

A Violent Past but a Peaceful Present: The Cultural Psychology of an Irish Recession

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The way in which collective memory is narrated has implications for understanding how people act in the present and orient toward the future. This article examines the role collective memories play in mitigating civil unrest since the 2008 Irish economic recession. I interviewed 20 highly influential people in the public eye in Ireland (i.e., TV and radio presenters, journalists, economists, outspoken academics and members of prominent financial institutions) to comprehend what aspects of the past they draw on to narrate the causes, consequences, and solutions to the economic recession. Current migration from Ireland is seen as a legitimate continuation of a historical response to hardship. My participants distanced contemporary peaceful Irish responses to austerity from previous violence on the island of Ireland. The central moral organizing principle that “you should reap what you sow,” and the endurance of collective suffering as a consequence of this moral foundation, is another factor used to explain the peaceful Irish response to austerity. On a theoretical level, this research suggests ways in which collective memories are used to inhibit violence and offer plausible alternatives about how to act when faced with crises.

Keywords: cultural psychology, collective memory, master narratives, financial crisis, Ireland

The way in which collective memory is narrated has implications for understanding how people act in the present and orient toward the future. This article examines the role collective memories play in mitigating civil unrest since the 2008 Irish economic recession. Collective remembering is informed by social and cultural factors. In *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs (1925/1992) argued that individual memory is possible only through participation in social life. Social groups offer culturally legitimate frameworks to individuals to aid their recall of the past. These frameworks are collectively formed by social interactions and shared language by social and cultural groups. Individual remembering occurs in relation to these preexisting sociocultural frameworks. In this way, an individual’s memory is framed within the preexisting cultural scaffolding in which they are embedded.

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Extending from this, Bartlett (1932), in *Remembering: A Study of Experimental and Social Psychology*, illustrated the ways in which remembering is a dynamic sociocultural process that involves an *effort after meaning*. By this he meant that the recalling of past narratives, or other stimuli, occurs along cultural norms. In the classic experiment, Cambridge University students recalled an unfamiliar Native American story. Over repeated reproductions, unfamiliar elements of the story were transformed, elaborated upon, or omitted so that the story became familiar within their cultural tradition. Contemporary elaborations of Bartlett’s method also illustrate the cultural familiarization of unfamiliar phenomena, in which differences with Bartlett’s participants could be explained by the changed cultural background (Wagoner & Gillespie, 2014).

Developing on Bartlett, Wertsch (1997) argued that memory is done *in* a group, not *by* a group. Therefore there is space for individuals to exercise agency within their groups, or broader cultures, to remember and narrate the past. Wertsch’s sociocultural elaboration on previous theories concerning remembering is noteworthy. This is because he links collective memory to group identity, for “we can’t know who we are if we don’t know where we have been” (Wertsch, 1997, p. 5). Collective remembering imbues both individuals and groups with a sense of identity and ways of thinking and acting in the present. He argued collective memory is constructed using culturally shared narrative templates (Wertsch, 2008). These are frameworks for recalling the past but are elaborated upon in the present in light of novel circumstances. In a similar way to Halbwachs and Bartlett, memory for Wertsch is also a dynamic sociocultural process that is done by individuals who are embedded within social groups.

Conceptualizing memory as a dynamic construction implies that certain individuals or groups are more powerful than others in articulating their version of the past. Remembering, and gaining legitimacy for a group’s conceptualization of the past, is a potentially controversial issue (Jovchelovitch, 2006; Märtsin, Wagoner,

Aveling, Kadianaki, & Whittaker, 2011). For example, who is identified as either the victims or perpetrators of violent conflict depends on who is recalling and narrating the past (see Brescò, 2009; Power, 2011). This is because cultural groups, in unique social positions, often vie with one another about legitimate ways of interpreting the past. Therefore remembering and narrating previous events is not a neutral process: The past actively informs both the present and future.

