us with some direction for analysing the agency of participants within such governance structures, the question remains as to how we examine what happens within the processes themselves. As we have seen in Chapter One, participation is a highly contested concept. It has the potential to empower participants and actors, but it can also ‘tyrannise’ them. How can we ascertain which is happening within the processes under investigation? As we have also seen in Chapter One, little empirical work has been carried out in this area to date. The literature available is largely normative and, while offering views and arguments on the policy and/or political outcomes of participatory processes, it is largely devoid of detail on the micro-processes as to how these outcomes come about. Therefore, we need a framework through which these micro-processes can be revealed and analysed.

While lacking empirical direction, this same literature offers an excellent point of departure for devising such a framework. As we have seen in Chapter One, development studies literature highlights the political nature of participatory governance. Specifically, it draws attention to the importance of power and discourse, communications, and issues of representation and democracy within these processes.

The political science literature focuses more directly on the institutions of participatory governance themselves. Institutional design is a key area of focus and the associated issues of competing discourses, decision-making, and interaction with existing political institutions constitute primary areas of interest. And so, a range of factors emerge from both literatures meriting consideration when examining participatory processes – the forms of institutional frameworks themselves – whether they are once-off spaces for participation or more durable, the procedures and norms that underpin them, the discourses, forms of communication and power relations that circulate within them, the actors and their agency that inhabit them, and their linkage to / embeddedness in existing political institutions and structures.

While these issues have been highlighted in the relevant literatures, their application, in the form of a framework facilitating an analysis of the dynamics underpinning participatory processes, requires further theorisation. This is the subject of this Chapter. While each factor enumerated above may be considered a subset of the first, with clear linkages and overlap between all, to facilitate greater clarity in the exploration of these factors, I discuss each in turn below.

4.2 Institutional frameworks: Spaces and processes

It has been noted that new forms of governance cannot rely on diverse networks, but must take place within a sustainable institutional framework comprising a mix of policy structures (Reddel, 2004). This institutional framework provides the space within which the potential for participation may be realised. It is perhaps useful to examine the work of some social theorists who draw attention to the socially constructed and constantly changing nature of space at this point as it highlights the importance of the

role of actors and agency occupying these spaces. Lefebvre (1991), in his book *The Production of Space*, examines the spatiality of society and political action. He posits that social space is a produced space, and draws attention to the significance of the interplay between how particular spaces come to be defined and perceived, and the ways in which they come to be animated. In doing so, he highlights the importance of analysing the social and power relations that constitute spaces for participation, the ‘spatial dialectic’ of identities, activities, discourses and images associated with any given place.

Space is a social product ... it is not simply "there", a neutral container waiting to be filled, but is a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control and hence domination, of power.

(Lefebvre, 1991: 24)

Lefebvre notes that all struggles and achievements of civilisation take place in space. All social struggles are contained and defined in their spatiality. According to this analysis, social struggle must therefore become a conscious politically spatial struggle to regain control over the social production of this space. Thus, the dynamics of the spaces in which both PRSP and Social Partnership take place become an empirical site of study.

Social movements have often opened up existing political spaces and created new spaces as sites of social struggle. Cornwall (2002b), drawing on the work of both Lefebvre and social movements, posits that spaces opened up by dominant interests may be re-colonised and become a site for the expression of alternative visions and policies.

Particular spaces may be produced by the powerful, but filled with those whose alternative visions transform their possibilities. Spaces may be created with one

purpose in mind, but used by those who come to fill them for something quite different. The fluidity and ambiguity of efforts at enhancing participation means that spaces produced to lend legitimacy to powerful interests can become a site for expression and expansion of the agency of those who are invited to participate.

(Cornwall, 2002b: 9)

And so, the spaces opened up by the PRSP process and Social Partnership may be seen to offer potential to groups to introduce transformatory agendas and processes. It is acknowledged by Cornwall however that this is not an easy task. Elsewhere (2002a: 2-3), speaking of contemporary mainstream development, she points out that “*the primary emphasis seems to be on relocating the poor within the prevailing order: bringing them in, finding them a place, lending them opportunities, empowering them, inviting them to participate*”, thus suggesting that the spaces are both created and maintained by the dominant forces. Nonetheless, Lefebvre’s theories on space as sites of social struggle, and the experiences of some social movements in wresting control of spaces from the dominant forces, remain pertinent to the activities and strategies of groups within the MPRSP and Social Partnership, serving to potentially transform these into sites of transformative participation.

In a more recent contribution on this topic, Cornwall (2004) focuses more specifically on the dynamics of power and difference within these “*invited spaces*” as she terms them and suggests that the broad configuration of actors within the spaces turns them into sites that are constantly in transformation. Cornwall (2004: 85–87) highlights three elements which may help toward realising the transformative potential of such invited spaces. The first lies in the area of institutional design whereby institutions are designed to maximise participation, the second element involves strategies to allow participants to engage in reframing debate, and the third element consists of popular mobilisation wherein participants may reframe and define for themselves their own

scope for agency. She notes (2004: 86-87) that “...*transformative participation is not just about interventions in and through ‘invited spaces’ to transform the way that they work... mobilising to put on pressure from ‘outside’ may be required.*”.

Acknowledging that work needs to be done in each of these areas Cornwall (2004: 87) notes that there is a need for new “*ethnographies of participation that help locate spaces for participation in the places in which they occur, framing their possibilities with reference to actual political, social, cultural and historical particularities rather than idealised models of democratic practice*”. This study, in going ‘behind the doors’ of Malawi’s PRSP/MGDS and Ireland’s Social Partnership, and exploring the implications for participants’ involvement in these, meets this challenge.

Cornwall’s second and third elements will be discussed in due course, but I will deal here in more detail with the issue of institutional design. Cornwall is not alone in drawing attention to this. Reddel (2004) notes that this remains an unfinished task in many emerging forms of governance. The work of Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright on what they term “*empowered participatory governance*” also draws attention to the need for specific design characteristics built into institutional arrangements (2003: 20-23), although Fung and Wright’s focus on problem-solving as distinct from problem-framing (see Section 4.3 for more on this) appears to limit the scope for transformative participation following their conceptualisation of institutions of “*empowered participatory governance*”. Triantafillou (2004) also highlights the need for further conceptual work in the area of institutional design. In particular, he is interested in examining and questioning how certain norms come to form the common ground for the deliberations and contestation of governmental practices. He highlights the need for clarity on the norms surrounding specific processes within participatory governance

institutions. Particular issues he raises include the norms for decision making, norms for negotiating different discourses / positions, norms regarding the form of knowledge acceptable, and norms regarding inclusivity – of both peoples and processes. Thus, the specific processes and procedures within potentially participatory governance institutions require close examination – issues such as who is involved, who decides who is involved, who sets the agenda, who organises meetings, timing of and notice for meetings, chairing of meetings, communicative procedures etc. The key issues of discourse, power and decision-making, and representation are examined in further detail below.

A second issue in relation to institutional frameworks is how these are chaired / facilitated / mediated. What form of leadership emerges within these spaces? Newman et al (2004) draw attention to this issue in a study of network / co-governance institutional frameworks in the UK where the political culture appears to militate against the principles and norms of the participatory structures. Interviews with local politicians reveal that they either do not understand, or have not bought into the participatory culture underlying the new processes, preferring to carry out business as usual (Newman et al, 2004). A similar study within four municipalities in Denmark (Sorenson 2006) highlights the same issue, and argues that political leaders / officials must re-visit their roles, strengthening them by broadening their concept of leadership to suit the changing circumstances.

Thus, institutional design is seen to be a key factor influencing the transformative potential of participatory spaces. Lefevbre's work draws attention to the fact that this design never remains fixed, but is subject to constant influence, modification, and

change by the plurality of actors involved, thereby increasing its transformative potential. As we have seen, this institutional design incorporates a range of factors, among them questions regarding how debates are framed within them, how competing discourses are negotiated, what forms communications within and without the processes take, how decisions are made, and how these institutions interact with existing political institutions and cultures. These are examined in turn below.

4.3 Power and discourse

It has been seen that one of the main charges against so-called participatory processes to date is that they ignore critical issues of power and politics, thereby reducing the processes to mere technocratic exercises, and negating less obvious forms of exclusion. While power is readily visible in its outcomes and effects, as a force it proves far more elusive and hard to pin down. Iris Marion Young articulates the dilemma:

Although the media attend to the persons of the powerful, and in particular to their rhetorical pronouncements, their handshakes, their school choices, their jogging and shopping trips, still in modern states and corporations, power loves to hide. It lurks between the lines of quarterly reports, executive orders and memos which circulate and get filed; it feeds on the dull routines of everyday professional life. The effects of power are clear... But the forces of power, the responsible parties, cannot be located.

Young (2000: 174)

Sociological theories of power highlight three dimensions: direct power through decision making, indirect power through non-decision making, and ideological power through the shaping of other actors' perceptions (Lukes, 1974). Many pluralist studies of power examine the first dimension of power in its most visible manifestation. Studies examine who has participated in a particular action, who has benefited and who has lost, in an effort to conclude who has power. Gaventa (2004: 37-38) draws

attention to the less visible manifestations of power within relationships of place and space in a manner which may be seen to apply Luke's classification more directly to contemporary participatory processes. While pluralist approaches to power examine contests over interests which take place in visible, open public spaces, hidden (indirect) forms of power may operate to privilege the entry of certain interests and actors into particular spaces through a prevailing 'mobilisation of bias' or manipulation of the rules of the game. Hence boundaries to participation are constructed. A third form of power highlighted by Gaventa, what he terms "*its more insidious form*" (2004: 37), and analogous to Luke's 'ideological power', occurs where visible conflict is hidden through internalisation of dominating ideologies, values, forms of behaviour, self-esteem and identities "*such that voices in visible places are but echoes of what the power-holders who shaped the places want to hear*". This draws attention to the importance of discursive power – a dimension highlighted by Foucault and discussed below.

Many academics concerned with countering marginalisation theorise the exercise and dissemination of power as a zero-sum game divided between the 'power-holders' and the 'marginalised'. For example Arnstein (1969), in her famous "*ladder of participation*", concentrates on the visible form of power through the action of decision-making and its transfer from the 'haves' to the 'have-nots'. Foucault's "*capillary*" conception of power (1980: 96 – see also Chapter Two) stands in contrast to this however. In this perspective, power is something which circulates among people. Accordingly, power may not only pressurise individuals and/or groups to conform to prevailing or dominant norms, truths, and knowledge, but may also move in another direction toward the development and articulation of new norms, truths and

knowledge. In this way Foucault highlights the transformatory nature of power whereby its mechanisms “*have been – and continue to be - invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended, etc...*” (1980: 99). While, as discussed in the previous Chapter, much of Foucault’s work focuses on highlighting the ‘disciplining’ and controlling force of power over individuals (in particular in his work *Discipline and Punish* where he asserts that “*discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies*” (1977: 138)), he consistently draws attention to how power circulates, transforming individuals, groups and networks. Following Foucault’s theory of power, norms are constantly being remoulded, processes and procedures transformed, and it thus becomes clearer how Lefebvre’s socially constructed spaces may come to be inhabited, animated and transformed.

Foucault’s work on knowledge and power, in particular his work on the power of discourse, expands Gaventa’s third form of power as outlined above, that of internalisation. Discourses shape not only what is said and done but also what is say-able and do-able in any given social space, constituting what counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts. Iris Marion Young has defined discourse as follows:

...the system of stories and expert knowledge diffused through society, which convey the widely accepted generalisations about how society operates that are theorised in those terms, as well as the social norms and cultural values to which most of the people appeal when discussing their social and political problems and proposed solutions.

(Young, 2003: 115)

Within this perspective, power is established, exercised and consolidated through discourse which, in turn, shapes what is understood as knowledge and ‘truth’ within particular fields such as public policy. Foucault argues that particular forms of

knowledge or discourses vie with each other for control or power over what becomes established as the ‘truth’.

...in a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.

(1980: 93)

Thus, as in his theory of power, Foucault draws attention to the transformation of discourses, and hence knowledge and truth. The key factor here, he asserts, is “*a modification in the rules of formation of statements which are accepted as scientifically true*” (1980: 112). It is not the content of the statements (or submissions or positions in the case of policy fora), but the rules which dictate how they should look, what form they should take, which is key. And we will see, this is a key issue in relation to what discourses are allowable within both processes under investigation. The issue of power and discourse in turn raise the issue of communication. This is examined in more detail in the following Section.

Before leaving Foucault’s work in this area, it is pertinent to note that, in a lecture delivered in 1976, Foucault noted a phenomenon of the time which was the emergence of marginalised forms of knowledge or what he called “*the insurrection of subjugated knowledges*” (1980: 81). These correspond with what Freire (1972), and later Chambers (1977), termed “*local knowledge*”. Foucault goes on in the same lecture to highlight the importance of such forms of knowledge in deconstructing dominant ideologies and frameworks, and providing critiques to controlling discourses.

I also believe that it is through the re-emergence of these low-ranking knowledges, these unqualified, even directly disqualified knowledges... and which involve what I call popular knowledge (le savoir des gens)... a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which is it opposed by everything surrounding it – that it is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work.

(1980: 82)

I will return to the significance of such knowledges, together with the rules determining how they should look, in my discussion of communicative processes in the following Section.

Before turning to the processes and mechanisms whereby different discourses are elicited, mediated and negotiated however, it is relevant to examine the dominant discourses within development theory both internationally, and in Ireland, as these frame both the MPRSP and Social Partnership. A number of post-development theorists (Ferguson, 1990, Sachs, 1992, Escobar, 1995, Rahnema 1997, Abrahamsen, 2000, and Ziai, 2004) argue that ‘development’, as practised and theorised within mainstream international development circles, constitutes a particular discourse which does not reflect, but rather constructs reality. In doing so, it is argued, it closes off alternative ways of thinking and so constitutes a form of power, a dominant discourse in Foucauldian terms. It is argued that development discourse legitimises and reinforces Western dominance over the so-called ‘Third World’, in part through its very definition or categorisation of the ‘Third World’ as being in need of Western-style development. Speaking of what she characterises as the ‘hegemonic status’ of the so-called

‘Washington consensus’³⁷, Abrahamsen (2000: 142) notes that this discourse has become an accepted paradigm not just for virtually all bilateral donors, but also for African elites. *“Political leaders, incumbents as well as those in opposition, have come to understand that without acceptance of the neo-liberal paradigm, no international financial assistance will be forthcoming”* (2000: 142). She argues that such policies, now imposed in the form of the ‘good governance agenda’, constitute a discursive formation – *“that is, a historically contingent form of knowledge intimately connected to prevailing structures and relations of power at the time of its formation”* (2000: 143). International development theorist Kohler (1995) argues that globalisation has brought with it a shift in this dominant development discourse, repackaging development in the context of globalisation *“...away from the economic compressions of all preceding decades to a socially-sensitised approach”* (1995: 59) aimed at tackling growing marginalisation associated with economic globalisation. Kohler asserts that in an increasingly globalised world where the rationale of capital constitutes the organising force in this globalised economy, development discourse has turned towards an ‘inclusion – exclusion paradigm’, aimed at rectifying the downsides of globalisation without in any way challenging the processes themselves.

With its keen focus on growth and competitiveness, it is clear that mainstream strategies and discourses of development were key in setting out the path for Ireland’s development, albeit in a form that afforded a key role for political intervention and innovation. With Ireland identified as one of the most globalised (open) economies in Europe (Kitchen and Bartley, 2007), Kohler’s analysis appears pertinent in this case. In

³⁷ The term ‘Washington consensus’ was originally coined to describe a relatively specific set of ten policies under the IMF and World Bank’s structural adjustment programmes, applicable to all countries. It has since come to be used, less specifically, to describe a range of policies broadly associated with expanding the role of the market, constraining that of the state.

particular her explanation of the ‘inclusion – exclusion’ paradigm resonates strongly with the ‘problem-solving approach’ which has been used to characterise Ireland’s Social Partnership. O’Donnell (2001) points out that the successes of Social Partnership have been greater in the area of macro economic policy than in social policy (or the supply-side issues as NESC terms them - i.e. on issues such as transport, traffic, childcare, housing, and waste management). These issues, which it is acknowledged have deteriorated over time, are to be tackled by social partners employing a ‘problem-solving’ approach. This ‘problem-solving’ approach resonates with the ‘fallout management’ thesis of Hoogvelt (2001), and indicates an instrumental approach to participation, thereby limiting the potential to engage multiple development discourses.

It has been argued by commentators from Africa and Ireland alike (see Matthews, 2004 on Africa; Peillon, 2002 on Ireland) that the mainstream model of development rooted in modernist values has proven unsuitable to local cultures. This paves the way for alternative discourses on development as posited by post-development theorists.

Matthews (2004), writing from South Africa, argues that the way in which Africa is different from the West and the Westernised world in terms of values, world-views and lifestyles of its peoples, as well as the way in which Africa is home to diverse groups of people who experience the world in diverse ways, can both provide some alternatives for those who are trying to conceive alternatives. She suggests that mainstream development theories have failed in many African contexts because they are premised upon an alien set of values. Matthews (2004) also points to the diversity of cultures within Africa “*Africa can be said to be home to a number of different ways of understanding and being*” (2004: 380). This offers a rich source of ideas for those looking for alternatives. Similarly, it has been argued by commentators in Ireland

(Peillon, 2002, Keating and Desmond, 1993 – cited in Kirby, 1997) that the mainstream development paradigm adopted proved highly unsuited to cultural conditions in Ireland for similar reasons. The avowedly modernist values embodying this paradigm do not sit well with the diverse worldviews and ways of being of Ireland's increasingly diverse peoples.

Freire's (1972) exhortations against the oppressor becoming the oppressed are highly pertinent to a discussion on power and discourse, in particular with respect to Luke's third form of power, internalising ideologies. Da Cuhna and Pena (1997), pointing out that participation in itself fails to resolve the classic economic dilemma of ordering social choices, argue that because participation is a social act that springs from a pre-existing set of social relations, when used to address problems it will assign costs and benefits in accordance with the pre-existing local distribution of power. This critical argument highlights the importance of representation and democratic legitimacy within participatory processes – an issue we examine in Section 4.5 below. The same point is made by Cornwall (2002, 2004) who argues that the very projects and processes that appear so inclusive and transformative may turn out to be supportive of a status quo that is highly inequitable. Both Gaventa's 'internalising' (2004) and Foucault's 'disciplining' powers (1977, 1980) clearly lurk within participatory processes. The question of pertinence to this study therefore becomes how might these invisible, elusive forms of power be identified, uncovered and examined. The key to this appears to lie in the communication mechanisms and processes whereby multiple discourses are elicited, mediated and negotiated. These provide a guide as to how power circulates and manifests within participatory processes. This is discussed in the following Section.

4.4 Communication and decision making

I have argued in the previous sub-section that power and discourse circulate within spaces opened through participatory processes. I have further argued that particular discourses appear dominant at particular times, acquiring the elevated status of ‘knowledge’ or ‘truth’. Within fora where particular discourses, frameworks, and knowledge systems dominate, it can doubtless prove daunting for less established or less elite groups to introduce divergent points of view. Yet it is now established (Rosell, 2004) that participants are likely to come from diverse backgrounds, and are unlikely to have shared sets of myths, assumptions and frameworks of interpretation. The choice and style of communication and decision-making processes are key factors in this regard. In this Section I firstly examine the process of deliberation, a process which has been used to characterise Ireland’s Social Partnership process (NESF, 1997, O’ Donnell and Thomas, 2002). I examine different forms of communication in this context. Although this mechanism has not been explicitly applied to Malawi’s PRSP process, both processes emphasise their consensus-driven nature (see McGee et al, 2002, and Jenkins and Tsoka, 2003 on the Malawi’s PRSP). I go on within the Section to explore other forms of communication, in particular those aimed at increasing public awareness of and involvement in the issues under discussion. Finally, I turn to the issue of consensus-driven decision-making and its attendant implications.

4.4.1 Deliberation – privileging argument, distorting consensus?

Literature on the Irish Social Partnership process emanating from the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) places Social Partnership firmly within a deliberative model. NESC describes its role in this process as follows:

NESC performs a function of “attitudinal restructuring” in which key actors seek to establish a common agenda through intensive debate and negotiation.
(O’Donnell and Thomas, 2002: 171)

Elsewhere, the process of deliberation which underlies this fostering of shared understanding is described more fully.

Although the concepts of ‘negotiation’ and ‘bargaining’ distinguish social partnership from more liberal and pluralist approaches in which consultation is more prominent, they are not entirely adequate to describe the social partnership process. Bargaining describes a process in which each party comes with a definite set of defined preferences and seeks to maximise their gains. While this is a definite part of Irish social partnership, the overall process (including various policy forums), would seem to involve something more. Partnership involves the players in a process of deliberation which has the potential to shape and reshape their understanding, identity, and preferences.
(NESF, 1997: 33)

Largely under the influence of Jurgen Habermas, the idea that democracy revolves around the transformation rather than simply the aggregation of preferences has led to a burgeoning literature within democratic theory on the area of deliberation. Deliberation may be viewed as a process where debate “*is organised around alternative conceptions of the public good*” (Cohen, 1989: 17-19). The idea is not to suppress difference, but to allow differences about competing conceptions of the public good to be debated in common fora that ensure the greatest degree of fairness to all participants.

Much of the literature in this area, be it focused on the outcome of the process (see for example Millar, 2003), its features (Habermas, 1999, Cohen, 1989), or its scope (Fishkin and Hazlett, 2003, Fung and Wright, 1999, 2003) pays little attention to the possibility for false or distorted agreement as a consequence of pressures to reach agreement. An exception to this is provided by Iris Marion Young (2003) who, concerned with the issue of inclusion, suggests that some consensus may be false and some communication systematically distorted by power. While this clearly may be the

case through the explicit exclusion of certain groups (representation), Young argues that the phenomenon of hegemony or systematically distorted communication can be more subtle than this. It refers to how the conceptual or normative framework of the members of a society is deeply influenced by premises and terms of discourse that make it difficult to think critically about aspects of their social relations or alternative possibilities of institutionalisation and action. She claims that the theory and practice of deliberative democracy has no tools for raising the possibility that deliberations may be closed and distorted in this way. It lacks a theory, as well as an account of the genealogy of discourses, and their manner of helping to constitute the way individuals see themselves and their social world. For most deliberative democrats, Young claims that discourse seems more ‘innocent’.

Drawing on James Bohman’s deliberative theory which Young identifies as an important exception to this claim, and which is concerned with identifying ways that structural inequalities operate effectively to block the political influence of some while magnifying that of others, even when formal guarantees of political equality hold, Young posits that “*Democratic theory that emphasises discussion as a criterion of legitimacy requires a more developed theory of the kinds and mechanisms of ideology, and methods for performing critique of specific political discussion*” (2003: 118). She notes that “*Such ideology critique needs not only to be able to analyse specific exchanges and speech, but to theorise how media contribute to naturalising assumptions and making it difficult for participants in a discussion to speak outside a certain set of concepts or images.*” Young is thus drawing attention to the importance of different forms of speech, together with the role of the media in disseminating and consolidating dominant discourses. Warning that “*we should resist the temptation to*

consider that ideals of deliberative democracy are put into practice when public officials or foundations construct procedures influenced by these ideals” (2003: 18), Young argues that the exchange of ideas and processes of communication in a vibrant democracy take place as far more rowdy, disorderly and decentred processes, and so *“processes of engaged and responsible democratic communication include street demonstrations and sit-ins, musical works and cartoons, as much as parliamentary speeches and letters to the editor”* (2003: 118-119). And so, communication, for Young, exists in many different forms and at many different levels.

Elsewhere, Young (2000: 36-51) expands on what she views as some of the limitations of deliberative models in ensuring inclusion for all parties. Although acknowledging that the models of deliberative democracy offer a useful beginning for offering a vision of inclusion, Young notes that some formulations of the model privilege argument as the primary form of communication. By this, she means an orderly chain of reasoning from premises to conclusion. She argues that there are good reasons to be suspicious of privileging argument as the primary communicative form in that it is premised on an agreed conceptual framework / set of premises by all parties. Given, as noted above, that participants are more than likely to come with divergent frameworks, such a method proves exclusive or a non-starter from the outset. Additionally, Young points out that expectations about norms of speech and levels of dispassion sometimes serve to devalue or dismiss the interventions of some participants. Norms of speaking, what she terms ‘articulateness’, can privilege modes of expression more typical of more educated participants. Norms of dispassionate speech tend to privilege white, middle-class men, while the speech of women, ethnic minorities, and more marginalised groups is often perceived to be more excited and embodied.

A second limitation Young sees to this model is in its privileging of unity or a common understanding, (in NESC's terms a 'shared understanding'), among participants. Young asserts that, again, given the diversity of participants, this is unlikely, either as a condition, or as an outcome of the process. Thirdly, Young notes that the face-to-face discussion assumed by many contemporary theorists of deliberative models rarely occurs.

Finally, Young finds fault with the norms of order which seem inherent to deliberative processes whereby more disorderly, or disruptive forms of communication, or certain positions, are dismissed as being extreme and 'out of order'. She argues that, while being reasonable (a key component of deliberative processes) entails non-violence, disordered forms of communications should not be excluded. Among such forms of communication Young (2000: 52-77) includes public acknowledgment of participants, affirmative uses of rhetoric including emotion, use of figures of speech and story-telling, and forms of communication not involving speech such as visual media, signs and banners and street protests. A number of other commentators, speaking explicitly of participatory processes, also draw attention to this issue of communication. Cornwall (2004: 84), noting that speech acts constitute acts of power, asserts that "*having a voice clearly depends on more than getting a seat at the table*". Alluding to the almost intimidatory environment in which many participants find themselves, Young exhorts participants to overcome their nerves and speak out. She acknowledges however (2004: 84) that "*Resisting discursive closure, reframing what counts as knowledge and articulating alternatives, especially in the face of apparently incommensurable knowledge systems, requires more than simply seeking to allow everyone to speak and*

asserting the need to listen”, later arguing (2004: 86) that strategies are required to allow participants to engage fully in the debate, articulating their own experiences and perspectives. Young (2000: 70-77), drawing from the experiences of Latin American scholars, elaborates on the method of storytelling as one such strategy. This is particularly pertinent to Malawi where storytelling is arguably the most popular form of communication (see Lwanda, 2005). Young points out that radical injustice can occur when those who suffer a wrongful harm or oppression lack the terms to express their claim of injustice within the prevailing normative discourse leading to their exclusion. She argues that storytelling is often an important bridge in such cases between the mute experience of being wronged and arguments about justice. She notes that

While it sometimes happens that people know they are ignorant about the lives of others in the polity, perhaps more often people come to a situation with a stock of empty generalities, false assumptions, or incomplete and biased pictures of the needs, aspirations, and histories of others with whom or about whom they communicate... Narratives often help target and correct such pre-understandings.

(Young, 2000: 74)

The importance of storytelling as a form of communication within participation is also underlined by Sorenson (2006) who argues that facilitators of participative processes should actively encourage and support such forms. Thus, while acknowledging the potential for inclusive and constructive communication within deliberative fora, Young, together with a number of other commentators examining participatory processes, draws attention to the importance of eliciting and mediating between multiple discourses through the use of a range of communication techniques.

4.4.2 Stimulating public debate

Another feature of communication, and one which links directly to the issue of representation (discussed below – Section 4.5), is the extent to which participatory processes stimulate public debate, thereby drawing a wider group of people and their voices into consideration. Cornwall (2004: 86-87), conscious of the hegemonic potential of dominant discourses within so-called ‘participatory’ processes, argues that such processes should be accompanied by mechanisms to stimulate wider public debate. Asserting that “...*transformative participation is not just about interventions in and through ‘invited spaces’ to transform the way that they work, strengthening their inclusiveness and representativity*”, Cornwall (2004: 86-87) argues for a range of accompanying measures through the arena of popular mobilisation (including popular education, information, and mobilisation to increase pressure from the outside). In this way individuals and groups may “*reframe and define for themselves the scope of their agency rather than just taking their place within established discursive spaces*” (2004: 86). Cornwall’s ideas in this area call to mind Habermas’s contributions on the need for ‘public spheres’ within societies wherein he argues that individuals become part of a wider political community through engagement in public discussion and deliberation (Habermas, 1990). This, he argues, becomes a means of realising active citizenship. Habermas’s contributions in this area have been criticised in the respect that they appear to assume all actors are able to participate equally, i.e. as has been seen with earlier participation theory, ignoring issues of differential power and access. His ideas are taken up by Young (2000: 177-178) however who, taking into account the main criticism of assumed communicative equality, argues that such public fora serve an important function if they facilitate inclusive processes of communication. And so, Cornwall’s ideas on the use of public spaces as a complement to participatory processes

ally to those of Young. It is seen, therefore, that fora and mechanisms to stimulate public debate serve as an important complement to participatory processes, further extending the opportunities for inclusivity by engaging multiple discourses and actors within the wider public sphere.

4.4.3 Decision-making and consensus

As we have already seen (Chapter Three), both Malawian and Irish societies have been characterised as being very consensus-driven. Both the MPRS and Social Partnership are characterised as consensus agreements. It is interesting that one of the first models of participation to appear in the literature, that outlined by Arnstein in the late 1960s (Arnstein, 1969), took an explicitly political approach which focused on the issue of decision-making. Despite emerging from a liberal pluralist political context (the US), ostensibly underpinned by consensus (Dahl, 1989), Arnstein's model makes no mention of the possibility of consensus-type arrangements. Defining citizen participation as *"...the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future..."* (1969: 216), Arnstein's 'ladder of participation', envisaged the marginalised obtaining majority decision-making capacity at rungs seven and eight of the ladder, where she viewed processes as being at their most participatory. The form of power envisaged by Arnstein's model was either visible or invisible, corresponding to Luke's first two categories. In consensus-driven processes however, it proves much more difficult to ascertain how power is circulating, or to whose advantage consensus is reached. Clearly consensus requires shifting positions and thus may well entail internalisations of particular discourses. The question is whose discourses and how. Consensus driven processes have been critiqued as being anti-democratic.

Chantal Mouffe (1996), drawing from a post-modern critique of essentialism, offers a critique of pluralistic processes which seek to find consensus and agreement, arguing that instead they should give positive status to difference and refuse the objectives of unanimity and homogeneity which, she argues, are always revealed as fictitious and based on acts of exclusion. Distinguishing between the *fact* of pluralism and its *symbolic* dimension, Mouffe argues (1996: 246) that “*what is at stake is the legitimation of conflict and division, the emergence of individual liberty, and assertion of equal liberty for all*”. Mouffe, like many others already discussed, draws attention to the issue of power in pluralist societies and policy fora.

To deny the need for a construction of collective identities and to conceive democratic politics exclusively in terms of a struggle of a multiplicity of interest groups or of minorities for the assertion of their rights is to remain blind to the relations of power. It is to ignore the limits imposed on the extension of the sphere of rights by the fact that some existing rights have been constructed on the very exclusion or the subordination of others.

(Mouffe, 1996: 247)

Arguing that democratic politics as envisaged and practised from an anti-essentialist perspective means that no social actor can dominate, Mouffe argues that the dream of perfect harmony in social relations is no longer conceivable. The issue then becomes “*not how to eliminate power, but how to constitute forms of power that are compatible with democratic values.*” (1996: 248). Mouffe (1996: 248) goes on to argue that “*To negate the ineradicable character of antagonism and aim at a universal rational consensus – this is the real threat to democracy. Indeed it can lead to violence being unrecognised and hidden behind appeals to ‘rationality’, as is often the case in liberal thinking, which disguises the necessary frontiers and forms of exclusion behind pretences of ‘neutrality’*”. Thus, for Mouffe, modern pluralist democratic societies and

spaces necessarily entail conflict and confrontation, and attempts to negate or subvert them through consensus results in the subordination of some groups, thereby being inherently anti-democratic. This view is echoed by Held (2006: 166-167) who draws on the findings of survey research conducted in the US in the late 1950s and 1960s to point out that there was more ‘dissensus’ than consensus between middle and working class people at the time. He concludes (2006: 167) that “...*any claim about widespread adherence to a common value system needs to be treated with the utmost scepticism.*”

It has become clear at this point that, given the social construction of contemporary society in both Malawi and Ireland³⁸, participatory processes will necessarily (if they are to be inclusive) engage with a wider range of interests, ideas, perspectives, experiences and frameworks. Theories on communication and decision-making processes highlight the importance of engaging this diversity through a range of mechanisms, as well as establishing clear norms for how contributions will be mediated, and decisions reached, in a way which does not mask conflict and dissent among actors.

4.5 Representation and democracy

Just who is involved in participatory processes, how they are selected, and who they purport to represent are thorny and complex issues. As Whaites (2000) points out, ‘the people’ are not a homogenous group. How can diverse interests, perspectives and frameworks be represented within participatory processes? The issue of representation is one which is not sufficiently theorised within literature on participation and there are calls for more work in this area (Hickey and Mohan, 2004, Gaventa, 2004).

³⁸ This may be illustrated by two indicators. Both Malawi and Ireland are characterised by a high degree of income inequality - Gini index values for Malawi and Ireland stand at 50.3 and 34.3 respectively, (source UNDP *Human Development Report*, 2006) and both societies include a high degree of ethnic diversity (see Chirwa, 1998 on Malawi; NESCS, 2006 on Ireland).

The issue of representation is intrinsically linked to that of democracy. This is a theme theorised in some detail by Iris Marion Young in her book *Inclusion and Democracy* (2000). Drawing from John Rawls' theory that democracy should be measured in terms of its ability to provide just solutions, for Young, justice is ensured procedurally. According to Young (2000: 29), a governance process is democratic if “*all significantly affected by the problems and their solutions are included in the discussion and decision making on the basis of equality and non-domination.*” Following this theorisation, Young is interested in the particular context of the inclusion through representation of structurally disadvantaged groups within political society in general. Speaking of political representation, Young argues that representation is not about assuming the identity or substituting for a group of people (the constituents), rather it is about mediating between different actors.

Rather than a relation of identity or substitution, political representation should be thought of as a process involving a mediated relation of constituents to one another and to a representative.

(Young, 2000: 127)

Young goes on to argue that it follows that any evaluation of a process of representation should examine the nature of the relationship between the representative and the constituents. The representative, though separate from the constituents, should be connected to them in determinate ways. Constituents should also be connected to one another. Young (2000: 128) notes that “*Representative systems sometimes fail to be sufficiently democratic not because the representatives fail to stand for the will of the constituents, but because they have lost connection with them.*” Effective representation is a process that occurs over time, moving between moments of authorisation and accountability (2000: 129). Young argues (2000: 132) that the major

problem of representation is the threat of disconnection between the representative and the people s/he represents, “*When representatives become too separated, constituents lose the sense that they have influence over policy making, become disaffected and withdraw their participation.*” Young’s analysis in this respect highlights the inherent danger of what Nancy Frasers’ (2005) terms “*misframing*”. According to Fraser’s analysis, misframing occurs when people are effectively excluded “*from the universe of those entitled to consideration within the community in matters of distribution, recognition, and ordinary-political representation*” (2005: 77). This occurs when states and elites monopolise the activity of frame setting, thereby excluding the experiences and analyses of particular groups and peoples from participation in the discourses that determine their fates.

Young goes on (2000: 134-141) to conceptualise a distinction between representation based on interests, opinions and social perspective. Interests are defined as “*... what affects or is important to the life prospects of individuals, or the goals of organisations*” (2000: 134). This is probably the most familiar form of representation and there exists a large body of theory within the area of communicative democracy discussing this (see for example Cohen and Arato, 1995). Young (2000: 135) defines opinions as “*... any judgement or belief about how things are or ought to be, and the political judgements that follow from these judgements or beliefs.*” Opinions thus lie in the area of principles, values and priorities, what has been referred to as the “*politics of ideas*” (Phillips, 1995 in Young, 2000). Representation based on opinion therefore, constitutes a more ideologically based form of representation. The third form of representation explored by Young is that based on perspective. This, resonating with (though not

explicitly attributed to) Foucault's work on knowledge and power, derives from the situated knowledge of different groups and individuals. As Young explains:

Because of their social locations, people are attuned to particular kinds of social meanings and relationships to which others are less attuned. Sometimes others are not positioned to be aware of them at all. From their social locations people have differentiated knowledge of social events and their consequences.

(Young, 2000: 136)

Representation based on perspective therefore, drawing from the situated knowledge of different groups, does not offer a determinate specific content. As Young (2000: 137) explains "*Social perspective consists of a set of questions, kinds of experience, and assumptions with which reasoning begins, rather than the conclusions drawn.*" In line with the anti-essentialists, representation based on (common) perspective does not negate the conflicting interests and opinions of members of the same social group however, and so this form of representation does not aim to draw conclusions on outcomes or engage in 'problem-solving' as such. Thus, a key difference between representation based on interest or opinion, versus that based on perspective, is that while the former two forms usually entail promoting certain specific outcomes in the decision-making process, the latter usually means promoting certain starting points for discussion.

In relation to the specific issue of the representation of marginalised groups, noting (2000: 141) that "... *structural social and economic inequality often produces political inequality and relative exclusion from influential political discussion... More inclusion of and influence for currently under-represented social groups can help a society confront and find some remedies for structural social inequality*", Young highlights the importance of perspective-based forms of representation in that "*Special representation*

of marginalised social groups... brings to political discussion and decision-making (the) situated knowledges...” (2000: 144). She further argues (2000: 147) that such groups may require financial support “... *a fair system of interest group representation ought to subsidise self-organisation by those with legitimate interests but few resources*”. Finally, to return to Whaites’ (2000) point as to who does the representing, Young notes that it is desirable that the person, or indeed people, doing the representing on behalf of a perspective-based group share similar social relations and experiences as group members.

A final issue in relation to representation and democracy is that of legitimacy. Within a liberal democratic system what is the legitimacy of non-elected groups? This is an issue which is commonly raised in Malawi in relation to civil society groups (Englund, 2003), although rarely in Ireland³⁹. While, as has already been mentioned above, questions of this nature have been raised more widely within political science literature, advocates of ‘deeper’ democracy argue that such groups do indeed have legitimacy within the widening sphere of public policy and decision-making. As discussed above, Young, in particular, argues that democracy is deepened by the inclusion of heretofore marginalised and excluded groups and perspectives. Gaventa’s brief intervention in this area relates back to Young’s point on the importance of the relationship between those representing, and their constituent groups. Noting that “*the politics of intersection is also about identity, and understanding which identities actors use in which spaces to construct their own legitimacy to represent others, or how they perceive the identities and legitimacy of others who speak on their behalf*” (2004: 38), Gaventa draws

³⁹ See Chapter Two for a more detailed discussion on this.

attention to the possibility that identities may be constructed and transformed within participatory spaces in efforts to secure legitimacy among different actors.

The issue of representation is clearly one that remains critical to ongoing debates and developments within participatory practices, in particular in relation to charges of their being ‘anti-democratic’ (see for example O’Cinnéide, 1999 on Social Partnership). Several forms of representation have been examined here, with perspective-based representation being highlighted as being of particular relevance to heretofore marginalised groups and constituencies. We have seen that this form of representation privileges a form of communication which aims at setting out starting points for discussion, rather than moving towards agreed outcomes or ‘solutions’. Finally, the quality of the ongoing relationship between those representing and their constituency has been identified as core to both the question of who represents, and to the wider issues of legitimacy and democracy.

4.6 Linkages to existing political structures

As we have already seen, a number of commentators, in particular writing within the field of political science, have questioned the compatibility of institutions of participatory governance with existing institutions of liberal democracy. Emerging from the literature is a concern regarding what might be termed a ‘layering effect’ wherein new participatory forms of governance appear to be merely superimposed on existing institutional frameworks, with insufficient attention paid to how the multiplicity of layers interact. This further fuels the charge that various new forms of governance are inherently anti-democratic in that they fail to interact with existing institutions of representative democracy.

Exploring the development of new participatory fora within two cities in the UK, Newman et al (2004) highlight this issue. The authors note that, although the government has attempted to introduce collaborative governance strategies in order to help solve a number of 'cross-cutting' social problems through policies emphasising partnership and participation, these developments have been subordinated to other policy imperatives linked to a highly managerial form of governance based on a plethora of goals, targets and performance improvement strategies (2004: 218). The authors highlight the resultant tensions within the public policy system. These, in turn, produce conflicting imperatives for local actors – encourage participation from below but ensure you deliver on the targets imposed from above, even when these are in conflict with local views. The authors conclude that new forms of governance, as exemplified in the participatory, deliberative forums examined in their work, do not displace the old, but interact with them, often uncomfortably.

