The dynamics of conflict in Northern Ireland

Power, conflict and emancipation

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The IRA ceasefire of 31 August 1994 and the loyalist ceasefire six weeks later brought to an end – for a time at least – twenty-five years of violent communal conflict in Northern Ireland. During that period 3,400 people were killed and over 20,000 suffered injury; some were left permanently disabled. The people of Northern Ireland bore the greatest weight of suffering; almost half the population – over 80 per cent in some areas – knew someone killed or injured in the conflict; some experienced multiple personal tragedies. There were also deaths and injuries in the Republic of Ireland, Great Britain and on mainland Europe, sometimes of people with no conceivable relationship to the conflict.

The violence of that period damaged the whole fabric of the liberal democratic state and civic culture in Northern Ireland, the Republic and Great Britain. Normal judicial processes were suspended, there were repeated breaches of human rights, there was collusion between members of the security forces and paramilitaries, a 'war culture' emerged built around propaganda and the demonisation of the 'enemy', paramilitaries took over the functions of policing in many areas, stores of military weapons were built up in private hands. In Northern Ireland the conflict produced a generation of politicians highly skilled in conflict-related negotiation but with little or no experience in the normal business of government; in the Republic, it absorbed political and diplomatic resources out of all proportion to the capacity of a small country.

In Northern Ireland all aspects of community life became politicised, religiously homogeneous communities of defence emerged as a result of a vast process of resettlement, valued social relationships were ruptured, community trust was destroyed by government and paramilitary informants, the erection of social and physical barriers broke long established patterns of communal life, open communities were turned into closed ones. Similar tendencies emerged, although of lower intensity, in the border counties of the Republic and among sections of the Irish community in Britain.

Throughout the island of Ireland, cultural development was stunted.

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Questions of cultural and national identity became the focus of intense conflict. The normal and necessary processes of culture criticism, innovation and updating were distorted by the felt need to show – or to avoid showing – solidarity with one or other of the protagonists. A dialectic of cultural oppression of the other and repression of the self was set in motion. A set of negative images and symbols of Ireland – of nationalism and unionism, Catholic and Protestant – became fixed in the mind of a whole generation.

Northern Ireland's industrial economy went into free-fall. The cost of maintaining the security forces in Northern Ireland was £1 billion in 1990–1, UK government compensation averaged over £33 million per year in the first decades of the conflict; one bomb in the City of London in 1993 cost over £1 billion in insurance payments. The cost of the Northern Ireland conflict to the Republic in the years of violence is estimated at over £100 million per year. The economic costs of the conflict are gradually being reversed; the human costs can never be.

A ceasefire is not a settlement and the conflict is not over. The two communities are still sharply divided; at the time of writing, the 'peace process' faces an impasse over the decommissioning of arms and the proposals set out by the two governments in the Frameworks Documents of February 1995. Violence continues in the form of paramilitary policing and clashes between demonstrators and police. More serious violence may recur and any settlement may have a limited time-span. Resolving the conflict remains one of the most important tasks confronting the British and Irish governments and peoples. This study offers an analysis of the causes of the conflict and proposes an emancipatory approach to resolving it.

Successive chapters present the analysis. Chapter 2 discusses the historical roots and dynamics of the conflict. Chapters 3 to 7 focus on aspects of the conflict in contemporary Northern Ireland – structures of community, ideology, the dynamics of power and inequality in the political, economic and cultural arenas. Chapters 8, 9 and 10 deal with the British, Irish and international roles in the conflict. In chapter 11 we bring the analysis of the preceding chapters to bear on the current situation and outline the possibility of an emancipatory resolution. In the remainder of chapter 1 we clarify some of the methodological principles and concepts which inform our approach.

The role of theory

Interpretations of the conflict – as of any social or cultural reality – differ in their use of theoretical models. Social scientists tend to use formal and

explicit models. Thus O'Leary and McGarry distinguish their 'analytical history' from conventional history and structure their historical account in terms of the categories of nation-building.[1] Fulton uses Gramscian concepts of historic bloc and hegemony to examine the emergence of two opposed religious-political blocs on the island of Ireland.[2] Gibbon constructs his explanatory narrative of the origins of Ulster unionism around notions of modes of production and class derived from political economy.[3] Historians, in contrast, tend to work more empirically and intuitively, leaving their conceptual and analytical models implicit.