Conceptualizing memory as a dynamic process is part of a larger oeuvre of cultural psychological literature that aims to understand individuals in context (Shweder, 1991, 2003; Shweder & Power, 2013). Narratives are important social tools in forming a temporal account of how individuals are situated and develop within socio-cultural worlds (Bruner, 1990, 2002; Hammack, 2011; Shweder, 2008). They are cultural tools by which people make sense of their place within developing social, cultural, and temporal worlds. In this way they help in forming temporal accounts of the past, present, and future.

Master narratives are the dominant and most influential frameworks that groups use to make sense of their current position and future outlook (Hammack, 2011; Shweder, 2008). Shweder (2008) argued that although heterogeneity of narratives exist in each culture, it is possible to trace dominant themes that help define a group's cultural psychology. This is because prevailing collective memories of the past, and their implications for acting and being in the present and future, act as overarching organizing principles. They give meanings and values to past experiences.

Cultural Conceptions of Economics

A large oeuvre of research has highlighted the importance of the interactions between history, culture, and economic development (Harrison & Huntington, 2000; Landes, 1999; Putnam, 2007). Research in this area has highlighted the importance of understanding culture and the (lack of) migration of cultural groups as a basis for understanding the development of diverse economies and economic thought throughout the contemporary world.

The association between cultural values and economics has implications for the contemporary recession in the European Union (EU) context. Jindra (2014, in referencing Eichengreen, 2011), stated, "The current trouble in the Euro zone over debt is further evidence of the tensions over diversity and equality, the 'stickiness' of cultural differences, and the willingness of elite's to ignore them in favor of a universal mode of wealth and accumulation" (p. 320). Jindra developed the argument for the necessity of understanding conflicting cultural values in relation to the fiscal integration in Europe. He specifically identified the Mediterranean countries as struggling to cope with the integration with northern European countries' historically ingrained cultural values and norms.

The contemporary EU context is an interesting example of the tension between diverse cultural values, norms, and histories and economic equality. This *equality-difference paradox* has been highlighted elsewhere (Minnow, Shweder & Markus, 2008; Shweder, 2014¹; Shweder & Power, 2013). The paradox is startling: One trade-off of having diverse cultural values and norms within one nation is greater economic inequality between social groups. Within the financially united but culturally heterogeneous European Union, what are the implications of this paradox? Krugman

(2013) suggested financial lenders mistakenly thought southern and northern European nations were on an economic par and invested in countries such as Greece and Portugal to the same degree as Germany. The assumption of cultural homogeneity, according to Krugman, was a large factor in the EU economic downturn.

The European Union is an interesting location to explore how cultural values are entwined with economic development. This is because all 28 member states are geographically contiguous and have strong economic links. However, there are centuries of divergence in terms of cultural traditions, values, and worldviews, as well as beliefs about what constitutes "development" and cultural norms about what is good, true, and efficient (Shweder, 1991, 2003).

Ireland and the Economic Crisis

The Republic of Ireland is an interesting case sample to explore within the European Union. It benefitted greatly from EU funding in terms of the modernization of all aspects of national development since joining the European Commission in 1972. On Monday, September 29, 2008, the Irish government made the controversial decision to safeguard all deposits, bonds, and debts in the six failing Irish banks at the expense of the taxpayer. This decision set in motion a series of societal and cultural changes that continue to be felt today. A number of austere policy measures have been introduced since 2008. Migration is estimated to be 400,000 people since 2008, and despite this trend, unemployment was highest in December 2012, at 14.7% (Power, 2015).

The Irish response to the recent fiscal crisis, and imposed austerity measures, has been atypical in Europe. In contrast to the protests and riots of some of its EU neighbors, the Irish reaction has been curiously peaceful (Power & Nussbaum, 2014). Ireland is relatively culturally homogeneous, so one would not expect large divergences in wealth inequality. Indeed, despite cutbacks to numerous social payments, successive Irish governments have protected core social welfare for the unemployed.