Sorenson (2002), writing from a public administration tradition, and concerned with the changing role of traditional political leaders, argues that the basic concepts of liberal democracy need to be reinterpreted and reformulated. In this context, she suggests that the way forward is not in restricting the autonomy of representation, but rather in developing guidelines to direct efforts to systemically involve 'the people' in concrete decision-making processes. She notes that in the context of political globalisation, the need for such guidelines will increase.

The national parliament and government has no longer a monopolised right to perform political representation. Network governance has transformed the right to represent into a political battle not only between political parties but between multitudes of other actors as well. In a system of network governance the right to

represent the people must be obtained over and over again in ongoing competition with others.

(Sorenson, 2002: 698)

And so, it appears that while there have been considerable developments in establishing participatory processes and governance structures in many places, much work remains in establishing how these link with existing processes and what the implications of this will be for the different actors, state and civil society alike.

Allied to the need for work at this institutional level is the issue of political culture and how actors perceive and operate within their new roles in such processes. Writing from a public administration viewpoint, Bang (2004) argues that political authority is becoming increasingly both communicative and interactive in order for it to be able to meet complexity with complexity. Concerned with how political authority will manage to re-exert its power, he uses the term “*cultural governance*” to describe how this authority must increasingly act upon, reform, and utilise individual and collective conduct so that it might be amenable to its rule. While Bang’s contribution contains echoes of Luke’s third form of power, it also raises the issue of the implications of such new arrangements on traditional state structures, an issue explored in more depth in Chapters Three and Seven of this study. At a more procedural level, Newman et al’s research (2004) in the UK found that an important promoter or inhibitor within participatory processes is the culture among decision-making institutions and members thereof towards these processes. This issue is also raised by Bartley and Shine (2000) in their work examining policy processes and models of participation within local partnership structures in Dublin. For local and national decision-making bodies alike, this factor is undoubtedly key and remains central to the conflicts that can arise through contested understandings of the concept and form of participation being employed.

Writing from a related theoretical background (public policy), but drawing from empirical work on participative fora in Brazil, Rebecca Abers (2003) appears to theorise this issue differently in that she draws attention to the possibilities for participation as an alternative political strategy. In her work she acknowledges the evidence from other empirical work that, in cases where states have the political will to create participatory processes, their efforts create political and practical burdens that most governments cannot withstand. Abers goes on to outline how the participatory budget processes in Porto Alegre avoided this fate because the participatory processes functioned as a political asset to the administration, becoming a central part of the administration's strategy for re-election, rather than simply another burden to be overcome. The administration successfully managed to turn the participatory process to its favour and rally support.

Put simply, rather than attempting to compete on traditional grounds, where favour exchanges and pork barrel politics rally support, the Porto Alegre administration successfully built an alternative political coalition.

(Abers, 2003: 202)

She attributes the most important factor in this to the support of the middle class which sought a government associated with social justice, transparency and the battle against corruption.

There is a common acknowledgement within the literature, therefore, that more work needs to be done in theorising ways in which current participatory processes can become more firmly linked to existing political structures and institutions, transforming political cultures. How this may be achieved and to what end – garnering support to

continue business as usual versus sharing power in the creation of new political conditions remains an open question.

4.7 Conclusion

In this Chapter I have sought to respond to calls from both disciplines of development studies and political science for a deeper theorising on the theory and practice of participatory governance in a number of particular areas. Drawing on a wider body of literature, and employing contributions from social and political theorists interested in deepening democracy and securing voices for heretofore marginalised groups, I have explored each of these areas in greater depth. The result is a theoretically situated framework within which the transformative potential of participatory processes, in particular Malawi's PRSP/MGDS and Ireland's Social Partnership, but also any other, may be examined.

The theorisation raises questions in relation to the institutional design of participatory processes – what are the norms of this design, how is this design influenced by participants' agency, and what are the possibilities for colonising space within it? More specifically, the theorisation raises questions in relation to power and discourse – what forms of power circulate within the processes, what discourses are allowable and what are not, what forms of knowledge count and what counts as knowledge, and what are the rules which dictate this? In relation to communications and decision making, the importance of facilitating multiple forms of communication, both within and without the participatory processes has been highlighted. Do these forms of communication mask underlying conflict and dissent? On the allied issues of representation and democracy, the question as to how civil society actors mediate relations with their

constituents and the nature of this relationship has been highlighted. And finally, the theorisation raises questions on the interlinkages between participatory institutions of governance and existing political institutions and cultures – what are the structural linkages, how do these interact, and how does the horizontal culture of participatory governance sit with the hierarchical legacies of political culture as explored in Chapter Three? These key questions form the basis for the analysis of the dynamics within Malawi’s PRSP/MGDS and Ireland’s Social Partnership which is set out in Chapters Six to Eight which follow.

Chapter Five

Comparing the Incomparable?: Research Design and Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This study constitutes a comparative analysis of two national development processes, one in Malawi and one in Ireland. While, on the surface, the location of the objects of comparison within two countries which clearly differ in a number of significant ways may seem to offer little to a comparative analysis, as noted in Chapter One, this study stems from a belief that in the contemporary globalised world boundaries are more conceptual than geographic. Poverty and social exclusion affect increasing numbers of people in the global North as well as the global South, and development is an issue that concerns us all. Moreover, the ‘participatory turn’ in development and political governance has affected states both South and North of the mythical fault line. Unsurprisingly therefore, both Malawi’s PRSP/MGDS and Ireland’s Social Partnership processes share a considerable degree of surface parallels. Both are national development strategies; both are underpinned by concepts of participation and partnership; both involve a wide range of actors; both result in consensus-based agreements; and the attraction of international finance, in the form of aid and investment, was core to their establishment, and remains core to the ongoing functioning of both.

These similarities notwithstanding, clearly both processes are located within different national socio-political contexts (as explored in Chapter Three) and involve different social actors operating within different relational contexts. We may therefore presume that the variable dynamics and outcomes of both processes can ultimately be attributed

in some degree to these different contexts. However, are these differences so manifold and complex as to render attempts at singling out specific causalities meaningless? Or can a comparative approach be designed which is sufficiently bounded to uphold the comparative logic of the ensuing argument while remaining sufficiently flexible to capture significant and relevant extraneous features?

These questions drove the research design in which I sought to bring a comparative rigour to the analysis while simultaneously leaving a space open for factors unforeseen in the original design. The way in which this was carried out is set out in this Chapter. Section 5.2 discusses the logic of the comparative design and the ensuing analytical framework. Section 5.3 goes on to examine some relevant issues in relation to researching ‘others’ and discusses the rationale for the main research approach employed in this study – critical theory – in the context of research approaches employed in studies to date of PRSPs and Social Partnership. Section 5.4 then documents the specific research methods employed together with any difficulties encountered in this regard.

5.2 Learning through comparison: A comparative case study approach

As Karl W Deutsch (1996) points out, a large part of human learning has always occurred through comparison. According to Deutsch (1996: 3), the first four steps in the learning process of science entail curiosity, recognition of patterns, counting cases of recognition, and perceptions of similarities and hence general classes. This study draws from my own experience working with community and voluntary / NGO groups within, or on the margins of ‘participatory’ governance processes, both in Ireland and

overseas. I was struck – and certainly curious – by both the similarities in the concepts underpinning participatory processes both in Ireland and other countries (participation, partnership, consensus, capacity building (always one-way and directed at civil society)), together with the similarities in the experiences, as recounted anecdotally, by participants within these different processes. These general ‘perceptions of similarities’, in Deutsch’s terms, led me to conclude that the ‘participatory processes’ I was informally hearing so much about, both in Ireland and overseas, constituted a ‘general class’ or category which could be treated as particular cases, despite their geographic disparities. From there curiosity led me to select two specific cases – the PRSP/MGDS in Malawi and Social Partnership in Ireland – for closer examination. I felt there surely had to be some differences between the processes and was keen to explore how both the similarities and (presumed) differences came about. A ‘North-South’ comparison was deliberately chosen because I felt that the distinct socio-political contexts within which both processes are embedded might reveal interesting and informative differences in the transformatory potential of both processes. In other words, while both processes appear to be products of a globalised discourse of governance and participation, they sit within distinct contexts. Does this make a difference?

5.2.1 The limits and possibilities of the comparative approach

Cross-national comparative research is an ambitious undertaking and is certainly not without its limitations. Melvin L Kohn puts these succinctly. “*It is costly in time and money, it is difficult to do, and it often seems to raise more interpretive problems than it solves*” (1996: 28). These limitations notwithstanding, Kohn strongly argues in favour of such an approach for two principal reasons. First, cross-national comparative research strengthens the case for generalising findings. “...*cross-national research is*

valuable, even indispensable, for establishing the generality of findings and the validity of interpretations derived from single-nation studies” (1996: 28). In other words, a comparative approach of Malawi’s PRSP/MGDS and Ireland’s Social Partnership helps elucidate to what extent globalised forms and conceptions of governance impact on the agency of domestic actors, to what extent the converse happens, and under which conditions. Kohn further argues that cross-national research is “...*equally valuable, perhaps even more valuable, in forcing us to revise our interpretations to take account of cross-national differences and inconsistencies that could never be uncovered in single-nation research”* (1996: 28). A comparative approach therefore, in highlighting differences between both Malawi’s PRSP/MGDS and Ireland’s Social Partnership processes, provides more data than a single case analysis to enrich our understanding and interpretation of what is going on within each process. Cross-national comparative approaches therefore offer tremendous potential for understanding the dynamics of participation. However, for this potential to be maximised, the research design needed to take account of, and, in as far as possible, address, inherent weaknesses in the approach, in particular the difficulties in interpreting differences between the processes. The following two sub-sections outline how I addressed this in the present study.

5.2.2 Bounding the study: Malawi and Ireland as context, development processes as cases

Melvin L Kohn (1996), in his discussion of cross-national comparative research, draws a very useful distinction between nation as *unit* of analysis and nation as *context*. In the former, nations as *units*, nations themselves are the objects of study, and comparisons are made between particular nation states and/or their institutions - for example a comparative analysis of social security systems in the USA and the UK, or educational systems in Britain and Ireland. In the latter, nations as *context*, nations merely form the

context to comparisons which focus on how institutions operate or how certain aspects of social structure impinge upon behaviour and agency. While the distinction in the two approaches (nation as unit and nation as context) is generally more gradual than sharply defined, it is nonetheless useful in that it helps focus attention on the actual unit of analysis and its relevant features.

In this study the primary units of analysis are the national development processes in Malawi and Ireland respectively. The nation states of Malawi and Ireland are therefore the contexts for the analysis but do not constitute the primary focus. A case study approach was chosen as the most appropriate method for studying these units.

Sarantakos (1998) explains that today, case studies are considered to be valid forms of inquiry in the context of descriptive as well as evaluative and causal studies, particularly when the research context is too complex for survey studies or experimental strategies, and when the researcher is interested in the structure, process and outcomes of a single unit. This is the case in this study. Yin (1994: 13) describes a case study as an empirical enquiry that “...*investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.*” He argues that a case study approach is most useful in situations where the researcher believes that contextual conditions might be highly pertinent to the study. Having deliberately selected a ‘North-South’ comparison for this reason, a case study approach therefore appeared most appropriate.

The criteria for the selection of the two cases focused therefore, on the governance processes in both countries and their immediate contexts, rather than on broader features of both nation states *per se*. The process in Ireland was chosen, as might be expected,

as I had, through my work, some experience of participatory governance processes in-country (at a local level) and was somewhat familiar with the national process. There was a wide range (over seventy) of 'PRSP countries' to choose from worldwide. The process in Malawi was chosen as I felt it had, in governance terms, some degree of commonality with Ireland. As we have seen in Chapter Three, Malawi, a relatively small, ex-British colony, with a high dependence on external aid, and a strong religious and authoritarian tradition, bears many superficial contextual similarities to Ireland. Malawi's PRSP process proved a useful comparator to Ireland's Social Partnership in two further ways. First, Malawi was one of the first African countries to undertake the PRSP process and so provided more material for the processual approach taken in this study, examining not only the process itself, but its ongoing impact over the years. And second, the principal civil society group involved in Malawi's PRSP, MEJN, appeared comparable to Ireland's Community Platform which is involved in Social Partnership, in that both constitute self-formed networks of diverse groups, specifically established to input to both processes (although this is contested among members of Ireland's Community Platform⁴⁰).

As we have seen in Chapter Three, the disparity between Malawi and Ireland in national economic terms is quite striking. While this is unarguably a significant factor in relation to both state capacity and developmental imperatives within both countries, I feel it is not directly significant in relation to the cases under investigation in this study for two main reasons. First, national income figures do not include aid inflows. These are particularly significant in relation to Malawi's PRSP/MGDS process. Although precise figures are not available, Malawi's PRSP formulation process in 2000/2001

⁴⁰ While some members of the Community Platform assert that the Platform was established specifically to input to Social Partnership, others maintain that it was established in any case and that Social Partnership is not its primary focus.

received significant financial support from donors. Reviewing the range and diversity of fora (as outlined in Chapter Six), together with the time taken to carry out the process, it is likely that, despite Malawi's low national income, far more financial resources were invested in the PRSP process than in any of Ireland's Social Partnership processes. While the MGDS formulation process certainly constituted a financially scaled back version of the PRSP (again, this is examined in detail in Chapter Six), significant amounts of financial resources were nonetheless again invested in the 2004 process, with a significant proportion being provided by the UK Department for International Development (DfID). Second, while the developmental imperatives of both countries are clearly different, both in scale and acuity, growing inequality and marginalisation (economic, social and political) remain a common problem to both. The primary unit of analysis of this study – both governance processes and their potential for transformatory participation – focuses on spaces for developmental debate rather than on actual policy outcomes. The 'who', in terms of participant agency, rather than the 'what', in terms of policy outcomes, of both processes (where the 'who' necessarily precedes the 'what') is of primary interest. Consequently, aggregate income figures are of less relevance to this study than their distributional effects, socially and politically.

5.2.3 Bounding the study: Exercising 'theoretical parsimony'

Commonalities between both processes notwithstanding, the difficulties in the interpretative component of the study remain. Arend Lijphart, writing early on in his career, succinctly characterises the principal problem of the comparative method as a problem of "*many variables, small number of cases*" (1971: 685). In a paper focusing in this area, Lijphart suggests four ways of minimising the problem. First, he advises

that the comparative analysis be focused on ‘comparable’ cases, meaning those which are similar in a large number of variables. As we have already seen, Malawi’s PRSP/MGDS and Ireland’s Social Partnership, underpinned by identical concepts and giving rise to literatures highlighting common issues, appear to fulfil this criterion. Two further ways in which problems with the comparative method may be reduced, according to Lijphart, focus on the research variables. These are respectively a) to combine, if possible, two or more variables that express an essentially similar underlying characteristic into a single variable, and b) to exercise what Lijphart terms “*theoretical parsimony*” (1971: 690) focusing the comparative analysis on ‘key’ variables. I accomplished this in this study by designing a theoretical framework which comprises just five composite variables. This framework is set out in Chapter Four. A reflexive approach was taken in its development. While four of the variables (institutional frameworks, power and discourse, communications and decision making, and linkages to existing political structures) were developed in the early stages of the study following theoretical research, one of these (communications and decision making) was expanded and another (representation) was developed during the interview phase. In this way, while theory initially formed the parameters of data collection, additional data went on to drive the research contours. While this approach may be a little less ‘parsimonious’ than that advocated by Lijphart, and certainly owes much to Michael Burawoy’s (1998) reflexive approach to research (see Section 5.2.4 below), it still bounded the study within a relatively tight comparative framework with the same variables being examined in both cases. This framework, in particular the composite variables of institutional design and representation respectively, proved sufficiently broad to accommodate the constantly shifting parameters of both cases.

5.2.4 The rigour dilemma

The fourth way in which the problems of the comparative method may be reduced, according to Lijphart, is to increase the number of cases as much as possible as this introduces a greater rigour and control to the study. His own work over the years has followed this injunction and this has allowed him to back up his qualitative analysis with statistical comparisons. This ‘multi-method’ approach has found popularity in political science over the years – combining small N comparisons with big N statistical analysis or mathematical models.

This study has not followed this approach however for two main reasons. First, such a study would be extremely time consuming and costly, and would certainly extend beyond the parameters of a PhD study. And second, and more importantly, the largely interpretive nature of this study which draws from participants’ own experiences, analyses and insights into the two processes, does not lend itself to statistical analysis. It was felt that to embark upon such an approach would, in Theda Skocpol’s terms, when asked whether her own comparative study on states and revolutions might have benefited from statistical analysis, result in “*letting the statistical tail wag the dog*” (2007: 689), thereby losing the depth of analysis of the ‘dog’ itself.

The rigour dilemma is one which has long haunted the comparative case study approach. This issue is addressed by Charles Ragin who suggests that “*Perhaps a rigorous comparative method is a contradiction in terms as the comparative method is used only when the number of relevant cases is too small to allow the investigator to establish statistical controls over the conditions and causes of variation in social phenomena*” (1987: 13). As Lijphart has pointed out, the necessarily limited number of

cases imposes constraints on rigour. Ragin goes on to argue however (1987: 14-15) that, although comparative case study analyses may appear constrained in rigour as a result of their holistic nature, they are based on sound logic methods, drawing on two of Mills' methods of inductive enquiry – methods of agreement and difference respectively. A strong advocate of a comparative case study approach, Ragin goes on to argue (1987: 15) that the comparative method is superior to the statistical method when, *inter alia*, seeking to address historical specificity, and addressing macro-phenomena rather than exploring relationships between distinct variables. The phenomena examined in this study largely correspond to this categorisation. Embedded within the respective socio-political contexts (see Chapter Three), both processes are broad, macro-phenomena, and the evolution of both within an era of globalised governance (see Chapter Two) comes at a specific historical period.

5.2.5 Generalising the findings: Can it be done?

While a study of Malawi's PRSP/MGDS and Ireland's Social Partnership proves useful in and of itself, its findings, extended to a more general study of participatory governance, may potentially unearth issues applicable to other participatory processes. This raises the question as to whether specific cases, and the research findings from these, may be generalised to other contexts. John Walton (1992) argues that cases do not just relate to the specificity of the event or phenomenon under investigation.

Rather, he argues that

When researchers speak of a 'case' rather than a circumstance, instance, or event, they invest the study of a particular social setting with some sense of generality. An 'instance' is just that and goes no further. A 'case' implies a family; it alleges that the particular case is a case of something else. Implicit in the idea of a case is a claim.

(Walton, 1992: 121)

Going on to discuss how cases may form the basis for more generalised claims, Walton asserts that they need to demonstrate a causal argument about how general social forces take shape and produce results in specific settings. These causal connections thus serve to suggest something about the potential generality of the results (1992: 122). A comparison of causal connections with those of other cases moves the analysis towards theory. As Walton explains

Analogies identify similar causal processes across cases, meaning cases are those bundles of reality to which analogies apply. Causal processes discovered in cases and generalised through analogies constitute our theories. Thinking about cases, in short, is a singularly theoretical business.

(Walton, 1992: 134)

And so, following Walton's argument, specific cases may be generalised to broader arguments about social life and its forces, by drawing on other cases and their claims.

Another theorist interested in the possibilities of generalising case findings to broader arguments is Michael Burawoy. Burawoy (1998), who argues for a reflexive model of science, such as that applied in this study, echoes Walton in arguing that specific phenomena can only be understood in the context of a wider body of theory to which they apply. Thus

Reflexive science starts out from dialogue, virtual or real, between observer and participants, embeds such dialogue within a second dialogue between local processes and extralocal forces that in turn can only be comprehended through a third, expanding dialogue of theory with itself.

(Burawoy, 1998: 5)

Put another way, Burawoy (1998: 15) argues that the process of case generalisation following the reflexive method involves aggregating situational knowledge into social

processes, and from there, moving on to delineate the social forces that frame these processes. Following Burawoy's method, data drive theory construction.

We begin with our favourite theory but seek not confirmations but refutations that inspire us to deepen that theory. Instead of discovering grounded theory we elaborate existing theory.

(Burawoy, 1998: 16)

Both Walton and Burawoy argue, therefore, that data assimilated from specific cases may be extended and situated within an appropriate body of broader theory when analysed in terms of overarching social processes (or in Walton's terms causal processes), and on outward toward social forces. Moreover, Burawoy notes that this may not always be the most obvious theory, and that deeper, more reflexive analysis may uncover processes at play which lead to alternative theorisations of the research findings. This reflexive approach is also favoured by Charles C Ragin who, writing some ten years earlier (1987: 164), asserts that "... *most hypotheses and concepts are refined, often reformulated, after the data have been collected and analysed.*"

Following Walton and Burawoy, in this study I go beyond a simple presentation of the similarities and differences in participation within both processes. The analyses Chapters (Six to Nine) combine a presentation of findings regarding the participatory dynamics of both processes with interpretative analysis of these findings. I interrogate the 'why' of the similarities and differences between both processes as well as the 'what'. I do this by invoking the upward logic outlined above by both Walton and Burawoy, extending and situating the findings within a broader body of social theory and exploring the effects of broader social forces on participant agency and structure within both processes.

The deliberate sampling of the Malawi-Ireland comparison therefore, offers additional, and new information on the importance of global versus national factors impacting on both processes. The specific cases of Malawi and Ireland's development processes were chosen for reasons of commonality, while the parameters of the study were bounded (albeit reflexively so) employing a theoretical framework comprising five composite variables. While these choices addressed some of the main challenges inherent in a comparative approach, from my own perspective as a development practitioner, a number of additional issues also needed to be addressed when designing the study. These relate to the role of the researcher and are discussed below.

5.3 On researching 'others' and research aims

As we have seen in Chapter One, the subject of this research, participation and participatory governance, draws principally from two theoretical disciplines, development studies and political science respectively. As I have noted in Chapter One, studies to date of the PRSP and Social Partnership processes have focused largely on policy outcomes, rather than on issues of process or agency (although the former has received some attention in some PRSP studies), or on the longterm implications of both processes for socio-political relations in general in the relevant countries. This may well reflect the epistemological approaches of both disciplines which, commencing from a normative point of departure – to improve people's lives – share a commitment to the practical, or policy relevance of research. In this regard they tend to assume however, that knowledge is not contestable, and that policy makers operate as rational,

politically neutral arbitrators of different ‘evidence’⁴¹. This, however, is an assumption which is not shared by many sociologists.

Although both the PRSP and Social Partnership processes have received a considerable level of critical attention within the literature, these critiques have largely focused on the (perceived) agendas of dominant actors within both processes (generally articulated as the dominant discourse of neo-liberal capitalism), rather than on factors influencing participants’ agency more broadly. And so, while these accounts tend to highlight dominant forms of knowledge, they largely fail to explore if, or how, these are contested within the respective processes. This research aims at broadening this analysis by applying a critical theory approach to both the processes themselves (structure), and the actions and motivations of the actors that inhabit them (agency), exploring if, and how, knowledge is contested within both processes.

5.3.1 Critical social theory

Critical social theory, as the name implies, invites a critical epistemological approach to social research. It aims at employing theory to seek self-understanding, and from this self-understanding to find a place in which to stand outside existing knowledge practices, in order to critique them. Jurgen Habermas, in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984) and related writings, has elaborated on the concept and practice of critical social theory. In these writings, Habermas argues for a strong distinction between practical knowledge, which tends to serve the interests of established orders, and more critical knowledge which is grounded in a “*reflexiveness*” that practical knowledge lacks. Habermas’s conception of critical social theory has itself come under some

⁴¹ See Sylvester (1999) and Sumner (2006) on development studies approaches and Newman et al (2004) on public administration approaches.

critique however. Critics point to the fact that his theory tends to attach to Western notions of reality which, presupposing agreement or consensus, neglects the “*politics of difference*”. One such critic, who has built on Habermas’s work to highlight the “*politics of difference*” or “*otherness*”, is Nancy Fraser. According to Fraser (1984: 97) “*a critical social theory frames its research program and its conceptual framework with an eye to the aims and activities of those oppositional social movements with which it has a partisan though not uncritical identification*” (emphasis added). Among the requirements of such an approach are (a) that it be sensitive to the way in which allegedly disappearing institutions and norms persist in structuring social reality, and (b) that it foregrounds “*the evil of dominance and subordination*” more broadly, rather than focus exclusively on “*the evil of welfare capitalism*” (1984: 130-131).

Fraser’s conception of critical social theory strongly informs the approach I employed in this research. The aspirations, experiences and activities of community and voluntary / NGO participant groups and their constituents form the main basis for the study and my research aims to move beyond accounts which focus, either positively, or negatively, on the outcomes of the processes, to critically examine features of the processes themselves – their norms, procedures, contexts, together with the agency of actors within them and the implications for evolving socio-political relations.

As outlined in Chapter One, specifically, two principal research questions guided the research. These are as follows:

- What are the enablers and constraints to transformative participation in Malawi’s PRSP/MGDS and Ireland’s Social Partnership processes?
- How do internal interests, ideologies and influences combine with external factors to produce these enablers and constraints?

Although, as discussed in Chapter One, the critical social theory approach employed carries some degree of discomfort for myself, as well as significant challenges for actors engaged in the two processes, my aim is to critically analyse both the respective processes and actors' engagement within them in a constructive, reflexive manner – a manner which, hopefully, serves to highlight, challenge, and inform the actions and experiences of actors in both processes.

5.3.2 On researching 'others' and the multiplicity of 'otherness'

A significant methodological issue arising in any research, but particularly research conducted by an 'outsider' as in my own case, examining issues of agency and action within a Malawian context, are the limitations inherent in researching 'others', i.e. people with different experiences of social divisions and oppressions. Exploring this issue in a broad sense, Fawcett and Hearn (2004) argue that consideration needs to be given to how 'otherness' is engaged with. Employing standpoint theory, which centres on relations of power and knowledge to highlight the importance of the politics of location and positioning, the authors point out that there is generally, not only one, but multiple standpoints (or multiple 'others'). The best way to approach this reality, the authors contend, is by theorising from a variety of experiences (2004: 211-212) and paying strong attention to historical context (2004: 216).

Writing more specifically in the context of African studies, Adebayo Olukoshi highlights the damage caused by 'outsiders', or non-Africans, researching African 'others'. Olukoshi (2006: 535) argues that

the power relations within African Studies have produced hierarchies that are also contiguous with existing North-South asymmetries that underpin the

broader interaction between Africa and the West. It is out of these asymmetries that questions have been posed within African Studies as to who may legitimately speak for Africa: Africans or non-Africans?

Noting that most of the concepts and conceptual frames that are applied to understanding the African continent are all too frequently borrowed from other parts of the world and applied uncritically and hastily to Africa, Olukoshi argues that a re-orientation in approaches to African Studies is required wherein non-African researchers / 'outsiders' "*begin to relate to locally based academic communities, both in the field, and in their scholarly output*" (2006: 539). His call for greater collaboration between non-African and locally based researchers is echoed by Sumner who argues that development studies (and its researchers) "*...needs to think about how it addresses heterogeneity in the 'Third World(s)' and open more space for alternative 'voices'*" (Sumner, 2006: 644).

Clearly, any study of 'others', in particular those within vastly different social and political contexts, is fraught with problems and challenges. From the above brief discussion a number of points may be elicited. First, context matters. While it is clearly not possible to comprehensively understand the complexity of the contexts underpinning Malawi's PRSP/MGDS (or indeed Ireland's Social Partnership), attempts should, nonetheless, be made to do so. This is the rationale for Chapter Three of this study. Second, textual material by African scholars carries with it less Western bias. Specific efforts have been made to source and draw on relevant work of African (including Malawian) scholars where possible although of course, a limitation remains in that my own reading and comprehension of these is still rooted in my own Western bias. Third, there is a need to engage with multiple standpoints / 'voices'. As discussed in Section 5.5.2, my second field trip to Malawi explicitly aimed at this. And fourth,

and perhaps most critically, there is a need to collaborate with local scholars, commentators and practitioners. This latter point forms the basis for the second methodological approach employed (albeit to a limited degree) in this research. This is discussed in the following Section.

5.3.3 Participatory Action Research: instrumental versus emancipatory considerations

With many of the latter points in mind, and bearing in mind the subject matter of the research, I made efforts from the outset to incorporate some elements of a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach into the methodological approach employed.

Participatory action research (PAR) may be defined as research *“from a theory of political change that involves consciously theorising within a community of practice or ‘field of constitutive relations’ where the relevant participants are together ‘researching’, ‘theorising’ and ‘acting’ (consciously intervening) in that social field or discourse of substantive practice”* (Wadsworth, 2005: 274). In echoes of Freire (see Chapter Two), the point, therefore, is to work with, not on, research participants in exploring issues relevant to their own agency.

In common with the core theme of this research, participation in PAR can mean very different things to different people. And so participation can happen at a number of levels. Fawcett and Hearn (2004) outline a number of these. A PAR approach may aim to fully involve all participants. Alternatively, it may involve just a select few. It may involve shared agendas and operating procedures for the research. Or it may constitute research with an initial agenda which is then influenced and changed through the involvement of participants. Alternatively, participants may engage to the extent that they remain informed of the research progress, but the agenda of the researcher is

followed throughout. Depending on the level employed, the researcher may confront dilemmas of control and influence as described by Sense (2006: 1) who likens his experience as a PAR researcher to that of a backseat passenger wherein he found himself “*wanting to participate as a passenger but still wanting some degree of control over the destination*”.

An underlying assumption within the PAR approach is that research participants are willing, and crucially, available, to participate fully in the research. Wadsworth (2005) draws on the work of MacDonald (1976) to highlight a distinction between autocratic or bureaucratic, and democratic participatory action research. The former can be experienced as manipulative and presumptuous by the targeted ‘participants’ who are not interested in being ‘brought in’ to the research process. The latter, on the other hand, seeks to meet research participants on their own terms, moulding the research to their interests and availability. Another relevant issue is the multiplicity of research participants or, as discussed above, ‘others’ – who is to be involved? Do decisions in this regard increase the marginalisation of others?

Given that the underlying theme of this study is that of participation, and given my own background as a practitioner, a key interest from the outset was to employ a PAR approach. To this end, meetings were held with both a representative of MEJN⁴², and a representative from one of the member organisations of Social Partnership’s community and voluntary pillar as the research proposal was being developed. The ideas and insights generated in these meetings informed the subsequent research proposal. However, as the research unfolded, while the groups consulted expressed interest in,

⁴² This was carried out during a visit of the then MEJN Programme Manager to Ireland. This meeting was followed by a number of subsequent telephone conversations.

and enthusiasm for the project, they were not in a position (due to work pressures) to sustain an ongoing input to its development. Conscious of the danger of slipping into an ‘autocratic’ PAR approach, active consultation with research participants was, therefore, limited to updates on the research progress as time went on⁴³. Moreover, as the range of research participants expanded, their active involvement was neither practicable or feasible. As such, the PAR approach employed was necessarily quite limited.

5.4 Research methods

Field research for the study was carried out over an eighteen-month period from May 2005 to November 2006. This included two field trips to Malawi, the first over a six-week period in August – September 2005, and the second over a five-week period in July – August 2006, with field research in Ireland conducted in the intervening periods. This Section outlines the data collection and collation methods employed.

It has been seen in the previous Section that data for case study research needs to come from a number of sources. Robert K Yin (1994: 79-90) discusses six possible sources of evidence in case study research. These are as follows:

- Documentation
- Archival records
- Interviews
- Direct observation
- Participant observation
- Physical artifacts

⁴³ These were conducted on an informal basis in Ireland. In Malawi meetings were held with MEJN during both field trips and a related piece of research (reviewing MEJN’s district Chapter Programme) was carried out and presented and discussed with MEJN management and Chapter members at a feedback workshop towards the end of the first field trip.

He notes that, of these, one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview. The interview constituted the main source of data within this study although documentation, and, in Malawi, direct observation employing an ethnographic approach, were also employed. Cornwall (2004) has noted that participant observation is a method well suited to studies of participatory processes. I made efforts to gain access to both NESC meetings and to the Social Partnership plenaries in 2006 but access was not granted. Similarly, in telephone discussions, MEJN's Programme Manager suggested that access to MGDS formulation meetings might be possible, and so, the first field trip to Malawi was timed to coincide with negotiation of the MGDS but, on arrival, it transpired that access was not possible. These obstacles to access in both cases were undoubtedly due to the confidentiality which surrounds both processes, together with notions of trust and relationship building which imbue both processes. These issues and their implications are discussed in more detail in the Chapters which follow. While, at the time, these access difficulties appeared to limit the scope and depth of the research, the largely informal nature of both processes, together with differential participation within specific fora (see Chapter Six) means that, even had access to these specific fora been granted, the data generated would have reflected just a microcosm of the multi-layered complexity of both processes.

The main features of the research process and procedures are outlined below.

5.4.1 Documentation

A range of secondary materials was collected and consulted for the study. These included copies of the Malawian PRSP, MEGS, and MGDS together with past Social Partnership agreements and associated NESC documentation. Additionally,

documentation was furnished by a number of research participants. Efforts were made to collect research participants' written submissions to the respective processes, with a view to comparing them to the final strategies employing discourse analysis, but this proved largely unsuccessful as a) back records proved difficult and time consuming for participants to locate, and b) as outlined in Chapter Six, the main negotiations were conducted largely on an oral basis in both cases. In Ireland, official background material on Social Partnership is readily available and relevant documentation was sourced either through respondents, or directly within a number of relevant publications. Background material on the PRSP/MGDS process in Malawi proved more difficult to locate but, cognisant of the conceptual biases of research conducted 'on' Malawi by 'outsiders', as discussed in Section 5.3.2, particular efforts were made to source materials relevant to the study by Malawian scholars and commentators. Time was set aside during field work in Malawi for visits to book shops, public libraries, and the library of the University of Malawi to collect relevant documentation.

5.4.2 Interviews

As noted above, the main research method employed was the qualitative interview. Robson (2002: 271) notes that qualitative interviews prove most appropriate in cases where a study focuses on the meaning of a particular phenomenon to participants and where individual historical accounts are required of how a particular phenomenon developed. This method, therefore, proved highly appropriate to the objectives of this study.

Participant selection

Participants in the research included a number of state actors and community and voluntary sector / NGO participants in the respective processes. Participant selection, both in Ireland, but more particularly in Malawi, raised significant challenges in two principal respects. First, identifying participants in both processes proved difficult as the composition and level of involvement of participants varied significantly over the time periods studied. While Annex 6c of the Malawian PRSP strategy (Government of Malawi, 2002) includes a list of participant organisations, investigations revealed that many of these organisations were, in fact, only nominally involved, or that the representative named was no longer with the organisation or deceased. The same proved true for the MGDS. Within Ireland, representatives of participant organisations are not named in Social Partnership strategies and so it proved necessary to contact each organisation individually with an enquiry as to the relevant individual. Second, the research ran into problems of access, in particular in relation to state officials in both Malawi and Ireland. Consequently, a range of relevant official state documentation was sourced and employed to complement data derived from interviews in the analysis of the state's role and agency within both processes (see in particular Chapter Seven).

These broader difficulties in identification and access among elite policy makers have been studied by other researchers in different contexts. Farquharson (2005) recommends what he terms a "*reputational snowball technique*" to aid in overcoming these difficulties. This method was used in both Malawi and Ireland and proved particularly useful in identifying community and voluntary / NGO actors, although it yielded less success in attempting to identify and gain access to state actors in both

instances⁴⁴. In Malawi, the annexed list of participants in the PRSP strategy document was used as the basis of discussions with the then MEJN Programme Manager⁴⁵, following which a preliminary list of interviewees (PRSP participants) for the first round of field research was drawn up. This list included representatives of MEJN member organisations, state officials, and donor representatives. MEJN was extremely helpful in facilitating access to participants during the first round of Malawian field research although it became apparent by the end of this field trip that a certain level of gatekeeping, or what Gokah (2006) terms “*political escorting*” was occurring. For this reason, and also to stave drawing further on MEJN’s already over-extended resources, the second field trip was conducted independently, and a snowball method was used to identify potential interviewees. In addition to respondents identified by MEJN involved in the PRSP/MGDS process, commentators on the wider socio-political context, and representatives from a number of additional MEJN member organisations were also sourced in an attempt to collate data from multiple standpoints during the second field trip.

In Ireland, contact was made with member organisations of the community and voluntary pillar, both past and present, and interviews sought. A snowball method was employed to identify who the representatives in the respective organisations were. With the exception of a number of recent (post-2003) members of the pillar, interviews were granted and conducted. In addition, interviews were held with a limited number of key

⁴⁴ In Malawi, access difficulties can be due to the perceived lack of value of academic research – policy oriented research tends to be viewed as more useful and significant. Attempts were made to overcome this by drawing on my links with MEJN and Trócaire. In Ireland, access difficulties were at the level of individual departmental staff. These appear to be due to the aura of confidentiality that surrounds the Social Partnership talks.

⁴⁵ This took place during a visit of the Programme Manager to Ireland (at the invite of Trócaire), prior to the field research, and was followed up by telephone and email communications.

state officials. Table 5.4.2 below presents a breakdown of research participants by sectoral category. Appendix II provides a full list of research participants.

Table 5.4.2: Research participants⁴⁶

Category	Malawi	Ireland
State official (national)	3	4
State official (local)	5	-
NGO/community and voluntary sector process participants	19	21
MEJN Chapter members (group interviews)	8	-
Donor	6	-
External commentators / Other	5	3
Total	46	28

Interview procedures

In total, seventy-four interviews were conducted – forty-six in Malawi and twenty-eight in Ireland⁴⁷. Interviews were typically two hours in length and were conducted employing a semi-structured questionnaire. The broad topics and themes explored were drawn from the conceptual framework elaborated in Chapter Four. These were as follows:

- Participants’ reasons for becoming involved in, and expectations from, the respective processes
- A description of the processes – how they worked inside the doors
- Discourses allowable – the parameters of the discussion and communications employed
- Power sharing – how rules and procedures were agreed, how decisions were reached
- How participants represent their constituents within the processes
- The openness of the processes – possibilities for media work

⁴⁶ Table 5.4.2 presents a list of recorded interviews. These recorded interviews were supplemented with a range of ‘off the record’ interviews with a wider range of actors, principally from the categories of NGO/community and voluntary sector, donor and external commentators

⁴⁷ The higher number of interviews in Malawi is due to the aforementioned efforts at acquiring data from multiple standpoints. Interviewees included some academics, writers, and social commentators.

- The implications of involvement in the respective processes for participating organisations – advantages, disadvantages, skill requirements, and impact⁴⁸

Time was also given to a more open-ended discussion on relevant topics raised by respondents themselves. Each interview was recorded on audio-tape and respondents were asked to sign a consent form which affords them access to a copy of the recording should they require it⁴⁹. Interviews were conducted at a time and a place selected by the respondents.

5.4.3 Direct Observation – An ethnographic approach

As noted above, in addition to interviews carried out for the specific purpose of this study, the first Malawian field trip also included three weeks work with MEJN⁵⁰. This work, which involved extensive travel throughout the country with MEJN staff, facilitated more in-depth study of the organisation’s culture, practices, and ongoing challenges. While this work with MEJN falls far short of a full-scale ethnography⁵¹, it proved invaluable in a number of respects. First, it afforded access to a number of MEJN’s district members and district state officials which greatly enhanced the depth and quality of the research. This would not have been possible in the time period available without MEJN’s collaboration for practical reasons of transport, access etc.

⁴⁸ The final area was introduced by a number participants themselves who were keen to explore the implications for their own organisations’ direction and development.

⁴⁹ The research received ethical approval from the NUIM Ethics Committee and the consent form formed part of the requirements for this approval. It should be noted that not all Malawian participants, in particular district state officials, and also one Irish state official, were comfortable with the audio-recording and consent form procedure, and so, a number of interviews were conducted ‘off the record’, with the data generated constituting background information only.

⁵⁰ The topic and terms of reference for this work were set out by MEJN. The work was supported by both Trócaire and MEJN.

⁵¹ Robson (2002 : 186) distinguishes between an ethnographic approach and full-scale ethnography noting (2002 : 190) that “*An ethnographic approach is particularly indicated when you are seeking insight into an area of field which is new or different.*”. He adds that description and interpretation are likely to be stressed within this approach.

Second, the focus of the work, communications within MEJN's district chapter structure, provided a rich source of material for the issue of representation examined in this study. And third, relations developed with MEJN staff, which continued over the course of the research, were extremely helpful in attempting to understand important underlying contextual issues, thereby deepening and enriching the findings on agency, context and socio-political relations presented in the findings Chapters. In hindsight, it would certainly have been useful to have attempted a similar approach with one of the community and voluntary groups or the Community Platform in Ireland, but unfortunately time did not permit this.