The disadvantages of the social science approach – the tendency to impose rigid or inappropriate theoretical categories on the data – are well known. The historical process in all its specificity constantly depasses the boundaries of theoretical concepts and models. But without explicit theoretical reflection, crucial issues can be elided. Theoretical models are particularly useful in identifying structures of relationships and the dynamics of change over long periods.[4] They are essential when one moves from interpretation to practical proposals, particularly emancipatory ones.

The theoretical interpretation of the conflict presented in this book is both systematic and explicit. We speak of a system of relationships with different levels which interlock and mutually reinforce each other; we postulate a dynamic for change coming in part from within, in part from without this system which has changed the balance of power underlying the system, producing in turn conflict and crisis; we use this theoretical understanding to identify the conditions for resolving the conflict. But this interpretation does not derive from the application of a general theory to the Irish case. Rather it emerged from a process of reflection on our field research and reading of primary and secondary sources.[5] Our reflection was inevitably mediated by the dominant theories and paradigms of our disciplines. But we used them in a sensitising way, as

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[1] Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland*, London, Athlone, 1993, p. 2 and ch. 2.

[2] John Fulton, *The Tragedy of Belief: Division, Politics and Religion in Ireland*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1991, pp. 4ff.

[3] Peter Gibbon, *The Origins of Ulster Unionism: The Formation of Popular Protestant Politics and Ideology in Nineteenth Century Ireland*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1975, ch. 1.

[4] Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Causality and history', in Juha Manninen and Raimo Tuomela, eds., *Essays on Explanation and Understanding*, Dordrecht, D. Reidel, 1976.

[5] Our field research consisted principally of interviews and participant observation carried out while resident in Northern Ireland from October 1987 to September 1988.

heuristics and as sources of insights rather than to impose a preconceived pattern on our research findings. Our theoretical interpretation was worked out from engagement with the material.

Questions of comparison

Comparative research on Northern Ireland began early in the conflict and is now an important part of the literature. Northern Ireland has been compared, *inter alia*, with Canada, South Tyrol, Algeria, the southern US, Bohemia, Prussian Poland, ex-Yugoslavia, the Armenian–Azerbaijan frontier, and implicitly with societies such as Fiji and Burundi.[6] Our approach to comparison has been more cautious. Most comparative work takes the conflict to be an example of settler-colonial or of ethno-national conflict. There are ethno-nationalist and settler-colonial aspects to the conflict (chapter 2), but there are dangers in classifying the conflict as unambiguously ethno-national or settler-colonial and then proceeding to comparison and generalisation.

First, the comparative method itself is not without problems. One centres on cultural meaning. Meaning is constitutive of social life, not a superficial overlay; how such concepts as 'community', 'class', 'violence' or 'nation' are used partly determines their nature and their role in social life. Culturally based variations in meanings make comparison difficult even where the institutions and the words used to describe them appear much the same. Multidetermination also poses a problem for comparative analysis. If effects are determined by the *interaction* of several variables then comparison on the basis of just one variable may be seriously misleading. A further problem concerns context. All particular social realities are embedded in a wider context and this context is always simultaneously 'internal' and 'external' to them. Where contexts vary, comparison must itself be contextualised.

In the book we explore the different meanings of such terms as 'British', 'Irish', 'unionist', 'nationalist', but there are further depths, subtleties and conditionalities of meaning which became apparent to us in interviews. We stress the role of multidetermination in the conflict – the effect, for example, of the overlap between religious and other differences, and between cultural difference and structures of power –

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[6] Frank Wright, *Northern Ireland: A Comparative Analysis*, Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1987. John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, eds., *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation*, London, Routledge, 1993; Christopher Hewitt, 'The roots of violence: Catholic grievances and Irish nationalism during the civil rights period', in Patrick J. Roche and Brian Barton, eds., *The Northern Ireland Question: Myth and Reality*, Aldershot, Avebury, 1991.

but here too, much remains to be said. We have tried to place Northern Ireland into its wider context, but in some respects – in particular in relation to the British context (chapter 8) – we have been opening up new ground.