Despite numerous media analyses of the economic recession, little research has explored the cultural psychological reasons underlying the peaceful Irish response to imposed austerity. What is the impact of a relatively culturally homogeneous population in explaining an Irish response to austerity? What is the role of collective memory, and the ways it is narrated, in explaining the general Irish reaction to austere measures?

The present study investigates the master narratives told by people in the public eye in Ireland about their understandings of the causes, consequences, and solutions to the current economic downturn. Before presenting my analysis of interview data for this group, I outline and justify my methodological approach.

Method

I conducted semistructured interviews with 20 people in the public eye in the Republic of Ireland in summer and winter of 2013 at a time and location most convenient for them. I identified suitable respondents directly and through referral. The interview

¹ Shweder (2014) article can be obtained from author upon request at rshd@uchicago.edu.

schedule developed as an iterative process. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and note taking after interviews further contextualized these findings. Only pseudonyms are used in the analysis. I conducted a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Participants were all prominent social actors and commentators in the Republic of Ireland. All were highly educated and employed in prestigious and relatively high-paying jobs, and all produced frequent print, social, visual, or audio media commentary to the public about the causes and consequences of and solutions to the economic recession. My interviewees included a mixture of radio and TV commentators, economists, analysts, journalists, outspoken academics, and members of prominent fiscal institutions. Often, these people held positions in multiple categories. It is important to understand the perspectives of people in the public eye because this group comprises people who regularly engage with the media to transmit their understandings of aspects of this downturn to the population of Ireland. Therefore, this group was in a unique position to form and disseminate “master narratives” of the Irish response to the recession.

Analysis

Part One: Migration. Ireland has a long history of migration (Gillespie, Kadianaki & O’Sullivan-Lago, 2012). This theme was discussed by each of my 20 respondents. Migration was represented as a “safety valve” to release pressure on government expenditure and to help maintain the peace with those who chose to stay in Ireland. This metaphor of a safety valve is not unique to the present crisis. Instead, it is ingrained within Irish history. The extract below shows the way in which Dan, a senior economist and self-proclaimed “talking-head,” uses a template of the past to make sense of the present:

Now you can think back at the half million who emigrated from 1946 to '61; if they hadn't emigrated you would have had over the period, on average, 250,000 young very angry and annoyed people. You wouldn't have had the money to pay them decent social welfare, so what would have happened to society? Would it have just meandered along [suggesting there might have been civil unrest]? So the phrase is often used “safety value of emigration” that stops the pressure.

During eras of previous economic hardship, migration was also a plausible solution. In a similar way to that suggested by Wertsch (1997), Dan used a preexisting historical framework of the Irish migrating during times of stress to frame his narrative of current emigration. It reduces the pressure on the government to pay social welfare that it cannot afford to mostly young unemployed people. Migration seems to be a better alternative to having 250,000 “angry and annoyed people” at home.

Migration acts as a method of reducing societal and fiscal pressure in Irish society. This is because when people leave Ireland they relinquish their right to claim social welfare. This historically ingrained pattern of dealing with economic decline has contributed to a pattern of migration rather than the venting of anger on the streets in the form of protests or riots. Tom, who is a hugely influential talk show host, also highlighted the effect migration has on Ireland. The Irish, he said, have responded to the recession “with great forbearance.” With specific reference to migration he said:

If you bear in mind that people will say “look at Portugal, or look at Greece or Spain,” I mean they got into the streets and went protesting. It hasn't happened here [in Ireland]. I suspect two reasons for this. One, we still have a pretty good social welfare system. And second, migration, which if it wasn't there, a lot of angry people would still be here putting more pressure on the social welfare system, and in turn meaning there would be fewer benefits, or lower benefits, and they might be in a position of protesting and people would be very angry.