5.4.4 Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed in full and the interview transcripts were first analysed one by one. The main issues and themes emerging were extracted, coded, and organised together. To facilitate comparisons, some of the coded material was recorded on grids and summarised in matrix displays using techniques suggested by Yin (1994) for standardising and processing qualitative data.

5.5 Conclusion

This Chapter has outlined both the rationale for and the research design employed in the comparative case study approach selected for this study. I have argued that the deliberate sampling of a 'North/South' case comparison offers new data on the evolution and effectiveness of both specific processes, as well as to the field of global governance more broadly. The second research question framing the study specifically aims at uncovering this data.

Cognisant of the difficulties and limitations inherent in such a comparative approach, I have set out how the research design aimed at addressing these challenges. The study has been bounded – both in the case selection and within the theoretical framework employed – although the latter was developed in a reflexive manner as the research progressed. The limitations of, and potential damage caused in researching ‘others’ have been considered within this context, and four principal methods of reducing these through the approaches and methodology employed have been discussed. Finally, noting that many studies to date of both PRSPs and Social Partnership have started from a normative point of departure, thereby largely ignoring the assumption that knowledge is contestable, a critical social theory has been chosen as most appropriate and useful (although admittedly, also more challenging) to all concerned.

Chapter Six

The Dynamics of participation in the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership processes

6.1 Introduction

Drawing on the theoretical framework elaborated in Chapter Four, in this Chapter I set out to explore participation within the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership processes. I focus, in particular, on features of their overall institutional design, and the circulation of power, discourse and communications within and around them. I examine broader features of both processes, including their linkages to existing political institutions, practices and cultures, together with the associated issues of civil society representation and democracy in Chapters Seven and Eight respectively.

Following a discussion of the principal institutional features of both processes, in Section 6.5 I bring together the analysis to elicit the key enabling and constraining factors to participation within each case. I demonstrate that these (to varying degrees) are constantly shifting and changing. Participation within both processes is therefore revealed to be a dynamic process, with spaces opening and closing to transformative forms of participation over time. A key factor underpinning these shifts is the agency and actions of both state and civil society actors, thereby highlighting the interaction between structures and agency, the capillarity of power, and the role of all participants, to differing degrees at differing times, in shaping and moulding the institutional design and functioning in both processes.

6.2 Institutional arrangements

Many commentators, in particular those within the field of political science, have stressed the importance of underpinning emerging forms of governance with sustainable institutional frameworks within which ongoing deliberations and discussions with a range of actors may take place (Fung and Wright, 2003, Reddel, 2004, Triantifillou, 2004). In this Section I examine the institutional frameworks underpinning processes in Malawi and Ireland respectively. Four main factors are immediately apparent. Three of these point to close similarities between the two processes while a fourth highlights a key difference. Taken together, these four factors illustrate the dynamic nature of participation within both processes wherein, like a pendulum, participation swings from more normative and/or instrumental forms to more transformative forms, and back again, over time.

First, it is seen that, contrary to many accounts within the literature which focus on the workings of one or two formal institutions within both processes respectively, each process is seen to be made up of a wide range of fora which have evolved in rather a fluid manner and are ongoing over time. Moreover, each of these involves different sets of actors, often limited in number, thereby constraining, in a differential manner, the opportunities afforded for participation among participants. Second, a key difference between the two processes is that the Malawian process brings together actors from the state, trade union, private and NGO sectors in a range of joint deliberative fora, whereas, in Ireland, members of the different sectors (pillars) largely meet separately, either with their own pillar members, or bilaterally with state actors, thereby limiting the scope for exchange and cross deliberation. Third, a similarity between both processes is that the rules and procedures within both remain unclear and constantly shifting, leaving

participants oscillating between a constraining environment, wherein they operate in a largely ‘reactionary mode’, and an enabling one, wherein they successfully manage to colonise and maximise their agency within the spaces afforded. And fourth, it emerges that the formal institutional arrangements capture just a part of both processes. High levels of informal networking and relationship building also constitute a significant component of both processes. Each of these factors is explored in greater depth below.

6.2.1 Institutional design: Differential access across an extensive complex

Table 6.2.1 below presents a synopsis of the formal institutions of both processes together with their main purpose and the main actors involved in each. These are discussed in more detail in the narrative following the table.

Table 6.2.1: Institutional arrangements for Malawi’s PRSP / MGDS and Ireland’s Social Partnership processes

Institutional arrangement	Who involved (State and CV sector only)*	Purpose of institutional arrangement
MPRSP / MGDS		
District consultations for Interim PRSP – October – November 2000	Reps from Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, NEC, District Assembly staff and Traditional Authorities	To gather the views of people within the districts on the ‘ <i>challenges that they face</i> ’ – annexed as a list to final PRSP strategy
Interim PRSP process – December 2000	Reps from MFEP, NEC, IMF & World Bank – no CV involvement	To produce an interim strategy thereby allowing Malawi to qualify for interim (partial) debt relief
Technical committee for PRSP – established December 2000	MoFEP, NEC, Reserve Bank of Malawi	To design and coordinate the PRSP process
21 Thematic Working Groups (TWGs) (Jan – Sept 2001)	Officials from different line ministries, MEJN members in 17 out of 21	To draw up sectoral strategies for inclusion in the final PRSP strategy
Plenaries (Jan – Sept 2001) a) for donors b) MEJN members	a) World Bank, IMF, DfID, EU, members TWGs b) MEJN member organisations	a) To feed back findings of TWGs to donors b) To bring organisations views into the different TWGs

Drafting group (Sept – Feb 2002)	Members of technical committee plus MIPA plus 4 reps NGOs (2 selected by state and 2 from MEJN)	To bring together the contributions of the 21 TWGs into one final document
Monitoring committee	State officials (MEPD) and 1-2 reps MEJN	To monitor implementation of the agreement – first review published in Feb 2004, second Feb 2005, third (and final) Sept 2006
MEGS consultations – early 2004	MEPD, World Bank, IMF, NAG, no other CV group, MEJN not involved	To develop an economic growth strategy – developing one section of the PRSP and moving focus from poverty reduction to growth
MEGS – MGDS		
Technical committee / drafting group Early 2005	Reps MEPD, Finance, Trade and Private sector development, Reserve Bank, MIPA, World Bank consultant, director MEJN	To bring together PRSP, MEGS and sectoral plans from each ministry into one document
TWGs Sporadically throughout 2005	CV organisations selected by relevant line minister	To provide input at thematic levels through a template of goals, targets and activities
Consultations – approx every 2 months – July – Dec 2005	a) with districts to MPs b) CV groups nationally (limited) b) presented to cabinet and parliament	To collect and incorporate comments and inputs
Costing team – Jan-Feb 2006	MEPD, donors, 1 rep MEJN	To cost the resultant strategy
Other policy fora and working committees	Variable – invited by government – increasingly just one rep of MEJN	To input to state policy in particular areas
Social Partnership		
NESF – established in 1993 – ongoing	Up to 15 reps from CV pillar (generally variable) together with 15 reps from each of 3 other strands – Oireachtas; employer-trade union-farmer; and central-local government-independents respectively; NESF staff	To draw up reports in areas of social inclusion which may inform relevant policy
NESC – established in 1973 – ongoing	5 reps from CV pillar, NESC staff, 2 reps from Dept of an Taoiseach & 10 government nominees	To draw up a strategy to frame negotiations
Negotiations – P2000 (1997)	All CV pillar : 7 members plus community platform	To negotiate social policy commitments as part of pay talks
Negotiations – PPF (2000)	All CV pillar : 7 members plus community platform	To negotiate social policy commitments as part of pay talks
Negotiations – Sustaining Progress (2003)	All CV pillar : 7 members plus community platform	To negotiate social policy commitments as part of pay talks
Negotiations – Towards 2016 (2006)	All new pillar : 6 existing members plus 9 new members (stranded)	To negotiate social policy commitments as part of pay talks
Monitoring committee /	5 reps of the CV pillar (old	Regular meetings (every 1 to 3 months) to

Steering group (post 2003 on)	members)	track implementation of SP agreements
Quarterly plenaries	All members of CV pillar	Formal sessions where state reports on progress of agreement
Other policy fora and working committees	Variable – either elected by CV pillar members or invited by state	To input to state policy in specific areas – some directly arising from SP agreement, others formed directly by state

* The second column (who involved) contains details only on the relevant community and voluntary / NGO groups and state actors (the focus of this study) in both processes. Participants from other sectors were also involved in many of these, although also – as discussed below - differentially.

While a detailed examination of each of these institutions or stages is beyond the scope of this Chapter, Table 6.2.1 serves to illustrate three important and often overlooked aspects of both processes, namely their extensive institutional scope, the differential access opportunities afforded different actors, and, in particular, in Ireland, the restricted opportunities for deliberation.

Table 6.2.1, a necessarily heavily condensed synopsis of both processes, illustrates the complexity of institutional arrangements necessary in aiming for some form of participatory or even consultative governance. Although both the PRSP and Social Partnership are often referred to as ‘a process’, or, in the case of the latter, sometimes ‘an institution’, it is important to note that both are actually made up of a multitude of sub-processes and institutions. This is important in that many studies to date on both processes have focused narrowly on just one or two institutions or fora, drawing generalised conclusions for both processes which, in fact, only apply to the specific forum examined. In the case of Social Partnership, much writing on the process to date focuses on the NESC, which, as will be seen, functions in a very different manner to the negotiations. Literature on the Malawian process has focused predominantly on the Thematic Working Groups (TWGs) within the PRSP, with little attention given to the plenaries where donors inputted, the work of the drafting group, or that of the monitoring committee. There is no account to date of how the process evolved into the

MEGS and on into the MGDS. An examination of both processes in their fuller complexity provides a clearer picture of who is involved where (not all participants are involved in all fora), together with how much resources are required from all parties to input meaningfully.

A glance at the second column in the table also reveals a degree of complexity in relation to who participants are in both processes. While literature on both processes lists a wide range of participants (in Ireland's case these are designated 'social partners'), Table 6.2.1 demonstrates that many participants are directly involved in just one forum of the entire process⁵². Different fora involve different actors. Thus, in Malawi, the PRSP ostensibly involved officials from the country's twenty-nine districts (although it is worth noting that of the eight districts visited for this research only officials interviewed in three could recall these taking place), while some actors from MEJN appear to have been involved at a number of different stages. However the PRSP also involved a range of other actors through fora which have gone un- or under-reported, such as the plenaries which directly involved the main donors. For the MGDS some years later, however, the space for NGOs appears to have closed somewhat. As one NGO representative describes it "*...the door was still open, but it was not advertised... I think the development of this new strategy (MDGS) – government just opened the door, left it. Whosoever has got an issue come.*". In Ireland, although organisations may have 'social partner' status and be members of the community and voluntary pillar, this does not automatically secure them a place within the NESC, the monitoring committee, or on any other associated working committees. A number of community and voluntary pillar members noted that these places are hotly contested,

⁵² In Ireland, these are nominated from within their respective pillars. In Malawi, this occurs at the formal invite of the state.

undoubtedly one factor contributing to tensions within the pillar, an aspect I return to elsewhere (Chapter Eight). And so, the only forum involving all the social partners is the negotiation itself. While this forum is identified as key by many community and voluntary participants, both the specific working committees and latterly, (among members of the new pillar) the monitoring/steering committee are also felt to be extremely important, together with the NESC which sets the framework for each round of negotiations. Each of these involves a limited number (between two and five) of social partners nominated from within their respective pillars. In Malawi, although much attention within the literature has been paid to the TWGs, participants point to both the drafting group and donor consultations as wielding significant influence within both the PRSP and the MGDS processes. Again these involve a far more limited range of actors.

A key difference between the Malawian and Irish processes is that the Malawian process (the PRSP and to a lesser degree the MGDS) brings actors from state, union, private and community and voluntary sectors together in deliberation. This occurs at a sectoral level through the TWGs and again, to a more limited extent, within the drafting and monitoring groups. In Ireland, contrary to popular conception, members of the different pillars largely meet separately with state actors during the negotiations, although much of this time is spent “*hanging about*” “*twiddling our thumbs*” while the state meets with the employer and union pillars. Occasional formal plenaries are organised during the negotiations which bring all pillars together but these are described by participants as largely “*set pieces*” where prepared speeches are delivered but few exchanges take place. Other institutional arenas within Social Partnership such as the NESF, the NESC, the monitoring committee and the various working committees do

bring members of different pillars together but, as outlined in Table 6.2.1, participants' numbers are restricted so that the majority of community and voluntary pillar members do not participate in these fora. Thus, while institutional arrangements within the Malawian process afford the potential for a high degree of exchange and cross-deliberation between different sectoral actors and groups, these remain limited (in scope and numbers of participants involved) within the Irish process.

6.2.2 Processes and procedures: transforming constraints?

A commonality between both processes is that the rules and procedures in both were not clearly laid out at the outset and, moreover, continue to shift as time evolves. On the one hand, this could be attributed to a genuine willingness for flexibility as suggested by the Chair of Social Partnership⁵³

The whole thing is very fluid as a process...is it deliberate? I suppose it is. I mean the thing... ahm... it can't work... without that flexibility to respond to issues and problems as they are presented. You know, if you had a very rigid negotiating structure and timescale and so on, it probably wouldn't do justice to the sorts of problems that get presented. In some ways, you know, you can't anticipate fully where... you know you have a fair idea for a lot of them, but you can't anticipate fully where things might get stuck.

(Chair of Social Partnership)

Social partners, on the other hand, feel that this is deliberate in order to keep them in a state of controlled ignorance. This has operated both to the benefit, and to the disadvantage of actors within both processes. On the one hand, this flexibility has had the advantage for participants of affording them some space to influence how the processes have evolved, giving them more leeway to operate within them, thereby, to some degree, 'colonising space', and transforming potentially constraining features into enabling conditions. For example, in Malawi, although the I-PRSP did not involve

⁵³ Secretary General within the Department of an Taoiseach

NGOs at a national level, MEJN skilfully employed the core concept of participation to raise public debate and pressure for its involvement. Largely on foot of a MEJN email which circulated across international networks (international NGOs and IFIs alike), decrying the state's claims to popular participation in Malawi's PRSP, MEJN gained for network members places in seventeen of the twenty-one thematic working groups (TWGs) in the preparation of the final PRSP. Similarly, the network successfully managed to extend the period for work within these groups from four to nine months to give network representatives time to consult with the broader membership, and it negotiated access to the drafting group for the final strategy and membership on the ongoing monitoring committee, although it was not initially invited onto either. In Ireland, although the process appears more controlled, some participants, nonetheless, do appear, at times, to have also colonised spaces and turned constraints into opportunities. The most frequently cited method was availing of bilateral meetings with key departmental officials during negotiations on the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (PPF) in 2000 where some community and voluntary pillar members report they managed to agree specific wording and commitments in a manner not available to them heretofore. This was disallowed during negotiations in 2003, but was again used by a number of community and voluntary pillar members in 2006. This (albeit at times restricted) fluidity in both processes reinforces Lefebvre's conceptualisation of space as a socially produced space drawing attention to its transformative potential given the agency of its inhabitants. Although institutions within both processes continue to evolve, the pendulum now appears to have swung away from transformative opportunities, however, through a combination of both a consolidation of control by the state and, as argued in Chapter Nine, arguably perhaps greater acquiescence to this control on the part of community and voluntary /NGO actors.

Despite this transformative potential, with the rules of engagement unclear and constantly shifting in both processes, in particular in the Irish case, many participants fail to react quickly enough to maximise the opportunities available. For example, in Malawi, the Secretary General of the Malawi Congress of Trade Unions (MCTU) comments that, for the PRSP, the union was not sufficiently aware of what form the meetings were going to take, and what kind of input was being requested from participants. In common with a number of other agencies, he notes that it was all over by the time they had realised what was really required and how they could best intervene. Clearly, a number of Malawian actors were acting in a more reactionary capacity, despite the more proactive actions of MEJN. With the passage of time, it appears that this proactivity on the part of many NGO actors, including MEJN, has waned somewhat, as evidenced in a number of NGO actors' assertions that they are now clearer on what is expected and in a better position to deliver.

In Ireland similarly, community and voluntary pillar members, in their first negotiations in 1997, profess to being largely at sea as to what was happening. By 2000 however, some had realised the importance of the NESC forum in setting the overall agenda for the final negotiations, and this was used by them to manoeuvre within the space offered and engage directly with departmental staff, thereby maximising their input. In 2003, this changed however and pillar members, having acknowledged the dominant communication norms expected (see following Sections), and distilled and costed their policy positions in advance of the negotiations, found they were denied access to departmental officials and that their policy submissions were falling on deaf ears. Community and voluntary pillar members interviewed just prior to the 2006

negotiations again had no idea how these were to pan out or what exactly would be requested of them. One community and voluntary pillar member, interviewed following the 2006 negotiations, expressing his frustration with this, implicitly acknowledges an acceptance of the rules of engagement as set out by the state.

The rules of engagement were never clear, even as we went through it, when was the next meeting going to be. I found it frustrating that even when the process had kicked off, after the hold up, we could never seem to be told from one week to the next when the next meeting was actually taking place. And all of us, in our own sectors, we have jobs to do. And even though we had left ourselves quite free up until Christmas, thinking that we would have it all done by Christmas, a lot of us were quite busy when the negotiations were going on with our other work. And it was quite frustrating that from one week to the next they couldn't tell you that we were having a meeting next week or not. And I thought why not?

(CV pillar member)

In general, with respect to both processes, agendas and timings of meetings, and background working papers tend to be made available to participants at very short notice. For example, with regard to NESC, one community and voluntary pillar member noted that “*NESC would be quite intensive. You get these documents this big... you get these massive documents to read, two to three days before a meeting*” while another is a little stronger in her condemnation

NESC is notorious. Like people on NESC get documents, it could be forty-eight hours before the meetings. And it was difficult because she [CV pillar representative] was trying to represent the wider pillar but the [community] platform in a very specific way. She would send us, god love her, a chapter at a time, and a chapter could be a hundred pages.... She would literally email them and sometimes she would email them and say, 'I am so sorry, I only just got this and I need your comments by five, I have a meeting in the morning.' It was outrageous, it was absolutely outrageous.

(CV pillar member)

In Malawi, the situation does not appear to be much different. Agendas and timings of meetings for the PRSP were set by the technical working group and MEJN complains that, for the first four months of the process, notification for the TWGs was given at very short notice, leaving the network with very little time to organise itself with representation and inputs for the meetings. MEJN took the initiative to go to government buildings itself and seek the appropriate background documentation in advance of meetings. An Oxfam representative who was a member of the MEJN network, explains how MEJN operated in a highly proactive manner...

I think it was a very big challenge to know what was expected. What the team, that was put in place in Mangochi, what they did was to go to government, get documents from them, get information from them, and circulate it to the other members. And when the meetings, the TWGs, what used to happen was the government would invite us through that core team, and this core team is the one which would send invitations to whoever is supposed to attend that meeting. So they would write 'this is the agenda – can we prepare in these areas.

(MEJN member)

The MEJN director also recalls the time

...they would deny us information – especially in the first four months of 2001. So invitations would come to us at very awkward times – for example a meeting would be at 2 o' clock in the afternoon, there would be an invitation in the morning. So it means we would have to call each other – 'who is supposed to attend that one?' And if the person was in Blantyre and the meeting was in Lilongwe there was a problem...

(MEJN Director)

The situation is reported as having improved over time in Malawi however, as some members of MEJN are learning to manoeuvre within the spaces offered. Nonetheless, it is clear that respective states' tight control over both processes hampers the ability of non-state participants to operate effectively. While the failure to establish norms (as proposed by a number of public administration analysts such as Bang (2003), Rosell (2004), Triantifalou (2004) and Sorenson (2006)) may simply be the result of disorganisation on the part of the state, many participants feel that it is deliberate in that

it leaves them constantly in the dark and ill-prepared in their own interventions. This suggests that participants are ready to operate within norms, once they are set out, i.e. to be 'disciplined', in a Foucauldian sense. Participants note that time is required to understand the operating environment before being able to manoeuvre within it, in both the Malawian and Irish cases. The challenge for participants, particularly in the Irish process, is that as soon as they begin to understand the 'rules of the game', these change, leaving them playing a constant game of catch-up. Thus, although both processes appear to leave room to manoeuvre, and, at times, participants have managed to turn apparent constraints into enablers, this requires fast reflexes, as the ground, in particular within Social Partnership, but also to a degree in Malawi, is constantly shifting.

6.2.3 How important is institutional design at all?: The informal dimensions of participation

While the literature on PRSPs and Social Partnership, together with wider literature on new forms of governance, tends to focus on their formal processes and procedures (this, as has been seen, being a specific area of focus of public administration analysts), in reality both the Malawian and Irish processes involve a high level of informal networking and relationship building. This is underscored repeatedly by both state and non-state actors within both processes. And so, an exclusive focus on the formal arenas and institutions, together with their rules and procedures, the focus of much recent public administration literature, fails to capture the spatial scope and provides an incomplete picture of how power circulates, how alliances are formed, how decisions are reached within both processes.

In Malawi, a small country, members of the elite class (to which NGO representatives either aspire or belong) are few and generally all know each other, belonging to the same social networks. As one NGO representative commented “*we all went to the same schools*”. Another interviewee (a Malawian working with DfID) elaborated on what this means in terms of setting policy and direction for the country

How decisions are made in Malawi, [it is] largely informal. So it means that what we capture [in the literature] usually in terms of consultation and what we judge to be good or bad consultation is of the formal bit, but I think we kind of underplay the informal.... And [how] a lot of that manoeuvring is never done in public, kind of done deals behind closed doors... A lot in the corridors yeah, a lot in the corridors, very, very much so in the corridors.

(DfID representative)

In Ireland, much of the manoeuvring also takes place in the corridors, or outside the doors and gaze of the formal institutions of Social Partnership. This is acknowledged by the Chair of Social Partnership where he notes that “*There’s a lot of informal chatting and everything that goes on as people try to establish bottom line positions...*”.

For some participants however this penny is just dropping, as one community and voluntary pillar member notes

I suppose what we’ve learned very slowly... is the unofficial dynamic that’s happening as a social partner that some organisations really really use strategically and others don’t. For me I’m probably too formal and I believe if there’s meetings set that that’s where the game is, and if there’s drafts going out that’s where the game is. And what I’m slowly learning is that actually, it’s [unofficial dynamic] very important. But there are a lot of very active social partners who are linking directly with individuals within for example Taoiseach’s department, having conversations about specific policy issues and by virtue of them being a social partner, and by virtue of them being quite proactive in the informal arena they are progressing things that the rest of us sitting in the formal forum aren’t necessarily, or those of us who are only doing the formal aren’t doing. And I think the penny just dropped with me this summer after the talks. And that’s, I’ve been through three talks...

(CV pillar member)

It appears that other community and voluntary pillar members seem to be much more attuned to this way of working. Indeed the informal arena is becoming increasingly important within Social Partnership, as outlined below by one of the new members of the community and voluntary pillar fresh from the 2006 negotiation.

Well you're not having a bilateral announcing that you're having a bilateral. But I would ring the office of the Minister of X from here and say look, I think we need to meet on this one. So it's not a visible bilateral... I think some organisations believed because in previous negotiations, more negotiations happened around the table. But in fact these negotiations in the most part happened, not just in the corridors, [but] in the offices outside of meeting times, outside of the normal. And because the process [negotiation] went on for so long you were able to build up that bilateral, to have those discussions.

(CV pillar member)

The spaces within which issues are introduced, deliberated and decided upon within both the PRSP-MGDS and Social Partnership processes therefore include both formal and informal arenas wherein rules and procedures for engagement shift and change all the time. This offers an environment which, on the one hand can act to bewilder and constrain actors yet, on the other, can offer considerable leeway for the exercise of individual agency in transforming potential constraints into enabling conditions. It has been seen that while some actors in both processes operated in a largely 'reactive' mode, waiting until the norms for engagement became clear, thereby finding themselves constrained in their participation, others seized the initiative to transform these constraints to opportunities, with MEJN, in particular, drawing on both the discourse of participation and its international links, to maximise its agency within the PRSP process, although its agency in this regard in relation to the MGDS appears more muted.

In such formal and informal spaces pluralist theorisations of relatively open, transparent forms of power, agency, and decision making have little to offer. Rather, a study of the

Malawian and Irish processes' participatory nuances and potentials, exploring what goes on in the corridors, offices, bars and social clubs, as well as within formal arenas, needs to draw on theoretical accounts of less visible forms of power and agency. It is to this that we now turn in the next Section.

6.3 Power and Discourse

I have shown that the deliberation and discussions within formal institutional structures within the processes in both Malawi and Ireland are complemented by a high degree of informal networking. Hence, invisible forms of power circulate within both processes. This Section explores this dimension further. I draw on the work of Michel Foucault to examine the range of discourses in both processes – those which are dominant, those which are absent / not allowable, and those that have come to dominate both processes. In doing this we may begin to discern where the power lies, or in what direction it shifts within both processes in the Foucauldian sense. In the beginning of the Section, it is seen that a technocratic policy-oriented discourse dominated both processes at the outset – both in terms of the issues on the respective agendas, and in terms of communication norms. It is seen that certain issues and certain frameworks were not allowable, with participants raising these being labelled 'troublemakers' going against the spirit of the processes. I go on to explore the issue of agency within this confined operating environment, exploring how some participants attempted to introduce alternative discourses and frameworks by dovetailing them with / attempting to insert them into existing frameworks. In the final part of the Section I then examine how and if competing or diverse discourses were mediated, and I end with some conclusions on where and how power appears to have shifted within both processes, examining the

appropriation of particular discourses, in particular that of problem-solving, by many participating groups.

6.3.1 Discourses which dominate

While the PRSP process and Social Partnership, both involving a diverse range of actors, might be expected to accommodate a range of discourses, it is clear that, at the outset, certain discourses were privileged in each. An ongoing criticism of the PRSP process has been donor, in particular IFI, influence over the process. Although IFI officials consistently argue that the strategies should be country-owned and developed, the *World Bank PRSP Sourcebook* (World Bank, 2004) contains relatively concrete guidelines on how these documents should look. Again, although stressing that the Bank should adopt a hands-off approach, the Malawi Country Director outlines a pretty concrete view of what a PRSP should entail – macroeconomic frameworks, costings, expenditure plans, monitoring systems and “*bang to the buck*”.... The discourse adopted and required by the Bank is quite technocratic, effectively seeking an elaborate expenditure plan as a final outcome of the process.

You're talking about something that's got a very sound macroeconomic framework that everything's based in, expenditure levels and budgets are realistic, the whole macroeconomic indications of a certain level of donor assistance are accounted for. Then you have flying out of it, ideally there's this long term vision embedded in it, that is the MDGs⁵⁴ or by 2015 we want to be X, Y, Z. That somehow you've made some effort to cost these very long term goals which I think all our experience shows is a very 'figure in the air' affair... Then you should have a, in an ideal world you'd have a lot of sector investment and expenditure plans that have been analysed, prioritised, in order of bang to the buck. And then flying out of that you should have a sort of medium term expenditure plans that a government in theory could use to guide its annual budget. ...agreed within the country monitoring indicators so that you can track progress towards your long term goal, and a mechanism for feeding those indicators back into the system and then adjusting dynamically.

(World Bank Malawi Country Director)

⁵⁴ Millennium Development Goals

There appears to have been agreement on this general technocratic approach to the PRSP strategy with other donors providing a high degree of technical support at the outset to guide participants in strategy formulation. This is acknowledged by both the World Bank, *“I think in some of the other examples (countries) I saw I think we were all a little bit over-eager and ‘oh you need any help with your PRSP – here’s 15 consultants to help you out”* (WB Malawi Country Director) and DfID, Malawi’s largest donor, *“I think that there was a huge amount of hand-on investment or involvement in the formulation of the PRS... it was clear that consultants funded by DfID were playing a very hands-on role in that... lots of involvement at a technical level”* (DfID representative). Although donors now claim to have taken a more backseat role in work towards the MGDS, a World Bank consultant was again contracted to assist its drafting team. Although drafting team members claim the work was theirs, one MGDS participant noted that the MGDS drafts which circulated all bore the authorship of the World Bank consultant (as identified within the properties tab of the various *Microsoft Word* documents which circulated among participants).

In Ireland, there is general agreement that the issue, or ‘crisis’ of unemployment framed discourse within Social Partnership in the mid-1990s when the community and voluntary pillar first became involved. Elements of the community and voluntary pillar whose discourse coincided with the interests of state (in particular the Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed (INOU)) wielded considerable power at the time. One community and voluntary pillar representative, speaking of the INOU’s power at the time, notes that *“their agenda was going to float to the top because they had the power in that structure”*. A continued focus on growth and competitiveness is apparent as time has moved on, as is made clear in the account by one community and voluntary

pillar member of an exchange during a plenary meeting in 2004 “...*the message was very clear – competitiveness was the driving force and in, fact, during one [plenary] exchange between X [community and voluntary pillar] and Y [trade union pillar], Y acknowledged something that X said about equality, and the guy from IBEC⁵⁵ [employment pillar] says ‘if this in any way threatens competitiveness we’re out of here’.*”

A more recent discourse which has entered Social Partnership is that of ‘problem-solving’ – tackling the growing social problems or ‘challenges’ which are the fallout of Ireland’s recent economic prosperity, as theorised by Hoogvelt (2001) and discussed in detail in Chapter Two. This framework was originally introduced by NESC when attempting to describe the nature of Social Partnership. For the government this translates specifically into policy formulation. As outlined by the Chair of Social Partnership this appears to involve trying to mould participants’ views and actions to that of the state and, to a lesser extent, *vice versa*.

Of course government has policies on just about everything so, what one would be trying to do is to establish the fit between what people are saying they’re trying to do, and to change with what either is current policy or what might be regarded as an evolution of current policy. And then in so far as that isn’t adequate, or the issues raised are challenging existing policy then obviously the political system [the particular minister] has to be asked whether it is willing to contemplate this, and in what way.

(Chair of Social Partnership)

Broad similarities are apparent across both processes therefore, in that a technocratic, problem-solving discourse has come to dominate both, with a focus on problem-solving as opposed to problem-framing within a wider structural framework. This focus corresponds to the role of civil society ‘partners’ within the globalised polity as

⁵⁵ Irish Business and Employers Confederation

discussed in Chapter Two, wherein their contemporary role is seen to lie narrowly in addressing the inequalities issuing from economic globalisation, away from debates and discussions on their causes.

6.3.2 Negotiating Discourses

Given the diversity of groups, constituencies and issues of interest, it is reasonable to assume that people came to both processes with competing positions and arguments, emerging out of somewhat different frameworks. Participants within the PRSP in Malawi were asked, in the context of both the TWGs, and later in the drafting group, how these different positions were negotiated, and how agreements on common positions were reached by the end. Reflecting, perhaps, an acceptance of the technocratic discourse norms prevailing, many participants claimed that there was little dissent within the TWGs, arguing that, as members came from the same thematic sector, they were more or less in agreement as to policies and strategies for action therein. “...*Differences were not many in the sense that it was sector specialists sitting down within their own sector. The health group for instance, what are they going to disagree about to a large extent? As a health group they will agree*” (PRSP NGO participant). Again, although it was never explicitly outlined to participants, it appears that the ‘quality’ of submissions and inputs was key. ‘Quality’ in this instance, as we will see in Section 6.3.5, entails adopting a problem-solving rather problem-framing approach, and rooting inputs within existing policy and research frameworks.

In Ireland, it is interesting to note that many of the differences in discourse appear to have arisen between different pillars and indeed within the community and voluntary pillar itself. In particular, the trade unions, operating within the prevailing framework,

were unhappy with members of the community and voluntary pillar who espoused more transformatory agendas aimed at critiquing and re-designing existing systems.

...when the community pillar came into partnership first, the biggest criticism that we had of them... was their approach was almost the ideal world approach. They were coming at things with a blank sheet. And of course that isn't the case – there's a system in place.

(ICTU representative)

Other examples came from within the community and voluntary pillar itself. A common example is in the area of welfare versus transformative approaches towards different issues, as typified in the INOU's campaign for full employment versus CORI's⁵⁶ basic income campaign. This example neatly distinguishes between the working with (transformative) and working for (welfare) approaches highlighted by Freire. The dilemma is outlined by a then representative of the INOU.

And, in the issue of poverty and unemployment at that time, the biggest ideological division was between ourselves and CORI. CORI took the view that there would never be full employment, there were more people than you could possibly create jobs for and we had to gear society for continuing mass unemployment and therefore needed to give everybody a basic income. And we said we can run society in such a way that people can get jobs, a basic income which you're never likely to get is basically abandoning that group of unemployed people, and that we need to be driving the economy in a completely different way.

(INOUE representative)

Two members of the drafting group for the current MGDS, when asked what criteria they used to prioritise and make final decisions on what does and does not make it to the final document, were unable to provide specific criteria. Both explained how they linked pieces together...

If we find that there is strong collaboration between some sector activities, which in a way can be narrowed down to some... simpler blocks which can be

⁵⁶ Conference of Religious of Ireland

apportioned to maybe some particular maybe joint implementation of stakeholders.

(MIPA⁵⁷ representative)

... but neither talked about leaving anything out. Again the official from the MEPD commissioned with coordinating the recent MGDS strategy was also unable to respond to the question. His emphasis was again on stressing the interlinkages between different frameworks in an effort to appease everyone.

This approach, which fails to negotiate between competing discourses, resonates strongly with that adopted by NESC in Ireland, where sections of the strategy report appear to constitute a meaningless amalgam of empty statements. NESC's Director explains how this comes about

There's the kind of really, the worst outcome, the lowest common denominator bargain that all you agree to is kind of platitudes, which all sides can agree to but don't actually say anything.

(NESC Director)

He goes on to explain that two other methods may also be used, one where the NESC secretariat engages in classic bargaining with groups (drop this and you might get that), and secondly where it is agreed to set up a structure (be it another institution, for example the National Centre for Partnership, or a working group) to attempt to move forward the issue.

The contradictions inherent in some of the Social Partnership reports have not gone unnoticed among participants on the NESC. One community and voluntary pillar member notes the contradictions within some NESC reports "*this happens in NESC as*

⁵⁷ Malawi Investment and Procurement Agency

well. Ok, if we've got this, and you think that, we'll put both positions in and pretend, and not mention in the report that in fact they're in direct contradiction to each other. And you get that a lot in Forum (NESF) reports.... Intellectually totally incoherent. But everybody can quote the bit that represents them. I don't know what the point of that is but...It happens a lot..." (CV pillar member)

6.3.3 Discourses disallowed

Although from the above it would seem that all voices, frameworks, experiences and perspectives were expressed and included in documentation emanating from the processes, this was not in fact the case, either in Ireland, or in Malawi. It appears in both cases certain discourses were not allowed, certain issues were not to be raised, and certain attitudes were not to be expressed. These issues never made it to drafts of relevant documents and so do not appear subsumed within or in contradiction to other extracts therein.

In Malawi, this is as yet an unreported phenomenon and was not acknowledged by any of the PRSP or MGDS participants. However an independent academic observer from the University of Malawi noted that "*critical voices were excluded*" from the PRSP process, these being "*some institutions that were seen to be very vocal...*". Some of these so-called critical voices were sought out for this research and the issue explored in further depth with them. It appears that contributions which (a) were critical of the state; (b) raised broader issues over which the state had little or no control; or (c) put forward more radical alternatives, were eschewed, with participants swiftly removed by the state from the process by not being invited to any subsequent TWG meetings or

wider consultations. One NGO representative explains how his intervention was ignored.

At some point some of us were members of the TWG on governance, but in the process we were kicked out because we were seen to be very controversial... In our group we were raising some of the critical human rights violations, lack of respect for rule of law, because if we are able write these things we would be able to assist the government on decision making on this area... And there were practical examples that we were actually giving. And on top of that the people that we have consulted gave a number of issues, critical issues... But unfortunately our colleagues from the state, didn't want that kind of information to be included. Because to them, they were afraid of the ministers, that the document would not be approved once we put in critical statements. So the document was written in such a way that in anticipation that it would be approved, it was nicely written reports, nicely noted to them, but not addressing the common issues, the critical issues affecting either the governance, either affecting some of the human development workers.

(NGO representative)

Another explains his experience

I attended one workshop [TWG meeting] and thereafter was never called back... Normally what happens is, those people who espouse an alternative, or wish to create a new horizon, tend to be shunned. You must remember, here we have a hedgerow mentality. So you stick your head above the hedgerow it tends to get shot off... they were saying we were trying to derail the whole thing... My impression, from the limited exposure I got, was that the agenda had already been predetermined and we were there to lend a legitimacy that it had been done in consultation. But the actual scheme had already been laid out and they didn't want any changes.

(NGO representative)

In Ireland, it appears that participants were not so much raising critical voices as trying to put forward some alternatives. The experience of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) within the NESC is a case in point.

Now I mean I do think particularly in NESC it was an extreme, well I suppose lots of places are, but it seemed like really, really difficult around gender inequality, and around women's inequality, and the issue of patriarchy, and how did that actually affect policy outcomes. It just really, a really difficult place for that. It was only where it affected the labour market... where some of the issues were causing inequality within the labour market then, then you could get some sort of an understanding. But beyond that our stuff was just being ignored all the time. And so also was a deeper analysis around broader equality in that it

doesn't just relate to women... there was no real analysis around – you know – how is inequality caused? What are the structural barriers there to prevent it?
(NWCI representative)

Other issues which were not debatable within Social Partnership, either within the NESAC or in any other forum, included the issues of refugees, asylum seekers and the broader issue of racism, issues of core interest to some community and voluntary pillar members.

There was the whole thing about refugees and asylum seekers, people, they just would not engage in conversation about it, in discussion about it, they said that's not for this agreement, it's not going in there...
(CV pillar member)

Another straw was that close to the end we were trying to raise issues of racism and we were told that racism is not discussed in social partnership.
(CV pillar member)

Clearly therefore, the room to colonise spaces within both processes with more transformatory discourses – i.e. those challenging dominant frameworks and contexts (in Ireland identified by participants as patriarchal and racist) rather than, in a far more limited manner, merely addressing the symptomatic inequalities arising, were eschewed and disallowed. These blockages to broader development discourses came from state participants, but also, as we will see in greater detail in Chapter Eight, from community and voluntary/NGO participants.

6.3.4 Dovetailing Discourses

Despite these constraints, Foucault reminds us that neither power nor discourse is static. In the face of confined space within which to discursively move, participants in both processes appear to be faced with two choices. One is to exercise their agency and, in Cornwall's terms, colonise the dominant discourses by attempting to dovetail their issues with them. The other, in Foucauldian terms, is to internalise and adopt the dominant discourse, thereby building credibility and support for their positions. As will

be seen, in practice, both strategies were adopted by participants within both processes, both knowingly and unknowingly. Moreover, the boundaries between each strategy are quite porous so that participants, intending to adopt dominant discourses to their own ends, arguably sometimes ended up losing sight of these when enveloped in the mists of dominant discourses.

A number of community and voluntary pillar participants within Ireland's Social Partnership outlined their strategies for dovetailing their issues with what they perceived to be the dominant interests within the process, in this case generally identified as labour market issues. Thus, for example, one community and voluntary pillar member, interested in the issue of examination fees, found it relatively easy to incorporate this as it could draw out the direct links to employment. Another pillar member, interested in a broader equality framework, outlines the difficulties it encountered in attempting to bring this onto the agenda.

Whereas if you were dealing conceptually with something or if you were trying to promote concepts like individualisation or participation, rights and... if you were vaguer and not tangible it was much more difficult, to get practical things. You could get a lot of words and there was a lot of words, it was quite hard to get actions.

(CV pillar member)

Yet another community and voluntary pillar member underscores the need to link issues and frameworks with the dominant framework.

You need to know what you want. You need to know how it fits in... Because there's all a lot of talk in our stuff which is all about moral right and all this sort of stuff, and all that's great... [but] It's where you think your issue fits in, what you want to say about it, what specifically you want to deliver.

