

## CHAPTER 1

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# *Colonialism and academic representations of the troubles*

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According to the vast bulk of literature on the topic Northern Ireland is not a colony of Britain and the conflict there is not colonial in nature. Many analysts are willing to admit that there used to be a colonial relationship between Britain and Ireland (although a substantial portion see this as of little significance and some even appear to deny that Ireland was a colony). When we come to the present, hardly a whisper is heard about the colonial relationship between Britain and Northern Ireland. Most historians do refer to relations between Britain and Ireland as colonial for the years between the late medieval period and the eighteenth century (see Ruane 1992). But after that colonialism as an explanation seems to vanish – reference to it by historians becomes ‘unusual’ (Ruane 1992: 296). Economists, sociologists and anthropologists have tended not to analyse the political, economic or cultural development of Ireland in colonial terms. Political scientists – especially in Ireland – and geographers have analysed the relationship between Britain and Ireland in terms of colonialism at least at some stage in history. But as we move nearer to the present references to colonialism become rarer. According to Ruane no anthropological study has referred to Northern Ireland as a colonial situation (1992:303). This is at best curious.

Amongst those who acknowledge a colonial relationship or dimension in the past, there is little which identifies the precise date or historical period when Northern Ireland ceased to be a colony. If all Ireland was a colony of Britain, did it stop being so with the Act of Union in 1801? Did the North stop being a colony in 1920 with the Government of Ireland Act? Or perhaps in 1921 with the ending of the war of independence and the withdrawal of British forces from the 26 counties of the Free State? Was it before that with the alleged emergence of a separate ‘nation’ in the North in the nineteenth century? Was it when the British state ceased to have economic interests in Ireland which some argue was after 1945? Or was it when unionist one-party rule was ended in 1972 and Westminster imposed direct

rule? Or when British strategic interests became less important in the 1970s and 1980s and decisively so after 1989? The date is not specified and the discussion on this matter severely underdeveloped. As one leading analyst (who himself does not describe the North of Ireland as a colony) has observed, those authors who do not use a colonial model 'simply remain silent on the subject, and do not actually argue the case against employing it' (Whyte 1990: 178). Similarly, Ruane states 'the language of colonialism simply stopped with the advent of the nineteenth century, without explicit discussion or justification' (1992: 318).

The argument here is that none of the above dates is of any significance for describing the colonial relations between Britain and Ireland and later between Britain and Northern Ireland, since they refer to arguments about changes in British (or Irish) interests or to arguments about settler identity which do not relate to the structural and historical realities of the contemporary situation. Nor would such arguments be accepted in analyses of other settler colonial societies. No one now suggests that Northern Ireland is really part of 'Great Britain' and the mouthful which is the name of the state reflects this – the 'United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland'. When people in Northern Ireland claim to be British they justify this in imperial and ideological terms since they don't actually live in Britain. Ulster is British in the sense that it is a colonial possession which the British state has tried to present as an integral part of the state. Not even Margaret Thatcher really believed that Northern Ireland was, in her own phrase, 'as British as Finchley', as her memoirs show (Thatcher 1995:385).

This chapter will examine how academics in Britain, Ireland and beyond have responded to the conflict in Northern Ireland. First it will examine the inadequacies of a wide variety of academic work which has dealt with Northern Ireland, ranging across both the social and human sciences, from history, political science, sociology, international relations, economics, economic history, psychology and geography to philosophy, literary criticism, art history and media and cultural studies. This section will highlight how such studies deal with the question of colonialism, and with their characterisations especially of unionism.

## *Academic explanations of the conflict*

If Northern Ireland is a colony the question arises, how could so many academic 'experts' get their analyses so comprehensively wrong? Whyte seems somewhat perplexed by the failure to argue about colonial explanations in the literature, tending to treat academic explanations of the conflict at face value rather than as emanating from and contributing to the ideological contest over definition of the conflict.<sup>1</sup> This chapter sets contemporary Northern Ireland in its colonial context and argues that colonialism and its associated propaganda, information and cultural enterprises are part of the reason for the systematic inadequacy of much writing on Northern Ireland. In other words it

directs attention to the class, national and ethnic backgrounds of intellectuals and academics, their sectional interests, and their role in hegemonic contest (see O'Dowd 1996b). But before we go on to assess some of the reasons for this, let us turn to some of the arguments for and against colonialism as an explanation.

## *Northern Ireland as a colony*

Northern Ireland is a colony of 'Great Britain'. But this does not necessarily mean that the conflict is 'colonial' in exactly the same way as all other colonial conflicts. For a start, as Pamela Clayton argues (this volume, 1996; see also Lustick 1993; MacDonald 1986; Weitzer 1990) Northern Ireland exhibits many of the characteristics associated with settler colonialism. Apposite parallels include Rhodesia, Palestine and especially French Algeria. South Africa also exhibits some of the same features, though matters are made more complex by two competing groups of settlers. Northern Ireland, by contrast, shows less parallel with colonial situations such as India under the Raj, any of the other British non-settler colonies, or with the resistance against repressive third world regimes such as those in Nicaragua under Somoza or Chile under Pinochet. The colonial relationship between Britain and Ireland also makes the conflict different from other armed struggles in Western Europe, such as those waged by the Rote Armee Fraktion in West Germany, by the Combatant Communist Cells in Belgium or by Action Directe in France. The situation in Euskadi (the Basque country) does bear more comparison (in the strategies of the state and the insurgents and arguably in the facets of relations between the Spanish state and the Basque country which have colonial parallels), but the specifically settler dimension of the conflict in Northern Ireland does mark it out as different.