In fact the Irish case poses a quite specific form of the general problem of context. At various stages in the book (chapters 2, 8 and 10) we elaborate on the wider context – British, European, international – in which Ireland has developed. Our working model is of a society shaped by the quite different – in some respects, contradictory – forces stemming from these different spheres. For example, throughout the history of the expansion and later contraction of the British world, Ireland was ambiguously located between the metropolitan and colonial spheres; some of its distinctive features derive precisely from that ambiguity. A fully contextualised understanding of Ireland's development is necessary before the possibilities and limits of comparison can be stated precisely.[7] For the present, we combine a cautious approach to comparison with further exploration of the complexities of meaning, multi-determination and context.

Structure, meaning and ideology

Many writers on Northern Ireland define the conflict as one of identity or ideology – the conflict, we are told, is one of conflicting nationalisms, a matter 'ultimately' of identities or allegiances or, for some, of the irrational expression of 'myths and fears'.[8] Others stress structural relationships, in particular the role of political and economic inequality. These perspectives on the conflict are not mutually exclusive: on the contrary, structural inequality matters so much precisely because it exists between two communities with different national identities.

In this study we present structural relations, ideas and meanings as interpenetrating in all areas of social life. Thus communal division depends upon pre-existing constructs of self and other, whether 'Protestant/Catholic', 'Irish/British' or 'settler/native'. But the origins and dynamics of such symbolic distinctions are interwoven with actual experiences rooted in social and structural relationships – position in the economy, demographic strength, access to the means of coercion – and

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[7] Joseph Ruane, 'Colonialism and the interpretation of Irish historical development', in M. Silverman and P. Gulliver, eds., *Approaching the Past: Historical Anthropology Through Irish Case Studies*, Columbia, Columbia University Press, 1992.

[8] See Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd '"Why can't you get along with each other?" Culture, structure and the Northern Ireland conflict', in Eamonn Hughes, ed., *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1991.

over time such structurally based experiences have become constitutive components of communal culture and identity. Social theory tends to oscillate between an overly 'material' and an overly 'cultural' view of reality – to lose sight of culture altogether or to interpret reality as the expression of cultural symbols, ideas or language. Without attempting a theoretical synthesis of these two aspects of reality, we have sought to capture something of the interplay between them.

We also consider ideologies, conceived as elaborations of the meanings implicit in daily life into complex conceptual systems. Ideologies operate at a level removed from daily experience and seldom accurately reflect the ambiguous, mixed, often contradictory beliefs of ordinary people. Nonetheless they are centrally important, reached for in times of stress as the logical presuppositions of common sense assumptions and as a source of communal justification and certainty. They play a central role in sharpening conflict, preventing views from developing in a more plural way. Their independent significance is, however, limited; they too serve to defend or advance structurally based interests. Ideological critique without structural change has limited capacity to transform even ideology.

The locus of conflict

All interpretations of the conflict posit a geographical locus to conflict. John Whyte identified the dominant paradigm as the 'internal conflict model' – one which sees the communities in conflict and (more ambiguously) the conditions of conflict as 'internal' rather than 'external' to Northern Ireland.[9] In this understanding, the conflict is primarily between two communities in Northern Ireland; there is no essential conflict between the peoples of Great Britain and Ireland or between the British and Irish states.

This paradigm has an obvious political appeal, for example, to 'outside' political actors who wish to reassure themselves that the conflict is not of their making or to 'insiders' committed to the survival of Northern Ireland as a geo-political unit. But at first sight the paradigm also appears to have analytic merit. It is within Northern Ireland and between the two communities there that most of the overt conflict and violence has occurred during the past twenty-five years. It was mobilisation of the Northern Catholic minority in the civil rights movement, rather than pressure from outside actors or governments,

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[9] John Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1990, pp. 114–15 and ch. 9.

that provoked the crisis of unionist rule.[10] Moreover the north-east of Ireland has a long history of local communal conflict. The two states and their citizens – once thought to be the main protagonists – have shown themselves to be accomodating and have cooperated with each other in trying to contain the conflict between the two Northern communities. But the conflict often seems beyond their reach, impervious to their attempts at mediation. Whatever outside actors might do, it might seem that a purely local conflict would remain.[11]

Questions of space and causality cannot, however, be resolved so simply. Societies unlike states are not bounded realms but structures of social relationships that are infinitely extensible. Moreover Northern Ireland can lay few claims even to be considered 'a society'; it is a region and, like all regions, is formed by the wider systems and cultures in which it is embedded. Overt conflict and violence may be concentrated within Northern Ireland, but the causes of conflict are not necessarily so located. Indeed one would expect the causes and conditions of any conflict to have plural and interlocking spatial loci.