(CV pillar member)

Within the Malawian PRSP, with a focus clearly on ‘technical’ programmatic issues within narrowly defined thematic groups, there was clearly little leeway afforded for wider discussions. This appears to have been understood and accepted by all participants as time wore on. This is illustrated repeatedly, e.g. in the Oxfam representative’s view that civil society needed time to develop capacity and input meaningfully; the view that ‘organised’ groups which knew their theme and prepared papers in advance were most successful; the view that when the government saw the ‘calibre’ of MEJN representatives the climate changed and the government started to listen; and the need for ‘competent’ chairs for the TWGs so that they might ‘deliver’. When talking of interventions on the MGDS, MEJN’s Director highlights the organisation’s sensitivity to how issues should be framed within the dominant discourse

...you should also understand that the top political leadership is not the type of leadership that would try to recognise the language of poverty reduction. We Malawians should talk more of wealth creation, income generation and economic growth, the positives, not poverty reduction, negative type of language.
(Director of MEJN)

6.3.5 Adopting discourses: from transformative frameworks to problem-solving

Many participating groups in both processes therefore appear to have adopted prevailing discourses in an effort to bring their issues onto the agenda. It appears that the focus turned to concrete issues, rather than seeking to influence the broader frameworks around them. The strategy of one community and voluntary pillar member illustrates this.

We had been arguing that the economic and the social are two sides of the one coin.... Now I wouldn’t believe myself that the social should be funded on the basis that it helps the economic. But if that’s what they require to believe to drive it and it actually happens to be true then I don’t mind why they do the right thing even if it is for the wrong reason.

(CV pillar member)

In Malawi this also appears to have been the case, where participants moved to adopt the discourse apparently required in order to attain credibility within the process and get their issues on the table.

And you see government couldn't also just take anything. They looked at 'who is making a better presentation, who has got better issues?'. So they were taking those issues.

(PRSP participant)

MEJN, consistently highlighting the issue of capacity, is confident that it was this technical capacity that eventually prised open the door for them within the PRSP process, a door which has remained ajar, if not fully open, within the MGDS.

I think the calibre of people we featured in the TWGs but also in the drafting, the technical drafting team of the PRSP, was calibre that wouldn't be doubted, by the government, the donors, and everybody else. It wasn't just people that would just sit down and watch people discussing technical issues. So that instilled a lot of confidence on the part of government. They said 'I think we can listen to the civil society'.

(MEJN Director)

Again, one of the new community and voluntary pillar members within Ireland's Social Partnership illustrates its learning in terms of adopting discourses for the purposes of having their inputs taken on board.

I think we have to learn a language of being able to express that in terms of an overall public policy, economic and social policy context. That you're not saying... you plead a case on the basis of, I was dealing with this issue yesterday, this woman, this situation, da, da, da, da, appalling, appalling, appalling. And anyone and everyone you'll be saying it to will be saying that shouldn't happen.... But how do you get, not just that not to happen in that situation, but how do you get systems to operate in a way that that should be the oddest thing to ever happen.

(CV pillar member)

This point illustrates the importance of ‘learning the policy language’, thereby adopting a problem-solving rather than problem-framing approach, an approach which explicitly underpins recent Social Partnership processes as well as implicitly forming the basis for the PRSP and MGDS processes. It has been argued that this is a discourse which has consistently underpinned mainstream development approaches within so-called developing countries (Escobar, 1995, Sylvester, 1999, Sumner 2006) while, in Ireland, although the term ‘problem-solving’ was first explicitly adopted by NESC as a descriptor for the Social Partnership process, it appears that many of the community and voluntary pillar members came into the process with this in mind, specifically in terms of attracting more resources to the sector to tackle the problems. A member of the Community Worker’s Coop (CWC), one of the founding members of the community platform within the community and voluntary pillar explains.

...that was our strategy within the Coop. To go for big, big investments, way over and above the types of investments we’d had say, around the community development programmes and things like that. (CWC member)

NESC Director, Rory O’Donnell, the first to explicitly characterise Social Partnership in this way, explains how it was rapidly adopted by both the state and other pillar members.

I mean I remember tentatively writing down a mixture of bargaining and deliberation and problem-solving as a key mode and thinking, these hard-headed characters will think this is terribly airy fairy. And they just latched onto it. They just latched onto that language.

(NESC Director)

This is apparent in interviews with both state and community and voluntary pillar members in 2006 when, asked to characterise Social Partnership, the same language kept emerging.

... I take the view that the social partners have actually a major role to play in both identifying and solving some of the major challenges that face us as a country... (Vice-Chair Social Partnership⁵⁸)

I think the nugget of partnership is problem-solving. (ICTU representative)

Social Partnership is, as they put it, a problem-solving process. If it stops being that, or if we get the problem solved, we don't have to be bothered about Social Partnership in a sense. (CV Pillar member)

You don't win these arguments by rhetoric. What you've got to do is say ok, let's see what the main themes are, then what are the problems. Summarise the problem in one sentence, two sentences at most, no rhetoric. What's the problem. What's your proposed solution. A proposal. Don't write me a paragraph. Write me a sentence... short, and if you want to make a comment in one or two sentences. (CV pillar member)

While there appears to be widespread agreement on a problem-solving approach, the discourse employed therein perhaps does not meet with everyone's approval however, as discussed by one of the ex-community and voluntary pillar members in relation to the issue of care...

if you actually look at how they identify the problem – it's so narrow. That's not what the problem looks like. We're again back to, back to services, lack of places. That's not the problem in relation to care. You've got an unsustainable situation in relation to care in Ireland and the fact that the state... has predominantly seen the whole issue of care as being the private responsibility of families and within that women, and that that has been one of their huge difficulties in actually investing in it or getting involved in it, or interfering in it almost as men would see it. And until you can sort of shift that. And the exact same thing is happening in relation to childcare. And until we can shift that ground we're not going to get the type of system and the type of supports that people need. So that's where it starts.

(ex-CV pillar member)

In Malawi the discourse of problem-solving appears to have long been internalised into people's thinking. A commentator on civil society in Malawi notes that, with the issue of survival foremost in people's minds, more transformative, and necessarily long-term solutions remain remote.

⁵⁸ Assistant Secretary General, Department of an Taoiseach

So much of the activism in Malawian society revolves around survival... not in terms of the movement towards how do we succeed... how do we survive the day to day... I do not see much of the kind of futuristic activism...the whole debate is so much confined to survival today.

(Academic, University of Malawi)

The World Bank representative working on Malawi's MGDS reiterates the concept of problem-solving which underpins the MGDS. His comment also reveals a view that this remains beyond the capacity of 'ordinary' people.

Coming up with a strategy is not a straightforward issue, it's not just about asking people what their problems are because I think we really do know what their problems are. Coming up with a strategy is finding a solution to people's problems. Maybe people might have an idea at very grassroots level what the solutions are but not within the context of a national strategy.

(World Bank representative)

A comment from the Director of MEJN in 2006, five years on from his first involvement in the PRSP process, is telling in its revelation of the extent to which he appears to have internalised this technocratic approach "*these documents, time and again, should have a matrix which should contain detail on the activities that are going to be done...*"

It has been seen that both processes have become increasingly dominated by a technocratic, problem-solving approach to policy, thereby constraining the range of discourses allowable and hence, the scope for transformative participation. While attempts have been made by actors in both Malawi and Ireland to include competing discourses, some interventions and frameworks have proven unacceptable and have been excluded completely in both cases. It has been seen how some participants have abandoned their efforts at shifting prevailing discourses, instead, either consciously or

sub-consciously, adopting the favoured problem-solving approach by attempting to align specific issues with the prevailing discourse. The internalising of the prevailing discourse, as predicted by Foucault, has also been demonstrated by actors from both processes. Civil society agency in this regard reinforces constraints to participation. Closely allied to the issues of power and discourse, is that of communication. This is discussed in the following Section.

6.4 Communication and decision making

As theorised in Chapter Four, the issue of communication involves different forms employed both within and without respective processes. In this Section I examine both aspects, following which I go on to explore the decision-making mechanisms employed in both processes.

6.4.1 Communication within: ‘reasonable’ argument

Eliciting inputs

Young (2000) points out that the diversity of actors within participatory processes means that there will be different levels of what she terms ‘articulateness’ within the participating group. This calls for proactive mechanisms for eliciting interventions of different kinds from those participants present. Commentators from public administration disciplines have also alluded to this requirement (Sorenson, 2006). Within processes in both Malawi and Ireland however, it appears that this is a dimension which has by-passed chairs and facilitators of the respective processes. In

Malawi, it appears it was entirely left up to participants to take the initiative, as the ministry official⁵⁹ who coordinated the process outlines

I think... you know... this definition of democracy – people are free to say something – you cannot force somebody to say something. So if you have got something to say which you think is key to the operations of your institution, you will say it. If people are silent, that's it.

(MEPD official – coordinator of the MGDS)

In Ireland also, it appears that participants need to take the initiative to contribute. As noted previously, Social Partnership has been characterised as a deliberative forum. As also noted however, this characterisation has been applied primarily to the NESC forum, which, as we have seen in Section 6.2.1, constitutes just one of the many organs of Social Partnership. However this characterisation is more normative than actual, and the concept has been used as a descriptor of the process within NESC, rather than something that was consciously designed or is actively facilitated.

Deliberation – transforming views... ?

As outlined in Chapter Four, deliberation involves the transformation of preferences moving towards a consensus agreement among all concerned. In this it seems to resonate to some degree with Luke's third form of power, or Foucault's internalising of discourses. So can Social Partnership be characterised as deliberative? Participants, when asked if they felt they had changed their views, responded that no, they may have had to compromise, but have rarely shifted their ideological positions. Again, it should be noted that the negotiations are the only forum within Social Partnership which all social partners attend, and here they rarely sit down together with other pillar members.

⁵⁹ Both the PRSP and MGDS processes were coordinated by the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD).

The Chair of the process also commented that he has very rarely seen preferences being transformed, although he goes on to comment that the Social Partnership secretariat does try to foster such transformations...

I mean it does happen, but it is a rare phenomenon. I mean when you literally hear the penny drop on something. But it has happened and I've sort of experienced it. But it is very rare.... It requires a very good service if you like from the secretariat that produces material that is challenging and that offers reinterpretations of reality such that people can get a better fix on what might be do-able, and that happily does happen a lot. But, in the sense of you know people suddenly recognising that they've been wrong and they adopt a new position, it doesn't much happen.

(Chair of Social Partnership)

... Or just evidence-based argument?

The dominant communication mechanism in both processes appears to be that of argumentation. This consists of presenting a position backed up by statistics and facts and presenting a 'reasonable' argument, what in Malawi is known as 'evidence-based' lobbying. One long-standing community and voluntary pillar member outlines the recipe for success within the negotiations as follows

having a position, having an analysis that stands up, not by pumping the table or smart alec stuff, but actually being able to present, these are the facts, this is the date...

(CV pillar member)

Hence, "pumping the table" or other forms of communication as discussed by Young (2000) and Cornwall (2004), encapsulated here as "smart alec stuff", prove unacceptable. The same is true in Malawi. A Malawian NGO representative highlights the importance of evidence-based research which, as identified in the previous Section, seeks to feed into existing state frameworks and discourse.

[You] need to check on your facts before you speak out of the blue... make a pre-emptive strike by understanding what the government is doing and then targeting your concerns at those loopholes...

(PRSP participant)

While in Malawi deliberations and negotiations appear to be carried out in a reasonably respectful manner, in Ireland phrases like ‘hard nosed’, ‘hard ball’ and ‘being business-like’ are used to describe attitudes and behaviour within the Social Partnership negotiations. A number of community and voluntary pillar members pointed to the ‘machismo’ that pervades the negotiations. This is clearly a very male environment. In the words of one participant “...it’s the big boys, and it’s the big, and the boys.” This is an environment which is identified by both union and community and voluntary pillar members alike as one which suits the traditional bargaining mechanisms within the unions.

...for our side, we are used to negotiations, or used to getting 40 per cent of what we’re looking for, and coming back again to get the next 20 per cent and the next. There’s a different ethos in the community pillar which is about painting a big, big picture and, not being terribly happy. To me it must be a frustrating place to be because, not being very happy, you feel the disappointment...

(ICTU representative)

There’s also a kind of culture of negotiations that suits the unions. They’re that kind of hard-nosed negotiations that suits the unions even if they’re organised in a very particular way around ICTU, a certain number of priorities. So even though the employers have the strength and the power the unions are able to manage it very, very well.

(CV pillar member)

The Vice-Chair of Social Partnership describes it thus “*it always comes down to deal making you know... this is about the craft of negotiation, deal making you know? I can’t describe it. You either can do it or you can’t.*”

6.4.2 Communication without: Promoting public debate

The forms of communication employed by actors to promote public debate outside both processes emerge as a key area of difference between Malawian and Irish processes.

Two components of both the PRSP/MGDS process and Social Partnership are pertinent in this regard, namely media coverage and non-traditional means of communication.

Media coverage

A significant shift is apparent in the level of media coverage of both the PRSP/MGDS process and Social Partnership over time. In Malawi, the PRSP formulation process attracted quite a considerable degree of press coverage in 2001. This may be attributable in part to international interest in the process, but is also in no small degree due to extensive media work on the part of the participants, in particular MEJN.

Throughout the PRSP process, from its commencement, when MEJN successfully employed the internet as a tool to build global solidarity and support for its efforts to gain access, through its implementation (2001 to 2003), when the network on a regular, almost daily basis, issued press releases and statements within the national print, radio and television media, on developments in implementing the commitments agreed, the media was systematically employed as a tool to increase public awareness on both the existence and nature of the PRSP and its content. Following publication of the PRSP strategy, MEJN developed a simplified version which was translated into a number of local languages and distributed to local groups and associations throughout the country. The explicit aim of this publication was to increase local awareness of, and ownership over, the programme and its contents. MEJN reports that this publication has been used by both local MPs and media reporters in tracking progress on PRSP commitments.

Given the high level of publicity that accompanied the PRSP it is significant that the MGDS has attracted far less media coverage and public debate. Both the strategy and its contents remain virtually unknown outside of the small elite policy circle within which it has been developed. The majority of interviewees for this research, aware of the existence and, to varying degrees, the content of the PRSP, had not even heard of the MGDS. This appears to be no accident as the state, under the new President Bingu Mutharika, has introduced an element of confidentiality around the MGDS talks. This was noted by one participant when he found state actors reluctant to allow his organisation to circulate drafts of the strategy for discussion at a workshop.

...we asked them, when are we going to get to share a document with the private sector, we asked and asked, is there a draft, is there draft... we said you know we want to promote this event [consultation workshop] and tell people. They [state] said well, it's not, you can't really tell people about this yet, so you can't put an advert in the newspaper. And we didn't get the document to send to people until about two days before the event.

(MGDS participant)

MEJN also, although unwilling to state why this was the case, has carried out no media work in this area, although it continues to issue statements on some wider issues such as privatisation and the national budget. The launch of the MGDS was significantly delayed, finally occurring in early 2007 (the strategy was formulated from September 2005), and constituted a very subdued affair.

In Ireland, possibly due to unemployment being a pressing issue at the time, Social Partnership received a fairly significant degree of media coverage in the late 1990s. As recounted by Mike Allen (1998) in his book *The Bitter Word*, it appears it was the threat of his appearance on *Morning Ireland*, a national radio current affairs programme, to announce the INOU's rejection of the agreement in 1997, which prompted the state at

the eleventh hour into acquiescing to the INOU's demands on a particular sticking point. The community and voluntary pillar continued to employ the media in 2000 and 2003. During the 2003 negotiations the community and voluntary pillar contracted (from among one of the member organisations) a media specialist who worked with two spokespersons from the pillar during the period of the negotiations. In stark contrast stands the dearth of coverage of the community and voluntary pillar's contributions in the 2006 talks. Again the issue of confidentiality appears to surround more recent developments in Social Partnership. As the Chair of Social Partnership notes, "*I suppose we would also expect... a degree of observance of the no surprises principle*". This has clearly been communicated in subtle ways to community and voluntary pillar members.

...there's definitely a confidentiality anyway and I suppose you have to monitor that reasonably as well, there's probably a level of discretion. But there's also a spirit of the agreement or a spirit of Social Partnership which says well you know, the officials would say that wouldn't they, we'd rather you talk to us than go public, or they may not say it but you'll know it from body language, people not returning your calls, people being snotty, that there's certain issues which should remain within, not necessarily Social Partnership but a consultative, a departmental-driven consultative forum.

(CV pillar member)

The work of the NESF, the NESC and the various working committees remains virtually unknown publicly, while the negotiations themselves also appear shrouded in secrecy. The community and voluntary pillar in the 2006 negotiation did not adopt a media strategy, although members stressed that all were free to issue statements or carry out interviews as they saw fit. It is interesting that, when questioned about their lack of media work, a number of members of the recent community and voluntary pillar saw the use of media in terms of a lobbying tool, almost as a last resort, rather than as an

instrument to mobilise popular debate. Some noted that they needed to be very careful in employing it in that their interests could suffer as a result.

To be honest it has happened before where something leaked... the government might be willing to make a move on something... and it was leaked to the media and the officials. Suddenly the Minister reads the paper... so you have to be careful in the sense that you could actually damage your own interests. ... It is a very delicate balance and if you go out there and you start 'oh we've got agreement that we've got this, this and this', it could actually undermine the agreement. And it did in a previous agreement, there was a ... where somebody leaked, and the Minister put it off the table... we would use the media judiciously... you want to be very careful.

(CV pillar member)

And again another pillar member

I think that annoyance can be shown publicly. You can certainly do it, 'come here I want to talk to you'. It can also be done publicly but it has to be done in a way, you have to still understand that you're more in than out, that you're part of, and if you throw stones you, you know what I mean? You just have to be careful how you do it.

(CV pillar member)

And again another pillar member

...you need to be careful not to use it [the media] too often. One, you upset the other organisations in the negotiations if you don't manage it right. Two you upset the civil servants.... You need to be careful, what do you want to be your end result. So our members, I would have kept them updated on where we were and what we were doing. And in fairness to them they all kept sump on it, nobody brought out an issue publicly that we were maybe having difficulty or pushing.

(CV pillar member)

Yet commentators note that this lack of public debate on key issues has silenced dissent with one ex-CV pillar member noting that “*you don't get the crises because they're negotiated away*”. And so, while it is generally agreed among all participants that to get movement on something it must be perceived as a ‘crisis’, the lack of public debate on core issues mutes the elevation of any to the necessary level whereby it may be deemed a crisis.

In contrast to Malawi, where the PRSP was publicised as a strategy of the people, Social Partnership agreements are perceived to be the preserve of the elite. Even organisations and individuals interested in following the recent negotiations found it difficult to learn what was happening, with members of the community and voluntary pillar unwilling to share information.

We can't even find out from people around the table in partnership, at least officially, unofficially perhaps we can, what's being discussed, and members of their own boards and committees can't find out what's being discussed.

(ex-CV pillar member interviewed during 2006 negotiations)

As we will see in the coming Chapters, this difference between both processes – the underlying norm of confidentiality and NGO/community and voluntary pillar participants acceptance (as has occurred in Social Partnership) or rejection (as occurred in the PRSP) of this – has proven a key variable in shaping the evolving agency of NGO/community and voluntary pillar participants within both processes. While MEJN's agency, in publicising both the process and its own involvement within it, has focused a spotlight on its agency as a potential enabler of transformative participation, the community and voluntary pillar's agency in muting public debate has dimmed this spotlight, shielding their actions as potential agents or inhibitors of transformative participation from public scrutiny and commentary.

Other forms of communication

MEJN, in Malawi, has accompanied its work on the formulation and monitoring of the PRSP with community education, in particular in the area of economic literacy and budget tracking. While these developments have brought with them their own problems (see Chapter Eight), they represent a conscious attempt to draw a wider group of people

into the policy arena. Although, as seen previously, more critical voices were excluded from the PRSP process, MEJN has not been afraid to step forward and critique the government on specific issues, although some commentators note that its role in this regard has softened somewhat in more recent times.

In Ireland, although again it is beyond the scope of this research to examine the other aspects of community and voluntary pillar members' work, the observation that involvement in Social Partnership draws heavily on organisations' limited resources, thereby potentially limiting their activism in other areas, most notably *vis à vis* their membership or the wider public, is discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Chapter Nine). It has already been noted that particular forms of communication are privileged within Social Partnership. These are lessons which some community and voluntary pillar members learned the hard way as they attempted to build awareness of, and support for, particular issues employing less traditional methods. An illustration of this can be seen in the reaction to a walk-out by a section of the community and voluntary Pillar in 2003. Attempting to raise awareness on emerging issues around policies towards minorities (immigrants and Travellers specifically), a section of the community and voluntary Pillar read out a statement and walked out of a formal plenary session in Dublin Castle. One of the group recounts the reaction.

The trade unions in particular were extremely annoyed that we had done this. And also so were the Department of an Taoiseach. Because, and I thought it was very interesting at the meeting, X [Secretary General in the Department of an Taoiseach and Chair of Social Partnership] said, X, 'you can't bring politics into this plenary'. But this is all about politics. So what the hell does that mean?... The other organisations in the [CV] pillar were extremely annoyed that we had done that to them even though they all knew and it wasn't like we were surprising them. The topic for that day was social inclusion and it was them [state] presenting what they were doing on social inclusion and at the same time they're doing all of this stuff on all of these equality issues.

(CV pillar member)

Thus, within Social Partnership arenas in Ireland, the more popular forms of communication advocated by Young (2000) and Cornwall (2004) as a necessary component of participatory processes are seen to be both inappropriate and unacceptable. This restricts and stifles the capacity for wider public debate and constrains wider participation. In Malawi, on the other hand, MEJN, in particular, has made a conscious effort to employ a range of popular communication methods to increase public awareness of the PRSP and its contents. Moreover, these initiatives have been welcomed by state actors, although this may possibly be more symptomatic of a sensitivity to donors' conditions of PRSP ownership together with the current international vogue for 'democratisation' and free expression, than an indication of any real state interest in developing public arenas for debate in the Habermasian sense. It will be interesting to see whether any efforts are made, either by the state or NGO groups, to communicate the content and messages of the MGDS strategy, the development of which is widely held to have constituted a much more closed process.

6.4.3 Consensus decision making: True or false ?

Both processes in Malawi and Ireland seek to arrive at agreement through consensus. Participants are expected to work together as partners to reach agreement on issues and arrive at consensus strategies. How exactly this takes place is difficult to discern. A relevant factor in this, and one significant difference between the processes in Malawi and Ireland, is who is involved in drafting the final strategy. In Malawi, for both the PRSP and the MGDS, there appear to have been two stages in this – firstly, a drafting team, comprising representatives from the State, NGOs and donor consultants and secondly, a representative from the relevant ministry (MEPD) pulling together the final document. Interspersed between were a range of consultations, both formal and

informal, with diverse groupings and actors. Both the PRSP and MGDS have been criticised as comprising an amalgam of issues from all sectors, what has been described as a ‘wish list’, although the MGDS does include a prioritisation of activities and sectors. Asked how consensus is reached among participants on the final areas, one of the drafting team members finds it difficult to respond and ends up describing a fudge which apparently appeased all.

...yeah it's quite a big challenge... Because for example I know that this year [drafting of MGDS], when it came to [the] development budget, the emphasis was really on the infrastructure. There were a lot of queries that we were neglecting the social sector which was not the case. What we said [was] yes, 'let's put the infrastructure – the same infrastructure that will support the social sector as well as the economic sectors'. I think there an agreement was made – not really a formal agreement but at least an understanding. So what we said is 'infrastructure is important for both – social as well as economic – so the fact that the government is putting emphasis on the infrastructure does not mean that we are neglecting the social sector'. So it is this understanding how these different sectors support each other that, eventually, people understand, 'oh, yes, of course' it's after some discussions, then in the end you reach a consensus.

(Member of MGDS drafting team)

Ultimate authority appears to rest with the relevant ministry however (MEPD), where the representative appointed wields some power together with his senior officers and other consultees, notably the donors. Any areas of apparent contention are passed upwards to senior officials and on outwards to relevant ministers and/or donors. Thus, the final version of the MGDS incorporates sections on human and children's rights – inserted by donors – which did not appear in the original drafts.

A key difference between the Irish and Malawian processes for participants is that, while consensus appears to be very important in the cases of both the Malawian PRSP and the MGDS agreements, none of the participants are obliged to endorse or publicly

agree with all of their content. MEJN, for example, continues to critique state moves towards wide-scale privatisation even though policies and strategies towards this are contained in the MGDS which it helped draft. In contrast, participants within the Social Partnership process are obliged to publicly endorse (or at least not publicly denounce) the agreement in order to continue their involvement in the process, as community and voluntary pillar members who publicly rejected *Sustaining Progress* in 2003 discovered when their social partnership status was revoked following this move.

The idea of consensus very strongly underpins Ireland's Social Partnership process. Not only are the final agreements presented as consensus strategies but a "*Common Vision for Irish Society*" is laid out in the recent strategy report underpinning the agreement. This first appeared in 1999 and is endorsed by the Social Partners even though the Director of NESC has his doubts as to the viability of this level of consensus.

I sort of waver on how I feel about that [vision] because...yeah.... It's more useful now than I thought it would be, having that vision but...I actually don't think it's possible...I think the sort of normative pluralism is too great, or conflict or whatever the hell you call it. So, I don't think you can do that. And anyway even within one group's normative vision I'm not sure that deductively you can work an awful lot, you know that the links all hold up. (NESC Director)

MEJN therefore, retains the space to act as a critical participant and commentator on its process. As we have seen, the network has achieved this through extensive media work, raising public debate on the issues, the process, and their engagement within it. As such, while its involvement certainly legitimises the process as it helps fuel the 'spin' of participation critical to donor support (see the following Chapter (Seven) for more on this), it does not legitimate its policy content, and leaves the space open for wider critical comment on development policies and prescriptions issuing from the resultant

strategies. Members of the community and voluntary pillar, in contrast, trade this critical space for their ‘social partner’ status. Their ‘partner’ status relies on their public endorsement of the resultant strategy – the term ‘signing up to the agreement’ is frequently used. Thus, they have a powerful legitimising role in relation to both the process and its content. However, as a result, their role in stimulating critical public debate is significantly eroded.

The question remains as to how decisions are made and whether they (or can they) represent a general consensus. In contrast to the situation in Malawi, decision-making and drafting of the final agreements in Ireland are carried out exclusively at state level, within the NESC and Social Partnership secretariats respectively.

Community and voluntary pillar members appear in no doubt that they remain firmly out of the decision-making loop, with participants divided between those feeling decisions rest with senior state officials, and those feeling that participants from other pillars independently wield significant influence. One ex-member, speaking of NESC, characterises the decision-making process as one of ‘horse-trading’, taking place largely within informal, hidden arenas.

I think it works, just, the vast majority of it works through good old horse-trading. And, when I was on it [NESC], X [trade union representative] was on, and I can't remember the then head of IBEC, and you knew stuff was going down, you knew a deal had been done. There'd be a sort of a discussion, and you'd go around the table and things would be said, and it would be interesting and there'd be an intellectual and rational content to it and points would be made which would have validity in them and would influence stuff. But when it came to certain crisis issues, wherever they met, X and your man would have done the deal and that's what would appear in the text the next time and no matter what you could say...

(ex-CV pillar member)

Others are similarly under no illusions as to their distance from the decision-making processes

Don't make any mistake, we all bid in our stuff but the scribes are in [the Department of an] Taoiseach's, or in whatever Department, or with influence from other places, so what comes back to you as a draft is their hand with never enough of what you've put in...

(CV pillar member)

...obviously decisions had been made prior to it coming into that room. Simply, they were collecting, they were collecting. There was consultation but no participation. Put it like that. From our point of view.

(CV pillar member)

It certainly doesn't feel like you're part of any decision-making process really. You're just part of this thing, machine that's going along, you know?

(CV pillar member)

I recall pieces of the agreement, penultimate drafts that included certain observations, phrases, commitments, that we were very pleased with, that then didn't make it to the final cut. And the officials make a lot of those calls.

(CV pillar member)

In some instances, decisions were being made with other pillar members, but excluding the community and voluntary pillar. A case in point relates to the contentious decision to focus negotiations in 2003 on setting up working committees in ten sectoral areas (designated Special Initiatives) rather than agree concrete policy and financial commitments. This, as outlined by a community and voluntary pillar member, was agreed with the other pillars (confirmed in an interview with an ICTU representative) in the absence of the community and voluntary pillar.

...this idea of Special Initiatives in Sustaining Progress... at the plenary session it was thrown out there. I can't remember whether it came from the unions or the employers but it was thrown into the discussion. We had never heard about this before. But it was obvious from, it was choreographed between ICTU, the employers and the government. They knew what they were talking about ... And we even heard off the record from civil servants that they were shocked at what was going on in other rooms compared to what, how we were excluded... that

decisions were bring made in rooms in which we weren't involved...
(CV pillar member)

Clearly then, the consensus achieved in Social Partnership occurs, as argued by Mouffe (1996), through the exclusion of some participants. This view is backed up by the Vice-Chair of the process who is keen to point out that consensus does not mean, as it appears in the Malawian case, reducing inputs to a common denominator. Rather, a selective formula is in place whereby, as we have seen, the contributions of certain actors are, through informal and invisible avenues, simply ignored and/or dropped.

But it isn't just consensus... it is consensus based but that doesn't mean it's dumbed down. It's quite interesting. Sometimes people equate consensus with lowest common denominator. I just need to make the point that it's not.
(Vice-Chair Social Partnership)

Finally, and a point to which we will return, there is an open question as to how significant the contents of the agreement are in the first place. As discussed in the following Chapter, significant proportions of both Malawian and Irish agreements are not implemented anyway. Thus, for some community and voluntary members (and PRSP participants also) the benefits of participation in the process lie not in the content of the agreement, but in the relationships developed with other participants and the state (a point discussed in more detail elsewhere – Chapter Eight). This again underscores the significance of the informal dimension of both processes, and is discussed in more detail in Chapters Seven and Eight.

6.4.4 Transforming communications: Key similarities and differences between both processes and their implications for transformative participation

A number of similarities and a number of differences are therefore apparent in relation to communication norms promoted and adopted within and between both processes.

First, in relation to communications within both processes, one similarity and one difference emerge. Argumentation, backed up by solid research, constitutes the main communication mechanism within both. This requires not only high levels of what Young (2003) terms 'articulativeness', but also considerable resources to carry out the required research and gather the required evidence. Clearly these requirements serve to marginalise less well-resourced, research-based, and 'articulate' groups, and limit the space for transformative participation. However, the structures through which this communication takes place differ between both processes. In the Irish case, formal cross-communication and deliberation between participants is highly restricted, both by restricting the numbers of participants in different fora, and through the 'separate rooms' mechanisms of the negotiations whereby pillar members largely negotiate bilaterally with state actors. Malawi's TWG structure, while perhaps bureaucratically more demanding, promotes exchange and debate among sectorally grouped actors across all 'pillars', state and non-state. Although never characterised as such, such a space arguably offers more potential for deliberation and mutual learning than the structures of Social Partnership, with the resultant possibility of a transformation of preferences among diverse actors, moving toward some form of shared understanding. This possibility is by no means guaranteed however. While it may facilitate an opening for dialogue and understanding, leading to deliberation on multiple conceptions of development, it may also constitute a 'disciplining' mechanism whereby the space for such multiple conceptions is closed. As we have seen in Section 6.4.2, as time has evolved, the latter scenario appears to have increasingly become the case within the Malawian process.

Second, in relation to decision-making, both processes differ significantly. While the Malawian process is promoted as being consensus driven, and while the drafting team of the final strategies affords two places to MEJN actors, MEJN is nonetheless not obliged to publicly endorse the ensuing strategy. This leaves the network the space to publicly critique the strategy's content, thereby opening the space for more transformative debates, despite the strategy's policy content. With its implicit requirement for participant endorsement of ensuing strategies, Ireland's Social Partnership is an explicitly consensus driven process. This is reflected in the language employed (participants are 'partners' of the state, and the resultant strategies are termed 'agreements'). Community and voluntary pillar members are therefore extremely important in legitimising the process and helping maintain the international and domestic 'spin' of participation and consensus. This, in contrast to MEJN, erodes their critical potential and closes the public space for more transformatory discourses.

Third, and allied to the above difference, is the key difference in relation to communication norms surrounding both processes. MEJN, through extensive media work, has focused a public spotlight on the process, its content, and MEJN's own engagement within it, thereby stimulating public debate and opening the space for transformative participation. Members of the community and voluntary pillar, in contrast, adopting the confidentiality norms of Social Partnership, have, over time, curtailed their press work to the point where there is virtually no public information or debate on either the process itself, its development content, or the community and voluntary pillar's engagement within it. Consequently, the space for transformative participation through public debate and engagement has all but closed. As we will see in Chapter Eight, this key difference in actor agency in relation to communications

surrounding both processes emerges as a key variable influencing the evolution in NGO/community and voluntary actor agency within both processes over time.

6.5 Conclusion: Enablers and constraints to transformative participation

The above discussion has highlighted some constraining and enabling features of both Malawi's PRSP/MGDS and Ireland's Social Partnership processes as they have evolved over time. The underpinning of both processes by a complex mix of formal institutional structures and informal arenas, affording differential access to participants and differential opportunities for exchange, highlights the invisibility of power circulating within both processes. The constraints and enablers to participation within both processes emerge as manifestations of this power as it circulates, through both space and time, between, and among, different actors.

Although, as a result of this circulation, it proves difficult to decisively pinpoint enabling and constraining features of both processes at particular points in time, a number of features may be tentatively identified. In relation to the institutional arrangements for both processes, two key constraints are the differential access afforded to participants and the lack of clarity on the rules and procedures within both processes. These constraints appear to have been transformed into enablers however, by certain actors, at certain points in time. In particular, MEJN, during the PRSP formulation process, drew on its wider (national and international) networks to exploit the lack of clarity around the concept of participation, as well as the process's rules and procedures, to gain greater access for some of its members and significantly more time to consult with its wider membership. Some community and voluntary pillar members also exploited, at certain times, the lack of clarity around rules and procedures and the

informal nature of much of the process, to engage directly, on a bilateral basis, with key state officials. Within both processes, over time, it appears that these enablers may have once more been transformed into constraints, however, with the apparent increasing control of respective states over exclusive rules and procedures governing both processes, and the apparent acceptance of this by remaining participants. The reasons for this are explored in the following Chapters.

With regard to the discourses employed in both processes, I have shown that a technocratic, problem-solving discourse has dominated both processes, thereby constraining the participation of a wider range of actors. Moreover, I have argued that this discourse, or in Foucault's conception 'dominant knowledge', either consciously or subconsciously, has come to be reinforced by remaining NGO/community and voluntary actors, thereby increasing constraints to wider participation.

In relation to communication forms, both processes have been seen to privilege argumentation backed up by 'evidence-based' research. This, I have argued, requires a level of 'articulateness' and resources which constrains wider participation. A recent constraint to the Irish process has been, in adherence to the state's norms of 'confidentiality', the reluctance of community and voluntary pillar actors to stimulate wider public debate on the issues, through media work or other forms of communication, while the opposite action by MEJN, albeit more so during its earlier years of engagement, has acted as an enabler. Finally, participants' lack of clarity around how discourses are mediated and consensus attained, hints strongly of 'false consensus', another significant participatory constraint. The exclusivity of report writing (agreement and monitoring reports) arrangements in the Irish case, compiled by

a secretariat of state actors alone, is strongly suggestive of a false consensus, while the more inclusive drafting and monitoring teams for PRSP/MGDS reports potentially opens up possibilities for wider consensus, although this remains dependent on the discourses and knowledges included.

While the invisibility and porosity of power within both processes renders these conclusions regarding enabling and constraining features of both processes more tentative than conclusive, a factor emerging strongly from the above analysis is the agency of actors (state and NGO/community and voluntary) in determining these. The above findings suggest that states, in both processes, and to varying degrees at different times, act to constrain participation through both the (unwritten) rules and procedures employed, and the discourses and forms of communication privileged. Perhaps more surprisingly, the findings also suggest that the remaining NGO/community and voluntary actors in both processes, again to somewhat varying degrees, act to reinforce some of these constraints, in particular the exclusionary discourse and communication forms. Both findings appear a little perplexing. Why do state actors in both instances, ostensibly orchestrators of the respective processes, paradoxically invite NGO/community and voluntary participation, yet seemingly act to constrain it? And why do NGO/community and voluntary actors, purportedly enhancing participation and bringing a range of perspectives to the respective processes, paradoxically act to reinforce some of these constraints, thereby further constraining participation? Clearly there are wider factors at play in determining the agency and actions of participant groups. It is to these questions that the following Chapters turn.

Chapter 7

Spinning and contracting participation: The State and participation in the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership processes

7.1 Introduction

A key factor contributing to the different enabling and constraining factors to participation in both processes revealed in the previous Chapter is that of agency, both of the state and of civil society participants engaged within both processes. As we saw in Chapter One, the issue of agency within participatory processes, and factors impinging upon this, is one which has received scant attention in the literature to date, and there have been calls for empirical work in this area. The similarities and differences between both Malawian and Irish processes in this regard raise questions as to the similarities and differences in state and civil society agency, and the reasons for these. Both this and the following Chapter focus on this issue, examining, over time, the motivations, actions and experiences of both Malawian and Irish states (this Chapter), and specific elements of civil society (following Chapter) within both the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership.

I begin the Chapter with an examination of which state actors are involved in both processes. Although both Malawian and Irish contemporary states comprise a dispersed range of actors and interests, I show that a somewhat restricted subsection of these drawn from the civil service are directly engaged in both processes. I also show that both processes are superimposed upon, rather than linked to existing political institutions and practices (although efforts have been made to address this situation in Malawi). Following some content analysis of recent strategies within both processes,

however, in Section 7.3 I argue that the interests of a wider grouping of actors is represented in both processes wherein, as respective states network outwards to seek international legitimacy, the ‘spin’ of participation proves critical in securing this legitimacy.

Turning to state agency in networking inwards, in Section 7.4 I go on to argue that Malawian and Irish state actors seek to build national legitimacy by ‘contracting’ partners through the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership as they seek to insert their national economies into global and/or regional economies. I argue that, in this context, and to varying degrees in each place, state agency is focused in three main areas – capitalising on partners’ knowledge; employing a multiplier effect through partners’ own networks building public support for the state and its globalisation project; and harnessing active civic engagement in managing the social costs accruing from this project. The relations fostered with key partners are central in this. While this relationship is conducted on a business footing in Ireland, the Malawian state, in echoes of former dictator Banda’s legacy, employs concepts of unity, solidarity and familial responsibility in its consolidation.

7.2 Layering governance: State actors involved in the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership

This Section sets out the principal state actors involved in both the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership. It is seen that state officials involved in the Malawian PRSP comprised primarily some key civil servants, in particular from one key ministry together with, in what is termed the ‘network state’ as theorised in Chapter Two, donor agencies and institutions. The Section goes on to outline how the MGDS process was designed to include civil servants from other key ministries in an effort to broaden ownership and hence adherence to the resultant strategy. Within the Irish Social Partnership process it is seen that key state actors again principally comprised civil servants from different ministries / departments. What emerges therefore in both processes is an absence of political representatives in the form of MPs / TDs and local councillors together with an absence (in a visible form at least) of Ministers of different ministries / departments. There is agreement among civil society actors within both processes that policy implementation within both processes has been very poor⁶⁰. One explanatory factor for this may be the absence of elected representatives within both processes. And so, the short-term political imperatives of these elected representatives within the largely clientelist political system examined in Chapter Three tends to override the long-term strategies contained within the two processes, leaving state officials mediating between the short-term exigencies of elected political leaders and the more long-term strategies agreed within wider sets of actors in the two processes.

⁶⁰ See various progress reports emanating from the PRSP process. These, written by a monitoring committee including civil society representatives, highlight both policy achievements and shortfalls within the PRSP strategy. Social Partnership progress reports, in contrast, written by state actors alone, highlight only areas of implementation, with these including accounts of policies implemented under a range of other, non-Social Partnership initiatives. In general however, the poor policy implementation record of Social Partnership has been noted by NESC (2005a).

Annex 6c of the Malawian PRSP sets out the actors involved in the process (Government of Malawi, 2002: 68-76). While the extensive list includes officials from a range of different ministries, interviews reveal that in practice very few of these turned up to relevant meetings or were involved in the formulation of the final strategy. One interviewee explained that although twelve people were assigned to his particular working group, in practice, just five would turn up, the majority of absentees being state officials.

Especially the government people wouldn't turn up. I think they were tied up with their other own engagements, but also I think frustrations begin to creep in within the government because a number of government officials thought that the PRSP was one of those projects that would inject new money into the government system. So when they realised that 'ah this thing is not a proposal at all, it's not going to bring in new salaries', a lot of them began to get frustrated.