Tom gives two interrelated reasons that further develop the metaphor of the “safety valve.” In his view, migration from Ireland, unlike other European countries, takes the fiscal pressure off the government. This has a dual effect. Migration means potentially angry and unemployed people have left. It also suggests people who stayed, particularly those who are unemployed, have access to the same level of social welfare as before the economic downturn. The implications of this extract, as well as discourse from other respondents, are that migration helps to alleviate societal unrest. Moreover, the analysis reveals the way in which participants use frameworks of the past to understand contemporary elaborations of the culturally legitimized, and historical ingrained, pattern of migration during times of hardship. This alleviates some of the potential for civil unrest among those who stayed. According to my respondents, mass migration is the first reason why the Irish have not organized a strong protest movement or rioted against the state.

The next section of the analysis suggests another plausible reason. Several respondents spoke at length about the reemergence of community in Ireland. Because of strong social cohesion, informed by the weight of Irish history, and ways of being Irish, the Irish feel they are “all in it together,” as one person in a prominent fiscal institution told me. Consequently, rioting is not represented as being a legitimate social action. Underlying and motivating this representation is an explicit rejection of past violence and a distancing of the current crisis from the previous paramilitarism in Ireland.

Part Two: Community and social cohesion. Previous literature linking cultural values and economics has highlighted the impact this association has in terms of social cohesion (Jindra, 2014; Minnow et al., 2008; Putnam, 2007). Often the relationship between the two is complex and varies due to context and levels of diversity. Ireland is a relatively homogeneous country (see figures on population; Central Statistics Office, 2014). Given predictions based on previous literature on the equality–difference paradox, the expectation is that Ireland, as a homogeneous country, would have a strong sense of community and fairly even wealth distribution. This pattern was indeed evident throughout my interview data. In explaining the sense of community in contemporary Ireland, my interviewees often referred to Irish history.

In particular, modern Ireland is distanced from the memories of violence, or “The Troubles” (the 30 years of violence between 1968 and 1998 in Northern Ireland). Instead Ireland is represented as having a strong sense of community. As one respondent, Sean, said to me, “We now do our blood letting at the ballot box.” The two following extracts are representative of a broader corpus of data that explore a distancing of the violent past from the peaceful and democratic present response.

Patrick, a radio and TV broadcaster, had this to say on the matter of the Irish response to the recession:

I don't think we are pushovers. I think there is a broad picture of what needs to be done, and I think people realize the point: What is the point of burning down EU offices, or a bank, or whatever? Who ends up paying for that? We do. The taxpayer. . . . They [the Irish people] saw rioting as a no-brainer—you just don't do it. And remember as well, we come from a background where we have lived tragedy after tragedy—rubber bullets, people being killed deliberately, accidentally, tit for tat, stupidity, decent places being burnt to the ground, decent schools, and people have said, “No, no, we are not going down that road.” It's not because we are pushovers. I think it's because we are intelligent.

This extract reveals an interesting part of the Irish master narrative about responding to the current crisis. Patrick draws on the past, the “tragedy after tragedy” in Northern Ireland, to make sense of current actions and orient behavior in the future. He explicitly recalls the events of the past to reject any repetition of them in the present. He thinks the Irish public also agree with this version of events: “They saw rioting as a no-brainer.” It is seen as a rational choice not to riot or protest—because the rioters will indirectly end up paying for this destruction—but the matter is steeped in the history of Irish conflict and a strong will not to have more violence during this and future crises. Earlier in the interview, when I asked him why the Irish haven't rioted, he said:

We don't want them fucking rioting. I don't want to see a pregnant bank worker burnt to death like in Greece. Does anyone know that lady's name? No. Is there anyone advocating that we should be out throwing bricks? It's nonsense, its absolute nonsense. The other reason, I think one of the things that has been demonstrated over the past 5 years is that the sense of community is greater than we thought it was. One reason why people don't throw bricks or throw petrol bombs is that more likely than not they know the Guard (member of the Irish police force) on the other side or they know someone who knows someone who is a Guard. There is still that sense of community. Why should I throw a brick at my neighbor's child? Why should I throw a petrol bomb at my cousin's husband?