Rather than working with preconceived notions of what is internal and external in the sources of this conflict, we adopted a more empirical and differentiated approach, one which started with the variables and relationships that impinged on the conflict and plotted their (changing) geographical form and boundaries. This did not preclude us from considering Northern Ireland as a distinct socio-spatial unit; on the contrary, much of the book is devoted to structures and relationships there. On the other hand, we see both the existence of Northern Ireland and the conflict as the product of a historic system of relationships that in its origins and dynamics operates at the level of the two islands. Partition restructured this system but did not dissolve it, and at the level of the system as a whole Northern Ireland is both a contingent and a fully open social world.

History

Virtually all accounts of the Northern Ireland conflict begin with an historical account as a backdrop to the present. Analysis of the conflict then proceeds synchronically by reference to present interests, ideologies, institutions or structural conditions. History as a living force enters into this analysis only in the form of the beliefs (erroneous or otherwise) of people about the past and the calculations they make on the

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 204.   [11] *Ibid.*, p. 196.

basis of these beliefs. This approach rigidly separates past from present, synchronic from diachronic analysis and is ill-equipped to grasp processes of change arising from evolving systems of relationships. To capture the dynamics of conflict – the central aim of our analysis – required that we identify these developing systems of relationships.

Identifying historical systems poses many problems and the search for them is currently out of fashion. 'Grand narratives' are suspect and the emphasis is on pluralities, fragmentation, discontinuities and a multiplicity of readings – and on the deconstruction of claims to anything else. Our emphasis on continuity rooted in an evolving system of relationships may suggest a prior methodological bias in favour of 'grand narrative'. This was far from the case. On the contrary, our interest in the long historical perspective and our perception of long range continuities came quite late in the analysis and we found it methodologically disconcerting rather than reassuring. However, once the extent of continuity became apparent to us it seemed more important to explain it than to deconstruct discourses about it. At the same time it was necessary to allow for change and contingency and to avoid any suggestion of an underlying determinism (see pp. 13–14 below).

Our periodisation of the development of the conflict derives from a concern to grasp its overall pattern and dynamic. Some writers locate its formative stage in the seventeenth century when the north-east of Ireland was colonised by Scots and English. Others stress the nineteenth century as the period that produced the conflicting ideologies of nationalism and unionism. Still others stress the years after partition, when Northern Ireland took on its distinctive political form and cultural ethos. We begin with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as the period when the system of relationships producing the conflict first emerged. But the pattern then set was not unchanging. On the contrary, the forms of conflict generated in different historical periods – the period of colonisation, the eighteenth century, the Union, partition, direct rule – were very different. We came to understand this mixture of continuity and change in terms of different orders of time, a notion that has been central to historical understanding since Braudel.[12] We have not tried to replicate Braudel's use of the concepts of *longue durée*, conjuncture and events, but we used these distinctions as guides, understanding successive short term phases of the conflict as conjunctures setting the conditions for events that then impacted back on the developing system of relationships.

[12] Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 vols., London, Fontana, 1978.

The system of relationships, as we conceive it, had three interlocking levels – a set of differences, a structure of dominance, dependence and inequality and a tendency towards communal division. We discuss the emergence and formal properties of the system more fully in chapter 2. Here we relate its different aspects to current debates in the literature.

Community

The concepts of community and communal conflict are much contested in general and in their applicability to Northern Ireland. Some see community as a purely ideological concept that masks divisions of class or gender.[13] Talk of 'two communities' seems to posit two monolithic blocs whether within Northern Ireland or on the island as a whole, denying 'internal' differences and cross-cutting commonalities. Some accept that community division exists today in Northern Ireland but see the presently divided communities as in process of irretrievable fragmentation. For others, the stress on communal division obscures the facts that Northern Ireland incorporates a multiplicity of communities, each internally diverse, and is itself a community, albeit a divided one.[14] It is sometimes argued that an intellectual focus on sectarian communities emphasises, and thereby reinforces, 'unreal' communal divisions – that a focus on gender, class or ideology would help further to pluralise politics in Northern Ireland.