(PRSP participant)

This demonstrates poor linkages within the system, as well as across it to other institutional arrangements (for example the decentralised policy formulation process as set out under the country's decentralisation programme). Although, following the launch of the programme, donors were keen to point out that they had remained peripherally involved, as demonstrated in the previous Chapter, their involvement, though less formalised, was nonetheless significant. This is a fact now acknowledged by many donors.

Here in Malawi at the moment there is this great tendency for all to want to run in and help the government with their PRSP. Where does helping become directing? It's a balance that I think we struggle with, other agencies struggle with, and other donors struggle with...

(World Bank representative)

Following the poor implementation of the PRSP, this tendency among donors appears to have been checked somewhat with donors asserting that they have stepped back somewhat from dictating how they wish to see the process directed.

We heavily invested in the PRS process, and the MGDS is the PRS, the difference is in the wording. But it also I think means we have learned our lessons in terms of what we could do better following from the previous PRS... What you could easily distinguish between the last PRS and this new one, I would argue, has been the form of government ownership or leadership in the process. Which, in a way, there's a bit of a tension there because what you've seen in this new MGDS is a very clear steer from the government on what it wants, and it selecting what it perceives as the important stakeholders to be consulted. Which in the previous PRS was, I would argue, quite a lot of donor domination of the process and therefore a broader choice of who donors, I think, perceived as civil society, and therefore the civil society to be consulted.

(DfID representative)

Additionally, again following the poor implementation of the PRSP, efforts were made within the MGDS process to involve civil servants from all ministries, by basing the strategy on their sectoral strategies. All line ministries submitted their sectoral strategies and the first draft comprised an amalgam of these. The MGDS therefore represents an attempt to involve a greater cross-section of state officials. Donors, realising the link between ownership and implementation, appeared to step back from the process somewhat.

Within Ireland, an examination of the various Social Partnership institutions reveals that key state actors again comprise civil servants. Although, unlike the PRSP and the MGDS, annexes to the different Social Partnership agreements do not detail the different departments and civil servants involved, interviews reveal that key civil servants from all relevant departments were involved in both formal Social Partnership fora (in particular within the final negotiations) as well as in informal meetings with social partners. Both Malawian and Irish processes have been led by civil servants.

Missing from this picture are elected representatives in the form of MPs / TDs, Ministers and heads of state. However, interview respondents report that individual

Ministers, although absent from formal arenas, have wielded significant influence behind the scenes, while both the current Malawian and Irish heads of state have also, in different ways, exercised a considerable degree of influence. The former, in instigating the MEGS and vigorously promoting its insertion into the MGDS, has proven highly influential, while the latter, in his consensus-driven approach to political life, although not directly influencing the outcomes of the respective agreements has, nonetheless, proven key in maintaining the continuity of the Social Partnership process. Nonetheless elected representatives in the form of MPs / TDs are still missing as both processes are superimposed upon rather than integrated into existing governance processes. And so, state actors involved in both processes appear to be acting independently of elected representatives – although it should be noted that some attempt was made to redress this within the MGDS process where the draft strategy was presented to parliament for debate and comment. However, it did not require formal parliamentary approval.

The absence of elected representatives from both processes has significant implications in two respects. First, it may help explain the poor implementation records of both the PRSP and different Social Partnership strategies. The long-term thrust of these new governance processes are at odds with the short-term political culture of clientelism / brokerage in both countries – as discussed in Chapter Three. While state actors, secure in their jobs within the administrative apparatus of the state can afford the luxury of long-term planning, elected representatives operate on a more short-term basis which, as has been examined in Chapter Three, relies on demonstrable results attributable to individual representatives and tends to follow a calendar dictated by elections and key political moments rather than appropriate policy timescales.

Second, given this absence of elected leaders within both processes, state officials need to secure wider public support and legitimacy for their policy programmes and plans. The data presented in this Chapter suggest that this is achieved through fostering and harnessing relationships with key civic actors which in turn, it is hoped, will draw their own constituencies into the shared state project, thereby providing both political and material support for this project. Before moving on to explore this argument in more detail however, it is first necessary to unpack a little further the nature and agency of state participation in both processes. In this respect both Castell's conception of a 'network state' and, as a component of this, Held's 'invisible government' (as discussed in Chapter Two) prove significant. This is examined in the following Section.

7.3 Spinning participation: Globalised states and 'invisible' governments

Following the conception of the 'network state', as developed by Castells (2003), national state agency has moved from a traditional redistributive function to one in which it mediates with a range of actors both nationally and globally in an effort to attract international investment as a means toward stimulating national development. The broad implication of this, as I have argued in Chapter Two, is that nation states have become embedded in global relations which exercise significant influence on their developmental direction and strategy. A narrower implication, of direct relevance to this study, is that global agencies, institutions, agendas, and cultures exert a significant influence on national governance processes. Thus, although 'invisible' in the sense that they do not appear in the annexes of national strategies or within the formal institutions involved therein, these invisible actors nonetheless exert significant influence. In this

Section I examine this dimension and I argue that the invisible agency of international institutions and players exerts an influence on both the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership in two principal ways. First, I argue that, within contemporary global discourses of ‘good governance’, wherein broad-based consultation and participation leading to social cohesion and consensus are mooted as key components within contemporary governance, the demonstrable portrayal of such elements has become a key element of state agency. Second, I argue that the “*transnational business culture of shared norms and values*” theorised by Hoogvelt (2001), and discussed in Chapter Two, has come to permeate both processes, thereby necessarily limiting the range of discourses permissible therein as discussed in the previous Chapter. As will be seen, both of these factors emerge to differing degrees and in different forms within both processes.

7.3.1 Cases of ‘spin’ for international investors?

It is widely felt that Malawi’s PRSP process, imposed by the IMF and World Bank as a condition for accessing HIPC debt relief, was generally perceived as one more hoop required to secure the confidence and attendant investment of international donors. As one commentator notes, different actors perceived this in different ways, but nonetheless the overall understanding was coherent.

for the MPRS the government understood it as a tool for accessing HIPC, for parliament they understood it as a budget framework, the donors understood it as a development framework, lots of people generally, they simply understood it as just another conditionality...

(Commentator from the University of Malawi)

Other commentators articulate a similar view.

...maybe the previous government [that oversaw the PRSP process] was very much seen to be engaging with civil society a lot more because maybe that’s what was expected from the donors.

(World Bank representative)

I think it's [consultation] pretty much an obligation to be honest. That's what donors expect them to do. That's what the World Bank says the PRSP should look like, or the process... and they pretty well know that donors will be asking for this or will be checking whether this has been done. It's pretty much a checklist – this is what we have to do, have we done it, great, let's go on to the next one, or something like that.

(GTZ advisor within the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development)

This latter analysis is borne out by the fact that Malawi's largest bilateral donor, DfID, requested a detailed report from the Ministry responsible for the coordination of the MGDS (Ministry of Economic Planning and Development – MEPD) on the consultation process involved in the formulation of the strategy. DfID provided much of the financial support for this consultation process.

State officials responsible for coordinating both the PRSP and MGDS processes also emphasise the importance of this portrayal. The official coordinating the PRSP bases his evaluation of the process on the international reception for the resultant strategy, while the official coordinating the more recent MGDS notes that other national actors such as parliamentarians base their judgement also on international evaluations of the process.

I think we did it right, which means that we had the right skills, because I remember that when we came up with the MPRS, we had the interim, then the final one, so far it was recommended to have been a good output.

(PRSP Coordinator – my emphasis)

Every donor, every cooperating partner and so on is emphasising on national consensus, participatory roles and so on. If you just do it on your own, very few own it. And the experience has shown that you need to involve people. Otherwise when you take these things to parliament and so on it has failed...

(MGDS Coordinator)

Ireland's Social Partnership continues to be hailed as one of the key elements of the country's economic turnaround (see Chapter One), and the industrial stability it boasts achieving offers an inducement to both EU members and international investors alike. Its role in this regard is repeatedly highlighted in speeches by the Taoiseach, as exemplified by his address to the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2007⁶¹.

Many factors have contributed to the extraordinary turnaround in the Irish economy... perhaps most significant of all has been our strong, perhaps unique system of social partnership. Since 1987, innovative three-year agreements between Government, unions and employers, have delivered wage moderation underpinned by tax policy, coupled with commitment to industrial stability.

An ex-state official interviewed suggests that Social Partnership provides an opportunity to portray an open, cohesive system of governance to international onlookers, one which proves useful to maintain in order to attract ongoing investment and support.

The government's answer to all these questionnaires [from the EU] 'what are you doing about good governance?'. 'We have a very broad all-encompassing social partnership which includes NGOs as well as other social partners.' So they're using this as their way of handling the whole idea of creating more open government.

(ex-state official)

In Mike Allen's time [1996] they had to involve unemployment... they couldn't be seen to do a deal without involving, particularly the unemployment organisations. A couple of years later that was less important but then no government wants to be seen to throw out people involved in partnership. That would have been really bad publicity or a complete walkout by everyone would have been bad publicity so it sort of staggers along... It's good PR cover certainly.

(ex-state official)

⁶¹ Address by An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern T.D. At the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, Davos, Thursday 25 January 2007", <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?docID=3169>, accessed February 12th, 2007

It therefore appears that the ‘spin’, or publicity element of both processes vis à vis international investors and/or donors is as important, if not more important than the actuality of the processes themselves. This goes some way toward explaining why states bother to organise ‘participative’ governance arrangements while, paradoxically, as identified in the previous Chapter, acting to constrain participation. While it may be argued that participation as a condition of donor support in Malawi differs significantly from participation as an inducement to FDI in Ireland, its spin nonetheless serves a similar purpose. The difference lies in the forms of power international capital wields over national states in this context – in Malawi’s case this is more visible, while in Ireland, it is invisible but nonetheless present and effective.

The spin of ‘good governance’ appears not to be the sole factor in securing investor confidence however. A second element reflecting the influence of invisible international actors appears in the culture and discourse of transnational capitalism which permeates both processes, albeit more recently in Malawi through the MEGS and onto the MGDS.

7.3.2 Transnational cultures within national processes

A brief content analysis of recent strategies in both contexts suggests that international norms and discourses permeate both processes. In Malawi, the influence of the international donor community is apparent within the PRSP’s emphasis on what has been termed a ‘self-help’ variant of participation (Berner and Phillips, 2005). The overall aim of the PRSP strategy is ‘empowering’ the poor to help themselves.

The overall goal of the MPRS is to achieve ‘sustainable poverty reduction through socio-economic and political empowerment of the poor’. It moves away from

seeing the poor as hapless victims of poverty in need of hand-outs and as passive recipients of trickle-down growth. Instead, the poor are seen as masters of their own destinies. Government's and development partner's role is to create the conditions whereby the poor can reduce their own poverty.

(Government of Malawi, 2002: 1)

This discourse is interesting in that it mirrors the self-help approach informing the Irish state's move towards so-called 'active citizenship', a shift which appears to have moved full circle back to the self-help conceptions of civil society espoused at the founding of the Irish state.

Within Malawi a significant shift in this approach is apparent by 2006 wherein the MGDS, deriving from the MEGS, and seemingly driven more by the President, highlights the importance of inserting Malawi into the international economy through export-led growth. The concept of trickle-down growth appears once more in vogue leading to improved conditions for "*most Malawians*".

The main driving force of the MGDS is to implement strategies that will stimulate economic growth and bring about prosperity and improve welfare of most Malawians. It is expected that once the Strategy is implemented, it will transform the country from a predominantly importing and consuming country to being a predominantly producing and exporting country.

(Government of Malawi, 2006: Vol 1, pp 3-4)

And so, the discourse underlying the Malawian process appears to have moved from one reflecting a donor 'problem-solving' self-help discourse, to one appropriating the language and framework of international capital. This represents, in Castells' terms, an effort to network outward, and incorporate Malawi into the global economy. It may well be, with Malawi's history of longterm donor involvement, that a tacit agreement has been reached for state forces, in the form of the President and his government, to assure Malawi's incorporation into the global economy, while donors continue their

inward networking with citizens to manage the inequalities arising from this, as theorised by both Hoogvelt (2001) and Kaldor (2003).

Within Ireland, the importance of networking outward also forefronts recent strategies, with specific emphasis on competitiveness within a sometimes adversarial international climate. The 2003 strategy *Sustaining Progress* envisages the following:

The shared overall goal of the new Agreement covering the period 2003-2005 is to continue progress towards the realisation of the NESC vision for Irish society in a period of considerable uncertainty, and to do this by sustaining economic growth and maintaining high levels of employment and securing living standards for all, while strengthening the economy's competitiveness and thereby its capacity to resume trend growth in more favourable international conditions.

(Government of Ireland, 2003: 6)

The overall aim of the more recent strategy, *Towards 2016*, appears all encompassing, non-specific, and perhaps even somewhat contradictory – possibly the outcome of deliberative process seeking to incorporate the aspirations of all. Incorporating both social and economic elements and, introducing a novel concept of environmental competitiveness (which receives no further elaboration), the aim of the strategy reads as follows...

...the overall aim of the Agreement is to attain the NESC vision of a dynamic, internationalised and participatory Irish society and economy, founded on a commitment to social justice, and economic development that is both environmentally and internationally competitive.

(Government of Ireland, 2006: 6)

Examining the strategy more closely, the priorities and underlying ethos become more apparent. The strategy consists of two parts, firstly, a section entitled “*Macro-economy, infrastructure, environment and social policy*” and, secondly, the section incorporating

the pay talks. This is entitled “*Pay, the workplace and employment rights and compliance*”. The first section is further subdivided into two main sections, namely

- *Enhancing Ireland’s competitive advantage in a changing world economy and building sustainable social and economic development*
- *The lifecycle framework (children, people of working age, older people, people with disabilities)*

The first section focuses on Ireland’s place within the world economy, explicitly acknowledging the significance of this global influence. The lifecycle framework, introduced in the second section, represents a new approach. This involves an assessment of ‘risks’ to individuals within society arising from social and economic policy, and the supports thus available (2006: 40). This may be either politically motivated – i.e. aiming to secure legitimacy in a context where state legitimacy is under threat due to the social fallout of economic globalisation, or economically motivated – i.e. stemming from the view that economic development relies on a degree of social protection and service provision. Either way, it prioritises an economically driven conception of development, leaving little room for alternative conceptions, and representing an instrumental form of participation as theorised by White (1996) and discussed in Chapter One.

The importance of networking outward and enhancing legitimacy within global networks is clear. It appears that international institutions, agencies, and cultures wield significant influences on both processes, both in respect of the processes themselves with their claims to consultation, and with regard to the discourses and frameworks which embody them. In Malawi, this latter aspect appears to have shifted from one, within the PRSP, embodying a donor discourse of self-help (characterised in this instance as ‘empowerment’) in the face of socio-economic challenges to one, articulated

in the MGDS, appropriating a global capitalist discourse of economic growth and prosperity, a discourse which appears to have underpinned Social Partnership from the outset. As noted above, this represents a new effort by specific Malawian state forces (in particular, the President and Finance Minister) to network outward, with the possible expectation that the management of the (ongoing) exclusion will continue to be led by donors. As will be seen however, both discourses do not stand in opposition to one another, but may be perceived as elements of the same overall discourse wherein fostering international relations, thereby attaining successful insertion into the global (or in Malawi's case regional) economy is accompanied by the fostering of self-help initiatives among citizens targeted at reducing the social costs of such global insertion. Clearly this latter strategy necessitates broad-based public / civic support. It is to this issue that the following Section turns.

7.4 Contracting participation: Securing domestic legitimacy

So far I have argued that, as states seek legitimacy within global political networks, both the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership are embedded within wider cultures and discourses of global capitalism (although the Malawian state is negotiating this with donors, many of whom (in particular, the World Bank, as outlined in successive *World Development Reports* in recent years) appear in favour of this approach, adopting a discourse of “*pro-poor growth*” to make it more palatable to different groups). In Chapter Two, two consequences of this globalisation of the national polity were discussed. First, global integration is accompanied by growing social inequality, as nation states’ capacity to secure the welfare of their populace is undermined, and second, following inevitably from this, nation states find themselves faced with domestic challenges in their legitimacy to govern. Following this theorisation, it appears that states need to build their national legitimacy in new and novel ways.

This Section, drawing mainly from interviews with state actors, together with relevant documentation, presents evidence to suggest that both the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership serve to secure domestic legitimacy for the respective states and their globalisation projects in three principal ways – first, by increasing broad-based public support for the state and its project; second, by fostering a policy consensus among key civic actors; and third, by actively enlisting civic support and engagement in managing the social fallout of global insertion. This latter aspect involves two components – (a) harnessing expertise in policy formulation to devise management strategies, and (b) harnessing material capacity / citizen engagement in assuring their implementation. The Malawian and Irish states differ in their focus within these areas. The Malawian state appears to focus more on the first area – that of using the process and its engagement

with civil society actors therein to increase its more broad-based public support – together with the third area wherein both policy expertise and citizen engagement are harnessed. Policy consensus appears lower on list of priorities (this may explain why decision making is not so controlled, with a range of state and non-state actors involved in drafting the strategies – as outlined in the previous Chapter) – perhaps reflecting a combination of both the perceived concentration of state power (see Chapter Three), and the fact that policy is generally perceived to lie within the domain of donors therefore public consensus is not so critical. On the other hand, the Irish state appears less concerned with securing broad-based political support through the community and voluntary sector (perhaps reflecting the dominance of civil servants within the Social Partnership process, relatively unconcerned with voting patterns), and appears more interested in securing both consensus and active engagement in managing the social costs accruing from global insertion. Each of these strategies, together with the means by which they are achieved – the development and consolidation of business relationships in Ireland, while drawing more traditionally on familial relationships and responsibilities in Malawi – is explored in more detail below.

7.4.1 Legitimacy enhanced: Building public support for the state

Although the PRSP/MGDS process commenced as a donor-driven process with, as has been seen, the ‘spin’ of consultation and participation appearing perhaps more important than its actuality, it appears that the Malawian state recognises the political capital to be gained in being seen to collaborate with certain civil society groups and bringing them onside in its plans and programmes. In relation to civil society participation in the MGDS, this point was noted by a Malawian World Bank official.

Sometimes governments think that civil society are a pain but I have always said that if only a government can listen to one or two things that civil society says they are likely to gain a lot of political capital for themselves. Because I think when they commend the government it reverberates in as much as it does when they criticise the government. So they lose a lot if they don't listen, they gain a lot if they listen.

(World Bank representative)

The suggestion here is that by taking on board certain issues from civil society groups the state reduces their criticism, thereby gaining more broad-based support within wider society in the process. This would suggest that the state is strategic in which groups it selects. Testimony from civil society commentators appears to bear this out. One commentator, when asked which groups tend to be favoured for collaborative purposes by the state, noted that it was those who were “*legitimate*”, legitimacy in this case being “*if you have political clout and if you have a grassroots support*”. And so, groups close to people on the ground with the ability to influence peoples’ attitudes toward the state appear to be favoured. This may be one factor influencing MEJN’s decision to establish a grassroots-based structure (see the following Chapter (Eight)). There is much agreement among civil society commentators that the churches in Malawi remain a strong political force. As one commentator notes:

Churches play a very influential role in guiding the electorate’s perception... And because this new government is quite not interested in just serving a five year term, it’s interested in institutionalising itself at the grassroot level, it’s in its interests that one of the key conduits of messages at that level is on its side. So it would definitely [be an influential civil society actor], partly also influenced by the fact that the present President is Catholic, a very devout one as well.

(Malawian DfID representative)

While the main Malawian church groups are not directly involved in the PRSP/MGDS process, MEJN, with its roots in the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), and a membership comprising organisations from the principal Malawian religious

persuasions (Catholic, Protestant and Muslim), may be seen to represent this important constituency. This interest in building public support may also explain why the state tolerates MEJN's public awareness work on issues relating to the PRSP, although it is noted by commentators that MEJN has, of late, become less critical in this regard.

In Ireland, the Chair of Social Partnership admits that the involvement of the community and voluntary pillar helps in obtaining broader public support for the policies contained therein.

...there is an aspect of legitimacy which derives from their [CV Pillar's] involvement. In a sense, the concern with fairness in the broader sense in the agreement, is a good element to have in terms of the wider public understanding and acceptance of the outcomes of these negotiations.

(Chair of Social Partnership)

However, he remains ambivalent about the community and voluntary sector's importance in securing broader public support for the state.

The difficulty I suppose, or a difference, at least that the C&V pillar have relative to the others is, going back to this point that I made earlier, the other pillars by and large have a standing and an efficacy outside partnership. If there was no partnership, government would have to deal with them. It's not entirely clear that the same is true of the community and voluntary pillar.

(Chair of Social Partnership)

From this it is clear that the support of both business associations and trade unions is far more significant from the Irish state's point of view than that of the community and voluntary pillar. This underlines the argument made in the previous Section on the salience of the international business culture, but also calls into question the Irish state's perceived need for wider public support beyond the business and financial world.

While the Chair's comments in this regard appear to underplay the political importance of the community and voluntary pillar, the state's reaction to the rejection of the 2003

strategy by a section of the pillar points to their importance and power as a legitimising force within the process. This is discussed further in Section 7.4.4 below.

7.4.2 Legitimising state policy: Securing policy consensus

In the case of Ireland's Social Partnership process, the state's project in engaging with community and voluntary pillar members appears to move beyond support manifested as reduced criticism, as in Malawi, and towards a more concrete consensus on policy direction. Again the Chair of Social Partnership articulates this at different times during interview.

[Social Partnership] has been a way of managing change. It's a way of mobilising key interests in support of a reasonably consistent policy approach and in that sense it amplifies the beneficial impact of policy because of the consistency of behaviour.

...the third [element] they [social partners] bring is a form of legitimacy. If they sign up for something they are, at least to some degree, bound to stick with it over the period of the agreement.

Therefore, the policy directions taken within various Social Partnership strategies are presented as consensus agreements by all parties, thereby reducing the scope for public conflict and disquiet.

we would have found the sort of, particularly restructuring the economy, much more problematic, much more conflictual, much less successful without it [social partnership].

(Chair of Social Partnership)

In effect, the strategies represent an opportunity for the state to obtain consensus on a wide range of areas, some of which, it appears, have not been discussed or deliberated upon by all the social partners at all. One ex- community and voluntary pillar member

recalls the strategy of 2000 wherein many additional issues were added by the state at the last minute without prior consultation with the participants.

Even in that one, the one in 2000 [PPF], there were a number of...[Finance Minister] McCreevy had just introduced individualisation and so on, which wasn't directly in our sphere but was very controversial. And government just wrote in all these clauses saying that the social partners supported this. We were sort of shocked that the trade union movement didn't say anything about it. Didn't say hold on. It was gratuitous sort of, throwing in all this sort of, and I agree to the war in Iraq. We'll get them to agree to this while we're at it. There was a lot of gratuitous stuff like that and we had some rows on the side and got some movement on it. But yes, you are asked basically...

(ex-CV pillar representative)

7.4.3 Redefining 'active citizenship'?: Managing exclusion

As noted above, the Chair of Social Partnership and Secretary General in the Department of an Taoiseach has noted that Social Partnership has been a way of “*managing change*”. This is articulated by the Taoiseach himself as “*managing uncertainty*” in a complex global environment, as outlined in a speech delivered in late 2006.

If we are to achieve sustainable social and economic development, we need to sharpen our competitive advantage in a changing world economy... Strategic planning and social partnership are key strengths for our country as we face into the future. Just as importantly, however, we need to equip our people to handle future uncertainty – by promoting a positive attitude to change, so that people actively embrace change as a matter of routine...

“‘Managing Uncertainty’ is something that people would perhaps associate with the private sector and coping with volatile markets, more so than the public sector. I believe, however, that the Public Service has an excellent track record in managing uncertainty – and indeed complexity but that the current challenges are greater and demanding of a greater change capacity in the public service.”⁶²

(my emphasis)

⁶² Speech by an Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern T.D. to the IBEC Human Resources Summit at the Four Seasons Hotel, on Tuesday, 10 October, 2006 at 8.45 a.m., <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?locID=199&docID=2922>, accessed February 11th, 2007.

Thus, Social Partnership represents an opportunity to “*equip our people to handle future uncertainty*” as we “*sharpen our competitive advantage*” within the global economy. This resonates strongly with Hoogvelt’s argument that the state’s (and donors’) programme for civil society has turned to what she terms the “*management of exclusion*” (2001), as discussed in Chapter Two. And so, whether it is termed “*management of change*”, “*management of uncertainty*” or “*management of exclusion*”, it would appear that Social Partnership provides a vehicle to secure legitimacy for states by encouraging citizens themselves to manage / mitigate the social costs associated with global integration. This emerges strongly as a theme within the NESC strategy document which formed the basis of the 2006 Social Partnership agreement.

Seeing Ireland’s enduring vulnerabilities and challenges is critical because, in the Council’s view, acceptance of the core elements of Ireland’s economic strategy demands recognition of the vulnerabilities, both social and economic, that attend that strategy.

(NESC 2005b: 84)

An updated understanding of the Irish economy will be one that incorporates the increased role of services, the increased significance of domestic demand and the implications of migration, without losing the focus on competitiveness and competitive advantage that characterised the shared understanding since the 1980s.

(NESC 2005b: 86)

Although this is not an aspect of the PRSP/MGDS process which explicitly emerges in the research findings, the focus on the policy expertise of Malawian NGOs and their capacity to contract their constituent groups implicitly underlines this argument also.

The question therefore becomes – how is this uncertainty managed? Research findings point to two ways in which this is achieved. First, states in both instances seek to

harness what they perceive to be the policy expertise of relevant groups. Second, perhaps recognising their own limitations, in line with Castells' theorisations on networking inward, states in both instances seek, through partners' own networks, to harness the material capacities of their citizenry as 'partners' in implementation. The relations fostered with partners in both instances prove key in this regard. As will be seen, the stage agency in nurturing these relations differs significantly between Malawi and Ireland.

7.4.4 The political management of 'knowledge'-based partnerships

State representatives in both Malawi and Ireland appear interested in drawing in expertise in policy formulation through both processes. In Malawi, although donors appear to have pulled back somewhat in their demands for participation, state officials continue to consult with specific groups.

... what you've seen in this new MGDS is a very clear steer from the government on what it wants, and it selecting what it perceives as the important stakeholders to be consulted.

(DfID representative)

What everybody says is 'no, we must have a dialogue, we didn't have it before now and we must have it. Because it's useful for government'. Government people say this. I was with the PS [Principal Secretary] for economic planning this morning saying 'no we really appreciate [organisation X], and I'm going to take this issue up in how we move forward'. And he was genuine. He said it's been a helpful outlet for them to put things to [the] sector and get some feedback.

(MGDS participant)

Policy expertise in Malawi, as discussed in the previous chapter, means evidenced-based policy inputs, interestingly, the specific area underpinning the financial

relationship developed by the Irish state with community and voluntary pillar members (see Section 7.4.4 on further).

I must say that when I read the way the government is currently engaging with civil society it's a government that wants to engage with civil society in, they don't want to just have a talking shop where civil society is complaining about issues... In my view the challenge and the onus is on civil society to come up with a good policy note that is evidence based, take it to the government, you can be sure that the government is going to take it. That's how I read the situation at the moment.

(World Bank representative)

In the MGDS they were looking at quality of involvement rather than just involvement. They didn't care about whether civil society is involved widely or comprehensively but whether they have got enough ideas from the civil society... It's like picking brains so to speak... Let's hear what these other guys have to say on this issue, oh yeah, we think they are right, we didn't think that way... Not just hey, jim and jack please come, we just want you here...

(MGDS participant)

In Ireland, it is suggested that this engagement with a wider grouping of expertise has allowed for policy innovation within what some describe as a somewhat sterile state administrative apparatus.

You know, within a bureaucracy it can be difficult to innovate. Because, you know risk taking wouldn't be high on anybody's agenda. And, in fact, in the Social Partnership space, and I think there are very good examples around this, we have been able to innovate I think, and be quite creative in a way that, I think, if policy was being made purely within government departments, simply couldn't be.

(Vice-Chair of Social Partnership)

In both instances it therefore appears that state officials are genuinely interested in engaging policy expertise with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of resultant policy. This corresponds to an instrumental conception of participation as outlined in Chapter One and helps explain the form of technocratic discourse in both processes. So far so

good. However, policy formulation does not take place in a political vacuum, and however innovative or effective proposals may be, it appears they run into two main obstacles in both instances.

First, while states appear willing to open their doors to policy inputs, the issue of their legitimacy, and more explicitly, their power, clearly remains uppermost in how they exercise this agency. In Ireland, state officials are quite explicit on this. While the Vice-Chair of Social Partnership is keen to point out that “*government is primus inter pares*” within the process, the Chair goes one step further in stressing the overarching power of the state in relation to decision making.

... Government is not just first among equals in the process. It isn't equal. It has invited people explicitly into, into this process, and to some extent shares, a degree at least, of its policy-making activity with them. But on the same basis it's entitled to exclude them again at a certain point. Or to respond to issues that arise that only the government can take responsibility for.

(Chair of Social Partnership)

Partnership, in this context, appears to be carefully politically managed. The Irish state chooses to consult, but retains the authority to ignore the views of participants, or to act outside the agreements reached⁶³. Thus, as seen in the previous Chapter, decision-making remains within the exclusive domain of the state. In Malawi, mindful of the rhetorical power of the good governance discourse, state interviewees are more careful in describing their role. However commentators on the political culture within the country stressing, as described elsewhere (Chapter Two), the strongly hierarchical nature of power within Malawian society, assert that ultimately decisions lie with Ministers, thereby suggesting that the policy inputs within the PRSP/MGDS processes may finally end up going nowhere.

⁶³ Indeed, the preface to each Social Partnership strategy contains an input to this effect.

The constitution is very clear that the role of making and implementing policy is the prerogative of the state, and not only that, it is actually the prerogative of the executive. And the executive guards that very jealously. So even the legislature has got very little role on policy formulation... every time other actors come in they are always reminded that this is the role of the executive and they have no mandate. So even where they have a very genuine contribution to make they will be challenged purely on that constitutional principle.

(Political commentator from the University of Malawi)

[The] Minister is definitely the most powerful. Another thing in Malawi, hierarchies are still very, very strong. Ministers are still the ones who decide, or maybe if there's a strong PS [Principal Secretary], then they are the ones taking the decisions. Down from there people will be doing their work, but everything they will be discussing with their superior. It will go all the way up the hierarchy, if not to the minister, at least to the PS before it is decided. People are quite reluctant to take, on the one hand hierarchies are reluctant to delegate work and responsibilities, on the other civil servants are reluctant to take on the responsibility, to take decisions on their own...

(GTZ advisor within the MEPD)

Second, in both instances, the coordinated policy approach within both processes which calls for coherence across different state departments / ministries, lies at odds with the uncoordinated approach and lack of linkages to MPs/TDs of individual ministries / departments. Although attempts have been made in Malawi to counter this by drawing on the sectoral plans of each ministry, there is still some doubt as to ministry officials' capacity or willingness to engage with strategies which lie outside their own sectoral strategy.

At a sectoral level there are still of course the sectoral strategies. In Malawi they are quite well aligned to the MGDS as compared to other countries... This ministry [MEPD which coordinated the MGDS] asked them to provide them with their strategy so to say and they were pretty much taken on one to one in the MDGS... but I'm not sure if the sectoral ministries take the MGDS beyond this... There was probably a lack of understanding of how this should link to a broader strategy. They pretty much work very closely with their own strategy.

(GTZ advisor within the MEPD)

In Ireland, this uncoordinated departmental approach is also prevalent and at odds with the interrelated aspects of much of the Social Partnership strategies. The dilemma is outlined by an ex-state official.

It [Social Partnership] was a new contract between different elements of society but, I don't think that was ever really understood, and even if it was understood, the people negotiating on the other side of the table couldn't have delivered on that, because our form of government doesn't work like that. It works by incremental change from year to year, each department has its own agenda, each section of each department has its own agenda, they don't allow someone from the department of an Taoiseach's, or any politician, they don't even allow ministers, to tell them what's going to come up next year or the year after. There's a big resistance to any centralised planning.

(ex-state official)

Once again, this highlights the diversity of social forces and agency within state institutions within both countries, together with the lack of linkages between both processes and existing practices and political cultures. While some state actors appear keen to promote coordinated, cross-sectoral strategies, others (employees within individual ministries / departments) resist such coordination, preferring to carry on with traditional work practices.

Overall, while state actors appear keen to engage the 'evidence-based' policy expertise of participants in both processes, this exercise is carefully politically managed. While, on the one hand, appearing to cede a degree of power through consultation, on the other, state actors remain trenchant that this is not the case. While, in Ireland, it appears this power lies with departmental civil servants, in Malawi it appears to be dispersed between Ministers and senior civil servants. The administrative apparatuses of the different ministries / departments in both instances, in resisting change toward a coordination of policy strategies and approaches, raise a significant blockage to the coordinated approach embodied in the new governance strategies.

7.4.5 The multiplier effect: Consolidating relations and contracting ‘partners’ in ‘change management’

Managing the “*change*”, “*uncertainty*”, or “*social exclusion*” engendered by the state’s globalisation project does not just rest at the level of harnessing expertise in devising policy responses to tackle these consequences however. The significance of both processes lies less in the area of policy, and more in the area of relationship building. In both Malawi and Ireland, state agency goes a step further in attempting to draw in citizens and citizen groups as “*implementation partners*” in managing exclusion. Necessitating the active engagement of citizen networks and groupings, this is achieved through partners’ own networks and constituents.

The necessity of ‘contracting’ partner networks (and citizens more widely) highlights the importance of nurturing and consolidating relations with societal actors. It was seen in Chapter Six that, in addition to the formal institutions associated with the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership, both processes involve a high degree of informal networking and relationship building. The bases for these relations differ in both contexts. While the Irish state (in the form of the department of an Taoiseach) nurtures a business relationship with Social Partners, the Malawian state (in the form of state officials engaged in programme and project development and implementation) draws on more traditional concepts of solidarity and familial values to depict the unity of the state-societal complex. Underlying both strategies are notions of loyalty, respect, and responsibility to participate in being, in the words of an Irish official, “*part of the solution*”. This appeal to civil society values resonates with Dean’s (2007) theory of “enfolding”, as discussed in Chapter Two. According to Dean, this selective adoption of civil society values in order to draw in support, complements the “*unfolding*” of the

political sphere onto the social through new partnership-type governance structures within what he characterises as a “*liberal authoritarian*” regime.

Family unity, loyalty and responsibility: Characterising Malawian state-societal relations

In Malawi, the state official coordinating the MGDS includes all actors, state and citizenry alike, within his conception of the state, arguing that all have a part to play in implementing the policies of the strategy.

... the strategies, the programmes, have to be owned by [the] Malawi government. When I say Malawi government it includes everybody, the civil servants, civil society, and the general public as such. They have to own the process, because all of these have got a role in terms of maybe implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Because government may just prepare a programme but when it comes to implementation, all these details are not going to be implemented by government. These other stakeholders take part in the implementation.

(State official coordinating the MGDS)

A district-based state official employs the concept of ‘family’ (in echoes of former dictator Hastings Banda) to describe the relationship between district officials and local MEJN members. As a “*family*”, state and civil society work hand in hand in deciding where specific projects should be located, while it falls to MEJN members, working in a voluntary capacity, to monitor the ongoing work of these projects on behalf of district officials.

At the district level we work as a family. So when there is any project that is coming into the district. We call these people [local MEJN members], we sensitise them, so we feel we know where this NGO should be directed. So we direct them to appropriate place. And at other times also they assist us in monitoring of projects. That is how the project is starting, how it is progressing. They also do give us, they assist us in monitoring these projects.

(District official, Nsanje)

Business professionalism, loyalty, and delivery: Characterising Irish state-societal relations

In Ireland, social relations with civil society groups appear to take the form of a business relationship, with loyalty, professionalism, and delivery expected in return for financial support. The Director of NESC describes civil society groups nationwide as “*professional brokers... they become like the softer, the flexible arm of the state*”. He goes on to describe Social Partnership as “*a kind of state building. This is, this is building services that have been hugely deficient.*” As in the case of Malawi, in Ireland this involves mobilising voluntary labour with, as examined in Chapter Two, an increasing emphasis being placed on the voluntary end of the community and voluntary sector with a view to harnessing local human resources to meet the resultant rising ‘uncertainty’. This emphasis is reflected in the recent Social Partnership agreement (*Towards 2016*) in a section devoted to volunteering wherein it is asserted that “*The Government recognises that community and voluntary activity forms the very core of a vibrant and inclusive society.*” (2006: 70) and that “*A key principle underlying the Government’s approach is that volunteering finds meaning and expression at a local level and that supports and funding should seek, as far as possible, to recognise this reality.*” (2006: 71).

The Vice-Chair of Social Partnership shares this view wherein, in a phrase interestingly reiterated by some of the community and voluntary pillar members (see the following Chapter (Eight)), she argues that participants in the Social Partnership process need to be actively engaged as “*part of the solution*”, mobilising their own networks in the process. If not, she sees no place for them in the Social Partnership process.

I take the view that the social partners have actually a major role to play in both identifying and solving some of the major challenges that face us as a country. I don't see them as passive participants in any sense. And this is something I think that we perhaps need to, need to try and develop a little bit in this agreement [Towards 2016]. In other words I see them not as... I see them as part of the solution. If they're not part of the solution then they can't be part of the problem.

(Vice-Chair of Social Partnership – my emphasis)

We actually have very large challenges facing us. They're not the challenges of disaster and crisis, and in some ways it's more difficult to mobilise in good times.... So there is a huge challenge to us to develop, going back to what I said earlier, that shared agenda and to identify the priorities.

(Vice-Chair of Social Partnership)

The Social Partnership relationship, elevated to the status of a “*special relationship*” in the most recent strategy (Government of Ireland, 2006: 74), is based on loyalty to the agreement, as noted by the Chair of the process.

...in the social partnership context there isn't anything, if you like, written down in terms of what's expected, but you're expected to manage the relationship... So there is an expectation that people will guard the social partnership relationship.

(Chair of Social Partnership)

...in our understanding there is no social partner as such unless there's a social partnership agreement. So the relationship is embodied in an agreement. So I mean I couldn't understand the argument that people, and I know the [National] Women's Council have made it in particular with others, that they were excluded from social partnership. I mean there is no social partnership that isn't grounded in an agreement. So if you reject the agreement, which is the basis on which people come together, well the consequences are, I'd have thought, obvious.

(Chair of Social Partnership)

As in a contractual relationship, social partners are expected to adhere to the unspoken, and unwritten, “*rules of the game*”, one of these being loyalty to the process and its outcomes as community and voluntary pillar members who rejected the 2003 agreement discovered. Dissenting parties found themselves excluded from a number of related policy fora while, reflecting the economics of the relationship, a number, most notably,

the Community Workers Co-Op (CWC), were also, in their terms, “*financially punished*”.

Following its rejection of the 2003 agreement, the CWC lost its state core funding. This resulted in the loss of two out of four of its staff, with two staff retained through separate project funding (CWC, 2005). While other pillar members who had rejected the 2003 strategy feared similar punishment, their funding was not so adversely affected as that of the CWC. Conversely, funding to remaining community and voluntary pillar members remained unaffected. In fact, two existing and one new pillar member (CORI, Irish Rural Link (IRL), and The Wheel respectively) received once-off grants in both 2003 and 2004 which did not fall under any of the usual funding streams. Under an initiative termed “*Special Once Off funding for Groups active in the co-ordination and provision of services and supports in the Community and Voluntary Sector*”, CORI received 75,000 Euro in 2003 and 100,000 Euro in 2004, with IRL receiving 50,000 Euro in 2004, and The Wheel 250,000 Euro in 2004⁶⁴.

State actors are unequivocal in their actions toward dissenting partners. The Vice-Chair of Social Partnership, noting that “*I think there’s a phrase called having your cake and eating it... We all know the rules of the game.*”, goes on to outline how she perceives this environment and its rules.

It [rejection of the 2003 agreement] was a naivety I think. This is a tough environment you know. People need to understand that you don’t, you can’t, it’s too complex you know. You’re either going to do it or you’re not. And you don’t mess people around. And if you mess people around there’s a price to be paid.

(Vice-Chair of Social Partnership)

⁶⁴ Data received by email communication from the Department of Community and Family Affairs.