However, the designation settler colonialism cannot by itself explain everything. We must also take into account how settler colonies differ and the specific historical circumstances and contests which shape every conflict. Not all settler societies resolve the tensions which tend to arise between settlers and natives in the same way and consequently the process of decolonisation (where it occurs) varies.<sup>2</sup> The declaration of UDI by the white settlers in Rhodesia is one variation (Weitzer 1990). Although there have been some stirrings amongst Ulster unionists on this matter, it is not more than a minority demand. More fundamentally, one key way to avoid conflicts between settlers and natives over territory and resources – by exterminating them – did not happen in Ireland as it did in, for example, North America. Today, few unionists publicly advance the extermination of natives as a policy goal – although in 1984 DUP Belfast city councillor, George Seawright, did propose that the council purchase an incinerator to burn Catholics and their priests (Johnson 1984). Loyalist paramilitaries also seem to have this as part of their military strategy, expressed in slogans in wall murals such as 'Kill All Irish' and 'Any Catholic Will Do'.

Ireland is also different in that it was ruled by 'Britain' for a long time prior to the processes generally identified as colonialism and imperialism and some writers have referred to Ireland as a whole as an integral part of British attempts at nation-building. This is one key way in which Northern Ireland is different from some other colonies. Ireland was Britain's first colony, but there was also an attempt to integrate it into the national territory. This strategy failed with the creation of the Irish Free State. Today Northern Ireland is officially a part of the 'UK' state. It is not, however, part of 'Great Britain'. In a sense then, Northern Ireland is a less integral part of Britain than Algeria was as a *département* of France. But Northern Ireland is to some extent integrated into the UK state and political system, albeit not to the extent that Scotland and Wales are.

To be fair, settler colonialism does seem to be a fairly widespread characterisation of the *origins* of the conflict in Northern Ireland. It has recently been partially endorsed by the leading political science commentators (O'Leary and McGarry 1993; McGarry and O'Leary 1995). However, many such commentators are reluctant to follow the point through and describe the current conflict as colonial in the same terms. Reading McGarry and O'Leary (1995) one is left feeling – contrary to evidence they quote elsewhere – that the conflict is simply about the playing out of historical wrongs as if it had been frozen in political stasis since the plantation. They argue that settler colonialism fits the experience of 'historic Ulster' (1995: 334) and that dispossession of the natives left a 'legacy of bitterness' (1995: 334). This is quite true, but it is surely not meant to suggest that this is the key motivator of the current conflict, nor could such a factor account for the significant periods of peace in Northern Ireland between the 1920s and 1960s. Although McGarry and O'Leary also note that the role of Britain is important they say only that it showed 'a lack of will' to solve the conflict. Britain is henceforth referred to as the 'sovereign power' with the colonial dimension mysteriously slipping out of view.

### *Imperialism*

Nor does maintaining a settler-colonial position require one to subscribe to the crude parodies of vulgar Marxism available in the literature or to the crude analyses of vulgar Marxism itself. Much of the debate on the left in social science seems to have been over the question of imperialism. Left writers are criticised by non-Marxists for a crude and conspiratorial conception of the interests of British imperialism (Whyte 1990; McGarry and O'Leary 1995) and by revisionist Marxists for overestimating the homogeneity of the Protestant community and underestimating the progressive potential of the Protestant working class (Morgan 1980; Bew *et al.* 1980; Patterson 1980b). We will return to the substantive issue of Protestantism, unionism and loyalism below. For present purposes we can note that the interests of the British state do not affect the characterisation of the problem as colonial, since whether the colonial power wants to retain a territory or

not, the important point for analysis is whether it does or not. To be fair, to designate the Northern Ireland problem as one of imperialism can tend to imply the pursuit of interests. In general Marxist writers from the varying revisionist camps (in common with non-Marxists) tend not to say explicitly why they do not describe the conflict in colonial terms. Some stress internal factors in producing conflict, and others the role of the state in mediating ruling class interests.

The most well known example of the latter, and the most widely cited, is that of Paul Bew and his colleagues (Bew *et al.* 1979, 1980; Bew and Patterson 1985). They attack approaches which emphasise the material interests of the participants in the conflict as economic and reductionist. Their approach – drawing partly on Althusserian Marxism (and on Poulantzas) – emphasises the relative autonomy of the state from the ruling class since it must be able to broker contradictions in ruling class interest. The chief problems with this type of work at a theoretical level are its functionalism and lack of agency. In the end it is as reductionist as its opponents in seeing state actions as a necessary function of bourgeois (and therefore capitalist) interests (Althusser 1970, 1971). The 'glacial grip' (Eagleton 1996b:3) of Louis Althusser on their theoretical conception of the state is related to their inability fully to comprehend the sectarian nature of class relations in Northern Ireland. For them sectarianism is a superstructural phenomena, relatively autonomous of economic determination. Pre-1972 Northern Ireland was, they say, in many ways an 'ordinary bourgeois' state (1980:155). This is a rather breathtaking misdescription of the actual situation, which sees the colonial marker of difference and domination as somehow an epiphenomenon of deeper structural processes. As Paul Stewart has put it

Unless one recognises that the process of class rule depended upon ... Catholic subordination, the notions of 'ordinariness' and 'normality' merely serve to reinforce the 'Alice in Wonderland' optic which was the prevailing way of viewing Northern Ireland from Westminster between 1920 and 1968.  
(Stewart 1991: 199)

The advantage of a conceptualisation involving settler colonialism, is that it requires that we analyse colonial/sectarian relations as well as class relations in explaining the conflict.

One of the few academics to address the colonial argument explicitly argues that his own 'preference, when it comes to contextualising the Irish experience, is for a European comparative perspective' (Kennedy 1996: xv). This can certainly be illuminating as can comparison with non-European countries, but Kennedy adopts a severely empiricist argument which fails to capture structural relationships in its haste to castigate Irish nationalism (and to a lesser extent Ulster unionism). He advances the rather patronising thesis that Irish nationalists claim to be 'Most Oppressed People Ever (MOPE)'. This framework, Kennedy argues, 'speaks as much to emotion as to reason' and results in 'a flourishing of the wilder forms of fanaticism, feeding

off their mutual atavisms' (1996:222). He proceeds to demolish the arguments of Irish exceptionalists by reference to slaughter and genocide elsewhere; since proportionately more Algerians died in their struggle for independence than died in Ireland, the colonial comparison breaks down. But the argument that the pools of blood in Ireland were historically not so deep as those in Germany, Russia, North America or Algeria seems rather incidental to both normative and conceptual questions.