There is validity to many of these points: communities are social constructs and there is a danger of hypostatising them. Critically understood, however, the concept of community is necessary to any analysis of the conflict. As we use the term, communities are emergent entities, products of structurally conditioned social practices which, however, possess some general properties including a level of self-consciousness, integrating organisational networks and a capacity for boundary maintainance. Thus conceived, community is neither an essential feature of the social structure nor one which can serve as a general basis of explanation. Nonetheless, at the level of actual social organisation, relations and practices, as well as in public consciousness, communities are very real phenomena.

We use the concept of community in a non-totalising and variable way

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[13] Desmond Bell, 'The community studies tradition and Irish social science', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1981.
[14] See, for example, Simon Lee's submission to the Opsahl Commission, Andy Pollak, ed., *A Citizens' Inquiry: The Opsahl Report on Northern Ireland*, Dublin, Lilliput, 1993, pp. 334–5; *Alliance News*, Inter Party talks supplement, Nov.–Dec. 1992, p. 2.

that allows for overlapping membership of different communities which may have differing degrees of solidarity and boundedness. As we make clear in chapter 2, the emergence of an island-wide communal division in Ireland was a slow and complex process which was completed only in the late nineteenth century. No sooner was the forging of these two communities complete than partition created new conditions for community formation (chapter 3). But if new communities emerged in the North and the South of Ireland, they did not wholly displace those of the pre-partition period. We show in detailed empirical study the structure and conditions of communal polarisation, not in order to hypostatise sectarian communities but to explain how communal conflict is constituted. At the core of this explanation lies our analysis of the dimensions of difference and the structure of dominance, dependence and inequality.

Dimensions of difference

The literature on Northern Ireland brings out different aspects of what divides the communities. Some stress differences of ethnic origin; others religion; others colonialism – a conflict of settlers and natives and their descendants. These dimensions are sometimes combined: Akenson combines a religious and a colonial interpretation;[15] O'Leary and McGarry acknowledge all these aspects of division but see the national one as 'ultimately' most important.[16] Still others focus on more recent differences in ideology – on nationalism and unionism as conflicting politico-ideological identities and allegiances.[17] There has been no systematic attempt to clarify in a more theoretical way the relations between these structures of difference; too often they have been taken separately as the basis for contradictory (and inherently reductionist) explanations of conflict.

We stress the relative autonomy of five dimensions of difference and show how they develop, interrelate, overlap and interact with wider forces to form a basis for communal opposition. We argue that, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, three socio-cultural dimensions of conflict – religion (Catholicism vs various strands of Protestantism), ethnicity (originally Gaelic-Irish, Old English, New English, Scottish)

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[15] Donald Harman Akenson, *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel and Ulster*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1992.
[16] O'Leary and McGarry, *Politics of Antagonism*, p. 278.
[17] Richard Rose, *Governing without Consensus: An Irish Perspective*, London, Faber and Faber, 1971. B. M. Walker, *Ulster Politics: The Formative Years 1868–1886*, Belfast, Ulster Historical Foundation and Institute of Irish Studies, 1989.

and colonialism (native vs. settler) – intertwined and mutually conditioned each other. These differences had many and varied ideological articulations. Two in particular are important. One is the distinction between 'civility' and 'barbarism', a distinction which emerged during the period of conquest and colonisation and evolved later into a distinction between 'progressiveness' and 'backwardness'. The second, much more recent, distinction is that between nationalism and unionism as conflicting bases of identity and political loyalty – British and Irish. Thus conceived, the distinction between British and Irish is quite different from the ethnic distinctions of the earlier period which it overlaid rather than replaced, just as today the ethnic identity 'Ulster-Scots' is quite distinct from the national identity 'British', and the ethnic identity 'Gaelic-Irish' distinct from the national identity 'Irish'.

These dimensions of difference represent another of the levels in our model of a historical system of relationships. Much of their importance derived from the fact that they overlapped – Irish Protestants were predominantly of English or Scottish stock, came as settlers, were imbued if not with a civilising ideology then with a self-perception as culturally superior to the native Irish; Catholics were predominantly of Old English or Gaelic-Irish stock, perceived themselves as displaced natives and found themselves cast in the role of a culturally backward people; two centuries later, Protestants became overwhelmingly unionist, Catholics became overwhelmingly nationalist. Yet there was never total coincidence between the dimensions. Their relative importance varied by locality, class, individual and over time, thereby permitting a degree of socio-cultural and ideological heterogeneity within each community. But even where one dimension was temporarily dominant, the others remained in existence, each reproduced and partially shaped by its interaction with the others.