With the publication of *Towards 2016* in 2006, the Irish state has consolidated its relations with civil society groups in two significant ways. First, the move towards a ten-year agreement together with the incorporation of many other national policy processes into it (e.g. the National Development Plan, the National Spatial Plan, the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion etc.) has left non-social partners in something of a policy wilderness. Second, the financial dimension of the relationship has been consolidated with the introduction of a ‘Social Partnership Scheme’ which commits 10 million Euro per annum to community and voluntary pillar members for “*costs arising from contributing to evidence-based policy making, over and above normal activities and programmes*” (Government of Ireland, 2006: 71). Clearly the state carrots have yielded results. Both the NWCi and the Community Platform, led by the CWC, in early 2007 agreed to rejoin the process. Both will receive 55,000 Euro per annum for their participation. Funding under the new ‘Social Partnership Scheme’ for an initial three-year period (2007-2009) has been granted overall to members of the community and voluntary pillar as follows⁶⁵:

⁶⁵ Data received by email communication from the Department of Community and Family Affairs.

Table 7.4.5: Funding to social partners under the new ‘Social Partnership Scheme’

Funding per annum (Euro)	Social Partner recipient
100,000	CORI The Wheel
55,000	Age Action Carer’s Association Children’s Rights Alliance Congress Centres for the Unemployed Disability Federation of Ireland INOUE Irish Council for Social Housing Irish Rural Link Irish Senior Citizen’s Parliament National Women’s Council of Ireland National Youth Council of Ireland St Vincent de Paul The Community Platform
30,000	National Association of Building Cooperatives Protestant Aid

I have argued in this Section that both Malawian and Irish states employ the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership processes respectively as vehicles to network inward and secure national legitimacy in three principal ways – first, in securing greater broad-based public support for policies and agendas through collaboration with strategically selected actors with influential links to a grassroots base (particular focus of Malawian state); second, in securing policy consensus (particular focus of Irish state); and third, in harnessing both policy expertise and civic labour in assisting in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of related projects (a focus of both states). A critical dimension to this inward networking is the relations fostered by state actors. While in Malawi, state officials draw on traditional concepts of solidarity and family values to promote the idea of a unitary state-societal complex, the discourse and actions of Irish state officials appear to place the relationship on a more professional, business footing, with social partners now, through a new ‘Social Partnership Scheme’, receiving financial remuneration for their engagement.

7.5 Conclusion: Spinning participation, contracting partners - diluting democracy?

Drawing from interviews with state actors and commentators, together with some content analysis of strategies emanating from both the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership processes, in this Chapter I have examined state agency within both contexts. Operating within a network state, as theorised in Chapter Two, I have demonstrated that state agency within both contexts mediates between international and national networks. I have argued that state agency, focussed outward towards the international polity, ‘spins’ participation in order to promote an image of ‘good governance’ through both processes, thereby corresponding to a nominal form of participation, while promoting an international business culture of growth and investment through the discourses imbuing the strategies of both. I have argued that both these elements are designed to enhance legitimacy internationally, thereby securing investor / donor confidence.

Supporting the theoretical assertions explored in Chapter Two that, within this globalised polity, states need to build national legitimacy in new and novel ways, I have argued that state agency within both processes as it networks inward at a national level involves ‘contracting’ civil society partners to build state legitimacy and support domestically. This is achieved in three main ways with different emphases by each state – by building broad-based public support for the state and its project (Malawi), by securing policy consensus for developmental strategies (Ireland), and by moving beyond political to material support by drawing citizens in to assist in managing the social costs accruing from the global insertion developmental project (both), thereby corresponding to an instrumental conception of participation. I have argued that states attempt to achieve this active consent and engagement through an explicit process of

relationship building which, in Malawi, draws on traditional concepts of solidarity and family values, and in Ireland, draws on business norms of professionalism, loyalty and reciprocity in exchange for financial remuneration.

The findings demonstrate that both Malawian and Irish states mediate relations between both 'invisible' international institutions and their cultures, and national civil society groups. Although this suggests a powersharing, states in both cases, in particular in Ireland, are keen to point out that they retain overall power. The dependence of both states on civil society support within these relations is apparent however. Despite donors apparently stepping back from the MGDS, MEJN remains involved and on cordial relations with many senior state officials. Indeed, state officials have taken the initiative to invite MEJN into the MGDS process, even though this is not explicitly required by donors. In Ireland, the state's annoyance, or "*fury*" as some community and voluntary pillar members describe it, at what it perceived as the "*disloyalty*" of some community and voluntary pillar members refusing to endorse the 2003 strategy, together with what could be perceived as its 'buying off' of these groups to bring them back in to the process in 2007, indicates that community and voluntary actors wield significant power as legitimising agents within the Social Partnership process. Clearly, the 'spin' of participation, with its undertones of social cohesion, harmony and consensus, rings a little hollow when 'partners' publicly dissent and are noticeably absent from the process. Moreover, it proves difficult to actively contract participants and their constituents in managing exclusion when they have been ousted from the process. Thus, while both the Malawian and, in particular, the Irish state, emphasise their overarching power within both processes, their actions, in actively seeking the engagement and support of MEJN and community and voluntary pillar members

respectively, belie the significant power wielded by civil society actors as both legitimising agents of both processes and gatekeepers to wider support bases.

The central power-brokers emerging from this analysis, therefore, include both state actors and civil society representatives, with civil society representatives holding critical legitimising and gatekeeping roles. It has been seen that the principal state actors involved are non-elected state officials (although some attempts have been made within Malawi's MGDS to involve MPs at the draft strategy stage). This raises questions as to the democratic legitimacy of both processes. Are they, in by-passing elected political representatives, effectively diluting democracy, as some commentators contend?

Democracy, as we have seen in Chapter Four following Iris Marion Young's theorisation, is attained when "*all significantly affected by the problems and their solutions are included in the discussion and decision making on the basis of equality and non-domination.*" (2000: 29). This draws attention to the representation of structurally disadvantaged groups within governance processes. Following Young's theorisation, democracy is deepened when marginalised groups are included. Within both processes under investigation, this is the role of MEJN and community and voluntary pillar members respectively. With, as we have seen, states 'spinning' participation and 'contracting' partners in forms of participation which swing from nominal to instrumental, how effectively do NGO participants 'transform' participation in a manner which bring the voices of the excluded and marginalised to the table, thereby deepening rather than diluting the democratic potential of the respective processes? Specifically, within both processes, how do NGO representatives mediate between their relations with the state and those within their own constituencies? Which

relations prove more important? How significant is the financial dimension of these relations? Are civil society agents more influenced by perceptions of status and power within national policy networks or by the marginalisation and exploitation of their representatives? These questions form the basis for understanding the transformatory potential of participation within both processes, and hence their democratic legitimacy. It is to these we now turn.

Chapter 8

Disciplining and transforming participation: Civil society and participation in the PRSP/MGDS and Social Partnership processes

8.1 Introduction

It has become apparent at this stage that the potential to transform participation, from nominal and instrumental forms favoured by states within both processes to more transformative modes, lies with their respective NGO and community and voluntary pillar participants. As we have seen in Chapter One, more critical accounts of both processes argue that civil society actors have been co-opted, with this co-option foreclosing opportunities to widen development discourses within the respective processes. This argument is largely supported by the findings presented in Chapter Six, where we have seen the enablers to transformative participation in both processes transformed, over time, into constraints. In contrast to these structuralist analyses however, here I argue that NGOs and community and voluntary pillar members have been active in their own co-option. Why have they chosen this course of action, and how have they managed to achieve it given their mandates?

This question forms the basis of this Chapter in which I seek to explain the dynamics underpinning both processes, as revealed in Chapter Six, in terms of the agency of NGO and community and voluntary pillar participants. In Section 8.2, I revisit the early stages of each process, and examine the motivations and actions of civil society actors at the outset. I demonstrate how international attention to both processes led to an initial high degree of energy and enthusiasm among civil society participants, although it is unclear to what degree this energy was channelled into a politics of presence, rather

than a politics of transformative change. In Section 8.3 I follow the experiences of civil society groups within both processes over time and reveal that organisational development, and in some instances, (perceived) personal status and prestige, drove many participants' actions in both cases. These goals, I argue, were achieved through a Foucauldian process of 'disciplining', whereby dominant communication and behavioural norms were enforced by leaders within both groupings, and dissenting parties were ultimately excluded. This was facilitated by national political cultural norms, as discussed in Chapter Three, although international donor influence was also a significant factor in MEJN's case.

While this disciplining, in the case of remaining community and voluntary pillar members appears to extend outward to constituent networks (although the findings on this are inconclusive), in contrast, MEJN leaders have been challenged in this. In Section 8.4 I explore how a combination of international forces and national civil society actors have compelled MEJN to establish a more representative grassroots base, and how this base, in turn, is challenging MEJN to assume a more 'organic' leadership role as it mediates between the exigencies of the state and donors, on the one hand, and its new membership base on the other. Drawing the analysis together, I conclude the Chapter with the argument that external communications fostering public debate prove critical in enabling transformative participation within governance processes.

8.2 Transforming participation?: Initial engagement

As outlined elsewhere, the community and voluntary sector's systematic involvement in Malawian policy deliberations began with the advent of the PRSP in 2001, while the community and voluntary sector became formally involved in Ireland's Social

Partnership process with the establishment of the community and voluntary pillar in 1996. Initially both processes included a combination of state invitees and self-amalgamated groupings, the latter comprising a network of NGO and civil society groups in Malawi known as the Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN), and a network of community NGOs and associations in Ireland known as the Community Platform. As will be seen, while MEJN continues to be involved in the MGDS and related fora, the Community Platform lost its Social Partner status following the negotiation of the 2003 strategy, although it regained this in early 2007. Membership of both MEJN and the community and voluntary pillar has changed significantly over the years.

8.2.1 MEJN and Malawi's PRSP

Initially, just four civil society organisations were invited by the state to participate in the PRSP process in 2001. These included two international NGOs (Oxfam and Action Aid), a German research institute (the Konrad Adenauer foundation), and the state umbrella organisation for NGOs (the Congress of NGOs in Malawi, CONGOMA). A Jubilee campaign for debt cancellation, coordinated by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), and networked with the international Jubilee movement, had been in existence in Malawi since 1997. Through their links with other international groups, campaign members learned of the HIPC initiative and the requirement that a PRSP be developed in Malawi with the participation of civil society. Campaign members came together to discuss their possible involvement in this development and it was decided to form a network, thereafter known as the Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN), to lobby for inclusion in the PRSP process. With initial funding from Oxfam International, a steering committee was elected and, shortly afterward, a

coordinator employed and office space secured. MEJN, a loose network of, initially, twenty-seven Malawian NGOs, religious groups, academics, and trade unions, was thus established with the express intention of inputting to the PRSP process, and was supported in this by the international NGO, Oxfam.

Through its international contacts, MEJN was aware that the PRSP process was supposed to be participatory, opening up a space for civil society groups. Nonetheless, network members, initially, found it extremely difficult to gain access to both meetings and relevant information, and were concerned that the proposed three month time frame was too short for them to be able to organise themselves and consult with their constituent groups. Intent on capitalising on the process's claims to participation, an email was sent to international contacts proclaiming Malawi's PRSP "a joke". One of the founding members outlines how this international communication came to enhance the transformatory potential of the process.

We also, having had contact with Zambia who had a little bit of advance on us, because they had started the PRSP process earlier, we found out from them that they had more than a year time for it, and in Malawi they only had about three months. So one of the first things we did was to lobby these organisations [IMF and World Bank] to make sure that the time would be enough to make it a participatory process. So that was, in the beginning, not very successful until, one of us has a remark in an email, going onto Oxfam and other big organisations saying, 'this participation stuff in Malawi, it looks more like a joke'. So next thing Oxfam beamed it back into the internet and says 'group in Malawi says PRSP is just a joke'. And that actually was the clinch because immediately after that there was a meeting of all the heads of thematic groups in the ministry, and then they called us in and they said 'ok, you want to participate now, let's make you participate'. And they were actually quite annoyed that this had gone out on the internet. And it actually, I think it was what clinched things.
(MEJN member)

And so, by throwing an international spotlight on the Malawian state's hollow claims to participation, MEJN managed, at the outset, to turn particular enablers into constraints,

gaining places for its members in seventeen of the twenty-one thematic working groups, and extending the overall timeframe for the formulation process.

As we have seen, MEJN participants were selected and contacted by MEJN's new coordinator on the basis of their technical proficiency in the relevant thematic area. These constituted, in the main, representatives of national organisations and institutions. This added a significant national NGO sector presence to the PRSP process. And so, while MEJN may be seen as an 'outsider' lobbying for involvement on the basis of a need for wider participation and the inclusion of a wider range of voices, it was, nonetheless, at its inception, constitutive of a normative version of civil society as discussed in Chapter Two. As detailed later, this composition has radically altered over the intervening years, and MEJN now comprises a mix of both NGOs and locally based associations and community groups.

8.2.2 The Community and Voluntary Pillar and Ireland's Social Partnership

High levels of unemployment⁶⁶ and socio-economic marginalisation in Ireland in the early 1990s were placing pressure on both the state and existing social partners alike. Simultaneously, a number of community and voluntary sector groups were turning their attention to the Social Partnership process arguing, in terms of issues, for a greater emphasis on equity and social inclusion and, for themselves, a place at the table. To the forefront in this was the INOU (Irish National Association of Unemployed) which, formed in 1987, and focused on the policy goal of full employment, had from the outset its sights set on Social Partnership, CORI (the Conference of Religious of Ireland), a

⁶⁶ In 1991 unemployment in Ireland stood at 16.8% of which a high proportion were long-term unemployed (NESC, 1997)

Catholic religious organisation commenting and lobbying on social issues, and the CWC (Community Workers Cooperative), a national network of community groups.

In 1996, following some community and voluntary organisations' involvement in some of the institutions surrounding Social Partnership (for example the NESF and the joint Oireachtas⁶⁷ sub-committee on unemployment), eight community and voluntary organisations were offered Social Partner status by the state. The eight organisations were as follows: CORI, CWC, INOU, ICTUCU, NWCI, NYCI, SVP⁶⁸, and Protestant Aid. Both the NWCI and the NYCI were invited to represent women and youth respectively. The SVP, although it had not explicitly lobbied for inclusion (instead it supported the INOU's lobbying efforts), with a membership largely representing 'middle Ireland' and comprising some civil servants keen for the organisation to become involved (illustrating the porosity between state and civil society in Ireland), represented another Catholic grouping, while Protestant Aid⁶⁹ was reportedly invited to balance the strong Catholic representation. The CWC, interested in gaining broader-based representation, went on to form the Community Platform, an amalgam of national community groups with a commitment to social inclusion and equality. The CWC ceded its seat to the Community Platform following which all other community and voluntary participant organisations, with the exception of the NYCI, joined the Platform as well as retaining their own seats. And so, the rather confusing configuration of community and voluntary pillar members joining the process in 1996 was as follows:

⁶⁷ parliamentary

⁶⁸ Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI), Community Workers Cooperative (CWC), Irish National Organisation for the Unemployed (INOUE), Irish Congress of Trade Unions Centres for the Unemployed (ICTUCU), National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCI), National Youth Council of Ireland (NYCI), and Society of Vincent de Paul (SVP)

⁶⁹ It is worth noting that Protestant Aid has no policy arm and had shown no interest in involvement. To date its participation has been minimal yet it retains its Social Partnership status as it perceives this to be beneficial in funding terms.

Table 8.2.2: Community and Voluntary Social Partners: 1996 – 2003

CV pillar members	Community Platform members
Community Platform	
CORI	CORI
ICTUCU	ICTUCU
INOUE	INOUE
NWCI	NWCI
NYCI	-
SVP	SVP
Protestant Aid	Protestant Aid
	CWC
	Community Action Network (CAN)
	European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)
	Focus on Children
	Forum for People with Disabilities
	Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN)
	Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas
	Irish Rural Link (IRL)
	Irish Traveller Movement (ITM)
	One Parent Exchange Network (OPEN)
	Pavee Point

This configuration continued up to, and including, the negotiations in 2003 (although membership of the Community Platform varied over this time).

8.2.3 “Our time has come”: Expectations of involvement

In both instances, international influences and discourse celebrating new forms of governance⁷⁰ clearly played a large part in motivating participants to initially become involved in both processes. Access to national policy fora was universally seen by civil society groups at the time as ‘a good thing’. Civil society in both Malawi and Ireland was imbued with a strong sense of optimism that the political climate was shifting toward a greater pluralism in direction and outlook. Thus, in Malawi, where the good governance discourse held sway...

⁷⁰ In Ireland’s case, the EU’s recent penchant for partnership-type governance through the reform of the structural funds in 1998 (doubling payments in 1989 and leading to a total investment in Ireland over the period 1989 to 1999 of eleven billion euro (after Larragy, 2002), and in Malawi the IFI’s new interest in civil society participation through the debt relief initiative, HIPC.

I think there was an air of excitement in Malawi that we have changed from Dr Banda [ex-dictator] into this new government. And even the government really had people's trust. We really thought things are going happen. We didn't expect things are going to change in the next two or three years the way they had degenerated. We had thought now we are on the right track. So civil society opened up, there was no sense of fear, we thought we can be free to do everything.

(MEJN member)

In Ireland, there was also a view that the national agenda had moved towards issues of equality and social inclusion. This, coupled with the influx of structural funds from Europe, suggested that this was an optimal moment for the participation of the community and voluntary sector. Parties entered both processes with a high degree of optimism and energy. As one ex-community and voluntary pillar member noted

...at that time Social Partnership was taken a lot more seriously than it is now... I personally think looking back on it now, and at the time I thought, that most organisations were giving too much, putting too many expectations on Social Partnership, but it was very much seen as the area. Organisations had fought for years to get in there, they suddenly found themselves in there talking to senior civil servants, ministers, leaders in IBEC, ICTU⁷¹, and sort of felt this is the place to be.

(ex-CV pillar member)

There therefore appeared to be room within both processes for a social agenda, thereby expanding developmental debates and offering the potential for transformative participation. However, from the outset, there were ideological divisions between NGOs and community and voluntary pillar groups in regard to the form of participation to be pursued. As noted in Chapter Seven, for many groups the initial emphasis was on securing places at the table / colonising spaces, a 'politics of presence / recognition' in Fraser's (2000) terms, although perhaps leading to perspective-based representation, as theorised by Young (2000). Others entered with specific policy demands, and were focused on interest-based representation (Young, 2000). Ideological divisions were

⁷¹ IBEC (Irish Business and Employers Confederation); ICTU (Irish Congress of Trade Unions)

thus apparent from the outset in both cases. One community and voluntary pillar member outlines the divergence in approach in Ireland's case.

But there were other organisations in there who.... Some of whom hadn't looked for Social Partnership, and you know the most extreme example would be [organisation X], but others as well, and others who'd sort of said well if there's going to be community sector in Social Partnership we want to be there too. And hadn't a clue what they wanted. Except for vagaries, press release sort of statements you know? And we had a, you know, we went in, this was our moment. And you had to deal with all these people who were sort of learning and weren't focused. And we used to have discussions which, certain groups wanted things to be named, you know that strand within the community and voluntary pillar, We want the position of [group X] to be named, we want the position of [group Y] to be named. And we would say, 'ok, you know, but do you think that's going to make any difference to them?'

(CV pillar member)

In Malawi, participants quickly moved toward a policy approach with a general view emerging that presence alone was not sufficient.

I think the civil society organisations on agriculture, education and health were already in existence... So they were already organised, they were at least moving forward. They had issues already which they wanted to influence. So when they were put in these thematic groups it was just like a carry over from whatever they were already doing. For the other sectors, starting to organise people, for them to understand issues, and then to understand the PRSP process, it was a deed. So by the time then they were realising 'so, so this was supposed to be our role', the process had already been completed.

(MEJN member)

Within both processes over time, as we have seen in Chapter Six, the focus of NGOs and community and voluntary groups turned primarily to interest-based representation – i.e. inputting to specific policy areas with a view to solving specific problems.

8.2.4 Networking outward: Enablers to participation

As we have also seen in Chapter Six, NGO and community and voluntary participants enjoyed a degree of success at the outset in transforming constraints to transformative

participation into enablers. A key factor in this regard was participants' support from wider networks. This was achieved through participants' own agency in networking outward and raising public debate on the respective processes. As we have seen, MEJN managed to both extend the timeframe for the PRSP negotiations and to secure places within the majority of the thematic working groups by drawing on the support of wider, international networks. Through its intensive national media work during the process, the network raised its profile domestically, and went on to secure two places on the final drafting group for the strategy, together with places in the subsequent monitoring committee.

In Ireland, community and voluntary pillar members were aware of, and kept up-to-date with, reforms within the EU's Structural Funds programme, which favoured participation of community and voluntary sector groups in policy formulation and implementation at both national and local levels. This was used as a lobbying tool to gain access to Social Partnership at the outset, although, in contrast to MEJN's actions, the EU was never directly lobbied for support. However, domestic public support played a large part in the community and voluntary pillar's initial engagement, with regular press briefings and interviews being carried out. Indeed, as recounted by then INOU Director Mike Allen, in his book *The Bitter Word*, (Allen, 1998), it was his impending interview with the popular national radio news programme, *Morning Ireland*, expressing dissatisfaction with the process, that proved key in bringing the pillar gains in the area of employment policy. This happened literally at the eleventh hour, as he walked into the studio, and demonstrates the importance of networking outside the process in building public support for particular positions, as well as

throwing a spotlight on the process, thereby transforming potential constraints into enablers.

Participants in both processes, therefore, had high hopes at the outset. Networking outward and employing mass media to focus the public gaze on both respective processes, they managed to secure concrete gains, increase their power within both processes, and move towards more transformative forms of participation. However, as Chapter Six reveals, these gains were shortlived, with enablers to transformative participation once more being turned back into constraints as time evolved within both processes. The following Section explores how this happened.

8.3 Disciplining participation, constraining capacity: Experiences and implications of involvement

In Chapter Six, we saw the enablers to transformative participation turn into constraints within both processes over time. This occurred through a narrowing of both discourses and communication norms allowable in both processes, as well as through the exclusion of certain actors deemed ‘troublemakers’ within the Malawian PRSP. Chapter Six also highlighted the agency of some civil society actors in reinforcing certain constraints to participation within both processes. Why did they adopt this course of action? What was to be gained from internalising and promoting dominant discursive and communicative norms? This Section explores these findings further. Tracking the experiences and motivations of NGO / community and voluntary pillar groups within both processes, I argue that these actions, in both cases, were the products of a ‘self-disciplining’ by certain civil society actors. In both cases, I reveal that these were

driven by actors' own organisational development goals, together with, among some actors, perceived notions of personal status and prestige.

8.3.1 Consolidation, fragmentation and exclusion: MEJN's journey

In Chapter Six we have seen that, back in 2001, MEJN, once its presence was secured, quickly adopted the dominant communications norms and policy discourse favoured within the PRSP negotiations. Moreover, MEJN went on to urge its members to do so. As we have seen, discussions within the thematic working groups were conducted at a purely technical level and focused on programme design and implementation, leaving little room for engaging discourses which lay outside the policy-oriented terms of reference. MEJN's coordinator and steering committee realised and accepted this early on, and made efforts to adapt to these dominant communication norms by sourcing 'technical experts' for the different thematic groups. As a result, as time wore on, MEJN acquired a more professional, technical edge and its influence within certain thematic groups is reported as having been significant. Network representatives report that this 'capacity' was the key to opening doors within the process.

I think the calibre of people we featured in the thematic working groups, but also in the drafting, the technical drafting team of the PRSP, was calibre that wouldn't be doubted, by the government, the donors, and everybody else. It wasn't just people that would just sit down and watch people discussing technical issues. So that instilled a lot of confidence on the part of government. They said 'I think we can listen to the civil society'.

(MEJN Director)

Following completion of the PRSP strategy, the network decided that its focus should move to monitoring its implementation. This move corresponded to international donor interest in monitoring the use of funds and countering corruption, an international 'good governance' agenda that dominates domestic public discourse in-country also, thereby attracting both national and international attention to MEJN's work, and contributing to

the network's growing status and profile. This consolidated the image of the network as one of the Malawi's main civil society organisations.

Harnessing resources, excluding members

With MEJN moving into a new area of work which dovetailed neatly with the international aid agenda, additional demands began to be placed on the network. Donor funds began to drive the work of the network in new and somewhat disparate directions, with a focus on monitoring of outcomes rather than, as was originally envisaged, building capacity among network members themselves. A board member outlines the problem,

But part of the MEJN lack of funding made us look for funding and sometimes go into kind of agreements that weren't very good. And it kind of scattered our attention a little bit all over the place... instead of being more focused and maybe sticking to some of the original objectives that we had set.

(MEJN Board member)

Over the last few years, MEJN has secured funds and carried out programmes in a wide range of areas including budget training for NGOs and government officials (this, corresponding to Igoe and Kelsall's (2005) analysis, highlights the porosity in state – civil society relations in Malawi), budget monitoring, research (on trade, service delivery and maize distribution), and media work on a number of issues⁷². Funding support has diversified and MEJN, at the time of writing, was receiving support from over ten donors⁷³, the majority of whom fund specific programmes of their choosing. And so, it appears that MEJN has moved significantly from its original mandate of

⁷² At the time of field research (2005-2006) MEJN's core staff had increased from one to seven with some research work being outsourced to consultants.

⁷³ MEJN donors include the following: the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Christian Aid, the German development agency, Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst (DED), the UK Department for International Development (DfID), Capacity Building International Germany (InWENT), Irish Aid, the Open Society Initiative for Africa (OSISA), the US-based National Democratic Institute (NDI), Oxfam International and Trócaire.

securing broad-based participation in governance processes, to what is now ubiquitously referred to as its 'watchdog role'. In this, MEJN's trajectory has come to resemble that described by Gould et al (2005) and others (Pearce, 2000, Lewis and Opoku- Mensah, 2006) as outlined in Chapter Two, and demonstrates the significance of international influences on the network's development. These developments required a shift in network members' own focus and direction from previous ways of working which involved more active campaigning, to new, more technical areas, such as budget monitoring. However, despite training workshops run by the secretariat in the area of budget monitoring, member organisations proved resistant to these changes, leaving the secretariat to take on an increasing amount of work directly.

But this shift ... has brought with it a number of challenges. Because the expectation in the membership of MEJN has been that they would be involved in the actual implementation of economic governance activities or programmes that MEJN has on the ground. Now the first challenge that this has come with has been that the organisation members of MEJN have not sufficiently reworked their work plans, or their own programmes to have like a specific line on economic governance. Which means that any direct link to implementation has been left to the [MEJN] secretariat.

(MEJN Director)

This increasing control and attempted 'disciplining' by the secretariat, in turn, led to conflict within the network where members, feeling excluded and sidelined, accused the secretariat of becoming an NGO in its own right. In the words of one network member...

MEJN is a network. They should not be implementers. Let them use their members... Of course there have been some clashes between MEJN and their members... And people have moved away from getting interested in MEJN. Because MEJN wants to be the implementer. ... I think that's a conflict, that's where the conflict comes in now. So let them identify what is their role. Are they facilitators or implementers? MEJN is not an NGO. The way I understand it, it is a network.

(representative of MEJN member organisation)

Some of this acrimony may be due to competition within the sector for resources. As noted in Chapter Two, ‘NGO-ism’ is big business in Malawi, as elsewhere.

Employment within the sector is extremely lucrative with high salaries on offer, in particular for those successful enough to obtain a position within an international NGO. MEJN’s relatively rapid rise to notoriety and its success in attracting large sums of donor support may well have led to envy within the sector. As noted by one NGO member this can lead to problems when NGOs attempt to form coalitions or networks...

The problems with the networks in Malawi is everybody comes with different motives. Some come because they think there is money, some are really committed to the issues, others have other motives.... It is a question of give and take.... There is a lot of power struggle, there is a lot of who is the NGO, who is powerful...

(MEJN member organisation)

And so, as MEJN developed and began to employ more staff, its disciplining actions also developed as it placed increasing emphasis on ‘capacity’, moving more into a role of technical expert, than coordinator.

Because I think that even a number of the member organisations of MEJN are viewing MEJN as a competitor, and not as one of their body to which they are part. And this can partly be explained by the levels of expertise that are existing within the civil society sector in Malawi. I think one positive thing that has seen MEJN moving much more tremendously than the other organisations is our pragmatic approach in terms of staffing, because we say the minimum is we are going to recruit somebody who has got say a Bachelors degree, or indeed whose experience is closer to having a Bachelors degree. Now generally, that is not the approach in other civil society organisations in Malawi...

(Director MEJN)

Many civil society organisations in Malawi, they just want to make noise out of emotions without investing in the research. This unwillingness to invest even in proper human resources has been a stumbling block.

(Director MEJN)

And so, MEJN quickly moved from its initial objectives – to secure broad-based NGO participation engaging multiple perspectives – to securing a much narrower technical

base, largely comprising core secretariat staff, in response to the discourse and communication norms favoured by both the state and international donors. This involved a self-disciplining, together with an attempted (but failed) disciplining of members. The positive consequences of these actions were significantly increased funding for the organisation, facilitating the consolidation of its status and profile, both nationally and internationally. Negative consequences included rising conflict with its membership base, growing competition with members over funding, and the exclusion of members deemed unsuitable or insufficiently ‘capacitated’ for MEJN’s new work programmes – in short, a fragmentation of the sector. MEJN’s story does not end here however. Before moving on to explore subsequent developments, we first turn to the community and voluntary pillar’s journey within Ireland’s Social Partnership, where, as we will see, many of the same issues arose.

8.3.2 Contestation, frustration and division: The community and voluntary pillar’s journey

The community and voluntary pillar members’ experiences within Social Partnership mirror those of MEJN to an extent, in that similar communication norms privileging a ‘professional’, argument-based approach favoured certain groups over others, in particular policy-oriented groups with research and resources to support their positions. As noted in Chapter Six, a key difference between the PRSP process and that of Social Partnership was that, while the former placed civil society representatives into separate thematic working groups, Social Partnership requires community and voluntary pillar members to work together within their own pillar, where they are required to produce joint proposals and inputs. As a result, the majority of many members’ time is taken up in meetings with other groups within their own pillar rather than with other actors within the wider process. From the outset, with a range of different groups involved,

the pillar proved to be a site of strong ideological contestation between participating groups. It is clear that a considerable proportion of members' time and energy went on, as it was frequently put, "*negotiating within the pillar*", as communication norms and discourses proved as contested as, if not even more than, specific policy positions.

Ideological conflicts

The community and voluntary pillar formed in 1996 bears out Gramsci's theory of civil society (and, in this case, a very small cross-section thereof) as a hotbed of ideological contestation and struggle. Ideological differences existed across a range of areas. There were conflicts between issue-based /single constituency groups focused specifically on policy outcome (e.g. NYCI, INOU), and broader-based groups who focused on process as well as outcome (e.g. the CWC and some other Platform members). There were conflicts between welfare-type approaches to social inclusion, as advocated in particular by the religious groups such as CORI and the SVP, to more transformative ones which aimed at structural change and, in some cases, cultural change (e.g. NWCI, Platform, INOU). For example the SVP acknowledges that...

...we don't tend to look for huge changes, massive, massive structural changes in the way that other organisations might advocate for. So in a way you could argue that we may maintain the status quo by looking for little tweaks and little increments and little changes that ensure that the currently existing machine continues in its present form and is nipped and tucked according to certain key needs or certain key gaps and blockages within the system, but that we're for the system if you like. And I think that would reflect where the [SVP] members are coming from...

(SVP representative)

Other groups operate out of a more transformative approach. For example, the NWCI has a distinctly feminist approach, seeking structural change towards a more equitably gendered system. There were also conflicts in communication norms, with some stressing a 'professional' approach (e.g. CORI), yet others favouring wider, and

sometimes emotional methods of communication (e.g. the CWC, NWCI). While some members, therefore, attempted to colonise and transform the spaces available, thereby enabling more transformative participation and perhaps acting as ‘organic’ leaders, others took on the mantle of ‘traditional’ leaders, acting within the dominant hegemonic framework. With this range of ideological diversity how did the pillar operate? Before turning to this, it is pertinent to examine the core constituent of the pillar in 1996, the Community Platform.

The Community Platform – ‘organic leader’?

The Community Platform’s aim of bringing a wider range of voices into the process suggests an initiative towards perspective-based representation with the Platform playing the role of Gramsci’s ‘organic intellectual’. The CWC and the ITM both claim that the purpose of the Platform was wider than Social Partnership, with the primary aim being the establishment of a collective platform to promote issues of inclusion and social equity. This is contested however by other members who claim that access to Social Partnership was the primary aim of Platform leaders. A number of Platform members (e.g. EAPN, IRL, Age Action) admit that they joined the Platform primarily to gain access to Social Partnership as they would not have managed to do so otherwise as their organisations were too small and under-resourced to input independently. For many members there was also a solidarity element however, as noted by one Platform member

...the thing about Social Partnership is it runs across groups because it’s a collective thing, so what you’re shaping is the bigger picture for a whole lot of other people, not just the sector that you’re in yourself.... Shaping the social agenda and where resources are going to be placed, it’s a bigger picture.
(CV platform member)

Whatever members' reasons for involvement, the Platform was very strong at the time it first became involved in the Social Partnership process, with meetings well attended at the time. It appeared to be a priority for member organisations and there was much enthusiasm and energy around it.

While the constituency of the Platform would suggest perspective-based representation, it remains unclear how this was mediated. Unfortunately, it is beyond the remit of this study to examine each member's mechanisms of mediation with its constituencies (although, as noted elsewhere, research in this area is required as it would contribute toward filling a significant empirical void that exists on civil society activism in Ireland, together with its implications for democracy more generally). Notwithstanding this limitation, it is pertinent to note that one ex-member's concerns in this area went largely unnoticed within the Platform.

We had concerns about what meaningful participation for people who experienced inequality and poverty, who was participating, how structures and processes could be out in place for that kind of participation, rather than people participating on their behalf.... And I would say now that, how would I say it, however I tried to voice that I didn't voice it very well, and it was heard very much as criticism of the people who were involved as I understand it.... I remember one meeting in particular that I found very difficult and the discussion came up, I tried to articulate that we had an interest in building the participation part of it. And the response back was very defended with people saying that our organisation represents x number of groups and I have no problem with participation, I represent blah, blah, and I have no problem about participation, so what's your problem?

(ex-Community Platform member)

It is also pertinent in this regard to note the Platform's ex-coordinator's comment which, similar to MEJN as it developed, reveals a gap between Social Partnership participants and those they represent. As with the MEJN secretariat, an internalisation of dominant forms of knowledge is apparent where, when asked about aim of Platform, she responded

to secure policy outcomes... [also] to try to reshape how decisions were made... looking at the whole of the equality framework, And sometimes to groups on the ground that might mean didly squat [my emphasis] but actually, what it was really really about was thinking longterm and saying if we're serious about securing equality outcomes you've got to address the rot in the system basically, you've got to try and change the way structures operate.

(ex-Community Platform Coordinator)

From the ex-Coordinator's comment, it appears that the Platform, like the Irish state, was outcome-based in its participation, appearing to be more interested in changing governance structures or, to use the NESC Director's phrase, "*state building*", than in perspective-based representation. The Platform appears to have been dominated by a small number of core members, a "*clique*" as some members referred to it. Members outside this 'clique' report that they sometimes found their inputs ignored. One of the Platform members who endorsed the 2003 agreement outlines how his views were sidelined and rejected by the dominant 'clique' within the Platform which chose to reject the agreement.

I had very strong views at the time, the manner in which it [the 2003 strategy] was rejected. The Community Platform have always said that anything they would do would be based on inclusion principles. The first time they ever took a vote was then, and they rejected effectively six people's views, in my case very strong views.

(Community Platform member)

The use of the term 'they' in this comment is telling in that it demonstrates that a member of the Platform nonetheless perceives it as something separate, (this was also the case with MEJN, where many members also referred to the network as 'they'). The Platform thus appears to have acquired, like MEJN, an organisational status all its own. While its difficult and uncompromising (as evidenced in its decision not to endorse the 2003 strategy) position is undeniable, questions may be raised as to its truly representative nature, and the manner in which its leaders (and key members) mediated Platform agency with their member constituencies.

From transformation to bureaucracy: 'Negotiating' within the pillar

As noted above, the Platform operated within the community and voluntary pillar, an official community and voluntary construct of the state for involvement within the Social Partnership process. With restricted access to many Social Partnership fora, the majority of participants' time was spent on meetings and negotiations with other pillar members. Engagement within the pillar proved to be extremely time-consuming and, for many groups, the most tedious and frustrating part of the process, leaving little time to engage with their own constituent groups and mediate their views. In this, the operation of pillar members begins to resemble that of the MEJN secretariat as it became embroiled in the exigencies of the PRSP/MGDS process and related fora. Pillar meetings largely consisted of discussions on procedure – how to prepare and present inputs for ministerial group meetings, who to select for different partnership-related committees and fora, how to review plenaries - as well as feedback from different fora and circulation of draft papers. In addition, many members also attended different committee meetings related to the process. One member describes the level of complexity of the bureaucracy.

As a new person coming in I used to go to the pillar... my first induction weeks, I went to a pillar meeting and a Platform meeting. I couldn't tell the difference – where one meeting ended – where another began. I didn't know what they were about – hadn't a clue. I used to find it so bizarre that people were just in it, and it was just like a bureaucracy, and that we were part of that bureaucracy really. And I'd hear of people going to so many meetings [committee meetings arising from Social Partnership agreements]. They were burnt out, they were fed up, and de-motivated, you know because there was so little to show for it.

(Community Platform member)

It is clear that the exigencies of both pillar and Platform meetings left little time for much other work.

I have to say when I look back at the work we did in the Platform, the amount of time that we spent working within that space within a broader, then housed within another Matridashka doll called the community and voluntary pillar that was in another doll called Social Partnership, it was just incredibly labour intensive.

(Community Platform member)

While a number of organisations divide the work involved between two or more people, the average estimate of human resource requirements for the process is at least one person full-time, with this intensifying during the period of the negotiations.

Unsurprisingly these requirements exclude many groups from the process, in particular smaller groups with no policy expertise...

to be involved you need to be a national organisation, you need to have some sort of resources. Now that itself a lot of the sector wouldn't have. And even for ourselves, just to have the time and energy to devote to it is huge in a way. And almost too you'd need to be specialised in all of the areas and not just your own because you're involved in it at every level... it would be hard to see how all community groups on the ground could engage at that level with a process like this.

(CV pillar member)

Elsewhere, the process was described as “*macho*” and “*for the big boys*”, and thus far from inclusive.

I was just thinking on the way in, my daughter is doing her Junior Cert this year, I'm at home helping with exams. I couldn't actually physically take part in Partnership now even if I wanted to. And I'd say that's true of a lot of people. I couldn't possibly find the time... And it would also affect the organisation as well. So if you are involved in Partnership it becomes almost like a fulltime job.

(ex-CV pillar member)

While many participants appreciate that at times the work required can be demanding this is generally seen as largely unnecessary...

And during the Partnership talks a lot of the people who were involved in the talks were fulltime in the room for three months. And by fulltime I mean sort of

four in the morning on a Sunday night, Monday morning, sitting around waiting for documents. This sort of macho negotiating style with the unions, employers lobbying, sitting up all night trying to reach an agreement. Which was completely irrelevant to the way our sector works because we're not into this sort of looking over the brink and trying to pull a two per cent increase out of... it doesn't make any sense. But it was seen as very much a priority area.

(ex-CV pillar member)

With these resource demands, Social Partnership has clearly had an impact on the direction and functioning of participant community and voluntary organisations, drawing resources away from other functions. Specifically, community and voluntary participants noted that their links with their respective membership bases have suffered, thereby affecting the nature and quality of their representation.

Conflict and frustration

Inevitably the ideological differences and power struggles within the pillar escalated into heated conflict and confrontation leaving participants tired, frustrated and demotivated. Two pillar members describe the atmosphere within the pillar leading up to the negotiations in 2000.

There had been absolute murder to be honest with you. All through the process it was just pure murder. There was just huge power struggles going on all the time.

(CV pillar member)

The pillar space was a pure head wreck. I mean it was a head wreck. It was a, a very very destructive, negative, place to be.

(CV pillar member)

Tensions and animosity mounted as some participants personalised this conflict...

If you don't agree with them [referring to particular organisations within the pillar] you're toast. And they will belittle you and deride you and slag you off and persecute you, when you're around and when you're not around, and I know.

(CV pillar member)

Following completion of the 2000 strategy, while participant organisations remained unchanged, there were some changes in staff composition. Some of these reflected individual career moves with some key actors moving into state or semi-state positions, a move again illustrating the porosity of the state and community and voluntary sector in Ireland, in line with that uncovered in an African context through recent research. Other moves simply reflected a disillusionment and frustration with the process as articulated by one ex-pillar member.

