Shifting Paradigms?: Mapping Policy Change in the Wake of the Financial Crisis

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Abstract

In Europe, the financial crisis heralded only temporary state intervention followed by a backlash of ‘austerity’ policies. This surprising policy ‘stasis’ raises the question of how academics and reformists can conceptualise how more wholesale change may occur. This paper hence sets out a conceptual model of wholesale policy change using the concepts of policy paradigms, (de)politicisation, and ‘macro’, ‘meso’ and ‘micro’ politicisation. The paper is divided into four sections. The first section frames the problem of stasis and wholesale change using Hall’s concept of ‘policy paradigms’, arguing that its roots in Historical Institutionalism make it especially apt in light of the financial crisis. The second section uses the concepts of (de)politicisation to conceptualise how a policy paradigm change may occur. It draws from scholars such as Gamble, Hay and Jenkins to create a multidimensional concept, which, it is suggested, allows us to analyse the ‘political’ drivers of paradigm shifts as opposed to dominant ‘social learning’ accounts. Section three drills deeper into specific politicisation strategies, distinguishing between ‘macro’, meso’ and ‘micro’ politicisation strategies at different societal ‘levels’. It is argued that this helps explicate how political actors inside and outside the state may affect paradigm shifts. Section four demonstrates the utility of the framework using the example of wholesale policy change in Britain from ‘welfare’ to ‘workfare’ state. The article concludes that this framework is useful both for scholars to plot and analyse the political dynamics of wholesale policy change and for reformists as a map to guide political action.

Key words: Policy Paradigms; Politicisation; Depoliticisation; Wholesale change; Financial Crisis.
The global financial crisis (GFC) of 2007-2009 saw a shortfall in liquidity in the United States financial market and consequently the collapse of several major financial corporations such as Lehman Brothers. This led to one of the most widespread recessionary periods in modern history, the consequences of which continue to unfold (Hay, 2011). At the time of the GFC, European governments responded in a generally Keynesian manner, rescuing failed financial institutions through nationalisation programmes and implementing fiscal stimulus packages to prop up teetering economies on the brink of depression (Jackson, 2010). This was in remarkable contrast to the policies of liberalisation and marketization of financial markets followed almost uniformly by Western governments since the late 1970s (Gamble, 2009, p.78). As a result, some commentators argued that the GFC may have resulted in not just a change in the way financial markets are governed, but towards a wholesale ‘shift’ in the ideas underpinning governance regimes more broadly (Torbat, 2008; Stiglitz, 2008; Lucarelli, 2009).

Yet, as the worst of the GFC appears to have passed, there has been an increased focus, particularly in Europe, on ‘fiscal austerity’, that is, cutting government expenditure and increasing taxation to decrease levels of government debt. Large economies like Germany, Britain, France and Sweden are undertaking self-imposed periods of fiscal retrenchment between 2010 and 2015 (Stoker and Taylor Gooby, 2011, p.6), while more fragile countries like Ireland, Greece, Portugal and Spain are implementing tough budget cuts at the behest of the European Union (EU) and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The European Commission has advocated tougher rules on budgetary discipline and a tightening of the Stability and Growth Pact, with harsher sanctions for non-compliant countries (Bohle, 2010, p.5). The consensus on the need to cut expenditure and trim budgets was achieved, it appears, ‘with breath-taking speed’ (Bohle, 2010, p.5). Overall, with public spending in the EU projected to fall from just below 50 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2009 to just above 45 per cent in 2015 (Stoker and Taylor Gooby, 2011, P.6), the brief period of public Keynesian ‘quantitative easing’ appears to have stalled significantly. Given the widespread predictions of wholesale policy change and the scale of the crisis in hand, it is somewhat remarkable that governments have reverted so readily, indeed in some cases with greater gusto than previously, to the consensus around ‘neoliberal’ or ‘privatised Keynesian’ policy – that is, of fiscal restraint and the fuelling of growth via private debt (Crouch, 2009). A few recent commentaries have attempted to understand why such wide-scale change did not occur (Hodson and Mabbett, 2009; Gamble, 2009; Levi-Faur and Parker, 2010; Hay, 2011), and the survival of ‘zombie neoliberalism’ (Peck, 2010). We might term this a form of ‘policy stasis’, which means that although individual policies may change in a knee-jerk movement, the overarching ideas behind policy remain stable and unchanged.

The aim of this paper is to move the debate on by taking ‘policy stasis’ after the GFC as a starting point for a wider conceptual discussion on how such wholesale policy change may occur in advanced liberal democracies. As such, its primary contribution is in constructing a conceptual framework for analysing how wide-scale policy change may be brought about by
political actors both inside and outside the state. In constructing this framework, the paper draws from the work of political scientists and analysts including the likes of Peter Hall (1993), Colin Hay (2007) and Laura Jenkins (2011). Through a discussion of the above authors, the framework is constructed utilising the following central concepts: ‘policy paradigms’, ‘(de)politicisation’ and ‘macro’, ‘micro’ and ‘meso’ politicisation. The paper is divided into four sections, the first three of which focus on how the concepts fit into the conceptual framework, and how they move on the conceptual debate about wide-scale change in light of the GFC. The fifth section suggests how the framework can be applied to the analysis of an instance of policy paradigm shift in Britain during the 1970s. It is argued that this framework is important because it is useful both to academics for analysing paradigm shifts in ‘political’ rather than ‘social learning’ terms, allows for a multi-dimensional analysis, and offers change-oriented political actors a practical ‘map’ of how wholesale political change may be achieved.

Policy Paradigms

The aim of this paper is to construct a conceptual framework for analysing how wholesale policy change may occur, in light of the apparent failure of an alternative paradigm to replace neoliberalism after the GFC. To begin, the central problem of a lack of wholesale change after the GFC points to the need to clarify exactly what is meant by ‘wholesale policy change’, in order to form the basis of the conceptual framework. This section does so by using Peter Hall’s (1993) concept of ‘policy paradigms’. It is argued that Hall’s concept, which draws from historical institutionalist theory, captures the nature of the policy change envisaged by many commentators during the GFC (from a ‘neoliberal’ to ‘neokeynesian’ ‘paradigm’), and clearly frames the problem of ‘policy stasis’.