Kennedy also attacks those who bewail British colonialism in Ireland by noting that Ireland 'was relatively advantaged by its mild climactic conditions' having more rain and fewer 'hot, dry summers' (p. 188) than even some other European countries. It is as if the relationship of conquest and domination between Britain and Ireland are all a fiction of the fevered imagination of the 'atavistic' Irish brought on by insufficiently rigorous application of British torture and killing and by a lack of sunny weather.

Ironically much of Kennedy's energy is devoted to attacking that brand of cultural analysis known as postcolonial studies, which, he reasons, must – when it refers to Ireland – see colonialism as at least a historical experience. Sadly, he is mistaken. Postcolonial studies originate with the study of literature in societies emerging from colonial domination. As with much contemporary cultural theory in its obsession with 'discourse' (see Philo and Miller 1998), a fair proportion of such work has very little grasp of empirical, economic or political realities in postcolonial societies and has very little account of postcolonial misery (Eagleton 1996c). Furthermore, some exponents find it difficult to avoid the temptations of colonial ideology when discussing Ireland. In one study, which includes even the USA, Canada and Australia in the postcolonial, Ireland (together with Scotland and Wales) is excluded, because:

while it is possible to argue that these societies were the first victims of English expansion, their subsequent complicity in the British imperial enterprise makes it difficult for colonised peoples outside Britain to accept their identity as postcolonial. (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989: 33)<sup>3</sup>

As Luke Gibbons notes:

this extraordinary statement (which does not appear to include Ireland as one of those countries 'outside Britain') only makes sense if one identifies the Irish historically with the settler colony in Ireland ... thus erasing in the process the entire indigenous population. (Gibbons 1996: 174)

Furthermore as one observer has pointed out:

The term 'post-colonialism' is, in many cases, prematurely celebratory: Ireland may, at a pinch, be 'post-colonial', but for the inhabitants of British occupied Northern Ireland, ... there may be nothing 'post' about colonialism at all. (McClintock 1994: 294)

We should have to say no more than Liam O'Dowd's neat summary that 'attempts to contain and marginalise the legacy of British colonialism in Ireland end up sustaining it politically and culturally – even if its old economic base has become attenuated' (1990: 31). Yet the literature on Northern Ireland and its parallel discourse in the media and the world of politics, forcefully remind us of the persistent and wilful forgetting which dominates discussion of Northern Ireland to this day.

## *Understanding unionism*

One of the key areas of dispute in conceptualising the Northern Ireland problem as colonial, and indeed one of the most common themes for work on the Northern Ireland problem since the late 1970s, has been about how to think about the unionists of Northern Ireland. The call for academics to 'understand' unionism was issued and since then a great deal of research has been done on the unionist community (See e.g. Aughey 1989; Bew and Patterson 1985; Bew *et al.* 1979, 1980; Bruce 1986, 1992, 1994b; English and Walker 1996; McAuley 1994; Nelson 1984; Porter, 1996; Shirlow and McGovern 1997). There has been a good deal of valuable work in this tradition which has helped refine understandings of aspects of the political economy of unionism, Ulster identities, struggles within unionism and amongst different class factions and religious factions. However, one key problem is that some social scientists have been unable to distinguish between understanding a social phenomenon and identifying with it. Moreover, some academics, usually with backgrounds in unionism have taken on a missionary function for the interests of unionism (O'Dowd, this volume).

Early work by left writers such as that by Bew *et al.* (1979, 1980), was in response to traditional nationalist and anti-imperialist left analyses which, it was argued, portrayed Ulster unionists as dupes of British imperialism or viewed the Protestant working class as manipulated by the Protestant bourgeoisie into an all-class alliance against Irish nationalism. Not only was the allegiance of many Protestants to the British state 'genuine', but there were important elements of class consciousness and class politics in sections of the Protestant industrial proletariat in the North. This argument called into question the role of Irish nationalism in causing and/or prolonging the conflict (see Ruane and Todd, this volume) and suggested that the most important issue was not colonialism, but respectively, ethnic division or class unity. We will examine questions of heterogeneity amongst Protestants now and then consider questions about ethnicity and identity.

## *Divisions among Protestants*

Much of the work in this area has agreed that it is a mistake to see Protestants as a unified bloc, and has encouraged appreciation of the fractures and tensions within the 'whole Protestant community'

(Brown 1985). It is undoubtedly correct to argue that the Protestant 'community' is not a monolith and that there are a number of contending and competing currents within the class alliance which is known as unionism (as is accepted by most commentators, see O'Dowd, this volume).<sup>4</sup> Some theorists see this as pointing to the possibility that progressive forces might emerge from the Protestant working class which – so they argue – would enable some forms of class politics to prosper. Most obviously, this would allow Catholic and Protestant workers to come together as *workers*, rendering the national question at least secondary and at most irrelevant. Such wishful thinking neglects the material fact of sectarian division, which is the result of colonialism. Such theories have long been recognised as misguided by theorists of colonialism. As Fanon put it, thirty years ago:

In a colonial country, it used to be said, there is a community of interests between the colonized people and the working class of the colonialist country. The history of the wars of liberation waged by colonized peoples is the history of non-verification of this thesis. (Fanon 1970a: 92)

On the other hand the search for class consciousness (and in parallel the search for feminist commitment) among Protestants has had a rather narrow focus and has tended to ignore those Protestants who have become radicalised in other ways, such as those who reject unionism. As Flann Campbell has argued 'a curious aspect of Irish historiography has been the fact that so little has been published, at least up until recently, about the dissenting aspects of Ulster Protestantism' (Campbell 1991:1). Campbell also notes that the 'failure to draw attention to the democratic, as distinct from the conservative Protestant tradition' (p.1) and another critic argues that the role of Protestants in nationalist politics has been 'overlooked, minimised or misrepresented' (McLoughlin 1984 cited in Campbell 1991: 2).

