

War in (Another) New Context: Postmodernism

Andrew J. Wilson

Volume 19, Number 2, Fall 1999

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs19_02re05

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The University of New Brunswick

ISSN

1198-8614 (print)

1715-5673 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Wilson, A. J. (1999). War in (Another) New Context: Postmodernism. *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 19(2), 194–195.

Conflict in Northern Ireland

Ruane, Joseph, and Jennifer Todd. *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland: Power, Conflict and Emancipation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Cash, John D. *Identity, Ideology and Conflict: The Structuration of Politics in Northern Ireland*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Joseph Ruane and Jennifer Todd's *The Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland* is a multi-disciplinary analysis of the factors that contribute to the Northern Ireland problem. The authors consider the historical background, ideological conflict, recent political initiatives, economic inequality, culture and community relations. They also assess the role of the British and Irish governments, and the increasing influence of the United States and European dimensions.

Ruane and Todd argue that the Northern Ireland conflict is based on an intricate system of relationships which generate two communities with radically different interests, aspirations and identities. The authors show how each level of the system interlock and mutually reinforce each other, thus contributing to the complexity of the problem. They conclude that progress toward a solution to the conflict must involve the dismantling of the whole framework of antagonistic and destructive relationships. This can only be achieved through an emancipatory process that would encompass a multi-stranded approach to moderate and differentiate the dimensions of difference, to undo the structure of dominance, dependence and inequality and to weaken the forces producing communal polarization." (p.307) Some of the elements of this emancipatory approach include the establishment of full economic, political and cultural equality between the two communities, and constructing an alternative source of communal security for Northern Ireland Protestants.

One of the outstanding features of this work is the incisive dissection of the issues that divide the two communities in Northern Ireland. Ruane and Todd capture all the nuances of conflict in exquisite detail and use them to present a convincing argument for their thesis. Furthermore, the emancipatory approach offers a challenging and provocative blueprint for Northern Ireland's future, elements of which are reflected in the recently signed Good Friday agreement. The authors fully acknowledge the potential of resistance to emancipation and, as with the Good Friday agreement, see that the greatest challenge remains the creation of "a relationship between the two historic communities on the island based on contact, cooperation and agreement rather than avoidance, mutual ill-will and conflict." (p. 311)

This book is a major contribution to the literature on Northern Ireland and should be a required text for those interested in the issue or in conflict studies generally.

Ruane and Todd see ideology as only one of the elements in the destructive framework of relationships producing conflict in Northern Ireland. John Cash, on the other hand, attempts to "eschew approaches which regard ideology as merely a derivative or

reflection of economic or social process" and show the "centrality of ideology and identity to the structuration of political life and political conflict." To do this, Cash devotes the first half of his book to an analysis of prevalent theories of ideology. Drawing critically on social theory and psychological theory, the author develops his own "somewhat novel theory of ideology" which emphasizes the inherent rules of structuration.

In part two, Cash uses his theoretical formulations to analyze unionist ideology in the "crisis years" from the early 1960s to 1975. He focuses on the speeches of unionist leaders, such as Terence O'Neill, William Craig and Ian Paisley, to show the unconscious rules of structuration of unionist ideology. He emphasizes how some of these actors drew upon certain exclusivist, triumphalist and denigrating rules. He shows how this contributed to a split within unionism between an inclusive conventional liberal mode and an ethno-religious affiliative corporate mode.

While Cash's theory of ideology is unclear in some aspects, it does provide a useful means of analysis. His focus on the structuration of unionist ideology is a compelling and original approach to the study of Ulster unionism. The discussion of the divisions within unionism, however, adds little to recent literature, and is discussed more systematically in Feargal Cochrane's *Unionist Politics* (Cork, 1997). Although Cash provides a concluding chapter on the spectrum of unionist responses to the Framework Documents, and how they relate to his theory, he does not do the same for other periods of unionist "crisis." It would have enhanced Cash's conclusions, for example, if he had shown the same rules of structuration emerging from unionist reactions to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Andrew J. Wilson
Loyola University Chicago