If the GFC and subsequent policy stasis has taught political analysts anything, it is that wholesale policy change is not easily or obviously achieved in the context of particular events or contradictions. Instead, the policy ideas developed in the past thirty years have appeared to ‘frame’ the policy debates themselves, with a ‘narrative of denial’ that blames governments for over-regulating financial services competing strongly against Keynesian alternatives (Levi Faur and Parker, 2010, pp.548-549). This argument that political ideas instituted within policy spheres tend to determine, or at least structure, the pattern of political debate that follows is a core assumption of Historical Institutionalism (HI) (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992). The primary theoretical insight of HI is that policy tends to exhibit ‘path dependency’ over time (Pierson, 2000). This means ‘that the policy choices made when an institution is being formed, or when a policy is initiated, will have a continuing and largely
determinate influence over the policy far into the future’ (Peters, 2005, p.71). Policy-making is essentially structured according to the power relations, institutional roles of actors and dominant ideas imparted by the design of institutions, which tends to bias certain policy decisions over others. While wholesale change in a totally different policy direction is still possible, it tends to be less likely. Hall’s (1993) concept of ‘policy paradigms’ is squarely based within the HI genre, and resonates with the notion of path dependency in policy making that policy stasis after the GFC highlights, rendering it particularly useful as a base from which to build our conceptual framework. Indeed, Hodson and Mabbett (2009) have already used Hall’s concept to analyse policy change after the GFC.

The concept of a ‘policy paradigm shift’, according to Hall (1993) is related to a particularly rare and fundamental ideational change among policy makers, similar to a ‘scientific paradigm shift’ identified by Thomas Kuhn. It involves an alteration of ‘the framework of ideas and standards that specifies not only goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very problems they are meant to be addressing’ (Hall, 1993, p.279). A policy paradigm shift is hence ‘a dramatic departure in policy goals, based on a new theoretical and ideological framework’ (Coleman et al, 1996, p.274). With this definition in mind, Hall identifies three types of policy change: ‘first order’, ‘second order’ and ‘third order’ change. These are set out as follows (Hall, 1993, pp.278-279):

1. First order change includes changes in the ‘levels (or settings) of the basic instruments of (public) policy’.
2. Second order change includes changes in ‘the basic techniques used to attain (policy goals are) altered’.
3. Third order change includes changes in ‘the hierarchy of goals behind policy’.

Hall argues that while the first two changes do not constitute a fundamental altering of policy, the third change does. First and second order changes he suggests occur within ‘normal policymaking’, that is, ‘process(es) that adjust policy without challenging the overall terms of a given policy paradigm, much like “normal science”’ (Hall, 1993, p.279). By contrast, ‘third order change…is likely to reflect a very different process, marked by the radical changes in the overarching terms of policy discourse associated with a “paradigm shift”’ (Hall, 1993, p.279). Thus, a policy paradigm shift involves not only changes in individual policy mechanisms or their replacement with other mechanisms, but by changes in the underlying ideas behind policy making.

How do policy paradigm shifts come about? Hall argues that change occurs through a process of ‘social learning’ (1993, pp.275-276). Beyond merely ‘powering’ to institute their preferred outcomes and ideas, policy makers ‘deliberate(ly) attempt to adjust the goals or techniques of policy in response to past experience and new information’ (Hall, 1993, p.278). This process is similar, but not necessarily equivalent to ‘scientific learning’, in that ‘it is often impossible for the advocates of different paradigms to agree on a common body of data against which a technical judgment in favour of one paradigm over another might be
made’ (Hall, 1993, p.280). The impossibility of agreement over key criteria for ‘learning’ to take place has three important implications, according to Hall (1993, p.280):

1. Policy paradigm change tends to be more ‘sociological’ than ‘scientific’, meaning that the power of one policy faction to ‘impose its paradigm over others’ take on greater importance.
2. Struggles over which group of policy experts is defined as ‘authoritative’ will likely precede shifts in policy paradigm.
3. Policy experimentation and success/failure are likely to influence whether a policy paradigm is successful or not.

These implications mean that policy paradigm shifts may well involve not only changes within policy circles, but also wider societal shifts in arenas such as media discourse and public opinion, that help to secure institutional positions (through elections) for the relevant actors (governments) to institute a new paradigm (Bennett and Howlett, 1992, p.289). Conversely, it has been argued that incremental policy change of the first and second order may build up to a wider paradigm shift or wholesale change, without requiring a fundamental shift in the wider political arena (Pierson, 1993; Coleman et al, 1996).

While this ‘social learning’ account of policy paradigm change compellingly resonates with lay conceptions of how policy making works, and how a wholesale change in thinking occurs, it might be argued that in light of policy stasis after the GFC its salience may have been weakened. This instance of policy stasis presents us with a particularly intriguing case when a monumental instance of ‘policy failure’ was not ‘learned’ from – the laissez faire approach to financial regulation was not dramatically altered, leaving us with a situation of ‘catastrophic equilibrium’ (Hay, 2011, p.3). Surely the fact that governments have failed to revise their ‘hierarchy of goals’ regarding financial regulation in the wake of such a blatant failure questions whether policy making really proceeds unproblematically as a process of ‘learning’? This criticism points to a fundamental problem with the social learning approach - it assumes that ideational change necessarily proceeds through a more-or-less rational process of failure identification, deliberation and subsequent paradigm replacement. It places too much emphasis on the rational capacities of policy makers to make and revise policy according to empirical evidence, and not enough on the dynamics of consensus creation and contestation. In other words, while the policy paradigms approach is useful in setting up the problem of policy stasis and wholesale change, it is argued here that the political dimension of how paradigm shifts occur needs to be emphasised. The following section does just this by introducing the dual concepts of politicisation and depoliticisation (collectively termed (de)politicisation) as an alternative way of conceptualising how paradigm shifts occur, based on the recognition or non-recognition of ‘political agency’.
This section builds upon the concept of policy paradigms by asking what concept can be used to analyse the political aspects of how policy paradigm shifts occur. It is argued that the concept of (de)politicisation is useful in this regard because it encompasses both political dynamics leading to political change – politicisation – and political dynamics creating entrenchment – depoliticisation, focusing on contestation and consensus rather than ‘learning’. Specifically, the focus is on the extent to which ‘political agency’, defined in terms of ‘capacities for autonomy in collective life’, is recognised (Jenkins, 2011, p.159).

Political scientists and public policy scholars have recently afforded the concept of (de)politicisation significant attention in relation to the political and normative implications of particular modes of governance (Burnham, 2001; Flinders and Buller, 2005, 2006; Hay, 2007; Roberts, 2010). Depoliticisation is broadly related to ‘the transfer of responsibility for major areas of public policy away from politicians’ (Flinders, 2010, p.318), and specifically to how so-called ‘experts’ can be used to shield politicians from blame for failed policy or more sinisterly to generate the illusion that ‘there is no alternative’ to a given policy direction or ideological mantra (Roberts, 2010). Depoliticisation is hence defined as ‘the process of placing at one remove the political character of decision-making’ (Burnham, 2001, p.128). Flinders and Buller (2006) identify a range of ‘tactics’ politicians may use to attempt to depoliticise policy decisions. These may be ‘institutional’, delegating responsibility for policy decisions to independent ‘expert’ bodies; ‘rule-based’, adopting rules or laws to limit the discretion of government officials; or ‘preference-shaping’, adopting language that asserts the necessity or inherent desirability of one policy direction over another. Conversely, ‘politicisation’ refers to ‘direct state intervention, management and control of the economy and society’, as governments take greater responsibility for policy decisions in trying to steer them in a particular direction (Flinders and Buller, 2006, p.297).