Nevertheless the dominant tradition amongst Ulster Protestants is the unionist one. And the extent to which there are strong socialist currents present within the Protestant working class is clearly limited (cf. Stewart 1991). Furthermore, as Bew *et al.* and writers such as Bruce recognise, the class-alliance of unionism is at its strongest whenever it is perceived that there are threats to Protestant interests – namely when constitutional reform is suggested. This in itself suggests that the strength of Protestant identity and unionist politics varies with material conditions. Yet, many authors discuss Protestant identities as if they are set in stone

### *Ethnicity and identity: construction and change*

Protestant ethnicity is claimed to be one of the keys to the conflict by writers such as Bruce (1986, 1992, 1994b). Bruce argues that 'much thinking about Northern Ireland is neither here nor there because it fails to appreciate the strength of ethnic identification, the power of ethnic divisions' (1994b: vi ). Northern Ireland is an 'ethnic conflict' in

which religion is an important element. Nationalists and Marxists, he argues, fail to appreciate that unionists will not magically become 'Irish' if the British withdraw. It is certainly the case that 'Ulster Unionist' identities are not the result of ideological manipulation and nor do they mask the 'true' (class or national) interests of Protestants in Ireland. Indeed it is quite possible to see unionist ideology as an efficient means of pursuing Protestant interests. Although Bruce does acknowledge that identities are not natural or inevitable and are subject to change, the weight of his case pulls in the opposite direction suggesting that they are too difficult to change and that they are the products of 'perceptions' rather than being linked to material and ideal interests. Several other authors have claimed that Protestants object to a united Ireland, because of their irreducible sense of Britishness. McGarry and O'Leary (1995) and Whyte (1990) emphasise the identifiably separate identity of Protestants as if this were some sort of fundamental criteria which rules out serious constitutional reform.<sup>5</sup>

Such arguments assert an essentialist notion of identity, as if identities were not historically contingent and constructed by human beings in the context of social, political and economic processes. The questions of how and why they came to regard themselves as 'British' tend to be neglected. Before partition many 'Ulster Unionists' referred to themselves as Irish. They became more clearly 'Ulster' unionists when it became obvious that some form of home rule was likely, leading to a split with unionists in the South (and to some extent in the West of Ulster). A key part of this process was the Ulster Unionist Convention of 1892 which was organised with the recognition amongst the Protestant business class that there was a distinct northern 'cause' (Gibbon 1975: 130). Although we should remember the extent to which unionists at the time saw themselves as key players in the British imperialist project, nevertheless the Convention was a key moment in the emergence of 'Ulster' identities.

The star of 'Unionism' which rose with the convention, proved to be the signal for the birth of a new being, the 'Ulsterman'. His birth was greeted with the provision for him, by an array of publicists, of a unique 'character', 'heritage' and destiny. (Gibbon 1975: 136)

After partition the Ulster Unionist Party put much effort into the creation of an 'Ulster' identity as distinct from Irish identity in its propaganda and publicity campaigns (MacDougall 1996). These emphasised (among other things) the number of American presidents with Ulster origins and the hard-working, entrepreneurial character of 'Ulster people'. But also crucially important in the construction of new identities was an emphasis on the connection with Britain. In some unionist circles, the name of the state 'Northern Ireland' left too much to chance since it sounded more Irish than British. Indeed in 1959, the Unionist government's Cabinet Publicity Committee considered a long memo from the Director of Publicity, Eric Montgomery which recommended changing the name of the state to something more British-sounding.

I believe it was a great mistake ever to have included the word Ireland in the title of our new state when it was set up in 1921. It links us forever with the south and with a stage-Irish interpretation of our character of which we feel ashamed . . . If only it were practicable, one of the biggest steps we could take towards clearing up permanently this confusion over our separateness from Eire would be to change the title of our state to something that would exclude the word Ireland. This would enable us to propagate our own picture of the Ulster character and of our modern industrial state . . . 'Ulster' is such a title and is already widely known and used though, could it but be found, there would be many advantages in using a name that would also imply a connection with Britain. I say this in part because it would emphasise our 'oneness' with the mainland (whereas the word 'Ulster' still implies a province of Ireland). (Montgomery 1959)

'West Britain' might have been a solution, but it was not suggested. Montgomery's proposal was rejected by the Cabinet Publicity Committee. It was thwarted by the twin factors of imperial and capitalist power. The power to change the name lay with Britain and a name change would not be in the commercial interest of the linen and whiskey industries which marketed themselves as Irish. By 1968 as many as 20 per cent of Northern Protestants still thought of themselves as Irish. With the impact of the conflict from 1969 this declined to 8 per cent in 1978 and 3 per cent in 1986 (Whyte 1990: 67-9).

Meanwhile, those Protestants in the South who had been attached to the union moved in the opposite direction, gradually coming to think of themselves as Irish. In his study of the fate of Protestants in an independent Ireland, conducted in the 1970s, Bowen points to

the growing irrelevance – indeed the absence – of the constitutional and ethnic issues of the past in Irish political life . . . In this new climate, the British ethnic allegiance of the minority finally seemed to die away. With the exception of a small proportion of upper-class 'West-Britons', all [interviewees in the study] insisted that they regarded themselves as simply Irish Protestants. (Bowen 1983: 70)

Ulster Protestants will not magically be converted to a united Ireland by argument or even by the fact of a 32-county republic or any other serious constitutional change. It is likely that there would be a long-term problem of Protestant accommodation to a united Ireland, until and unless their material interests change, or until 'the conditions that produce conflict and give power its compelling meaning' are dismantled (Ruane and Todd 1996: 324). In some respects a serious constitutional reform would itself change the material interests of some Protestants, but it would not by itself produce accommodation. We need only look at the varying ways in which settler populations in Africa (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Algeria) have fared, the ways in which their politics have evolved and the considerable extent to which they have maintained some economic privileges to appreciate this point. The dispute between the British and Zimbabwe governments over land ownership by Whites in late 1997 is one indication of the

long-term nature of such problems. Nevertheless, there is a fairly extensive world-wide experience in how such problems play themselves out, not to mention the closer experience of changes in identity to be found just over the Irish border.