In this extract Patrick is making three points. First, he defines Irishness in relation to what it is not: The Irish are not like the Greek protesters who would murder a pregnant banker. Again, there are echoes in this extract of distancing the Irish from the weight of the paramilitarism of the past. As a nation, the Irish have a new focus: on the development of communal spirit in times of hardship, such as harsh budgetary cuts across the board. It is this sense of community that stops Irish people from throwing bricks and petrol bombs against local people in the community that they are connected with such as the local Guard, or “my neighbor's child.” This purposeful distancing of memories of the past from the present where there is strong social cohesion is further developed in other extracts.

Like Patrick, Tom, an influential radio presenter, also positions contemporary Irish responses away from the memories of violent Irish history and steers the response toward a social cohesive position. In this way he is actively engaging with, and reinterpreting, collective memories of the past to create a peaceful narrative about how to act in the present:

We had pernicious trouble on this island for nigh on 30 years, from 1968 to 1998, and people realized that you know you solve your problems by working with other people—politicians working together, civil servants working together. . . . And so it may be the

experience of that, subliminally or subconsciously, has locked its way in there, has asserted itself into our thinking, that if you have a problem you solve it patiently, using democracy, respecting difference, respecting different points of view, and really we saw what violent protests in Northern Ireland for two and a half decades didn't really achieve, then you go about things in a systematic and logical way. . . . There is a strong sense of community.

Tom interprets the violence that characterized the island of Ireland for nearly 30 years and offers insights based on his analysis to explain the current crisis. The resolution to this violence was through community-based cooperation, where individuals worked together through democratic means. This problem-solving method—of systematically and logically working together—to resolve conflicting issues during crises has “subliminally or subconsciously” entered the Irish psyche. In this sense, Tom is foregrounding the solution to the violent past—rather than the actions during the conflict—as the historical lesson to be considered in relation to the current problem.

Taken as a whole, the cohesion and refocusing on communal aspects of Irish life highlight the importance of cooperation in a democratic society. There is a sense that engaging with the system in which everyone is a part of is the ideal way to work through the problems associated with the economic downturn. Consequently, there is a move away from organizing mass protests or rioting against the state. The violent aspects of Irish history are both explicitly and implicitly backgrounded, and the communal and democratic nature of contemporary Irish society is prominent in this master narrative.

The final section of this analysis looks at a third reason why the Irish haven't organized a strong protest movement or rioted against the state. It lies in the cultural psychological and moral foundation of what it means to be good and right within the context of Irish society. The moral tenet “you reap what you sow” is prevalent throughout all the transcripts of people in the public eye. This moral logic in Irish society has its basis in history and is reproduced in everyday discourse and reasoning (see [Scheper-Hughes, 2001](#); [Sullivan, 1990](#)). In contrast to the previous two sections, where emigration was seen as a legitimate and historical pattern and where the violent aspects of Irish collective memory were located in the shadow of social cohesion, the forthcoming section assumes a mostly implicit function of history as being at the basis of this moral foundation. In this way, remembering in the final master narrative is subtle but pervasive in my interview data. One consequence of the moral lesson that you reap what you sow is to suffer or endure the consequences of one's actions.

Part Three: Moral foundation. Alex sees the moral that you reap what you sow as a necessary consequence in participating in Irish democracy:

All those policies [concerning public expenditure, salary increases and tax decreases], all those fiscal policies were repeatedly endorsed by the Irish electorate in the elections. The fiscal policies of ramping up government expenditure and cutting taxes in a medium to long term in an unsustainable way were repeatedly endorsed by the electorate in 2002 and 2007. . . . So I don't agree with the idea that the Irish electorate—that the people didn't have anything to do with this [the economic collapse]. If you get child benefit, if you pay income tax and the income tax base was cut down so that over 45% of people in 2008, income earners, didn't pay income tax. Because we [the government] cut the base down so narrowly. These were ridiculously unsustainable

policies. I don't agree with the idea that "I didn't cause this. Why should I have to suffer it?"