The problem with the above approaches is that governance studies, as argued by Jenkins (2011, p.158) conceptualise (de)politicisation in narrow terms as referring only to the ‘actions, non-actions and limits of the state alone’. Yet, (de)politicisation can potentially occur from multiple directions within the public sphere – for instance the media, non-governmental organisations, interest groups, social movements, etc. This resonates with Hall’s (1993) point that analysing ‘third order’ policy paradigm change requires analysis of the political system more broadly and its interaction with the state, rather than separating these spheres. We hence require a multidimensional conception of (de)politicisation to fit in with the analysis of paradigm shifts. Moreover, the definition of (de)politicisation according to the level of direct control politicians have over the economy and society risks becoming a way of simply ‘recycling the distinction between social democratic state management and intervention and neo-liberal ‘statecraft’ and market provision’ (Jenkins, 2011, p.158). Hence,
we also need a more dynamic conception of (de)politicisation that does not equate it simply to one form of political/institutional configuration, but emphasises gradations.

To achieve the two aims identified above for a multidimensional, dynamic conception of (de)politicisation, we can focus on the arguments of scholars such as Colin Hay (2007), Andrew Gamble (2000) and Laura Jenkins (2011). Connected with policy paradigms at a broadly intuitive level, politicisation can be seen as a process by which a dominant ideological/theoretical framework underlying policy decisions – a particular ‘policy paradigm’ – is challenged or rendered contingent. Conversely, depoliticisation may be a process by which a policy paradigm becomes entrenched and unchallenged. These broad conceptions can be seen to rest on an underlying view of ‘the political’ as relating to the presence of human agency in social contexts, or what Hay (2007, p.66) describes simply as ‘situations in which actors can make a difference’. Conversely, he argues that ‘the extent to which our destiny is determined by processes beyond our control is the extent to which it is non-political’ (Hay, 2007, p.67). This ties in with Andrew Gamble’s (2000, pp.1-16) argument that politics is the recognition of contingency and the mechanism of acting upon such an acknowledgement - essentially the antithesis of ‘fatalism’ or ‘endism’ which deny radically different possibilities for social development.

From Hay and Gamble’s notions of ‘the political’ Laura Jenkins (2011) develops conceptions of (de)politicisation that explicitly emphasise the concept of agency. Agency, for her, is ‘the contingent but reflexive interplay between pervasive power relations and capacities for autonomy in collective life’ (Jenkins, 2011, p.159). In other words, politics involves a contested, power-laden struggle towards the recognition or de-recognition of ‘capacities for autonomy in collective life’. She hence stipulates broad conceptions of (de)politicisation as political strategies, defined as follows:

- ‘A strategy of politicisation, in its broadest sense, entails exposing and questioning what is taken for granted, or perceived to be necessary, permanent, invariable, morally or politically obligatory and essential’ (Jenkins, 2011, p.159).
- ‘A strategy of depoliticisation entails forming necessities, permanence, immobility, closure and fatalism and concealing/negating or removing contingency’ (Jenkins, 2011, p.160).

Conceptualising (de)politicisation as broad strategies in these terms is extremely useful for our purposes of analysing policy paradigm change. The focus is on how politicisation involves disputing the underlying assumptions that guide society and depoliticisation involves entrenching such assumptions. This has synergy with the notion of third order change as the aims and goals underlying the use of specific policy instruments. There is also an obvious dynamic sense of (de)politicisation here, as the conceptions are not static ‘modes of governance’ but fluid ‘strategies’ of political action. Moreover, these conceptions are broad enough to suggest that (de)politicisation may occur from many directions, that is, from multiple different actors not simply within policy spheres but across civil society,
fulfilling the ‘multidimensional’ criteria of the definition. The following section develops this notion of multidimensional (de)politicisation as a means for altering and instituting paradigms ‘politically’, that is, through contestation and consent, by drilling down in to specific strategies of politicisation.

‘Meso’, ‘Macro’ and ‘Micro’ Politicisation

The previous section argued that the political dimension of a policy paradigm change may be conceptualised as involving a dynamic of politicisation. This process is thus far, however, quite unspecific, relying on sweeping notions of politicisation as questioning established ‘necessities’ (and depoliticisation involving the formation of new ‘necessities’). The following section attempts to drill deeper into processes of politicisation to create a broad ‘map’ of specific strategies of politicisation that political actors from both inside and outside the state can engage in.¹ It begins from the assumption that paradigm change does not occur simply from forces within policy spheres, and hence seeks to identify specific types of politicisation from both within and outside the state. The section thus stipulates three particular types of politicisation – ‘macro’, ‘meso’ and ‘micro’, which describe politicisation not only within policy spheres, but also at a far wider or more confined social scale, thus helping to determine what politicisation strategies certain actors can engage in. In doing so, this section also helps to explicate the relationship between the concepts of (de)politicisation and paradigm shifts and other similar concepts relating to the ‘closure’ or ‘opening up’ of political contestation and the (de)recognition of political agency. The core argument of the section is that state actors may participate more in ‘meso’ and ‘micro’ politicisation, while non-state actors in civil society may engage more in ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ types of politicisation.