I left at that stage and I went to my organisation and I said like, 'I'm not doing another one of these'... I'd grown out of it to some degree, and I just thought... I just said to them 'I'm not going into another meeting with [individual X]. And I'm not getting into a power game that I don't want'. Because I didn't actually... genuinely... I have no interest in sitting up all night negotiating. I have two small kids. I had a one-year old, and I was just 'I'm just not doing it, like'.

(ex-CV pillar member)

Although the composition of individual personalities engaging in the process up to the 2003 agreement had changed somewhat, frustrations continued on through the 2003 negotiations, as articulated by a pillar member recalling that period.

People got very upset. Personally very upset. It brought people down really. Very, very macho and tempers frayed, and you know, all the rest of it. And at the end of it you'd really have to ask 'what was gained from that?'

(CV pillar member)

Mediating relations within and without

It is agreed by all (state and community and voluntary pillar members) that the negotiations in 2003 were very difficult in that the agenda had changed, with little funding on offer for social development. Having at this point understood, and to a large degree accepted, the norms of Social Partnership as securing specific budgeted policy commitments within a problem-solving framework, community and voluntary pillar members in the 2003 negotiations found that these were not on offer by the state.

Moreover, one of the enabling features identified in Chapter Six, direct access to key state servants, was also now being denied by state actors. Pillar members found themselves disoriented, powerless and excluded. The resultant agreement left members torn between maintaining relations built up within the process, and honouring those with their constituencies without. A split was inevitable. Following completion of the 2003 agreement, it was decided (by a majority vote) within the Platform to publicly reject it. While there has never been a formal ratification requirement for Social Partnership agreements, both the term itself (agreement as opposed to strategy in Malawi's case), and the unwritten codes of conduct that surround it, imply endorsement of resultant strategies by all. The Platform's rejection of the 2003 agreement (or non-agreement as it thus was)⁷⁴, although it attracted sparse media coverage and failed to generate wider public debate on either the process or the issues, nonetheless appears to have perturbed both the state and remaining Social Partners alike, in that it highlighted the reality of false consensus and undermined the legitimacy of both the process and its remaining participants. This is evidenced in the consequences for the dissenting parties which were removed by the state from the process, losing their Social Partner status, an issue discussed in more detail in the preceding Chapter (Seven). What is worth noting here however, is that the punitive consequences for dissenting groups came not just from the state, but also from members within the community and voluntary pillar itself, as well as from other pillar members. One ex-participant outlines its experience of this.

But what's interesting is that some of the groups that stayed in the pillar, and some of the trade union groups... would be even more punitive than the state itself... more exclusionary than the state itself.... The NESF has project teams. Now there was an election. That was based on no criteria – just an election. We didn't get elected even though it was something like atypical work in the labour market [an issue the group specifically works on]
(ex-2003 CV pillar member)

⁷⁴ While the Community Platform, as a coalition, rejected the 2003 strategy, many individual member organisations (e.g. CORI, ICTUCU, INOU, SVP, Protestant Aid, IRL and Age Action Ireland) chose to endorse it.

This exclusion of dissenting groups by other civil society groups themselves illustrates powerful hegemonic divergences among Social Partners within the process, with remaining Social Partners keen to excoriate dissensus from all fora associated with Social Partnership. Thus, for many participants remaining within the process, relationships built up within, with state actors and other Social Partners, remain paramount.

Fragmentation and division

This split, following the 2003 strategy, led to increased fragmentation within the sector. Both new and ex-pillar members have lost their appetite for collective ways of working. Both flagging energy levels and, as in Malawi, competition for resources appear to be the reasons for this. Within the re-constituted pillar, members are adopting more individualist approaches.

I kind of body-swerved the collective because I think that we've shown it seldom happens, not in the public domain. Especially when you have a number of formidable individuals who are going to do their own thing anyway.

(CV pillar member)

I will probably expend less energy in constructing a structure of a pillar than I will spend on implementing 2016 [the 2006 strategy]. The pillar can be a draining place, a lot of procedural issues get into play, people start arguing about voting rules, and all sorts of rules and regulations, and I think that's frankly a waste of energy and time.

(CV pillar member)

Because I think it's very clear, as much as we are democratic within the pillar, as much as we have worked to make a pillar position, this is not a consensus game, this is not a cooperation game. Every one of the fifteen of us is out for our own agenda and we really couldn't give a hoot about the others.

(New CV pillar member)

Meanwhile, outside the process from 2003 to early 2007, the Community Platform weakened considerably, with Platform meetings reportedly being very poorly attended and many affiliations just nominal. It appears that the appetite for collective action has waned within the sector in general as well as among Social Partners.

I don't think people are good in this country... we seem to have a problem in Ireland about setting up big coalitions, big alliances, they always fall apart again. And I think there's something about how fragmented we are, there's a suspicion of big alliances, people don't put too much energy into big alliances... I think it's partially a suspicion... there's a funding competition as well, everyone has to justify their own funding.

(ex-2003 CV pillar member)

And there aren't many organisations, again the Community Workers Coop is probably an exception, who now think its [Platform] important. We've gone from a situation where you'd have two or three people from each organisation at a typical Platform meeting to where you'd now have maybe only six or seven people in the room out of the twenty something organisations. It's a complete change-around. It's no longer seen as priority.

(Community Platform member)

As in Malawi, the community and voluntary pillar members' experiences serve to demonstrate the ideological diversity within the sector in Ireland. Their experiences also illustrate the highly competitive nature of the sector. This loss of appetite for collective action perhaps paves the way for greater engagement and mobilisation of members / representative groups, although the mood may again change with the Platform, led once more by the CWC, re-entering the process in 2007.

The Disciplined turn to Disciplining: The 2003-2007 CV pillar

Following the state's ejection of dissenting pillar members in 2003, new groups were invited by the state to join. While the process for the inclusion of new pillar members was open, with any national organisation reportedly free to apply, some (for example

The Wheel⁷⁵) were explicitly invited to apply. Not all organisations that applied were accepted⁷⁶. While the criteria for eligibility were quite broad (to be a national organisation, to have a proven track record, and to be representative of a broad societal group), it appears that criteria were somewhat fluid, with other unwritten factors also coming into play. Following the 2003 restructuring, a new community and voluntary pillar configuration emerged, divided between original pillar members who had endorsed the 2003 agreement (six) and nine new members, the latter organised into thematic strands. The new pillar, constituting a greater proportion of the voluntary end of the community and voluntary spectrum, and perhaps illustrative of the state's normative conception of civil society (see previous Chapter), is as follows:

Table 8.3.2: Community and Voluntary pillar members: 2003 – early 2007

Thematic Strand	Pillar member
-	CORI
-	ICTUCU
-	INO
-	NYCI
-	SVP
-	Protestant Aid
Disability Strand	Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI)
Carers Strand	Carer's Association of Ireland
Children's Strand	Children's Rights Alliance (CRA)
Community Strand	The Wheel
Elderly Strand	Age Action Ireland* Irish Senior Citizens Parliament
Housing Strand	Irish Council for Social Housing National Association of Building Cooperatives of Ireland
Rural strand	Irish Rural Link* (IRL)

*former members of the Community Platform

⁷⁵ At an unrelated meeting with the Chair of Social Partnership, The Wheel Director claims that he introduced the topic of Social Partnership and suggested that the organisation might be interested in putting in an application. "...various things were said that led us to understand. [X] speaks very, you interpret things you know?"

⁷⁶ In interview, representatives of the Department of an Taoiseach refused to divulge who these groups were or the reasons for their refusal.

Two principal features characterise the newly reconstituted pillar, post 2003. First, notwithstanding their individualist strategies, members are determined to present a united, consensual front and dispel any impressions of dissent, disagreement and conflict within the pillar. In many respects the new pillar which, in the words of one member, has now “*come of age*” appears to have followed a similar path to that travelled by MEJN, now conforming more closely to the professionalised communication norms privileged by the process.

I would have two experiences [working within the pillar]... the experience before, during 2003, Sustaining Progress, was more difficult in that agreement or consensus within the pillar was always more difficult... In the last three years there was a serious attempt to address that reality... I think members of the pillar, although there are and was tensions, came up with a working arrangement whereby we'd by and large put together our main priorities.
(CV pillar member)

Experience [within pillar] has generally been very good. I think it's been quite business-like.
(new CV pillar member)

Second, although cognisant of the need to include other groups within the pillar (in particular groups representing women, travellers and the ‘new Irish’), many members of the pillar are clear that the ‘professional’ codes of conduct will need to be recognised and adhered to by all. A disciplining (in the Foucauldian sense) element has entered the pillar, where there is no longer any room for groups not committed to a problem-solving discourse employing what have become the normative communication methods of “*reasonable*” evidenced-based argumentation. Any other communicative approach, as articulated by one new pillar member below, is now perceived as knocking the process, dragging down pillar members, and demonstrating a lack of respect for the process and its participants.

...I suppose I have no difficulty for any organisations coming in once they're coming in for the right reasons, and not to knock the whole process and not to drag us all down... It's a lot about attitude as well of people. I think the community and voluntary platform could make a very positive role in partnership once it doesn't try to unbalance the respect that we've built up.
(new CV pillar member)

It is too early to tell how the CWC and NWCI, re-entering the process in early 2007⁷⁷, will react to this disciplining. While, as previously noted, it lies beyond the parameters of this research to determine whether this disciplining extends to participant constituencies, some members' comments on the need to 'sell' the resultant agreement to their own organisation's membership, together with the comment of one new community and voluntary pillar member, reflecting on how its organisation's involvement in Social Partnership has affected its approach toward its members, provide some pointers in this regard.

I think we're becoming more the how to of making that stuff [policy commitments within the recent agreement] travel and developing our skills around how do we enable and support organisations within our own sector to work coherently into that stuff and issues more so than being an agency that will say or list out what are the top ten issues. ... you can't just carry on in your ordinary way.... We've started already trying to get our own organisations to understand that.

(New CV pillar member)

Communication and dialogue appear to be more of a top-down nature with an emphasis on disseminating information on the agreement's contents "*making that stuff travel*" and "*trying to get our organisations to understand...*". The approach is strongly consonant with that of Gramsci's 'traditional intellectual' leadership, and appears to offer little scope to member organisations to question or challenge the agreement's contents, or indeed the strategy and approach of its representative organisation.

⁷⁷ The newly reconstituted community and voluntary pillar post 2007 had not yet begun meeting at the time of writing.

However, it remains unclear if this is a generally held view within the pillar, or one particular to this organisation quoted. Further research exploring pillar participants' relations with their member organisations, including an examination of the agency of members themselves, is necessary to explore fully this question of 'disciplining' versus 'conscientising'.

8.3.3 MEJN and the Community and Voluntary Pillar: Disciplined and Disciplining

Bringing the journeys and experiences of the two groupings together (MEJN and the community voluntary pillar), we see that both have travelled a difficult, demanding and sometimes rocky road through their respective processes. The experiences of both groups strongly resemble each other up to this point. Ideological differences between and among constituent members were apparent from the outset, although arguably more so within the community and voluntary pillar than within MEJN. Members of both groupings clearly found efforts to work as an idealised homogenous construct challenging, with MEJN members resisting by not altering their work plans to fulfil the monitoring role ascribed post-PRSP formulation, while community and voluntary pillar members found efforts to overcome differences both frustrating and exhausting. There is undoubtedly an important lesson here for commentators and practitioners viewing (and financially supporting) civil society coalitions as idealised homogenous constructs. The procedural and communication norms of both processes, internalised by participants, clearly exacted a toll. Groups and organisations not adhering to the norms were marginalised, from within their own sectors and groupings, as well as by the state, and splits within both constructs were the inevitable result. Both processes today

involve a narrower array of actors⁷⁸ who, through their own agency, have ‘professionalised’ their behaviour and assumed a public consensual, cohesive front, enjoying a higher official profile and more solid financial base in return.

8.3.4 : Interpreting participants’ actions: Culture and discipline

While so far I have demonstrated the disciplining actions of specific actors within civil society groups in both processes, the question remains as to why actors in both processes adopted dominant norms and turned to actions of self-disciplining when, as we have seen, the result was conflict, exclusion, sectoral fragmentation, and the erosion of opportunities for transformative participation. This question may be explored in two ways. One is to examine participants’ own perceived benefits of the respective processes. The other is to consider the wider political cultures within which both processes are embedded.

In relation to the first, participants were asked what they felt the main benefits of engagement to be. In both Malawi and Ireland, the principal answer to this question was enhanced prestige and status for their organisation. This, in turn, was felt to afford access to key information and policy fora. In Malawi, as we have seen, MEJN’s involvement in the PRSP/MGDS process has clearly brought notoriety and status to the network, in the form of both access to official fora and, not insignificantly, to a large pool of donor funding. MEJN is now recognised as one of the most powerful NGO groups in the country, calling itself “*an official representative of the civil society*”⁷⁹, and regarded by the state as an umbrella for all civil society. For this reason, in 2005,

⁷⁸ Although again, both the Community Platform and NWCI’s re-entry to Social Partnership, on the surface, represents a widening of the Social Partnership process, it remains to be seen how this will play out within what has been argued to be a largely ‘disciplined’ community and voluntary pillar.

⁷⁹ *MEJN Programme Support Document* (MEJN, 2004c)

the state deemed it sufficient to invite MEJN alone (out of all Malawian NGOs) to participate in the MGDS. As a World Bank representative put it when speaking of the consultation process for the MGDS, *“I know some NGOs that are scattered all over have not been consulted. What government has done is concentrated on a few that are regarded as powerful”*.

Many of MEJN’s member organisations who participated in the PRSP formulation process cite the main benefit of participation as being the opportunity to network with donor organisations. They felt that being part of the process gave them a competitive edge and a ‘seriousness’ that was helpful in attempting to secure additional funding for their organisations. Participation in the process was perceived to bring a status and prestige to the participant organisations, facilitating their access to resources in the ever-competitive NGO sector.

In Ireland, some community and voluntary pillar members also alluded to this perceived status. In the words of one of the new pillar members...

The fact that you’ve got that mark, that you’ve been recognised as a social partner does add credence and credibility to your case, it does. There is a certain ‘oh, they’re a Social Partner, right, they’ve obviously had to achieve a certain standard’...

(new CV pillar member)

Other pillar members spoke of perception of power that some participants felt they had attained.

...at times I could sit back in amusement at the whole process and the vying for positions around a table. Some of my partners in negotiations wanted to be seen at the top table all the time and I was kind of bemused at their antics sometimes, trying to be seen to be in positions of influence and, at times, it didn’t really matter whether they were or not.

(CV pillar member)

Indeed, participation in Ireland's process explicitly confers a status in that participants are known as 'Social Partners'. Again, as in Malawi, and as detailed in the preceding Chapter (Seven), this has had the advantage of attracting additional state resources for certain participant organisations. Community and voluntary pillar members also noted that their Social Partner status afforded them access to both key civil servants and other Social partners (from other pillars as well as their own); access that proved difficult prior to their attainment of this status.

Thus, participation in the respective processes is perceived to have brought with it a status and prestige for participating organisations which has facilitated their access to key decision makers and influencers, as well as securing additional financial resources thereby further strengthening their position and viability.

A second, and related factor, lies in the political cultures within which both processes are embedded. Disciplining actions within both processes are illustrative of these broader cultures. As we have seen in Chapter Three, political cultures in both Malawi and Ireland embody many common features including hierarchical structures of social relations in which loyalty and conformity to political leaders remains strong, with conflict and dissensus not readily tolerated. These norms accord with NGO and community and voluntary pillar participants' perceptions that state fora are the place to be, together with the disciplining actions of civil society leaders within these fora. However, we also saw in Chapter Three that these authoritarian, hierarchical norms within both countries are changing, with the media emerging as a growing public space fostering critical analysis and transparency. As we will see, this public space proved

crucial in determining the differentially evolving forms of leadership among Malawian and Irish civil society participants respectively.

8.4 Fostering public debate and transforming participation: MEJN as ‘organic leader’?

As I outlined in Chapter Six, as time evolved within both processes, a key difference between Malawian and Irish civil society participant agency emerged in relation to their actions in fostering ‘communications without’ and raising public debate. While MEJN, in its ongoing intensive media work, maintained a public spotlight on the PRSP process and its own engagement therein, community and voluntary pillar members, adopting the ‘confidentiality’ norms of Social Partnership, significantly decreased their work in this area, thereby dimming the public spotlight on both the process and their engagement within it, and effectively silencing relevant public debate. This paucity of public debate in Ireland has allowed the issue of community and voluntary pillar members’ agency and legitimacy within the process to continue largely unquestioned (either by organs of the state or of civil society). In contrast, in Malawi, the healthy public debate on the PRSP, both in terms of its developmental implications and in terms of participant agency, has included challenges to MEJN and its claims to representivity. This has had implications for evolving forms of leadership within the secretariat, once again potentially increasing the space for transformative participation.

8.4.1 Networking outward: Legitimacy challenged

MEJN’s trajectory to this point largely corresponds to that of many NGOs embracing the normative model of the ‘good governance’ era as outlined in Chapter Two, whereby it appears that the impetus at the time of the network’s establishment – that of bringing

a wider set of voices espousing the concerns and agendas of the poor – had become over-ridden by the agendas of funding agencies – the professional requirements of which led to a widening gap between the secretariat, the network’s membership and the people it was purporting to represent. And so, to this point, MEJN was responding to international influences which, as has become apparent, appear largely unconcerned with issues of legitimacy and representation. However MEJN’s story does not end here as wider national debates and critiques, informed by international debate and, in particular, by the national media, began to make their mark.

With the growing gap between its members and the secretariat occurring at a time when MEJN was gaining national and international renown through its use of the mass media, MEJN’s secretariat began to find itself confronted with charges of legitimacy from within Malawi’s civil society sector. From its early days of relying on the World Bank’s *Voices of the Poor* (Naryan et al, 2000) as a basis for its inputs to the PRSP, MEJN’s management and secretariat were faced with a growing consciousness that the network had not consolidated a grassroots base which might feed into policy and advocacy activities, thereby putting into practice the theory of “*participatory economic governance*”⁸⁰ that the network espoused and informing a perspective-based representation. Indeed, with policy and programmes in the country becoming more and more decentralised, the MEJN network appeared the very embodiment of the ‘elite’ NGO divorced from its roots, as depicted in the critical development literature of the late 1990s. MEJN remained a largely urban-based network, purporting to represent the poor, yet with an office and entire staff in Lilongwe. In 2002, cognisant of these issues, responding to public critiques, and seeking to consolidate a grassroots base, the MEJN

⁸⁰ See *MEJN Programme Support Document* (MEJN, 2004c)

secretariat began to build a local network of representation in the form of what became known as the District Chapter Programme.

8.4.2 Networking inward: The District Chapter Programme

MEJN's District Chapter Programme consists of locally elected voluntary committees of eight to ten people claiming to represent the interests of their communities at district level. At the time of writing, committees had been established in twenty-seven of Malawi's twenty-nine districts⁸¹. Each district has its own local government in line with the country's decentralisation policy. While the initiative for the Chapter Programme came from MEJN secretariat staff, committees were elected locally and consist principally of representatives of both local NGOs and local community-based associations including youth groups, women's groups, faith-based groups, and trade and business associations.

This new model for the network represents an interesting development in a number of ways. First, it unveils the richness and diversity that is civil society in Malawi. In doing so, MEJN has challenged many of the normative assumptions upon which it was founded. Second, the innovative model, linking MEJN's normative 'elites' at national level with associations and groups on the ground, potentially provides a channel for local voices to articulate their situation and aspirations (corresponding to Young's (2000) "*perspective based representation*"), both at local government level, and nationally. This introduces a political dimension to local associational activism directly contesting the widespread assertion of apoliticism of civic life in Malawi as discussed in Chapter Two. In its initiative in establishing this structure, MEJN's role may be likened

⁸¹ Malawi had twenty-eight districts. One of these was recently split into two to make twenty-nine. MEJN has set up Chapters in all except the districts of N'eno and Likoma.

to that of an ‘organic intellectual’ (although, as we see below, the nature of the secretariat’s mediation with these groups remains contested). Third, this development illustrates the importance of external communications and debate (in this case both charges of legitimacy from the wider arena of civil society, including the media, and the national policy of decentralisation with its attendant discourse of participatory governance⁸²) on the network, despite its consolidated relations with both the state and international donors⁸³.

Contesting dominant communication norms: Perspective-based representation versus evidence generation

Responding to critiques, MEJN secretariat’s aim in developing the District Chapter structure was to institutionalise a national structure of representation which would enable the secretariat to bring people’s issues from the ground to the national policy arena. This was to be achieved by Chapter committee members systematically gathering data and information in specified areas (food security, health, education etc.) and feeding this upwards to the secretariat for what MEJN terms its “*evidence based advocacy*”⁸⁴, thereby responding to growing charges of legitimacy against the network. Chapter members, however, have a very different vision for their work. In interviews, committee members in eight different districts all emphasised that they were interested in representing their local communities, bringing issues of local concern and interest to local government structures. In particular, members were interested in moving beyond the main town within the district (where many committee members live) and going out to villages and settlements in outlying areas. Members were emphatic that MEJN’s role

⁸² The new Constitution Act No. 7 of 1995 (Chapter XIV) provided for the creation of local government authorities whose responsibilities include the promotion of local democratic participation.

⁸³ It should be acknowledged that, cognisant of wider critiques, these relations also appear to be increasingly dependent on MEJN demonstrating an institutional capacity to represent the poor.

⁸⁴ See *MEJN Programme Support Document* (MEJN, 2004c)

lay in facilitating people at the grassroots to articulate their view and concerns. As one Chapter member put it... “*MEJN is for the people... If MEJN is only for the boma [district main town] then we are a failure. It’s the people in the grassroots who need MEJN more*”. Many committee members were already engaged in this outreach work and had taken the initiative to hold meetings with village groups bringing the issues raised back to the relevant authorities in local government offices in what may be perceived as a move toward more perspective-based representation. Specific instances of this work cited ranged from moving forward developments on local services, to mediating local political disputes. There is, therefore, clearly a divergence of views on the role and function of local committee structures, together with understandings as to what constitutes representation and participation. While for the secretariat, having internalised dominant forms of communication, this representative structure is there to collect ‘evidence’, i.e. carry out research on specific areas as selected by the secretariat (often following donor requirements), committee members, employing more popular forms of communication, appear to view their role as a portal for the views and perspectives of local communities (however these may be defined or identified) to be fed upward to key decision makers, both through their own Chapter committee representatives at district level, and through those of the secretariat at national level.

This bifurcation is not lost on Chapter members. Repeatedly the question of representation was raised by committee members, as articulated by one member... “*who do we represent – do we represent MEJN or do we represent our communities?*”. When prompted to respond to their own question, committee members replied that they felt they represented their communities and that the MEJN secretariat should be there to facilitate them in doing this. The committee members’ question is illuminating in that it

highlights the contradiction between perspective-based representation and the discursive and communicative norms adopted by MEJN. While the secretariat, enmeshed in donor and state relations, is keen to direct committees in meeting their (donor and state) agendas by collating select pieces of evidence to support its ‘evidence-based advocacy’, thereby forestalling agendas and issues that might be raised, committees themselves, enmeshed in local relations, appear more keen to take their agendas from local ‘communities’ (in itself a problematic concept and generally mediated through the local TA (Traditional Authority⁸⁵)), thereby offering a channel to communities through less bounded, open dialogue and communication.

Committee members have begun to challenge members of the secretariat to listen to and support their plans for the future. A number of committees have put forward concrete plans for projects they wish to carry out, and there are calls for more supports and less directives from the secretariat. It would seem that the heretofore-neglected local associations and actors within Malawian civil society countrywide have found their political voice and are keen to use it. MEJN has clearly played a key role in facilitating this (albeit perhaps unwittingly) in its initiative to establish the Chapters. MEJN’s role as civil society leader in this context would seem to sway from ‘traditional’ to ‘organic’ in the Gramscian sense, as the secretariat attempts to mediate between the requirements of funders and those of communities and Chapter committees on the ground. In an ‘organic’ sense, the secretariat has provided support to the Chapters in the form of budget monitoring training, introductions to local government officials, and a small stipend to cover their expenses. A DED-funded post provides full-time coordination to the Programme, where local committees are supported in articulating and developing

⁸⁵ In Malawian political life elements of both modern and traditional co-exist. TAs or Chiefs, a hereditary title, form part of the local government structures (together with locally elected councillors and MPs) and mediate many local, community-based, socio-political relations.

their own activities. A gap remains in feeding analysis and perspectives upwards however. While some of this may be due to time constraints on secretariat staff workloads, quite possibly the communications norms of national-level deliberations, underpinned by cultural norms of knowledge and expertise (see Chapter Three), result in bottom-up communication structures remaining a low priority for secretariat staff. In its acceptance of these dominant norms of knowledge, discourse, and communications, and also through some ‘gatekeeping’ of NGO participation at national level, the secretariat may therefore be seen to be swinging back toward Gramsci’s ‘traditional’ form of intellectual leadership.

8.4.3 Mediating relations within the MGDS: MEJN as ‘bridge’?

In its own literature, MEJN describes itself as a “*bridge*” between the Malawian state and civil society, facilitating civil society’s advocacy and lobbying of government and donors⁸⁶. As we have seen, the District Chapter Programme offered significant potential for MEJN to re-invigorate its analysis in this regard by drawing from the lived realities and analyses of local communities as mediated through Chapter committees in Freirean fashion. However, with the advent of the MGDS in 2005, this has not happened. Although the District Chapters were established during the period 2002-2004, Chapter members, when interviewed, were unaware of the process for the formulation of the MGDS, as were MEJN’s original member organisations. Indeed, both Chapter members and original member organisations are largely unaware of much of the secretariat’s national-level work as time has evolved. Unlike the PRSP process, and despite its own characterisation as a “*bridge*”, MEJN’s involvement in the MGDS negotiations was restricted to just two secretariat staff members. Just one feedback

⁸⁶ *MEJN Programme Support Document* (MEJN, 2004c)

workshop was organised for member NGOs, and this is reported as having been hastily organised and poorly attended. There are a number of reasons for this limited and, arguably, non-representative participation, or what Fraser (2005: 76) has termed “*mis-framing*”, wherein secretariat members appear to be substituting for (rather than representing in any visible way) their constituencies. First, the MEJN secretariat, having established the grassroots-based District Chapter structure, continued to privilege ‘professionalised’ communication norms. According to MEJN’s Director, interviewed in 2006, this professionalisation involves building the organisation’s research capacity in line with the communication exigencies of both the state and donors.

... [I] think we must do a lot of research to support our position... research based advocacy to support positions that we have traditionally held. Before we just argued out of emotion but we have seen the advantage of providing well researched options, even to the government itself, and this has even seen certain quarters within the government asking the civil society to conduct research which otherwise would have been done by the government to fill a particular gap. This is what the SDSSs [Service Delivery Satisfaction Surveys – an Oxfam-funded programme⁸⁷] are doing that, government used to do that. It’s part of the process of recognising the role that civil society can play.
(MEJN Director)

This necessarily means focusing resources in the direction of research and technical support rather than toward supporting, nurturing and representing the membership. This aligns with donor interest in specific pieces of policy research and advocacy (with the exception of the DED which, interested in the decentralisation process, continues to fund the District Chapter Programme), but leaves little resources or time to liaise systematically with members and feed their perspectives into national policy processes.

⁸⁷ The SDSS is a formal questionnaire-based survey of people’s satisfaction with local services. While it may be perceived as affording local people a voice, a number of interviewees noted that its formal, closed-ended format and narrow focus on service delivery sets strict parameters on participants’ contributions and misses the fundamental point of resource distribution.

Indeed, despite the District Chapter structure on the ground, the comments of MEJN's Director appear to leave no room for 'local knowledges', discourses and truths in MEJN's national-level work. Second, as noted in Chapter Six, the communication norms of the MGDS process privileged technocratic inputs and left little space for other forms of communication which MEJN may have collated through its membership structures. These norms had, at this point, been internalised by the secretariat who, moving back into the role of 'traditional intellectual', saw little point in involving 'less capacitated' members. Third, the MGDS process was conducted over a relatively short time frame, leaving MEJN with little opportunity to mobilise inputs from Chapter members. It is noteworthy however that the secretariat did not make any effort to delay the process in order to be able to consult with its membership (as it had during PRSP development). Instead, the Director's⁸⁸ time was balanced between attending the various meetings connected to the MGDS, carrying out media interviews (unconnected to the MGDS), and catching up with the growing paper work attached to donor-funded projects and programmes.

And so, MEJN, by 2006, having participated in five years of the PRSP/MGDS process, emerges as a very different organisation to that originally envisaged by its founders. Over the period it has travelled a heady journey in, out, and around the dominant hegemonic terrain, at times assuming the role of an 'organic intellectual' leader, while at others swinging back to more 'traditional' forms of leadership. From the outset, MEJN emerged as a challenge to the procedural order of the PRSP, securing NGO participation and delaying the process to assure wider consultation. Its ongoing media work demonstrates a continued commitment to raising public debate and challenging

⁸⁸ In what is perhaps a telling reflection of MEJN's development over the years the position of Coordinator has now become that of Director, indicating that the leader's role is now to direct rather than coordinate.

certain dominant assumptions in relation to the country's socio-economic future. Although MEJN's recent national-level work suggests that the secretariat members have internalised procedural norms, thereby becoming part of the hegemonic apparatus, the secretariat's initiative in tapping into the diversity of civic life nationwide in an effort to secure a grassroots base brings with it new challenges, both to the network itself and to its situation within or without the hegemonic order, and to civic life in general within the country. MEJN's ongoing journey serves to demonstrate two important things. First, MEJN has highlighted the inaccuracies of normative accounts of Malawi's largely apolitical, voiceless, 'ignorant' civic life, by unveiling the diversity, dynamism and potential that permeates Malawi's civil society. Second, both MEJN's journey within the PRSP/MGDS process at national level, and its efforts to mediate between the exigencies of state and donors on the one hand, and its membership on the other, have demonstrated the significance of diverse political relations and the importance of public communication in challenging and potentially transforming these relations. While there are those who bemoan the network's increasing professionalism...

MEJN was great. MEJN lost direction...I think MEJN has lost its fire. It will become yet another NGO trying hard to justify its existence.
(MEJN original member organisation)

...its locally based membership still lies waiting in the wings, with members of some District Chapter committees becoming increasingly vocal about secretariat support in their efforts towards more perspective-based representation at both local and national level. It remains to be seen how MEJN's secretariat will negotiate the conflicting normative demands of state and donors, on the one hand, and Chapter members and their 'communities' on the other. 'Bridging' these relations and poised with one foot in, and one foot out of the hegemonic order, MEJN's future decisions and actions could

prove both insightful and inspirational to community and voluntary pillar members in Ireland caught in a similar nexus.

8.5 Conclusion: Janus-headed NGOs and transformative participation

In this Chapter I have explored the principal factors underlying the shifts from ‘organic’ forms of leadership to ‘traditional’ forms among civil society actors in both processes. I have argued that the focus has turned from coordinating and transforming participation to its disciplining. This has occurred to varying degrees among different actors in both processes. I have further argued that both organisational consolidation, through enhanced profile and status as well as financial security, together with underlying political cultural legacies embodying norms of hierarchy and loyalty to political leaders have constituted the principal variables underpinning this shift. Two different outcomes for participating groups have been identified. While community and voluntary pillar participants in Ireland’s Social Partnership appear unchallenged in these actions, MEJN, in Malawi, has met with growing public critique and has adapted, to some degree, its leadership to meet these challenges. The key factor underpinning these different outcomes is MEJN’s ‘communication without’ or its fostering of public debate on the process and its participants in Malawi, while the norms of ‘confidentiality’ internalised by community and voluntary pillar participants in Ireland has muted public debate.

In these actions community and voluntary / NGO participants may be likened to the Roman god Janus. Janus was a two-headed god whose statue is typically found in doorways, with each face poised in opposite directions. Standing at the threshold, Janus signifies both vigilance and new beginnings, as in its derivative, January. According to legend, the doors of the temple Janus guarded were kept open at times of war and closed

in times of peace. Legend further has it that Janus' doors were rarely closed (Larousse, 1974). Janus' doors remained open in times of war so that he could remain vigilant for potential enemies and what he perceived as 'the other', that which he did not engage with, and so, did not understand. Janus' signification of vigilance is a reminder of the necessity of continually remaining open to those that have been marginalised and cut off from dialogue, for they may emerge and destroy us. The opening up to these 'others' can offer a space for dialogue which may thwart further marginalisation and ultimately the mutual destruction that can result when we refuse to acknowledge or seek to engage the lived realities of 'others'. Engaging with the 'other', meeting them on their terms, offers the opportunity for new beginnings – new dialogues, new forms of communication, and new ways of visioning the world and its potentials.

The image of Janus, as a symbol of the importance of dialogue, mutual understanding, and new beginnings is pertinent to the agency of civil society actors within the two participatory processes under investigation in that it highlights the importance of communications – both inward, but most especially, outward, as a means towards listening, learning and visioning new beginnings and different conceptions of development. As we have seen, inward communications are certainly important if status and access within the two processes are to be retained. However, as Janus signifies, a sole focus in this direction incites attack, or certainly challenges, from those marginalised outside, thereby destroying the status which has been hard-won inside. This we have seen, both with groupings initially engaged in the two processes themselves, where challenges and attacks ultimately led to fragmentation and exclusion of civil society sectors in both cases, and, in MEJN's case, among wider forces, where charges of legitimacy threatened to undermine the organisation's status and profile.

‘Communication without’, or engaging the ‘other(s)’, as we have seen in this Chapter, serves three principal purposes. It strengthens participants’ positions within both processes by drawing on a wider support base. It maintains checks and balances on civil society actions within the respective processes. And, perhaps most importantly when envisioning developmental alternatives, it provides the potential to ground debates in the lived realities of those heretofore excluded, and therefore brings a relevance to these deliberations.

As we have seen, Social Partnership’s community and voluntary pillar (2003-2007), in adopting the confidentiality norms of Social Partnership, thereby negating the necessity of ‘communicating without’, has one, reduced its power as a transformative agent in the process – as we have seen in Chapter Six, many community and voluntary pillar participants acutely perceive their own powerlessness in the process; two, reduced its accountability and arguably therefore, its legitimacy; and three, in actively facilitating state suppression of public dialogue and debate on both the process and its content, reduced the public space for transformative participation. MEJN, on the other hand, has consistently focused on ‘communicating without’. This has increased its public visibility and profile as a significant civil society actor while, at the same time, increasing its accountability to both its members and the public at large. In consequence, MEJN retains its position as a formidable actor in national policy dialogue, while struggling to mediate the increasingly diverse voices of its constituent base.

MEJN's agency in this regard demonstrates the importance of critical analysis for civil society's continued invigoration. Its new structure of representation, developed in response to legitimacy critiques, places a spotlight on the diversity and political activism of Malawi's heretofore neglected rich body of civic life. In District Chapters' recent challenges to the secretariat to offer a supportive rather than directive leadership to its local structures, MEJN has found itself caught in the crossfire of relations carefully nurtured at national and international level, and the competing exigencies of relations developed at local level through the District Chapters. It remains to be seen how the secretariat will negotiate the conflicting ideological, social and political contexts of state and donors on the one hand, and those of Chapter members and 'their communities' on the other. What is pertinent is that the network's status within or without the hegemonic order remains open and contestable, in part due to MEJN's own agency in promoting public debate and establishing its local structure. This demonstrates MEJN's potential for 'organic leadership' in a complex and challenging environment which, operating within conceptions of 'nominal' and 'instrumental' participation, privileges the 'traditional leader'.

Chapter 9

Transforming participation?: Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

In a world of growing prosperity, the increasing polarisation of the world's community, both between and within countries, is evidence of significant shortcomings in, if not a failure of development. The growing marginalisation of significant sections of the world's population is not just material however, it is also political. It is no coincidence that violence is on the increase, both in Ireland and worldwide, as people, ignored, exploited and disaffected by the purposeful, onward march of economic globalisation, respond angrily to the failures of development in all its dimensions. The need to rethink our collective development paths is ever more urgent. This thesis has endeavoured to make a contribution in this regard by examining the potential of governance processes currently in place, underpinned by concepts of 'partnership' and 'participation', for engaging these disaffected voices. This is not a study about the 'what' of development, it is a study of its 'how'. The focus is not on prescribed development solutions, it is on the mechanisms by which development problems, and indeed strengths, may be framed, analysed and deliberated upon, and by whom. The underlying contention is that development needs to re-engage with the lived realities of marginalised peoples. Their experiences, analyses, dreams and visions need to find expression within current development policy.

Specifically, this study has sought to answer the question as to whether Malawi and Ireland's respective national development processes can offer an outlet for these disaffected voices, and if so, under what conditions. The findings show that, by

transforming participation within these processes, yes they can, but only under certain conditions. With state actors focused on nominal and instrumental forms of participation, these conditions are largely dependent upon civil society leaders within these processes acting in an ‘organic’ fashion. The study makes an original contribution to research on the two development processes under investigation. In re-inserting issues of power and politics into debates on these processes, it also offers a contribution to broader theoretical debates and pushes conceptual boundaries. It enables us to think more deeply and broadly about the broader contexts within which national developmental governance processes operate.

9.2 The dynamics of participation: Research contributions

This study has built on critical accounts of both processes by employing the theoretical framework developed in Chapter Four to go ‘behind the doors’ of both processes over time and examine the evolving dynamics therein. In contrast to more structuralist critical accounts, the study finds that participation within both processes is dynamic rather than fixed. Oscillating between nominal, instrumental and transformative forms, it has indeed, at times, constituted a ‘tyranny’, but at others, it has moved towards a more transformative form, engaging diverse voices and opening the space for multiple development discourses.

The findings presented in Chapter Six demonstrate that the structure of both processes has indeed been key in determining their respective transformative potential. However, the processual analysis employed demonstrates that these structures are not immutable and have changed over time. These changes have been determined by participants’ (state and civil society) agency, which in turn, has been determined by the multiple

relations in which participants are embedded. Constraints to transformative participation have included differential access to institutions within both processes (both formal and informal). This is particularly pronounced in Ireland's Social Partnership where, for most participants, deliberations and negotiations have taken place largely within their own pillars, thereby severely limiting the space for cross-deliberations with other interest groups. Moreover, the drafting committees for both the resultant strategies and the ongoing progress reports in Ireland, unlike Malawi, involve state actors alone. Other constraints within both processes include their adherence to technocratic, problem-solving discourses; their privileging of evidence-based argumentative norms of communication; and, in Ireland's case alone, the norms of confidentiality which increasingly surround Social Partnership, inhibiting broader public debate. Specific conditions enabling transformative participation have included access to key institutional fora (both formal and informal in both cases); time afforded for communication and consultation with members (in particular in Malawi); and the use of media to promote public debate and build support for broader discourses. These enablers, as we have seen, have been the result of civil society agency at particular times within both processes, but paradoxically, civil society participants have also been active in turning many of these enablers back into constraints.

Examining the influences and motivations of states in both processes, in Chapter Seven we have seen that state mediation, in both cases, of both global and national networks and relations (investors and political supporters respectively), focuses on either 'spinning' or 'contracting' participation. State agency in this regard promotes either nominal or instrumental participation. Nominal participation is motivated by the current international vogue for 'good governance' and the need to portray an image of

social cohesion. Instrumental participation, drawing on traditional national governance legacies which enforce norms of loyalty and respect on direct partners, together with the remorphing of self-help traditions into a discourse of ‘active citizenship’ in Ireland, contracts key civic actors as partners in, paradoxically, both managing the social costs accruing from the global development project and, through their own networks, building public support for this project. The argument I make here is that states therefore, in both instances, have no interest in engaging multiple discourses of development, or in moving from problem-solving to problem-framing approaches which engage with broader structural issues, as transformative forms of participation would entail. This task therefore falls to civil society participants in both instances.

Turning to the influences and motivations on civil society agency within both processes, in Chapter Eight I have shown that this is also the product of multiple motivations and influences. Different influences acquire different strengths at different times. One overriding motivation, in both instances, is the perceived status associated with involvement, and the resultant livelihood security which trades on this status.

Examining the evolving dynamics within both processes, disciplining actions are apparent among civil society participants as they have attempted, over time, to persuade their colleagues and members to conform to the dominant discursive and behavioural norms of both processes so that their status therein may be secured. This disciplining has led to fragmentation within civic sectors in both cases, leading ultimately to the exclusion of certain actors whose behaviour and communicative norms have been deemed inappropriate.