Alex's analysis of the causes and consequences follow a "reap what you sow" mentality. Although those in the public eye say the Irish public blames bankers, developers, politicians—"everyone except themselves," as one commentator said to me—Alex has a different opinion. A corollary and extension of using the ballot box to vote out previous governments, as discussed in the previous section, is that you must deal with the consequences of those you vote into power. Alex highlights how the Irish public, over several elections, continually elected a government that favored tax cuts and "ramping up expenditure." These policies were unsustainable, and therefore, by virtue of having endorsed them, the Irish public must "suffer" the consequences. In the Irish context, suffering austerity is seen as a consequence of having enjoyed previous financial excesses. The Irish do not protest, because they are partly culpable for their own economic hardship. Steve states:

Another reason Ireland didn't protest as much [as Greece], and didn't have that outright anger, was because there certainly was an acknowledgment that we are not blameless . . . there is a collective acknowledgment that we were all, most people, had a part to play [in the economic crisis].

It is clear from these extracts that those in the public eye think that Irish people are at least partly to blame for the economic downturn. The public should therefore take responsibility for the debt they incurred. Moreover, because there is a "collective acceptance" (though perhaps not manifest on an individual level) that the majority of the public was involved in the economic downturn, it serves as a form of justification against rioting and protesting. There is no clear agent to protest against because there is an implicit understanding that all people are involved. This moral judgment—about what is right to do—implies that the Irish public is reaping what they sowed: They acted foolishly in the financial realm and now must deal with the austere cutbacks. The final section of this third part of the analysis examines in more detail the content of what the Irish people "reap" in terms of austerity and associated suffering. Craig situates suffering among the Irish public as an inevitable consequence of the current zeitgeist in Ireland:

We are stuck with the world we live in. Within these confines there are a lot of things we can do, and will do, and austerity is just a consequence of what we do. We suffer it with dignity, we suffer it in anger, or you suffer it in one way or another. The motivation is to whether you do it in silence or in rage. That is probably the key question.

Given that the master narratives promote peace and distance the current Irish response from a violent history, Craig's statement, in relation to others he made, suggests that the Irish suffer in silence. He earlier claimed that "we don't do anger." The Irish suffer "one way or another" due to austerity measures that are a consequence of reaping what you sow. This idea is supported throughout the transcripts of the majority of respondents. Alex, for example, speaks several times about groups within Irish society who "suffer," and even suggests that it has roots in Catholicism, when he flippantly says, "If there is one thing the Catholic Church teaches, it is to pay for your sins."

This insight is in keeping with the literature surrounding suffering and the cultural psychology of the Irish (Sullivan, 1990). Interestingly,

throughout my transcripts it seems more appropriate to say my respondents were answering questions about the economic recession by drawing on historically informed ways of being Irish. In this sense, they are not explicitly alluding to the Catholic Church, but it is plausible to suggest that this version of morality is widespread throughout Irish society. The traumas spoken about by several respondents—"the famines, the oppressions, the civil war, the migrations"—are all part of a tapestry of Irish history that ingrains a form of suffering within the Irish collective mentality.

Conclusion

The analysis details the three interrelated master narratives told by people in the public eye in the Republic of Ireland about the causes, consequences, and solutions to the economic recession. The unifying theme was the ways in which these 20 respondents draw on the collective templates of the past to make sense of, and narrate, their understandings of the present crisis in Ireland. Taken together, these master narratives offer reasons why my respondents believe the Irish public did not respond violently to the economic downturn. Migration is seen as a historically ingrained, culturally legitimized, response to hardship. In this way, it acts as releasing a pressure valve as hundreds of thousands of people leave Ireland—giving up their claims on social welfare—which inhibits violence from the migrants as well as reduces the potential for protest from those who remain. This is because social welfare has not been significantly cut for those who chose to stay in Ireland. There is a distancing of the present crisis in Ireland from the "The Troubles" where there was a denigrating of the social fabric and violence was rife throughout Northern Ireland. A collective memory of these events is another reason for the current peaceful response in Ireland. Ireland is now a maturing democracy, with strong social ties and therefore leaves rioting to a collective memory of the past. The historical foundation of "you reap what you sow" is prevalent in the discourse of all my respondents. This moral logic reveals the ways in which the Irish are thought to be partially culpable for their own downfall. Consequently they do not protest or riot: It is illogical to do so when served one's just desserts.