This section begins to construct a map of policy paradigm change strategies by distinguishing between three types of politicisation – ‘macro’, ‘meso’ and ‘micro’. These refer to the ‘level’ at which politicisation occurs, that is, the scale on which ‘agency’ is recognised, or ‘what is taken for granted’ is ‘exposed and questioned’, and which may in turn lead to a policy paradigm shift. At a macro level, the dominant philosophical concepts of society such as liberty, equality and justice are exposed and questioned. At a meso level, the more practical ideational assumptions of policy makers within the state are exposed and

¹ While there is no space here for a detailed account of strategies of depoliticisation, it will be obvious how the politicisation strategies detailed in this section can be reversed into strategies of depoliticisation.
questioned. Finally, at a micro level, the personal conduct of individuals or groups is subject to exposure and questioning. Each ‘level’ of politicisation is stipulated as constituting a transition from one state of depoliticisation, dominated by the forming of necessities and removal of contingency, to one of politicisation involving the exposure and questioning of such necessities and closures. These ‘states’ of (de)politicisation are summarised in table 1:

Table 1: types of (de)politicisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of (de)politicisation</th>
<th>Depoliticised state</th>
<th>Politicised state</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Macro’</td>
<td>Hegemony</td>
<td>Dissensus</td>
<td>Societal philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Meso’</td>
<td>Ideological embeddedness</td>
<td>Ideological flux</td>
<td>Policy assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Micro’</td>
<td>Governmentality</td>
<td>Blame Games</td>
<td>Personal conduct</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The table shows that politicisation at a ‘macro’ level involves a transition from ‘hegemony’ where societal philosophical agreement on the meanings of key concepts generates consent for the existing political regime, to ‘dissensus’ where political actors reveal the political contingency of these meanings by giving voice to those who are disadvantaged under the existing system. ‘Meso’ politicisation involves a transition from ‘ideological embeddedness’ where the ideological assumptions of policy makers are so prevalent that policy makers assume their dictates as ‘self-evident truths’, to ‘ideological flux’ where ‘self-evident truths’ are uncovered as contingent assumptions, and policy decisions are thrown into disarray. Finally, ‘micro-politicisation’ involves a transition from ‘governmentality’, where the conduct of individuals is ‘rationalised’ or ‘normalised’ such that citizens are ‘disciplined’ into acting in certain ways, and ‘blame games’ whereby the conduct of certain actors is said to have ‘caused’ a particular ‘failure’ or ‘crisis’, and that they could and should conduct themselves differently. The following sub-sections detail how these concepts can be used to analyse politicisation at each ‘level’, and the particular actors who tend to be involved in politicisation at each level are emphasised. We begin with ‘meso-politicisation’, at the level of policy making itself, before focusing on ‘macro’ and then ‘micro’ politicisation.

i. Meso-politicisation: ‘ideological embeddedness’ to ‘ideological flux’

‘Meso’ forms of politicisation involve changes within the sphere of policy making, that is, moments in which the opportunity for policy paradigm change becomes recognised by
policy makers. Specifically, this involves what will be termed a shift from ‘ideological embeddedness’ to ‘ideological flux’. In order to understand these terms, it is necessary to briefly define ‘ideology’ in the context of policy making. Ideology, as it is understood here, is for policy makers ‘both a cognitive map of sets of expectations and a scale of values in which standards and imperatives are proclaimed’ (Simons and Ingram, 2000, p. 289). It is a ‘cognitive map’ in the sense of ‘a set of beliefs about the social world and how it operates’ and a ‘scale of values’ in the sense of ‘statements about the rightness of certain social arrangements’, which act as a guide to political action in the real world (Wilson, 1973, pp.91-92). This definition of ideology as ‘cognitive map’ and ‘scale of values’ is useful as it emphasises the practical aspect of ideology as a guide to action, which policy makers tend to draw on, rather than the ‘inflexible, dogmatic frameworks for ordering political thinking which are neither pragmatic nor commonsensical’, and hence difficult to square with the practical needs of the policy process (Humphrey, 2002, p.44).

Using this definition, we can suggest that ‘meso’ policy change from ‘ideological embeddedness’ and ‘ideological flux’ happens when the ‘cognitive map’ and ‘scale of values’ goes from being assumed as given and determined, to being contested and problematized. Specifically, in a situation of ‘ideological embeddedness’, the particular ideology that is prevalent in policy making spheres has become so dominant as to impart on policy makers a set of ‘self-evident truths’ (Ostrom, 2000). A ‘self-evident truth’, according to Elinor Ostrom (2000, p.33), is when ‘common sense dictates our understanding of (a policy) problem and the solution’. This might be the necessity of privatisation implied by globalisation, the superiority of the market in terms of improving efficiency, the beneficial nature of European integration for trade and diplomacy, or the need for fiscal restraint in the wake of a budget deficit. For the majority of the time in western democracies, policy makers use these shorthand assumptions to navigate their way through the complex policy reality. Yet, as Ostrom argues, these ‘truths’ are not always accurate, and can lead to inadequate policy decisions with ‘counterintuitive and counterintentional results’ (2000, p.42).

Hence, these truths are open to challenge, and when they are contested, especially in a period of policy failure or crisis when there is ‘a dislocation’ of hitherto dominant social, political or administrative discourses’ this can lead to a situation of ‘ideological flux’ (Boin et al, 2009, p.81). This can also occur when the efforts of particular actors within the policy process bring to light the inadequacy of these assumptions in light of new evidence; therefore there need not be the actual existence of a crisis or failure, only its recognition (c.f. Hay, 1999). By ideological ‘flux’, we mean that policy makers tend to be disorientated and confused about their ideological positions, that is, their previously settled ‘cognitive maps’ and ‘scale of values’ become problematized. In policy terms, this can often lead policy makers to grasp around for often contradictory policy responses, trying to fit previous ideological assumptions into new contexts, while the search for new cognitive maps and a revised scale of values to adapt policy thinking to different contextual factors takes place.
This level of ‘meso’ politicisation within policy spheres, on this analysis, is the central political process by which ‘third order’ policy paradigm shifts come about. It is a process primarily participated in by legislators, politicians, ministers, government advisors and senior civil servants. Their attempts at revealing the contingency of ‘self-evident truths’ in policy making create situations of ideological flux, which in turn necessitate the forging of a new (or at least different) ideological path, and thus policy paradigm. Yet, state actors are far from the only individuals who can influence (de)politicisation, and, as the following subsections show, other more ‘macro’ or ‘micro’ processes also play a part.

ii. Macro-politicisation: Hegemony to dissensus

Macro (de)politicisation involves broad changes across civil society to deep-rooted philosophical beliefs about political values such as freedom, equality and justice. In this sense, macro-politicisation involves a shift from a widely dominant idea-system or ‘deep’ world-view to a situation in which the dominant concepts of that order are exposed and contested. This process creates a broader movement of politicisation which influences the wider context in which governments act and policy paradigms are situated, discursively challenging the ‘social acceptability’ of policy decisions (Hajer, 1995, p.2). This sub-section conceptualises this move as one from ‘hegemony’ to ‘dissensus’.