The analysis of both processes uncovers many similarities, albeit to differing degrees, in their respective dynamics (although, as we have seen above, institutional differences do exist), the agency of their actors, and the factors influencing this agency. To this point also, the analysis resonates strongly with critical accounts of both processes. It has been argued by commentators that PRSPs constitute a refinement of the liberal political project (Craig and Porter, 2002, Weber, 2004, 2006, Zack-Williams and Mohan, 2006), with analysts contrarily arguing that this is achieved through the exclusion of the poor (Cornwall and Brock, 2005, Weber, 2004, Weber, 2006) or through their “*disciplined inclusion*” (Craig and Porter, 2002). The analysis of the dynamics of the Malawian process, together with the agency of its participants presented in this study, supports this “*disciplined inclusion*” thesis, although it demonstrates that this includes an exclusionary component in instances where disciplining norms are resisted. However, as we have seen in Chapter Eight, the analysis presented here also reveals that the disciplined inclusion of the poor within Malawi is a far from easy task, and certainly not, as Craig and Porter (2002) suggest, a *fait accompli*. Indeed, Craig and Porter’s (2002) analysis appears more suited to an analysis of Ireland’s Social Partnership than PRSPs, for it is this process of “*disciplined inclusion*” which reveals the significant difference between both processes.

In Ireland, Social Partnership critiques take a more overtly structuralist approach, arguing that the process (and by implication the state) has “*co-opted*” the community and voluntary sector (Meade and O’Donovan, 2002, Meade, 2005). It is argued that, through Social Partnership, the state has extended its power nationwide (Collins, 2002) while silencing debates on developmental alternatives (Allen, 2000). While these analyses seem apposite in the light of this study’s findings, they reveal nothing about

the mechanics of how this extension of state power, co-option of the community and voluntary sector, and silencing of debate take place. Moreover, these arguments' attendant images of a somewhat conflicted, emasculated community and voluntary sector, negate the agency of its members. The Irish Social Partnership process is therefore, characterised not only by a silence on developmental alternatives, but also by a silence on civil society agency therein. This study advances these debates by going behind the doors of both processes over time and examining the mechanisms by which such cooption, exclusion, and silencing of debates takes place. In doing so, it re-introduces the issue of agency, in particular that of civil society, and argues that community and voluntary pillar members have been active both in their own co-option, and in silencing debate. This, I argue, has been achieved through a disciplining of actors within the sector, a disciplining which includes the adoption of norms of 'confidentiality' within the process.

To this point the dynamics and outcomes of both processes bear a strong resemblance. The key difference emerging between both processes however, is the differential outcome of this disciplining in both cases.

While in Ireland it appears, at the time of writing (2007), that state and community and voluntary pillar actors have been successful in this disciplining, in Malawi, the incompatibility between these disciplining actions and MEJN's representation of the interests and realities of its constituents has been challenged, both from its own members and among political commentators more broadly. These challenges have been informed by critical debates in the national media, with these, in turn, being informed by international information networks raising issues regarding the legitimacy and

representation of political actors, including civil society. MEJN's reaction to these challenges, in establishing a national, locally based structure of representation, has both challenged normative accounts of a largely dormant, apolitical civil society, and animated local civic actors. These actors, in turn, have challenged MEJN's form of leadership, critiquing the relevance of its disciplinary actions, thereby, once more, opening the space for more transformatory participation.

Taken together, the study makes three principal contributions to research and critical debates on both processes. First, it moves beyond arguments on outcome, to explore the mechanisms by which these outcomes come about. By going behind the doors of both processes over time, the study highlights the dynamic nature of participation within both, whereby it oscillates between nominal, instrumental, representative and transformative forms. Second, it re-inserts the issue of agency, both that of the respective states, but also the largely negated agency of civil society, into debates on the two processes. The study demonstrates how the respective processes' structures, and thereby the form of participation pursued, is due to participant agency where power circulates among and between actors. It further uncovers the motivations and drivers behind participant agency – both state and civil society. Third, in exploring these motivations and drivers, the study demonstrates the importance of the relational contexts, both internal and external to the respective processes, in which actors are embedded. The principal difference in outcome between the two processes is due to the differential importance placed on these internal and external relational contexts in both cases.

The community and voluntary pillar, by early 2007, in privileging internal relations within the process, has adopted the dominant communicative and behavioural norms, including those of ‘confidentiality’, thereby muting public debate on both the process and its engagement therein, and closing the space for transformative participation. MEJN, on the other hand, has balanced relations within its process with those without. Through its intensive media and popular education work over the eight years, MEJN has animated public interest and debate on the PRSP process specifically, and developmental direction more broadly, focusing a public spotlight on both the Malawian process and its own engagement within it, thereby building political momentum for more transformative participation. As we will see below (Section 9.5), these differences are due to differences in the relative globalisation of the processes in both instances, and arguably therefore, the political cultures in which they are embedded. Before turning to this more theoretical point however, I will firstly revisit the central argument of the thesis in order to more comprehensively understand what has taken place in both cases, and why.

9.3 Discipline or be punished: Has civil society any alternative?

The principal argument of the study – that transformative participation is constrained within both processes not just by the respective states, but also by civil society actors privileging their relations within both processes through an attempted disciplining of colleagues and constituents – may appear a little harsh in the light of the significant constraints placed on civil society action by state actors within both cases. A more sympathetic view might assert civic actors’ relative powerlessness (as expressed by many participants in interviews, and as implicitly suggested within much of the critical literature on Ireland’s process) in the face of financial pressures from state (and donor)

actors. With states and state partners alike keen to excoriate dissent and dissensus from both processes, the question which merits further discussion therefore is this – do civil society actors have any choice in their actions? In this Section I interrogate this question by first, elucidating on the disciplining argument in more depth, second, revisiting the consequences for groups and actors who both adopted and refused to succumb to this disciplining, and third, drawing from this analysis, arguing that alternatives are not only available, but necessary, if civil society actors are to retain/regain their legitimacy as political actors within both processes, thereby opening spaces for transformative participation.

As Chapter Eight demonstrates, both MEJN and community and voluntary pillar members, as the “*rules of the game*” became clearer, increasingly adopted the communicative and discursive norms promoted by state actors. While this is strongly suggestive of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony wherein a power bloc emerges supporting the state’s project of capitalist expansion, Foucault’s conception of disciplining more aptly applies to the dynamics of what happened. There are three main reasons for this argument. First, the findings indicate that the “*rules of the game*” lay more in the area of behaviour and communication norms than in espousing a capitalist ideology as such. As outlined in Chapter Eight, participants learned to “*professionalise*” their behaviour, where communication norms based on “*reasonable, evidence-based argumentation*” or, as articulated by a community and voluntary pillar member “*having an analysis that stands up, not [by] pumping the table or smart alec stuff*” became the norm. Moreover, participants’ acknowledgement of the poor implementation record of the resultant strategies, coupled with their assertion that much of the respective strategy’s content

reflects commitments already made elsewhere, indicates that their ideological content was not uppermost in their minds.

Second, and this is a particularly interesting finding in the light of analyses that negate civil society/NGO agency, while this disciplining was certainly enacted by state actors at the outset, civil society members increasingly took on this disciplining role themselves. This is evidenced in the ongoing disputes within the community and voluntary pillar and exemplified in a number of specific incidents such as pillar members' reaction to a pillar faction staging a protest walk out from a Social Partnership plenary, or, post 2003, pillar members' blockages to dissenting groups' representation on different policy fora which were unconnected to Social Partnership. Dissenting members were punished from within their own networks. In the words of one dissenting group "*some of the groups that stayed in the [community and voluntary] pillar ... would be even more punitive than the state itself, more exclusionary than the state itself*". Similarly, in Malawi, MEJN's attempts at influencing the behaviour and direction of member groups are illustrative of disciplining actions. And once more, as MEJN members resisted this disciplining, they were punished by the secretariat by being increasingly sidelined from network activities. And so, according to Foucault's theorisation, the nexus of power, and its disciplinary actions, lies not just with the state, but with civil society actors also in both cases. While in Malawi, this disciplining within MEJN's network appeared to emerge as time evolved, elements of it appeared from the outset within Ireland's community and voluntary pillar where a number of members expressed frustration with the non-professional modes of conduct and behaviour of some other members from the beginning. This indicates that disciplining within the community and voluntary pillar took place from the outset, while MEJN, in

echoes of Freire’s exhortations against the oppressed becoming the oppressor, became both the disciplined and the discipliner through the process.

Third, civil society disciplining actions within both processes have become increasingly focused on harnessing the resources of their constituents – maximising their utility, in Foucauldian terms. In Malawi, MEJN leaders initially tried to persuade member organisations to change their work programmes so that they might engage in budget monitoring, an agenda promoted by MEJN’s donor agencies. In establishing the District Chapters, MEJN leaders again tried to use members to gather data for “*evidence-based*” lobbying. As we have seen, this is meeting with resistance locally, where Chapter members are challenging secretariat staff to represent more effectively development issues on the ground. While the evidence on community and voluntary pillar leaders’ activities in this regard is less conclusive (see Section 9.5 below on further research), as Chapters Two and Eight illustrate, in adopting the state discourse of seeing themselves (and presumably their constituencies) as part of the “*solution*”, this utility function is also highlighted.

The outcome in both cases, at the time of writing, is a highly disciplined and, although the evidence on this is less conclusive in the Irish case (see Section 9.5 below), disciplinary civil society component within both processes. While this appears to go unchallenged in Ireland, MEJN’s leadership in this regard is meeting with vigorous critique from both its new membership base in Malawi, and within wider public discourse. Why have civil society actors chosen this route, and have they had any alternative given the severe constraints placed on their own actions within both processes?

As I have shown in Chapters Seven and Eight, individuals and groups who adopted these disciplinary norms were financially rewarded by state actors, either directly, in the case of community and voluntary pillar members, or indirectly, through increased donor support, in the case of MEJN. Conversely, individuals and groups who resisted this disciplining in both cases were punished, through exclusion from the respective processes. This exclusion carried with it a risk of financial damage as access to policy fora was reduced through a loss of status. Clearly the stakes are high and the pressures to conform and retain participant or Social Partner status are considerable. But is there room for alternative action? The findings of this study indicate that there is.

For states and their donors, we have seen (in Chapter Seven) that civil society actors constitute powerful legitimising agents, both politically, and, through their national networks, materially, in both cases. MEJN continues to be involved, at the state's behest, in Malawi's MGDS, together with other related fora, despite its ongoing critical stance on specific development policies. In Ireland, the state's palpable anger at the Community Platform and the NWC's rejection of the 2003 strategy, with its implicit exposure of dissensus within Social Partnership, demonstrates the power of this dissenting group within the process. This power is further illustrated by the states' endeavours to bring dissenting partners back into the process, endeavours made all the more attractive by financial reward through the new 'Social Partnership Scheme'. It is important to remember that the legitimacy of both processes relies on civil society involvement. Claims of consensus, partnership and inclusion ring hollow when participants dissent. Public trust in political leadership suffers as cracks appear in the policy machine. Furthermore, states lose their ready access to participant networks,

networks which, as we have seen, are necessary in addressing the social costs of globalisation, when civil society groups are excluded. While MEJN, bolstered by both international discourses of good governance and democracy, occupies a key strategic position as gatekeeper to a national network of civic associations and appears aware of its power within Malawi's process (although its leadership style still ambiguously sways between traditional and organic forms), members of the community and voluntary pillar continue to see themselves as "*the poor relations*", with little or no power within Ireland's process. Seeing themselves as such, and repeatedly hearing themselves described as such – both by state actors keen to assert their dominance (see Chapter Seven), and commentators on the process (see for example Meade and O'Donovan, 2002, Meade, 2005, Larragy, 2006), this perception is undoubtedly self-reinforcing. The evidence presented here contradicts this perception however. Community and voluntary pillar members, like MEJN, possess significant legitimising power. The challenge is to recognise this, and to strategically use this power in transforming participation within the process.

So far, I have argued that alternatives are available to civil society participants within the processes. The argument is not, as some suggest, to leave the respective processes and attempt to mediate their constituents' needs within other fora. This option, while perhaps attractive, simply does not exist. There are no other developmental fora. As we have seen in Chapter Eight, participation in both Malawi and Ireland's processes is the passport to participation in many other developmental policy fora in both countries. As one ex-community and voluntary pillar member noted, "*I think in terms of whether we like it or not... they've [the state] sucked every policy process now into Social Partnership... it is a bloody hoover at the minute. Everything has just been gathered*

and is in it.” My argument is that participants underestimate their own legitimising power within both processes, most particularly in Ireland, and my exhortation is to them to play their legitimising cards more boldly.

Alternatives to civil society’s acceptance and enforcement of disciplinary norms within both processes are not just available however, they are also necessary. They are necessary for two reasons. First, they are needed if civic actors are to retain/regain their legitimacy within the two processes. And second, they are needed to transform participation to more inclusive, and therefore more democratic forms within both.

As we have seen in Chapter Eight, groups within both processes who have adopted these disciplinary norms have met with resistance from their colleagues and members, and have been forced to choose between prioritising mediation with members and succumbing to the disciplining communicative and behavioural norms of the respective processes. MEJN’s difficulties in this regard were articulated by one of its board members who acknowledged that MEJN’s new funding commitments “...*kind of scattered our attention a little bit all over the place... instead of being more focused and maybe sticking to some of the original objectives that we had set*”. This path led to challenges to MEJN’s legitimacy and its claims to represent the poor, and compelled the secretariat to revisit its mandate and establish a locally based, national structure of representation. Some community and voluntary pillar members also acknowledged that their links with membership structures suffered. One pillar member articulates the problem as follows. “*We realised, the staff within the [organisational] team, how dislocated we were... I think we forgot the size and importance of the organisation, and the need to get our mandate and build that mandate from the members, and feed back to*

the members". Other pillar members see this link as more top-down "*making stuff travel*" or "*trying to get our organisations to understand...*" and appear to see no problem. While, in contrast to Malawi, the dearth of public debate on the legitimacy and agency of civil society leaders in their representation of marginalised groupings within Social Partnership leaves them shielded from challenges similar to those faced by MEJN for the moment, it is inevitable that such challenges will arise.

Second, as we have seen, civil society actors' disciplining actions have resulted in the exclusion of non-conforming groups in both processes. Again, this has fuelled charges of mis- or even non-representation, in particular in the Malawian case. Actors in Ireland's process are also highly aware of the hollowness of claims of inclusion in the light of the exclusion of significant sections of the population. As I have argued, and as MEJN's District Chapter members have strongly articulated, the adoption of dominant communication and behavioural norms within both processes necessarily excludes more marginalised voices and actors. As we have seen, these actions have closed the space for transformative participation. In excluding the most marginalised, they have also reduced the democratic potential of the respective processes, further fuelling charges characterising them as anti-democratic. Both processes can hardly be characterised as "*deepening democracy*" if they fail to engage the perspectives of those most marginalised within the respective democracies.

Alternatives to the disciplining norms imbuing both processes are therefore, politically feasible. Moreover, if the representative claims of civil society participants are to ring true, and if both processes are to open discursive spaces for transformative participation in order to truly deepening democracy, alternatives are necessary. While the study, in

uncovering the dynamics underpinning both processes, together with factors influencing participant agency within them, makes new contributions to debates and research on the two specific processes under investigation, the findings also make a contribution at a more theoretical level. It is to these theoretical contributions we now turn.

9.4 Transforming conceptual frameworks: Theoretical contributions

The approach and design of this study provide theoretical contributions at two principal levels. First, the comparative case study uncovers some theoretical considerations for understanding globalisation processes. In its analysis of the factors which influence participant agency in both processes, the study highlights how global and national forces interact, to varying degrees in each case, to impact upon the two processes and participant agency within them. Second, the conceptual framework developed for the study contributes to participation theory specifically, and to governance theory more broadly. It does this by providing a framework within which the ongoing dynamics, both visible and invisible, may be examined. The application of this framework to the two cases under investigation specifically invites us to think more deeply about the core concepts of knowledge and capacity which underpin the processes, together with the constitution and agency of civil society within them. These contributions are elaborated upon below.

9.4.1 Globalising the national /nationalising the global

Perhaps the most surprising finding emerging from the study is that, despite the fact that both processes take place in countries with significantly different socio-economic backgrounds, more similarities than differences are apparent within the workings and consequences of both. Although arising from different immediate origins, the language,

concepts and dynamics of both processes bear striking similarities. Both processes are located within the field of governance, both employ a language of participation and partnership, both espouse to be apolitical, technocratic policy-formulation and 'problem-solving' processes, yet both have significant political implications for evolving state-civil society relations, and both are clearly influenced by the global political economy within which both countries are inserted. Although there are differences in the institutional makeup and procedures of both processes as they have evolved over time, their similarities outweigh these differences. Particularly strong similarities are seen in the highly political nature of both processes, in their importance in maintaining order and securing legitimacy for key groupings within society, and in their implications for evolving state-civil society relations. This indicates that both processes, although territorially bound, are in fact part of a wider global governance phenomenon. My core argument arising from these findings is that both processes are products of the wider phenomenon of economic globalisation. Their primary purpose is twofold - to promote order, consensus and social stability wherein international investment, be it in the form of FDI or ODA or a combination of both, may be attracted, and to build legitimacy and support domestically for this globalisation project.

However, while both processes constitute products of economic globalisation, their dynamics are influenced by national governance legacies and political cultures. To varying degrees in both cases, actors (state and civil society) within both processes have drawn on national political cultural traits, in particular norms of loyalty and respect, enveloped within hierarchical social systems, in attempting to discipline actors within and without both processes. I have discussed the incompatibility of transformative forms of participation with existing governance and political cultural legacies within

both countries in Chapter Three. As we have seen, hierarchical structures of authority espousing values of conformism, loyalty and respect characterise both countries.

Within such cultures it is easy to see how disciplining can succeed, as indeed it has to some degree in Malawi, where MEJN has adopted, though not unchallenged, the discursive norms of its process, and to a considerable degree in Ireland, where respect for and loyalty to internal relations have been favoured by community and voluntary pillar members. However, as we have also seen in Chapter Three, there are signs that these hierarchical cultures are breaking down in both countries as spaces for public debate are widening with power diffusing through informational networks, and political authority coming under increasing public scrutiny and critique. Global discourses of ‘good governance’, ‘partnership’, ‘participation’ and ‘democracy’ infuse these widening political spaces, and the differential exploitation of these spaces by civil society actors in both cases explains the differences in disciplining outcomes between both.

As we have seen, for civil society actors in both cases, these global discourses initially informed their courses of action, and a high degree of enthusiasm for transformative change characterised the early stages of both processes. In Malawi, MEJN used these discourses to open up the PRSP process, both in terms of access and in promoting public debate. Over its eight years’ involvement, MEJN has consistently drawn on these global discourses to increase its profile within the process. This has positively impacted on the network in enhancing its profile, status and power as a key political actor, while somewhat more problematically from an organisational standpoint, as it fell back to more culturally traditional forms of political leadership, fomenting public challenges on the relevance and appropriateness of this evolving leadership. MEJN’s agency within Malawi’s PRSP/MGDS therefore, has been influenced by a combination

of global and national factors, with, it seems, at the time of writing, the global emerging more strongly.

While global discourses, in particular as mediated through the EU, informed community and voluntary pillar member activity within Ireland's Social Partnership also at the outset, these influences have waned considerably, if not disappeared altogether. This may be due to dwindling EU structural funds and an internal view that, without the direct funding, global influences are less important. Whatever the reason, as we have seen, national political cultural norms of loyalty and respect have become dominant and the community and voluntary pillar's agency within Social Partnership at the time of writing has come to be characterised more by traditional governance and political cultural legacies, a process once again "*for the boys*", with barely a nod to its global influences.

This is an interesting outcome. Although Malawi, together with many of its Sub-Saharan neighbours, is often highlighted as a loser in economic globalisation, with Ireland's Celtic Tiger consistently cited as a winner, politically we see the opposite. The findings of this study demonstrate that, through the PRSP/MGDS, Malawi's political actors are more aware of, and more adept at exploiting globalisation's political opportunities, while Irish political actors remain closed to the political opportunities these discourses and power networks afford. What are the implications of these conclusions for globalisation theory more generally?

The outcomes of this research support Manuel Castells' theorisation of a network state wherein state agency is focused both outwards, internationally, and inwards

domestically. Contrary to the assertions of some globalisation theorists (for example Hoogvelt, 2001, Strange, 2003) that these global configurations signify an erosion of state power, the findings indicate that state power remains intact, but has been reconfigured. Castells' assertion of a co-dependence of state actors and civil society actors is borne out by the findings. However he underestimates the economic power of states within this configuration and the extent of the submission of civic actors to this power, as exemplified in their adoption and promotion of disciplining norms. The Malawian case also exemplifies Castells' theory of power diffusion across networks of, *inter alia*, information and images. The lesson from the Malawian case is that global forces matter. As we have seen, power diffusion into Malawian media networks, mediated in part by MEJN, has fuelled public debate on the legitimacy of NGOs such as MEJN to speak for 'the poor'. This, in turn has influenced both MEJN's actions in establishing its district-based structure of representation, and this new constituency's agency in challenging MEJN to provide a more 'organic' style of leadership. Castells, in his "*diffusion of power*" thesis, underestimates the influence of underlying socio-political culture on individual agency however. While power is being diffused across multiple networks, it meets with the embedded power of normalised cultures emerging from legacies of authoritarianism. This may account for the ongoing paucity of public debate and critique in relation to Social Partnership in Ireland. It also raises significant challenges for civil society leaders seeking to act in an 'organic' fashion. The findings do offer support to Castells' power diffusion thesis therefore, but they also highlight its shortcomings in failing to recognise the ongoing power of existing political cultures and legacies. This is most acutely apparent in the Irish case where disciplining appears, for the moment, dominant.

This disciplining, which is a feature of both processes, offers support to Ian Douglas's (1999) theory of "*disciplinary governance*" wherein, he argues, state power has become extended, consolidated and diffused throughout society as a whole through new forms of governance. However, in applying Douglas' theory, we should be careful not to overestimate the reach of civil society networks – in both cases they certainly fall short of reaching society as a whole. Furthermore, in contrast to Douglas' argument, this study demonstrates societal resistance to this disciplining. This is seen among ex-pillar members in Ireland and, in Malawi, both among MEJN's increasingly vocal District Chapter members, and within informational networks, in particular the media, more generally.

While Douglas argues that such forms of governance constitute "*disciplinary governance*", Mitchell Dean (2007), in espousing his theory of "*authoritarian liberalism*" goes a step further in proffering an explanation of how this disciplining occurs. While the Irish state employs Social Partnership as a mechanism "*unfolding*" the political sphere into civil society, it does so by selectively drawing on some of the values of civil society, an "*enfolding*" following Dean's theorisation. While this entails constructing "*market systems of allocation in domains where they had not previously been in operation*", or professionalising social services, as outlined by Dean, the findings presented here add to Dean's theory by demonstrating that the Irish state also draws on features of the traditional national political culture. As we have seen in Chapter Seven, values of "*loyalty*" and "*respect*" are repeatedly drawn on by the Irish state in its efforts to consolidate its relationship with community and voluntary pillar members. The Malawian state also employs this "*enfolding*" mechanism in its relations with civil society actors, drawing, as we have also seen in Chapter Seven, on traditional

family values in drawing civil society actors into governance processes. Again, in common with Douglas, Dean's focus is on state action alone, and he leaves no space for the possibility of civic resistance to this "*authoritarian liberalism*". While the evidence of such resistance is relatively weak in the Irish case – although the rejection by some members of the community and voluntary pillar of the 2003 strategy certainly provides some – MEJN's arduous journey mediating relations both within and without the Malawian process provides ample evidence of vigorous resistance in a Malawian context.

In summation, given that both processes constitute part of a global governance phenomenon, this study is of value to political globalisation theory. Its specific value is that it focuses on the influences of globalisation on national governance arrangements rather than focusing on institutions and mechanisms of global governance, as is the norm within political globalisation theory. While the Irish case demonstrates how globalised concepts and structures can be subsumed within national political cultures, consolidating state power, the Malawian case demonstrates how these global factors can be strategically employed to challenge and transform national political cultures, thereby diffusing state power. This occurs, as theorised by Castells, *via* a diffusion of power across global and national informational networks, opening public spaces for critical debate, which, in turn, impact upon participant agency within national governance processes, opening spaces for transformative participation. However, it is important to not overstate the effects of this diffusion given the empirical reality. Power, as I have shown in this study, also remains embedded within underlying socio-political cultures and norms which remain powerful in Malawi and Ireland. Power may be diffused, and it does circulate, but not without agency. And it is the agency of civil society leaders in

strategically seizing and using this power that determines the extent to which it is used in transforming participation. This issue is discussed in further detail in Section 9.5 which follows.

9.4.2 Revealing the invisible: Behind the doors

At another level, the study also makes a contribution to participation theory specifically, and governance theory more broadly. As we have seen in Chapter One, the concept of participation is as weakly theorised as it is strongly contested. Commentators in the field of development studies have called for analyses of participation to be situated in the field of governance more broadly, and for more attention to be focused on issues of power and politics in this context. Writing from the field of political science / public administration, commentators have called for a deeper theorising on the institutional norms underpinning participatory governance processes, in particular theorising how competing discourses are negotiated, how different communication norms are mediated, and how participatory institutions interact with existing institutions of representational democracy. The theoretical framework of analysis I have developed in Chapter Four is an explicit response to these calls.

As we have seen in Chapter Six, informal discussions and deliberations are as important, if not more important as the formal institutions comprising both processes. This highlights the invisibility of power as it circulates between and within these formal governance institutions. Pluralist frameworks, which assume visible forms of power which find expression in the decisions and policy outcomes of governance processes, therefore miss many of the less visible dynamics underpinning these processes. The theoretical framework I have developed for this study, with an explicit focus on power,

discourse and norms of communication, allows us to uncover many of these less visible forms of power. This framework proves more suitable than pluralist frameworks in revealing the underlying dynamics for the highly informal processes of policy deliberation and decision-making in the two cases under investigation.

The framework's application to the analysis of the two processes under investigation and the issues emerging from this analysis show that we need to reflect upon and theorise more deeply some of the concepts implicitly underpinning both processes. In particular, it raises questions as to what constitutes development knowledge and whose knowledge counts. MEJN's District Chapter members, in highlighting the irrelevance of MEJN's national level policy work to the issues faced by their communities on the ground, urge us to significantly rethink what constitutes relevant knowledge. While this is certainly a complex question, and clearly there are as many 'knowledges' as there are individual experiences, perspectives and aspirations, the findings point to the inadequacies of programme matrices, logframes, and the arsenal of planning tools employed within development planning in mediating the voices of the most marginalised and eliciting more relevant development knowledge. This draws attention to the need for deeper theorising on the allied concept of capacity.

Capacity and capacity building are concepts which are consistently raised in the context of both processes. Generally prefaced with a deep sigh, participants, in particular in Malawi, bemoan the lack of capacity in the civil society sector to engage in development policy. One of MEJN's prime areas of focus, since its initial engagement

in Malawi's process, has been to “*build capacity*” in the sector⁸⁹. This principally translates into budget monitoring training programmes, together with training for questionnaire interviewers for its SSDS, part of its evidence-based policy research. The new ‘Social Partnership Scheme’ for community and voluntary pillar participants in Ireland’s process is also targeted at building capacity for evidence-based policy research⁹⁰. In both cases, this lack of capacity is perceived to lie with civil society actors alone. In both cases, capacity is equated with the ability to generate ‘evidence-based research’ for policy interventions – evidence which is derived from either secondary data or closed-ended questionnaires, as in the SDSS survey. Thus, in both cases, capacity is equated with certain types of knowledge, knowledge which comes in the form of bullet points and policy prescriptions, and which leaves little room for wider forms of communication or experiential knowledge.

In these one-way discussions on capacity, the lack of capacity of state actors, in particular chairs and facilitators of the two processes to facilitate wider and deeper participation, has never been raised. This is despite the evidence that the communicative and discursive norms of both processes constrain participation. As we have seen, the coordinator of Malawi’s MGDS process’ idea of facilitation remains at the level of “*people are free to say something – you cannot force somebody to say something... If people are silent, that’s it.*”, while the Irish Vice-Chair of Social Partnership views responsibility in this area as lying squarely with participants, “*I think it’s up to them [Social Partners] to [communicate], if you like, they’re out there, they know what needs to be done in the market place, and they have to mediate that in, in some sensible way into the process.*” Following the findings of this study, in rethinking

⁸⁹ See Chapter Eight and also MEJN’s *Annual Report and Programme Support Document* (MEJN, 2004b, 2004c)

⁹⁰ Government of Ireland (2006: 71)

what constitutes development knowledge, we also need to rethink what constitutes capacity – capacity to do what, how, and in whose interests? In particular, there is a need to rethink capacity in terms of civil society, but also state capacity to engage multiple voices and knowledges. Evidence-based research falls far short of this task in that it forecloses the forms of communication and the ranges of knowledge available.

A second concept the application of the theoretical framework developed and employed in this study urges us to rethink is that of civil society and its agency. In providing a window into the dynamics underpinning both processes, the framework has brought civil society agency back into the spotlight. While community and voluntary pillar participants in Ireland's Social Partnership accord very much with normalised accounts of civil society in terms of their composition, they do not necessarily accord with normalised assumptions of their motivations and actions. Are they really closer to 'the people', and if so, to whom, and how? MEJN, although initially also according with normalised conceptions of civil society, in its actions in establishing its District Chapter structure has uncovered the diversity of Malawian civic life, revealed its political voice, and highlighted the shortcomings of normalised accounts of Malawian and African civil society. Both studies reveal a complex layering of relations within civil society, relations which demonstrate a porosity between many of these actors and those of the state, where fragmentation and not cohesion characterises the sector, and where the motivations and actions of civic leaders need to be analysed and understood as a function of this complex layering of relations. This highlights the need for empirically derived reconceptualisations of civil society agency and action, one of the areas arising from the study requiring further research and discussed below.

9.5 Areas requiring further research

While the study has uncovered the dynamics underpinning both processes, together with their key determinant factors, time and resources have necessarily limited its parameters. Two principal areas emerge where further research would facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of both processes.

As we have seen, the agency of civil society representatives within both processes has been a key factor in determining their transformative potential. This agency is rooted in relations mediated between, on the one hand the state, which promotes both a nominal and instrumental form of participation within the processes, and on the other, their constituencies, groups and individuals enduring the fallout of the respective states' global insertion projects. While civil society participants' mediation with the state has been explored in depth in relation to both processes, for reasons of time and access, their mediation with their constituencies has received less attention. The work conducted with MEJN in relation to their District Chapters, as detailed in Chapter Five, afforded an opportunity to investigate this issue to some degree in the Malawian context. However, this was not possible in the Irish context, and remains a limitation of the research.

The paucity of literature on the mediation of Irish community and voluntary organisations with their constituents, in tandem with the dominance of literature implicitly drawing from normative conceptions of civil society which tends to assume a role and function separate to that of the state, has been highlighted (see in particular Chapter Two). Empirically based studies on the community and voluntary sector (or

particular organisations therein) exploring these conceptions, in particular examining the form mediation with constituents takes, and the style of leadership employed, are lacking. This has implications for the legitimacy of community and voluntary actors within evolving governance processes, both nationally and locally, as well as for the study of evolving relations more generally. It also has implications for the state as orchestrator of Social Partnership. As I have argued in Chapters Four and Seven, the democratic legitimacy of the process rests on the quality of civil society participants' representation of and mediation with their constituents. Further research in this area would be of benefit to both the community and voluntary sector itself, and to the state, and would greatly add to debates on the democratic legitimacy of the Social Partnership process. Following the work carried out with MEJN, wherein an (albeit limited) ethnographic approach was employed, I suggest that such a methodological approach would prove most suitable to research in an Irish context in this area.

A second area requiring further research lies in the area of social policy. Taking an explicitly political focus, I have argued in this study that the significance of both processes lies less in the area of development policy and more in evolving state-civil society relations. This argument draws from interviewees' own assertions that much of the policy content of the resultant strategies represents prior policy commitments agreed elsewhere and/or that few of these policy commitments are implemented within the agreed timeframes, if at all, in any case. The poor implementation record of Malawi's PRSP has been documented in the programme's periodic progress reports⁹¹. The poor implementation rate of Irish social policy in general has also been noted (NESC, 2005a: 281-282). However, it was beyond the parameters of this study to engage in detailed

⁹¹ Government of Malawi, 2005, 2006

social policy research to ascertain first, what percentage of the respective strategy's policy content represents prior commitments, and second, what percentage has been implemented over the course of the respective programmes. Such a study would complement the findings and arguments presented here in that it would provide more robust empirical evidence to support the thesis that both processes are significant in political terms, but, as yet, less so in developmental terms. It would also help guide further research on both processes, as research to date, as we have seen, has tended to focus on the policy outcomes more than the political ramifications of both processes.

9.6 Conclusion

If the 'what' of development, a development which is more equitable to all, continues to elude us, perhaps it is because we are looking in the wrong place. The calls from MEJN's District Chapter members for more relevant representation, representation which is more attuned to the realities and perspectives of the people they represent, are testament to this. While the governance legacies in both Malawi and Ireland, embedded in broader political cultures emphasising hierarchy, loyalty and consensus, offer little hope that our search may be appropriately redirected, the changing public climate in both countries, with the diffusion of power across international informational networks and through national media, suggests that it may. This study demonstrates that such a shift is possible if participation is transformed within national governance processes, drawing in particular on wider informational networks in promoting public debate and "*communication without*".

As we have seen, this requires transformative action on the parts of both civil society and state actors within both processes. In particular, it requires engaging diverse, and

often emotional, angry voices, in not just solving, but investigating the causes of developmental problems. This necessarily means setting aside the matrices, the logframes, the policy prescriptions and wishlists, and engaging in deeper debates with wider groups on the lives and opportunities we wish for both ourselves and for generations to come. MEJN, in responding to legitimacy critiques, and tapping into the diversity that is civil society, has begun this process in Malawi. How secretariat members will continue to mediate this diversity in the more constrained space that is the MGDS remains an open question. It also remains to be seen how state (and donor) actors will respond to MEJN's pressure to mediate more effectively the experiences, perspectives and realities of its grassroots members. In Ireland, the future looks less bright as governance legacies and hierarchical political cultures remain largely intact and untouched by global developments. Power diffused across global networks remains eclipsed by traditional power clusters. This eclipse is prolonged by the disciplining actions of actors within these clusters. With public debate on both the Social Partnership process and the actions of its participants muted, if not silenced, and spaces for diverse voices within it narrowed, if not closed, the prospects for transforming participation within Ireland's process look bleak. However eclipses are ever only temporary. Drawing a lesson from MEJN, community and voluntary pillar members may choose to once again look outwards, and, harnessing their legitimising power while drawing support from wider networks, transform participation within Ireland's Social Partnership.

In co-dependent relationships with their respective states, civil society leaders within both processes are faced with difficult choices. They can choose to prioritise relations with their states and risk challenges to their legitimacy, challenges MEJN has already

faced, or they can choose to prioritise relations with their constituents, risking economic punishment, yet opening the debate on development alternatives and transforming participation within their respective processes. The paths chosen will determine both the democratic and developmental potential of participatory governance processes on and into the future.

Appendix I

Malawi and Ireland: Maps and Basic Statistics

Source: http://go.hrw.com/atlas/norm_hm/world.htm



Capital	Dublin
Total Area	27,135.26 sq mi 70,280.00 sq km
Population	3,840,838 (July 2001 est.)
Estimated Population in 2050	4,463,153
Languages	English is the language generally used, Irish (Gaelic) spoken mainly in areas located along the western seaboard
Literacy	98% total, N/A% male, N/A% female (1981 est.)
Religions	Roman Catholic 91.6%, Church of Ireland 2.5%, other 5.9% (1998)
Life Expectancy	74.23 male, 79.93 female (2001 est.)
Government Type	republic
Currency	1 euro (EUR) = 100 cents
GDP (per capita)	\$21,600 (2000 est.)
Industry	food products, brewing, textiles, clothing; chemicals, pharmaceuticals, machinery, transportation equipment, glass and crystal; software
Agriculture	turnips, barley, potatoes, sugar beets, wheat; beef, dairy products
Arable land	13%
Natural resources	zinc, lead, natural gas, barite, copper, gypsum, limestone, dolomite, peat, silver



Capital	Lilongwe
Total Area	45,745.38 sq mi 118,480.00 sq km
Population	10,548,250 (July 2001 est.)
Estimated Population in 2050	14,728,296
Languages	English (official), Chichewa (official), other languages important regionally
Literacy	58.0% total, 72.8% male, 43.4% female (1999 est.)
Religions	Protestant 55%, Roman Catholic 20%, Muslim 20%, indigenous beliefs
Life Expectancy	36.61 male, 37.55 female (2001 est.)
Government Type	multiparty democracy
Currency	1 Malawian kwacha (MK) = 100 tambala
GDP (per capita)	\$900 (2000 est.)
Industry	tobacco, tea, sugar, sawmill products, cement, consumer goods
Agriculture	tobacco, sugarcane, cotton, tea, corn, potatoes, cassava (tapioca), sorghum, pulses; cattle, goats
Arable Land	34%
Natural Resources	limestone, arable land, hydropower, unexploited deposits of uranium, coal, and bauxite

Appendix II

List of research participants

Malawi

National state officials

- Coordinator of PRSP process, Ministry of Economic Planning and Development
- Convenor of MGDS drafting committee, Ministry of Economic Planning and Development
- Technical Advisor, Ministry of Economic Planning and Development

District state officials

- Agriculture Officer, Chitipa District Assembly
- Director of Public Works, Ntcheu District Assembly
- Director of Administration, Nkhatabay District Assembly
- Director of Planning, Nsanje District Assembly
- Finance Officer, Nkhatabay District Assembly

Donors

- Country Director, World Bank Malawi
- Economists, World Bank Malawi (x2)
- Economist, IMF Malawi
- Field Manager, CIDA
- Policy Officer, DfID

Commentators

- Academics (x2) within Chancellor College, University of Malawi
- Academic within Bunda College, Malawi
- Programme staff (x3) of Malawi Local Government Association, MALGA
- Service Delivery & Decentralisation Manager, Malawi-German Programme for Democracy and Decentralisation (MGPDD)

PRSP/MGDS participants (non-MEJN)

- Director, MIPA
- Director, NAG

MEJN secretariat staff and Board members

- Director, MEJN
- Programme Manager, MEJN
- Former coordinator, MEJN

- Board members (x2), MEJN
- Programme Manager for Budget Programme Initiative, MEJN
- Programme Officer for Decentralisation, MEJN

MEJN Member organisations

- Coordinator, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP)
- Coordinator, Church and Society, Blantyre
- Coordinator, Church and Society, Mzuzu
- Director, Economists Association of Malawi (ECAMA)
- Director, Institute for Policy Interaction (IPI)
- Director, Malawi Health Equality Network (MHEN)
- Director, Public Affairs Committee (PAC)
- Director, Society for the Advancement of Women
- Head of Policy, Action Aid Malawi
- Programme Manager, Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation (CHRR)
- Secretary General, Malawi Congress of Trade Unions (MCTU)
- Secretary General, Teacher's Union of Malawi (TUM)

MEJN District Chapter committee members (focus group interviews)

Chitipa Chapter members (x5)

Karonga Chapter members (x5)

Mangochi Chapter members (x5)

Mchinji Chapter members (x5)

Mzimba Chapter members (x4)

Nkhatabay Chapter members (x5)

Nsanje Chapter members (x5)

Ntcheu Chapter members (x7)

Ireland

National State Officials

- Chair Social Partnership and General Secretary, Department of an Taoiseach
- Vice-Chair Social Partnership and Assistant General Secretary, Department of an Taoiseach
- Head of Social Partnership Secretariat, Department of an Taoiseach
- Director, NESC

Community and Voluntary Pillar members

- CEO, Children's Rights Alliance
- CEO, Disability Federation Ireland
- CEO, Irish Rural Link
- CEO, The Wheel
- Director OPEN
- Director, CORI
- Director, EAPN
- Director, NWC
- Former Director, ITM
- Former General Secretary, INOU
- Former Head of Social Justice and Policy, SVP
- Former members of Community Workers Coop (x3)
- Head of Policy and Research, Age Action Ireland
- Head of Social Justice and Policy, SVP
- National Coordinator, Community Workers Coop
- Policy and Advocacy Officer, NYCI
- Policy Officer, NWC
- Representative, GLEN
- Trainer, CAN

Other

- Academics / commentators on Social Partnership (x2), NUI Maynooth
- Social Policy Officer, ICTU

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