The point is that identities are formed and continually alter in relation to material circumstances and, crucially, interests. This does not make them any less real nor are they liable to wither away until the conditions which sustain them change. Apart from neglecting the dynamic nature of identities and their formation in relation to material and ideal interests, the basis upon which identities are said to be fundamental would need some very explicit grounding. As things stand this smacks of a cultural relativism which would in practice leave cultural (and political and economic) hierarchies intact in the name of identities forged in a mythical past. It is as if the 'identity' of Protestants was formed in a political, economic and indeed cultural void and just happens to be their politically neutral sense of place. This can no more be maintained for White supremacists than Orange parades for 'Flower of Scotland', 'God Save the Queen' or 'The Soldier Song'. There is no reason why the argument should stop with where people currently are.

Bruce argues that there are two possible outcomes (rather than solutions) to the conflict. The first is to 'accept the ethnic fault lines where they lie' and back a side and the second is to try to 'reduce the salience of ethnic identity' (1994b:147). In his view such efforts as there have been from the British government to do the latter have actually hardened loyalist identities. Bruce concludes, that divisions are now 'beyond manipulation'. Therefore, we should back a side. Bruce's preference as 'a relatively disinterested observer' is that on the grounds of their greater number 'doing the will of the majority leads one to the unionist rather than the nationalist position' (1994b:153). Because Protestants see every attempt to ameliorate sectarianism as a gain for Catholics, he argues that 'political changes are seen by loyalists as all loss and no compensation' (1995b: 148-9). Therefore, since, in his view, there is no prospect of getting Protestants to accept justice, the best solution is to back the dominant group, one of the key agents in the gerrymandering of the state in the first place. Supposing the apartheid regime had succeeded in its policy of moving Black South Africans into 'homelands', leaving a White majority in South Africa 'proper'. By the same logic we could find ourselves supporting White South Africans who felt that attempts to reform South Africa meant all loss and no compensation for them or that their 'cultural identity' was being devalued or 'swamped'. As Terry Eagleton writes:

justice, unlike the society it hopes to create, is a necessarily one-sided affair. It is this which the middle class liberal pluralist finds so hard to stomach ... To foster a tolerantly multiracial society means intransigently opposing fascism ... The narrative of political justice, and the narrative of cultural diversity, are related but distinct, and one must beware of those who recount one but not the other.

(Eagleton 1996a: 272)

Unionism, is founded on the material and ideal interests of 'Protestants' in Northern Ireland. The evidence of continuing supremacy in Northern Ireland is there for all to see in the publications of the Fair Employment Commission, in the experience of ordinary Catholics at the hands of the 'security forces' and in everyday sectarian harassment in public and social life. Such experiences are not confined to the working classes, but infect broad sweeps of public life in the private and public sectors (see e.g. Fair Employment Commission 1996). Sectarianism also structures employment patterns in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. A Fair Employment Agency report concluded in 1983 that the numbers and proportions of Catholics at senior level are 'very small' (p.13). Moreover, such surveys tend to concentrate on numbers and recruitment policies, rather than the atmosphere of workplaces. It is clear that the recruitment pattern parallels the sectarian mindset of many NIO officials. This can on occasion be expressed openly in what are thought to be secure conditions. In the early 1980s Liz Drummond was Chief Press Officer at the Northern Ireland Office in London. She later became Director of Information at the Scottish Office and was sacked by the incoming Labour government in 1997. She reports a meeting with a senior member of the Belfast press office, Billy Millar, now retired. Over lunch on her first visit to Belfast the conversation turned to football:

I told him my father was a professional footballer and he said 'Oh, who did he play for?' and I said 'Scotland and Glasgow Rangers', which of course meant that I was perfectly all right – I was a bluenose. He then took me back to Stormont to look at the press office and as we were approaching it he turned to me and said 'Of course, we've got two of *them* working here'. I said 'Two of what, Billy?', and he said 'Catholics!' and he said it with such venom I was shocked – I was appalled. I had never seen such blind prejudice. I could not believe that this man in a senior position in a responsible civil service job could hold that kind of view. I was a Protestant, I was a patriot, but I was so appalled ... That was a bad start, and I just hated it. There were just so many little incidents of bigotry, prejudice, ignorance, I thought I want out of it. (interview with the author, February 1998)

She lasted one year in the NIO. Since the Labour landslide on 1 May 1997 three Catholics have been appointed to the rank of Senior Information Officer and some in the civil service see this as symptomatic of an erosion of Protestant power. However, Andy Wood, the sacked English Director of Information, has recently been replaced by a Northern Protestant, Tom Kelly (Barker 1998). In addition, the proportion of Catholics in the Information Service at higher levels remains low. Only one third of Senior Information Officer's is Catholic, there is only one Catholic among the eight Principal Information Officers and there are no Catholics amongst the three most senior (grades 5 and 3) positions. Catholic information officers report that colleagues in the civil service at Stormont still pass derogatory comments and make 'jokey' sectarian comments, which allow them to get a measure of the changing culture of the civil service.<sup>6</sup>

## *Alternatives to colonialism*

A wide variety of contemporary authors explain Northern Ireland as the result of backwardness, extremism, myths, religion, tribal conflicts, irrationality, atavism, emotional attachment to self-serving versions of history, etc. 'Revisionist' historians seem to be particularly prone to such approaches (see Boyce and O'Day 1996; Brady 1994). Such explanations tend to fail to register that the conflict is about the pursuit of interests, and most tend incorrectly to leave the role of the British state as a party to the conflict out of consideration or to see it in terms which accord well with the propaganda of the Northern Ireland Office as holding the ring (see Tomlinson, this volume, on the role of the British state).