Hegemony, a concept first developed by Antonio Gramsci (1971), can be defined as ‘the consensual basis of an existing political system within civil society’ (Adamson, 1980, p.170). The concept of hegemony has a long history in international relations, referring to the ideational framework within global civil society supporting the dominant superpower in the global political system (Cox, 1983; Keohane, 1984; Strange, 1987; Lake, 2006), but it can also be used in the context of the national state to denote a similar ideational framework in civil society underlying the dominance of a policy paradigm (Davies, 2011). Specifically, hegemony in this sense refers to ‘widespread philosophical ideas that influence people’s perceptions’, which come from ‘religious groups, the law, from educational institutions, from political movements and parties’ (Bocock, 1986, p.12). These institutions shape the deep worldview of citizens, and generate consensus around, for instance, notions of liberty and equality, nationalism and fairness, etc. For instance, consensus can exist around what ‘kind’ of equality is preferable – formal or substantive – or the form liberty should take – ‘positive’ or ‘negative’. Consensus around these concepts in turn generates consent towards the existing political system which embodies those concepts, acting in a similar way to ‘ideological embeddedness’ within the state by generating certain unquestioned assumptions about the aims and goals of policy. This consensus is, however, more
philosophical in nature, as debate tends to be broader and concerned less with the practicalities of policy than overarching values that can be widely understood.

In opposition to hegemony is Jacques Ranciere’s concept of ‘dissensus’. Dissensus, according to Ranciere is not merely to do with the ‘confrontation between interests or opinions’ (this is possible in any form of communication), it is in fact a ‘demonstration...of a gap in the sensible itself’ (2010, p.38). By this he means that certain problematic aspects of everyday life in liberal democracies that lie unquestioned or taken as given or ‘sensible’ (like, for instance, the exclusion of women from full citizenship in the early 1900s) are ‘demonstrated’, or the grievances of those excluded by the hegemonic order are given voice (for instance, with the black, environmental and feminist movements in 1960s America, or the anti-slavery movement in early-1800s Britain) (Ranciere, 2011, pp.1-2). It is a task, as Ranciere (2010, p.39) puts it, of constructing ‘a paradoxical world that puts together two separate worlds’ – the ‘normal’ or ‘public’ world assumed by the many, and an alternate or ‘private’ world of those who are excluded by or suffer from the existing order. This definition relates dissensus not only to discursive conflict per se, but a moment in which the problematic aspects of social relations produced by hegemony are identified by political actors, be they social movements, the media, non-governmental organisations or public figures. It is a moment in which the consensus that holds up the existing hegemony is ruptured within civil society.

In terms of those involved in macro-politicisation, this is a process primarily engaged in by actors in civil society, such as NGOs, political parties, interest groups and individual citizens rather than policy makers in the state. The primary actors here are outside the state because civil society actors have far wider scope for challenging the philosophical assumptions of society, whereas policy makers within the state are constrained by tight deadlines imposed by the policy process, the imperatives of the electoral cycle, and the pressure of the media for instant success. They hence do not have the broad scope or remit of civil society actors to question the deeply held values and traditions of a hegemonic order.

**iii. Micro-politicisation: Governmentality to blame games**

Just as (de)politicisation can take a broad, sweeping scope encompassing philosophical ideas and concepts, so it can also encompass the more private, ‘everyday’ aspects of people’s lives. From norms concerning family arrangements, joining certain organisations or attending certain events, to specific individual or collective actions of officials, managers or companies, ‘micro’ aspects of human conduct can also be held as ‘natural’ and ‘rational’.
When it comes to be recognised (or alleged) that such individual or collective conduct has caused the ‘failure’ or ‘crisis’ of some sort, and could have been different, this is a process of ‘micro-politicisation’. The effect of this form of micro-politicisation is to change specific forms of conduct in relation to certain perceived ‘failures’ or ‘crises’. While the impact of ‘micro-politicisation’ as conceptualised here is more confined than the previous types of politicisation, the result may be an incremental step towards affecting the overall view of policy makers on the suitability of their policy assumptions to the new ways in which political conduct is perceived. This process can be conceptualised via the concepts of governmentality and blame games.

The concept of ‘governmentality’, as developed by Michel Foucault (1991), has a wide-ranging scope, covering the micro-management of citizen behaviour to the broad thinking behind different modes of government. Here, governmentality will be used in its more condensed meaning to analyse how elites attempt to control the actions of ordinary citizens by making certain forms of conduct seem ‘rational’ or ‘normal’. Specifically, this relates to how a disciplined order is created among citizens in order to justify and resist challenges to authority (Dean, 1999). Foucault argues that discipline is created through a discursive method which articulates a dominant ‘political rationality’ through ‘the delineation of concepts, the specification of objects and borders, the provision of arguments and justifications, etc’ (Lemke, 2001 p.191). It is essentially a way of rationalising or normalising certain ‘regimes’ of individual or collective conduct – creating a certain ‘mentality’ among citizens to govern how they act (hence the term govern-mentality) (Dean, 1999, p.18). For instance, buying consumer products, profiteering or displaying the national flag might be seen as perfectly rational and normal actions, which are often welcomed and praised. Conversely, actions that deviate from prescribed norms are seen as dangerous and are ‘punished’, not only by legal restrictions but often in the form of marginalisation from ‘normal’ society (Raby, 2005). For instance, attending a protest, forming a commune or going on strike tend to be seen as strange or irrational actions, which are often subject to societal disapproval, and the actors are shunned by the majority in society. In this sense, governmentality creates a situation whereby society effectively ‘governs itself’ – ‘rational’ conduct as articulated by dominant actors is supported and praised while ‘irrational’ conduct is isolated and condoned.

The converse concept in this case is ‘blame games’. Blame games occur when particular ‘failures’ or ‘crises’ in policy or across society more generally are identified and responsibility is attributed to individuals or groups of people whose conduct is thought to have ‘caused’ the problem (Hood, 2002; 2011; McGarity and Kaysar, 2006, pp.15-18). They are hence subject to pressure to change the way they act to atone for causing the failure, and to prevent it happening again. The important point of emphasis here is that the (mis)conduct of the organisations or individuals held to blame for the situation is explicitly ‘held to account’, rather than their ideas or world view (though this may of course be connected) (Bovens, 2005, pp.189-192). For instance, the problem of knife crime is often
blamed by left wing politicians on the actions of police attempting to be too ‘tough’ on offenders, and hence not dealing with the underlying causes, which they argue require a more sensitive and nuanced approach to family breakdown and social isolation. While this has ideological undertones, coming from an essentially leftist perspective, it is not an explicit call for a change in ideas per se, but in the specific conduct of a particular group of people who are to ‘blame’ (police officers). From this perspective, blame games essentially involve the recognition that an individual or group’s conduct which was previously thought to be ‘normal’ or ‘rational’ has caused a failure or crisis, and hence must be re-regulated or altered based on different premises as to what constitutes desirable conduct (Butler and Pidgeon, 2011, p.545). It is essentially a moment at which an existing governmentality is brought into question, and its contingency recognised and (possibly) altered.