A structure of dominance, dependence and inequality

The role of relations of dominance, dependence and inequality in the conflict is an important, though uneven, theme in the literature on the conflict. Inequality between the communities in Northern Ireland has received much attention, although its extent, causes and effects are in dispute.[18] The contribution of the British state to relations of inequality is also controversial. Today some see it as external to the conflict, a neutral mediator, managing conflict and reforming inequality

[18] See David J. Smith and Gerald Chambers, *Inequality in Northern Ireland*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1991.

within Northern Ireland; others question this.[19] We approach this issue historically, by reference to the way in which the relationships between Catholics, Protestants and the British state were forged into a structure of dominance, dependence and inequality which changed over time and which at each stage defined the interests and parameters of action of the parties to it.

This structure forms another of the levels within the system of relationships. Socio-cultural and ideological difference alone would not have produced oppositional communities or intense communal conflict. Difference became conflictual and lasting because it was the basis of access to resources and power. We locate the roots of the structure of dominance, dependence and inequality in the mode of Ireland's integration into the English/British state in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This was achieved and secured by an alliance between the British state and loyal settler Protestants. A relation of mutual dependence developed between Britain, who needed Protestant support to secure its own control, and Protestants, who needed British support to maintain their position. To hold Ireland for the Crown, Protestants had to be accorded power in Ireland; thus British dominance over Ireland was further reflected in Protestant dominance within Ireland.

Subsequent political conflict in Ireland was a working out of the logic of this situation. From a British and Protestant point of view, once the structure of dominance had come into being it could not easily be altered for the alienation of Catholics from the established order was a threat to both dominant parties. The only chance of change was to remove Protestant privileges and admit Catholics to equal participation in political power, a policy bound to provoke Protestant resistance with no guarantee of gaining Catholic loyalty, and only slowly, cautiously and uncertainly embraced by the British government. Catholic pressure, Protestant resistance and British reform became the recurrent elements in political struggle.

In subsequent chapters we show how this pattern of conflict was reproduced in the newly founded Northern Ireland and still exists today. Communal inequalities are stabilised by the British state's presence even if gradually eroded by British reforming policies. These policies are a response to increasing Catholic and nationalist pressure – from the Irish state as well as Northern Catholics – and they increase Protestant insecurity and resistance to change. This structure of dominance, dependence and inequality continues to generate radically opposed interests, communal polarisation and power struggle.

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[19] For an overview of some recent views, see Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, pp. 141–5.

Analysis/synthesis

In the last twenty years, the literature on the Northern Ireland conflict has become increasingly specialised and there is now a wide range of sub-fields in the literature – economic and demographic analysis, studies of community relations, political analysis, comparative analysis, studies of ideology, policy-making, Anglo-Irish relations, the impact of the international context. There are also general studies but few attempts at a full synthesis, and the best of these are critical assessments of the existing literature.[20] In this study we have drawn on the literature in all of these subfields to provide as comprehensive an account as possible while still retaining an integrated interpretation. The theoretical basis of our approach is, first, an emphasis on the internal complexity of each level of the system of relationships and the relations of multideter-mination which we postulate among these and, second, an emphasis on the role of the communal power balance in producing stability or change in the system.

The internal complexity of each level has already been shown; our concern here is with multidetermination and the role of power. The dimensions of difference provided the elements out of which relations of dominance, dependence and inequality could be constructed and the bases on which processes of community formation could begin. Once each level had emerged, the system as a whole became self-reinforcing. The structure of dominance generated interests of its own; defending or advancing those interests provided the basis for further communal solidarity and ever sharper communal division. Communal division intensified in turn the sense of socio-cultural and ideological difference and the interests on which the structure of dominance rested. The system has therefore had self-reproducing tendencies. However, changing power resources produced change in the system. The principal source of change was the Catholic recovery from the mid-eighteenth century. The penal laws, designed to prevent that recovery, were effective to a degree; but under conditions of incipient modernisation the logic of numbers began to assert itself. The Catholic recovery was, however, slow and uneven and three centuries later it is still going on. Today's conflict in Northern Ireland is a contemporary expression of it.

It should now be clear that our explanation of continuity does not imply a static situation or an underlying structural or cultural deter-minism. Our account draws attention to the contingent as well as the

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[20] For example, Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*; John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1995.