The most common approach to the conflict in Ireland is to see it as some sort of internal conflict. Whyte calculates that around 60 per cent of writing on the conflict since 1968 has conceptualised the problem in this way. It is extraordinary that the dominant account of the conflict given by academics could ignore the obviously central roles of the British state and the Irish Republic in the conflict, not to mention the impact of the world system of international relations (Cox 1997).

There are *recent* text books on Ireland which attempt to explain the troubles by reference to the 'backwardness' of Northern Irish politics, culture and economics, as Sabine Wichert has it (1991: 2).<sup>7</sup> Additionally some 'Marxist' analysts view the project of British imperialism as bringing progress to the backward colonies and as helping to 'modernise' Ireland (Bew *et al.* 1979). Conversely, according to economic historian Liam Kennedy, it is the relatively advanced nature of economic development and the relatively high levels of GNP in Ireland as a whole compared to both other European colonies and even some European countries at the turn of the century which makes the colonial parallel inappropriate (Kennedy 1996).

On the other hand the conflict can be explained as a product of the 'myths' of Irish nationalism (Hughes 1994) or by theories of 'ethnic conflict' in which ethnic identities are so deeply ingrained as to be little affected by political initiatives (Bruce 1992, 1994b). The ethnic conflict paradigm appears to go from strength to strength with its characterisation of 'the conflict of two [Irish] nationalism's' (Kennedy-Pipe 1997: 180). Meanwhile John Darby, one of the most experienced analysts of the conflict, opens his most recent book for the Minority Rights Group with the following: 'Any divided community is like a bottle containing two scorpions. If the scorpions cannot be persuaded to mate, or at least co-habit in a civilised manner within the same space, it may be better to recognise the fact, and to look around for another bottle' (1998: 1). According to the blurb, this is supposed to be a 'thought-provoking' statement. It can also be described as misleading in giving no indication that one scorpion is dominant and in suggesting that there are only two scorpions, thus leaving the British role out. More fundamentally, Darby doesn't ask who put the scorpions in the bottle in the first place. It is an indication of the problems of 'dispassionate' analysis that

the book's title metaphor condemns the people of Northern Ireland (all except the 'objective' academics presumably) as uncivilised poisonous invertebrates. For Theodore Hoppen, the 'divisions' in Northern Ireland are 'in many crucial respects quite literally religious ones'. Apparently academics should remember that they are not like the tribes on whom they seek to comment and it is therefore 'a mistake (tempting above all for intellectuals with no religion themselves) to seek to explain this away' (1989: 252).

Unfortunately, academics are more likely to succumb to the temptation to condescend to their research subjects and treat them as repositories of the irrational and emotional. Implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) they draw a contrast with themselves and their like who are – their books infer – rational, unemotional and not subject to the myths of history. Yet, their writings are not value-free, but profoundly committed to particular ways of seeing the world, the bulk of which are complicit with the official British (colonial) view. This mode of writing says more about the class position, national identity and ideology of intellectuals and academics, than about the conflict in Ireland. Moreover, given the appalling mess that is the Northern Ireland conflict, a lack of emotion on the part of the analyst suggests a serious lack of humanity.

## ***British academia and Northern Ireland: The silence of the lambs*<sup>8</sup>**

How has British academia responded to the colonial conflict on their doorstep? It has been suggested that 'it is quite possible that, in proportion to size, Northern Ireland is the most heavily researched area on earth' (Whyte 1990: viii). However, this picture of 'an explosion' of research (1991: viii), obscures the extraordinary neglect of the Northern Ireland conflict by academics outside Ireland. British academics especially have tended to steer clear of Northern Ireland in spite (or perhaps because) of the continual crisis of the last three decades. Although there clearly are a number of individuals who have become specialists on Ireland and there are an increasing number of centres for Irish Studies, there has been a very marked silence within social scientific disciplines on the significance of the war for social theory and its impact on the British political and legal system. Moreover, some accounts show great difficulty in even acknowledging the existence of the conflict in Ireland. Anthony Giddens is the doyen of British sociology. His textbook *Sociology* is a typical example of the genre. In 815 pages there is one index reference to Northern Ireland. This refers to a single paragraph in the midst of a discussion of the sociology of religion which states that religious differences are more marked in Northern Ireland than in Britain (Giddens 1989: 44).<sup>9</sup> The third edition fares slightly better, quantitatively, with three references to Northern Ireland in 625 pages (Giddens 1997). One of the additional

references is worthy of note because it is empirically untrue and conceptually naive.<sup>10</sup> The entire reference reads as follows:

In Northern Ireland, Protestants and Catholics keep alive a set of divided religious loyalties established for centuries, while the most activist members of each denomination engage in open warfare against each other. (1997: 465)

Firstly, the 'war' in Northern Ireland involved more than 'Protestants' and 'Catholics'. As is well known British forces inflicted and had inflicted upon them a large proportion of the casualties (Sutton, 1994). Secondly, the 'open warfare' has not been simply between religious denominations, since more than half of all killings by the IRA have been of 'security force' personnel, and it is them, rather than 'Protestants' which the IRA claimed to be at war with.<sup>11</sup> Leaving the British out implies their role has been theoretically insignificant. Perhaps they simply 'keep the peace' between the two warring factions – as British government propagandists have tried to suggest (Miller 1993b, 1994).

Let us turn now to one of the major criminology textbooks, *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology* (Maguire, Reiner and Morgan 1994), a 'massive textbook consisting of 1240 pages and 25 chapters and over 400,000 words. From all accounts, it has sold extremely well and is now a standard text for criminology courses at both A level and undergraduate level' (Hillyard 1995: 5). The editors note that the focus of the text is not international but specifically on the British system of justice. Yet, there is not a single chapter on Northern Ireland, nor are there any significant accounts of the differences between the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland and Britain or the significant impact of the Northern Ireland conflict on the British system. As Hillyard notes, there are only two references to Northern Ireland in the entire book. The first is a minor note on the difference in the juvenile justice system in Northern Ireland. The second – at a page long – relies almost entirely on a single source (O'Leary and McGarry 1993). The thirteen-page reference list includes only two references to publications on Northern Ireland, one for each of the index entries.