It could be argued against this analysis that blame games are in fact ways of disciplining people who act outside supposedly normal modes of conduct by blaming them for failures and crises in order to make them act in line with ‘normal’ modes of conduct. In other words, it would be argued that blame games are actually a way of reinforcing particular forms of governmentality. This argument is clearly a significant challenge, but it can be argued that blame games occur most often when there is no clear person who appears to have acted outside supposedly ‘rational’ or ‘normal’ ways of acting. When someone can easily be identified to have committed an irrational or abnormal act, they can easily and unproblematically be blamed and punished. In cases of blame games, however, the process of who is ‘responsible’ is relatively blurred and contestable – there is no one who has obviously acted in a ‘deviant’ manner – hence the common blame activity of ‘passing the buck’ occurs. Consequently, when those who are to ‘blame’ are identified, it is more likely that their conduct will previously have been thought ‘normal’, and they will be pressurised to change it.

In terms of the actors involved in micro-politicisation, both state and civil society actors may participate. Governments tend to set standards for ‘rational’ or proper conduct through the law, but these are also informally enforced and upheld throughout civil society by organisations like the Church, newspapers, and citizens’ bodies. Hence, governmentality is suffused across society; it is not merely imposed by the governors onto the governed. Similarly, with regard to blame games, policy makers and civil society actors can all be involved as ‘blame-makers’ and ‘blame-takers’ depending on the particular blame game at hand (Hood, 2011, p.25). Blame games can occur within government, between government and civil society, and between different spheres of civil society.

The above concepts of ‘meso’, ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ politicisation can be used to conceptualise how political actors within and outside the state can engage in strategies of politicisation. Indeed, this is the core conceptual argument offered by this section. As has been highlighted towards the end of each section, there are only certain types of
politicisation that policy makers within the state engage in to a significant extent, specifically of the ‘meso’ and ‘micro’ kind. They are less able to influence ‘macro’ politicisation as they are preoccupied by the confining necessities of creating policy and passing effective laws to tight deadlines. Civil society actors, on the other hand, tend to influence ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ forms of politicisation more than ‘meso’ politicisation, since they have limited access to the decision making processes of government. We can hence tentatively suggest how particular actors may engage in certain strategies of politicisation to shift a particular policy paradigm. This is no doubt a stylised account of how particular political actors can engage in politicisation strategies. It is evident that politicians may create dissensus through powerful, wide-ranging speeches, and non-state actors are sometimes deeply involved by governments in policy decisions. Yet, this distinction is still important in terms of creating a ‘map’ of how strategies of politicisation may be carried out, because it emphasises the essential difference between strategies that emanate from within policy making circles, and those that occur within civil society. While strategies in a policy context are often constrained from broadly contesting hegemony by the practical imperatives of ‘delivering’ policy results, actors in civil society are under no such constraints, and can hence practice their strategies at a more general level. Moreover, there are no doubt several other strategies available to political actors at these levels, but the reason for selecting the three conceptual dualisms shown in table 1 is to contextualise the relationship between (de)politicisation and policy paradigm change and the very similar concepts outlined in this section. The following section presents a brief example of how politicisation strategies may work successfully in practice, using the example of such strategies from 1970s Britain and the paradigm shift from ‘welfare’ to ‘workfare’ policy paradigms.

**Politicisation Strategies in the 1970s British Welfare to Workfare Policy Paradigm Shift**

One of the defining paradigm shifts in post-war British politics is the end of the ‘post-war consensus’ around the welfare state and the rise of ‘new right’ political philosophy during the 1970s leading to the emergence in the 1980s of the neoliberal ‘workfare state’ (Kavanagh, 1987; Jessop, 1993). Indeed, Hall (1993) situates his concept of paradigm shifts very much within the context of this period – from a ‘Keynesian’ to ‘neoliberal’ paradigm. It is hence useful to demonstrate the utility of the framework offered in this paper using this classic or perennially popular period of study. The following section thus provides an overview of how the end of the welfare state consensus can be seen in terms of processes of ‘macro’, ‘meso’ and ‘micro’ politicisation. It is argued that at the ‘meso’ level the 1970s
saw the questioning of ‘self-evident truths’ in economic policy, specifically focusing on the ‘self-evident truth’ of a ‘closed economy’. At a ‘macro’ level, the hegemonic discourse of ‘universalism’ was challenged by new left and new right critiques of the ‘one-size-fits-all’ welfarist regime. Finally, it is argued that the ‘rationalised’ conduct of individuals joining trade unions came under attack by the blame placed on trade union militancy for Britain’s economic decline. This perspective, linking (de)politicisation dynamics to the post-war consensus is important not only because it shows how political actors have caused policy paradigm shifts in the past, hence illustrating the approach developed in the previous section, but also because it offers a distinctive analytical account of this period in British politics.

i. ‘Meso-politicisation’: the challenge to Keynesianism’s ‘ideological embeddedness’

In policy circles, the dominant ideological assumptions that characterised the post-war period after the election of Clement Attlee’s government in 1945 are widely recognised as constituting the social democratic ‘post-war consensus’, a period of what we call ‘ideological embeddedness’ (Addison, 1975; Seldon, 1994). This period of ideological dominance was brought to an end during the 1970s, when economic stagnation and industrial turmoil left politicians grasping for alternatives, in a state of ‘ideological flux’ under the pressure of monetarist and neoliberal opponents who challenged the assumptions of welfarism. The main tenets of the post-war consensus include agreement on full employment, the mixed economy, interventionist government, industrial relations, and the welfare state (Kerr, 1999, p.68). While there has been fierce scholarly debate over the extent to which these points were actually subject to total ‘agreement’ or consensus (for a review see Seldon, 1994), it is hard to deny that until at least the late 1960s both Labour and Conservative governments adhered generally to these policies (Hickson, 2004, p.147). There is scant room here for an analysis of all aspects of the consensus and their ‘self-evident truths’ in depth, so we summarise one that is particularly central to post-war economic management: full employment and the assumption of a ‘closed economy’.