Taken together, these three master narratives—migration, community, and moral foundations—provide the content of the Irish response as articulated by highly influential respondents in the public sphere in Ireland. As a whole, these master narratives suggest three interrelated reasons why the Irish, unlike some of their EU neighbors, did not experience civil unrest.

Remembering is conceptualized as a dynamic activity that is bound to specific social, cultural and economic norms (Bartlett, 1932; Halbwachs, 1925/1992; Wagoner, 2011; Wertsch, 1997). My analysis illustrates the ways in which those in the public eye in Ireland use collective templates of the past to make sense of the present. More specifically, it reveals three ways in which my respondents elaborate on historical templates in order to comprehend and narrate their understandings of the causes, consequences, and solutions to the economic recession. My respondents understood contemporary migration from Ireland as a continuation of a long-established historical trend. This explanation was spoken about with ease by all of my respondents. The second remembering strategy also involved purposeful recall of the past to make sense of the present. However, rather than directly continuing the narrative of the past, a distancing strategy was used. This allowed

my respondents to define contemporary Ireland in a positive light in relation to the violence that marred Irish history, particularly during “The Troubles.” The third strategy was to invoke a historical and culturally ingrained form of moral logic to explain the crisis. Although some respondents hinted at this form of reasoning as having its origin in Irish history, all interviewees invoked it in their discourse. In this way, they evoked a cultural pattern from the past to use in the present. Taken together, these three interrelated master narratives offer a plausible, though not exhaustive, set of reasons for the relatively peaceful Irish response to the economic downturn. On a theoretical level, this study reveals three ways in which remembering is used as a dynamic sociocultural process to narrate a peaceful present.

Moreover, my analysis has implications for how we think about cultural values and economics. Previous literature has identified the importance of linking these two areas (Harrison & Huntington, 2000; Jindra, 2014; Landes, 1999; Shweder, 2014; Shweder & Power, 2013). My study illustrates how culturally and historically ingrained values—such as the legitimacy of migration, the importance of social cohesion, and moral reasoning and justifications—all contribute to the economic outlook in the Irish context. My analysis of the emphasis placed on communal and social values directly contributes to our theoretical and empirical understanding of the equality–difference paradox. My respondents claim that in Ireland, a relatively homogeneous country, austere measures were experienced by all groups, who were “all in it together.” This social solidarity is predicted by both the paradox and the insights provided about ethnic diversity and wealth distribution (Putnam, 2007). Greater homogeneity correlates with increased fairness in wealth distribution and greater social cohesion. This appears to be the case as extrapolated from my interview data.

The analysis has implications for how domestic and international stakeholders understand how people in the public eye think the Irish have responded to the economic recession. Future research should examine the ways in which cultural values and economics are interlinked and how this varies from context to context. Previous literature has suggested a religious, political, and cultural divide between different groups in terms of their understandings and evaluation of economics. One way these divides have been identified is through large-scale surveys that simply ask questions about these values. If they exist on this relatively superficial level, in-depth ethnographic work and field experiments can be used to offer more-detailed understanding of what these values are and how they are linked to the cultural psychology of these regions. By exploring the perspectives of different groups, it is possible to extrapolate a clearer picture of the actual nations’ cultural psyche and master narratives, rather than those told by just one group, which is a limitation of the present study.

Behind the facts and figures espoused by economists and bankers are lives, logics, and lived experiences that need to be understood. A psychology sensitive to culture and morality is the key needed to understand complex and confounding phenomena, such as the curiously peaceful Irish response to austerity and the civic unrest elsewhere in the EU (Power & Nussbaum, 2014).

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