The most serious point emerging from this is that the conflict in Northern Ireland seems not to have made much of an impact on mainstream social science. Given that this is a serious armed conflict within the national territory of the 'UK', this is at best somewhat surprising. One consequence is that many social science accounts of UK politics and governance must be inadequate. A more fundamental result is that British social scientists have been denied insights on the impact of the conflict on the political system. Another is that the writings of predominately Irish social scientists, who have examined the conflict have been undervalued. Conversely, much writing on Northern Ireland has proceeded in ignorance of and isolation from trends on social and cultural theory in Britain and elsewhere, some of which might be productive – though we should beware of transferring models of conflict, sectarianism and ethnicity wholesale as if they were automatically relevant to the contemporary Irish experience (McVeigh 1995c).

## ***The British left and Ireland***

The neglect is not confined to social science, but is even replicated by some of the sternest critics of the state on the British left. Contrary to the impression fostered by writers as diverse as Declan Kiberd (1996) and Edna Longley (1994b), the left in Britain has not made major common cause with the Irish struggle. And whatever deficiencies there are or have been on the 'British' left in their analyses of Ireland (and there have been many: See for example the minimal products of the CPGB, and the more extensive output of the various Trotskyist factions such as the SWP (Bambery 1987), RCP (Irish Freedom Movement 1983) and RCG (Reed 1984; see also Evans and Pollock 1983) it has not been the 'labourist left' which has been guilty of being 'greener than green' (Kiberd 1996: 647) They have been as good at ignoring Ireland as the best of them (Bell 1982; Moore 1991).<sup>12</sup> Furthermore a large part of the greenery of the Labour and trade union movement was and is supplied by the Irish Diaspora, especially in London, Liverpool and Glasgow. Examined in comparative terms, the engagement of the British left in the conflict in Northern Ireland has been cursory and reluctant. John Arden – one of the few who tried to raise the profile of the Irish question – put it in a more adequate comparative perspective in 1979:

For Zimbabwe, Chile, Vietnam and the massacred leviathans of the deep there are lobbies, factions, pressure-groups of political significance and intellectual weight: they draw upon both Oxbridge and Redbrick for their knowledge of public affairs ... and yet – save ... for a few intrepid agitators – all these worthy Britons have steadfastly refused to mobilise to extricate their nation from its incapacitating moral cramp created by the oppression of Ireland. (1979:57; see also Arden 1977, Arden and D'Arcy 1988)

For example, between November 1970 and October 1994 the journal *New Left Review* did not publish a single article on Ireland (Porter and O'Hearn, 1995).<sup>13</sup> The response of the British left echoes that of the French left towards Algeria in the 1950s. Such similarities, though, seem to be difficult for contemporary academics to perceive and they tend to ignore the literature thrown up by colonial conflicts elsewhere, such as the account of French intellectuals and the left given by Fanon, in his 'French Intellectuals and Democrats and the Algerian Revolution' (1970b: 86-101; see also Fanon 1970a and Memmi 1990).

## ***Colonial hegemony and academic production***

In Britain and Ireland, even (or perhaps especially) in academia, the boundaries of the thinkable are tightly drawn around a collection of 'acceptable' views. These are subject to a hierarchy of credibility and

seriousness at the top of which is the notion that academics should, in similar vein to the alleged role of the British state, be 'above' the conflict. In practice this means a replication of and/or cross-fertilisation with official views, giving representations of the war in Ireland the 'hallucinatory character' which Fanon (1970a: 127), argued was fostered by some European intellectuals writing on Algeria. Some commentators would prefer tighter strictures on researching the conflict. Brenda Maddox objects to the very idea of studying Ireland in a holistic way under the rubric 'Irish Studies'. For her this is a manifestation of 'aggressive ethnicity' and 'narrow nationalism'. 'There is' she writes 'something unlovely about young people seeking academic degrees in how the world has done them wrong' (1996: 21).<sup>14</sup> Presumably, we should be happy to study only within the systematic distortions on Ireland supplied by colonial history and government propaganda? Naturally enough Maddox also dislikes media studies, a discipline which, whatever its faults (on which see Philo and Miller 1998), can provide space to examine the construction and dissemination of misinformation by governments and their adversaries.

## *Approaches to studying the conflict*

We saw above that British social theory has been largely insulated from the empirical and theoretical questions thrown up by the conflict in Ireland. This finds parallels in the way that the British state has tried to 'contain' the conflict within the borders of Northern Ireland (or more precisely within certain localities within Northern Ireland (Rolston 1991b)). British academics seem to have produced more work on the conflict in the 1970s. By the 1980s writing about Northern Ireland was largely dominated by Irish academics, or those working in Irish universities. Of course, there has been a great deal of research on the conflict in Ireland. One observer has referred to 'a factory of books' (Cox 1989). Yet the vast bulk of such work has managed to avoid incorporating the colonial into its analyses and as a result has been severely limited in explanatory power. However, such work is not always pointless. To the extent that it is useful in administrative or propaganda terms to the British state, it has its purpose.

Amongst those who do research the conflict we can identify, in very crude terms, five traditions. The first is counter-insurgency theory – that brand of security analysis which concentrates on 'terrorism' and 'responses' to it by the state. The bulk of this school is openly partisan on behalf of the state (see, Clutterbuck 1981; Eveleigh 1978; Hooper 1982; Kitson 1971, 1987; O'Ballance 1981, 1989; Wilkinson 1986, 1996). In practice, though, such writing tends to be aligned with key elements of the military/security apparatus of the state and not always with the state as a whole (see George 1991, Herman and O'Sullivan 1989, Schlesinger 1991: ch. 4). In fact, to the extent that state policy changes – for example, in suing for peace – or

there are divisions within the state, the influence of counter-insurgents varies. Counter-insurgency theorists tend to be associated with the military and tend not to work in Northern Ireland.