‘Full employment’ was an ideological value espoused by both Labour and Conservative parties during the post-war period (Kavanagh, 1987, pp.40-41). In a 1944 White paper on employment stated that ‘the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment after the war’ was one of the government’s ‘primary aims and responsibilities’ (Kavanagh, 1987, p.40). While Winston Churchill did toy with the idea of a more laissez faire approach (Fraser, 2000, p.360), the 1950 Conservative manifesto confirmed this new consensus: ‘We regard the achievement of full employment as the first aim of a Conservative Government’
This general aim of full employment took as given the self-sufficiency arguments advanced during the Second World War, advocating ‘War Socialism’; government intervention in the economy to orient it towards the needs of war (Addison, 1975). The ‘self-evident truth’ here was that Britain was a relatively ‘closed economy’; it had only a limited number of inflexible resources limiting increases in supply. In order to stimulate the economy and create jobs, ‘demand management’ through counter-cyclical policies and wage increases was hence necessary. Essentially, the ‘Keynesian welfare state’, as Jessop (1996, p.168) points out, aimed to ‘secure full employment in a relatively closed national economy and to do so primarily through demand side management. In this way it tries to adjust demand to the supply-driven needs of Fordist mass-production with its dependence on economies of scale and full utilisation of relatively inflexible means of production’.

The dominant policy paradigm of Keynesianism was thrown into doubt during the 1970s (Hall, 1989; Palley, 2004), and this went alongside a specific challenge to the ‘closed economy’ assumption. It can be pointed out that ‘the long and stable post-war boom meant, among other things, that the world economy rapidly became more integrated’ (Anell, 1987, p.34). Hence, in theory, governments did not have to be obsessed with domestic demand management, as the increasing opportunities for foreign trade and investment offered alternative routes to economic growth. The economic disruptions of the early 1970s, with both high inflation and stagnating growth – ‘stagflation’, made this argument all the more pertinent for both Tory and Labour governments.

On the Conservative side, influential New Right free-marketeers like Enoch Powell and Peter Thornycroft, and later Margaret Thatcher and Keith Joseph, argued that a focus on engineering full employment was weakening Britain in an increasingly competitive world economy, hence contributing to Britain’s ‘decline’ as a world power. They argued that the alternative of abandoning full employment and instead controlling the money supply to limit inflation (monetarism) would attract more investment and hence renew economic growth. Edward Heath’s 1970-74 government hence came under increasing pressure to abandon Keynesian demand management, and while Heath did not cave in to these demands, his stance was seen as a significant weakness (Garnett, 1994). The Labour government of 1976-79, however, was not as steadfast. The saliency of Thatcher et al’s ‘declinist’ critique of the ‘closed economy’ assumption in the context of economic turmoil and media and electoral pressures led in 1976 to the incumbent Labour government ‘begrudgingly dropping Keynesian demand management and adopt monetarism’ (Fraser, 2000, p.357). This abandonment of Keynesianism by Labour is a clear example of the ‘ideological flux’ created by the challenging of ‘self-evident truths’, in which a staunchly Keynesian party was forced to grasp for alternatives under severe political pressure. Had politicians like Thatcher and Joseph not challenged the notion that the relatively ‘closed economy’ was a ‘given’, then demand management could have persisted as one of its core assumptions would have gone unchallenged.
As the previous section hinted at, the challenge to Keynesianism within policy spheres relied on a wider context of contestation within civil society. Fraser (2000, pp.357-58) argues that the 1970s marked not only a paradigm shift in policy, but ‘a shift in ideological hegemony, from Keynesian social democracy to ‘new right’ neoliberalism’. This shift was observable in civil society as ‘public opinion was moving to the right and against the post-war settlement’ (Fraser, 2000, p.357). The post-war consensus was hence, at least in part, a ‘voter-driven consensus’; in our terms meaning that Keynesianism relied significantly on a wider form of societal ‘hegemony’ (Fraser, 2000, p.354). One aspect of this social democratic ‘hegemony’ was the permeation of the concept of ‘universalism’, to be analysed here.

‘Universalism’ is a key concept of social democracy that essentially states the equal right of all citizens to the same social services, be they in education, health care or welfare benefits. This concept was widely proclaimed in civil society after the Second World War, which had forged an ethic of mutuality and reciprocity among citizens (Addison, 1975). This was reflected in the emphasis by citizens on the issues of education and health during the late 1940s and 1950s, and widespread support for the creation of institutions aiming to deliver equal standards of treatment to all citizens, such as the National Health Service, which survey evidence shows persisted until at least 1974 (Whiteley, 1981, p.462). This was not to say that the electorate ‘agreed’ on all matters of policy - party political allegiances were deeply entrenched. What it is to argue, however, is that political discourse generally revolved around who was better at ‘efficiently’ managing the welfare state and achieving its core aims, based around which party would produce more equitable and ‘fair’ outcomes (Abel-Smith, 1980, p.18).

This hegemonic discourse was challenged from two directions towards the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s: the ‘new left’ and ‘new right’ critiques. From the ‘new left’, there was the argument that this system of ‘universalism’ failed to recognised the needs of particular social groups, be they women, ethnic minorities, homosexuals or the disabled (Marquand, 1988). The argument was that these groups were, in many and varied ways, ‘excluded’ from the universal welfare regime as the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to welfare policy. Various pressure groups and social movements, such as feminists and anti-racist activists advanced this critique (Pierson, 1991, pp.66-104). From the ‘new right’ direction it was argued that the universalist welfare regime created a culture of ‘dependency’ amongst the unemployed and working class (Moran, 1989, p.400). Particularly in media outlets like The Telegraph, The Mail and The Express, groups such as single mothers, the unemployed
and immigrants were identified as being ‘dependent’ on welfare hand-outs, rather than being ‘enabled’ to improve their life chances (Gamble, 1979, p.3; Hall, 1979, p.17).

These arguments of both new left and new right can be seen as forms of ‘dissensus’, as they attempt to identify groups that are excluded or, in their view, do not ‘benefit’ from the social system promoted by a ‘universalist’ egalitarian welfare state. The arguments about dependency and exclusion marked a more fundamental undermining of the political philosophy behind the welfare state, thus creating a much more critical atmosphere of public opinion in which the policy debates of the 1970s took place.

iii. Micro-politicisation: Challenging the Conduct of Trade Union Members

Along with this broader discursive context, there was also more limited, but also significant problematisation of the individual conduct of citizens, or what can be conceptualised as ‘micro-politicisation’. This politicisation involved the questioning of various forms of social conduct, for instance the traditional way in which families organised themselves – with the father working and the mother as house-keeper, or the behaviour of welfare recipients as passive ‘pawns’ rather than activist ‘queens’ (Le Grand, 2006). Here we focus specifically on the traditional working class activity of joining or forming trade unions. This form of conduct was considered ‘normal’ or ‘rational’ and hence accommodated during the post-war period, but came under severe attack during the 1970s as a string of high profile industrial disputes, culminating with the infamous ‘Winter of Discontent’, led to a ‘blame game’ in which unions were blamed for causing the ‘decline’ of the British economy, and were hence ‘disciplined’ in a very different way.

During the period after the Second World War trade union membership in Britain rose from just over 7.8 million in 1945 to 13.3 million in 1979 (Wrigley, 1997, p.30). During this period, it was seen as ‘normal’ and indeed ‘rational’ that workers in the national industries like coal, steel and ship-building formed and joined unions (Booth, 1985). Moreover, the political views of large unions were even incorporated into the policy making process within government, with successive Prime Ministers attempting to curry favour with union leaders for their policies (Hickson, 2004, pp.148-149). In this sense, the post-war ‘norm’ of forming and joining trade unions can be seen as a social democratic ‘governmentality’, in which the conduct of individuals is ‘governed’ by a norm which enhances the existing regime, and complements the welfare policy paradigm.

The 1970s, however, saw the eruption of several highly charged industrial disputes with, for example the coal dispute of 1972 in which Edward Heath’s government was forced to back
down and increase miners’ wages, and similar disputes during 1972 and 1973 ‘with dockers, engineering workers, railwaymen and building workers all enjoying some success’ (Phillips, 2006, p.189). This culminated with the infamous ‘Winter of Discontent’ during which a number of high profile strikes over low pay by public sector workers, lorry drivers, bin men and even gravediggers was perceived to have brought the country to a standstill (Hay, 1996).

The trade unions blamed governments for the industrial disputes, arguing that they did not accept the reasonable demands of workers concerning wage increases and workplace improvements. Other actors in society, however, blamed the trade unions for stirring up hostility between workers and employers, for ‘holding the country to ransom’ by shutting down vital services and refusing to take what they saw as reasonable wage increases (Phillips, 2007, p.225). Particularly according to Conservative elements of the media, such as The Sun and The Mail, along with high profile politicians like Margaret Thatcher and Norman Tebbit, trade unions were responsible for Britain’s widely assumed status as the ‘sick man of Europe’, with escalating inflation and declining productivity (Hall, 1979).

This series of ‘blame games’ resulted in governments taking increasing action to curb trade union influence, and deter people from joining unions, from Heath’s Industrial Relations Act to Labour’s Social Contract. These measures contributed towards turning the ‘governmentality’ of trade unionism on its head, moving towards a British culture later to be developed under Margaret Thatcher where ‘normal’ or ‘rational’ behaviour was not to join trade unions and participate in strike actions to protect wages and jobs, but to be flexible and consumer-oriented, working for the profit of the business rather than participating in ‘out-dated’ organisations that were assumed only to cause inefficiency and stall productivity (Waddington and Whitston, 1994). It can thus be seen as an incremental step towards overturning the welfare policy paradigm.

The above analysis suggests that the policy paradigm of the Keynesian welfare state was not challenged merely by a ‘learning’ process whereby policy makers adapted their aims and goals in a directly rational response to the changing empirical context. Rather, it suggests the importance of the recognition of agency – that the ideological suppositions of policy makers, the philosophical assumptions of society and the conduct of individuals could be changed (i.e. their autonomy could be realised). At a meso, macro and micro level, the questioning of ideological assumptions about ‘full employment’ and a ‘closed economy’, hegemonic values of ‘universalism’, and trade unionist forms of conduct or ‘governmentality’ all contributed to the eventual dismantling of the welfare paradigm. While this analysis is only partial and in no way exhaustive, the perspective it offers us is distinctive in that it emphasises the political dynamics of change on different levels of British society. This is important because it contributes a multi-dimensional analysis of paradigm change, which breaks from the ‘social learning’ approach to emphasise the contestation of
political ideas and forms of conduct. The emphasis is on how ‘consensus’ is broken up or disrupted and forms and arenas of contestation are created, rather than on how policy makers or individuals rationally analyse and adapt to policy ‘failures’.

So What?

This paper has made four distinctive contributions to the conceptualisation of wholesale policy change. Firstly, it has contributed a distinctive perspective to the analysis of wholesale policy change, emphasising the political dynamics of policy paradigm shifts. It was argued that policy stasis after the GFC pointed towards the need for a historical institutionalist analysis of wholesale policy change, and Peter Hall’s policy paradigms concept was emphasised as useful in this regard. Yet, it was also recognised that the ‘social learning’ approach to explaining paradigm shifts argued for by Hall and others was problematized by the policy response to the GFC, which typified a case in which the ‘lesson’ of policy failure was emphatically not learned for a sustained period. Instead, the political dimensions of paradigm change were emphasised, that is, the generation of consent and the creation of antagonism and contestation. The concepts of (de)politicisation were hence introduced as explanatory concepts of paradigm change. It was argued that contestation and the recognition of ‘agency’ qua collective autonomy is an important determinate of change.

Secondly, the paper contributes a distinctive multi-dimensional approach to analysing paradigm shifts, emphasising change at different levels of society. The paper drilled down into the concept of politicisation, specifying three specific types of politicisation strategies on societal (‘macro’), policy (‘meso’) and personal (‘micro’) scales (see Table 1). It illustrated how we might use these concepts empirically using the example of paradigm change in Britain, and its ‘meso’, ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ aspects during the 1970s contestation of the welfare state.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, it points to how political actors might work to create a paradigm shift – with civil society actors engaging in argument at a general or ‘macro’ level, policy actors engaging in a critique of ‘self-evident truths’, and all actors in the public sphere attempting to alter the behaviour of certain key actors by ‘blaming’ them for policy failures or systemic crises. While this ‘map’ is fairly simple and in no way exhaustive, it is clear and accessible and open to modification in light of further empirical investigation.

To finish, and in relation to this point it is worth revisiting the problem of policy stasis and the GFC, which began our discussion of wholesale policy change. Why was there not a policy
paradigm shift across Europe of the kind experienced in late 1970s Britain, and more importantly how could a paradigm shift occur in the future? While it is perhaps too early to make a solid assessment of why paradigm change did not occur, we can perhaps see that from a ‘micro’ perspective the majority of ‘blame’ fell on bankers, who have been subject to greater taxation to contribute ‘their fair share’ for the crisis. On a ‘meso’ level policy makers faced a significant degree of ideological flux, as governments that had for so long opposed intervention in the financial sphere leaped into nationalising banks and quantitative easing. On a ‘macro’ level, however, there has been less of an identifiable challenging of societal notions of consumerism and ‘choice’, as a number of recent analyses testify (Flinders, 2010, pp.316-318; Corfe, 2010, p.63; Hay, 2011; Marquand, 2011; Southwood, 2011). This may have meant that the changes in policy were only temporary, as they were not reinforced by a broader societal shift. We might then finally argue that this paper also intimates the need to look at our contemporary crisis not just from the angle of policy debates or the particular way in which bankers ‘conduct’ themselves, but also from a broader philosophical perspective on societal values.

References