The second broad category are neutrals, those academics – whether British or Irish, or working in Britain or Northern Ireland – who see themselves as ‘above’ the conflict as neutral or disinterested commentators, able to provide dispassionate and explanatory commentary if not always to offer solutions. This group is clearly the largest, contains a wide variety of divergent views, and draws on a very wide range of disciplines. This is in contrast to the counter-insurgents who come fairly narrowly from military or strategic studies type disciplines and tend not to be in arts departments or in anthropology, geography or history departments. Their commonality with official views is their similarity of outlook as supposedly disinterested. In practice, as we saw in some of the examples above, such writers see the conflict as variously, tribal, irrational, outdated and see the participants as at best misguided and at worst as evil. Naturally the British state is not thought to be one of the participants but is seen as enlightened if sometimes arrogant and clumsy in its handling of the sectarian tribes. McVeigh notes that universities in Northern Ireland are heavily populated by academics from Britain (up to 68 per cent of staff at the University of Ulster in Coleraine are from outside Northern Ireland, mostly British (McVeigh 1995c: 112)). But neutrals can also be found amongst Irish (Protestant and Catholic) staff in the North and populate academic departments across Britain and elsewhere.

The third category we can call unionists. These are mainly but not exclusively from Northern Ireland and are disproportionately Irish Protestants. David Trimble the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party was formerly lecturer in Law at Queen’s. Detailed commentary on unionist academic output can be found in the chapters in this volume by Anderson, O’Dowd, and by Munck and Hamilton.

Fourth is research of a broadly Irish nationalist orientation, tending, unsurprisingly to be written mostly by Irish people. According to Whyte traditional unionist and nationalist writings accounted for around 10 per cent each of writing on Northern Ireland in the period between 1968 and the end of the 1980s (Whyte 1990: 202).<sup>15</sup>

We can also identify a fifth approach to the conflict, which might be called the critical approach. This draws variously on critical theory and on empirical social science. It is concerned with public issues and how they might be understood, explained and changed. Such an approach is drawn upon in differing ways and to differing degrees by all of the chapters in this book. However, this kind of approach is not unified and some of the criticisms made in this chapter are of work which might be regarded as critical or would self-identify as such.

The vast bulk of research on Northern Ireland is either supportive of the military actions of the British state or sees it as some form of neutral umpire. Some elements of this orientation speak of more than the self-evident superiority of the British case. Academic writing on Northern Ireland cannot be fully explained without some theory of the

production of consent to dominant views (Gramsci 1971, 1985). The British view on Northern Ireland is dominant and might be described as hegemonic. Hegemony refers to the dominance of the state in the circulation of ideas in civil society, by means not simply of coercion but by winning consent. However, in a situation like Northern Ireland, we must immediately qualify any account which rested on hegemony, since it is apparent that key elements of the production of consent in Northern Ireland rest and have rested since its formation on coercion. The restriction of 'normal' democratic freedoms have taken their toll on academics both in dissuading research and analysis and making it difficult to do. Furthermore, a second qualification to the use of hegemony in the Northern Ireland context is that the key reason why coercion has been more important in the Northern Ireland case than in Britain has been because of the counter-hegemonic project of Irish nationalism/republicanism (and arguably that of loyalism). This suggests a role for the concept of ideology in analysis of Irish nationalist and unionist academic production as well as in relation to hegemonic production.

But our explanations cannot stop with the state and ideology, since we also need to account for the concrete form and context in which academic production takes place. We need to examine the role of universities themselves in hegemonic contest. Of prime importance here are the universities in Northern Ireland, where a great deal of the research that has been done on Northern Ireland has taken place. These institutions are indelibly marked by the history and contemporary development of the conflict. This implies overlaying any understanding of intellectuals in democratic states with an analysis of the impact of colonial relationships on academia in the North.

One result of colonialism is to make it harder to conduct critical research in Northern Ireland universities than in Britain, where the conflict is geographically, politically and emotionally further away. However, critical research is a relatively rare commodity in British universities in general, not just in relation to Northern Ireland, although this does seem to be one of the most sensitive points for research. As a result of these factors researching Northern Ireland is constrained, by the 'consensus' which sees the state as neutral. We will examine some of the difficulties of conducting research on Northern Ireland in the following sections. We start by examining state attempts to manage academic production by winning consent and by coercion. Then we will deal with the management, recruitment practice and culture of universities in the North, going on to look at the impact of both state and academic pressures on research practice.

## *Research and the state*

First of all it is difficult and can be dangerous to do research on a conflict situation like that in Northern Ireland. In particular, state agencies tend not to be keen on research which they judge might not depict

them in the most favourable light (Taylor 1988: 129–34). The Royal Ulster Constabulary has recently adopted a policy for research access which requires an extremely restrictive contract to be signed by prospective researchers. As Superintendent B. D. Wilson of the Force Research Branch writes ‘we welcome requests . . . to conduct research which may prove to be of benefit to the force’ (Wilson 1997). The RUC has written to research establishments asking them to ‘ensure that any requests for research go through Force Research Branch, where a database of applications has been established and where all research projects will have an appointed RUC liaison officer.’ The contract provides that a ‘full project specification’ be submitted and agreed, that the RUC are kept informed of research progress and any changes to the research. Data from any such research can only be disclosed to ‘authorised’ persons. The ownership and copyright of all data remains with the Chief Constable. Finally all output (whether published or not) must be approved by the RUC. Researchers are required:

To submit the text of any proposed report, thesis, or other publication in connection with the research to the RUC – giving them the opportunity to comment on, and seek modification of any part of the text derived from official sources. This is to enable the RUC to ensure that nothing published would be likely to cause embarrassment . . . (RUC 1997)

Researchers must also:

Consult with the chief constable of the RUC, prior to the publication or communication in connection with the research through any channel of publicity, with regard to content, format and timing of any such publication. (RUC 1997)

This policy was put in place after the attempts by PhD researcher Graham Ellison to gain access to the RUC, which were rebuffed:

With the benefit of hindsight I was perhaps rather naive in framing the content of my proposal in terms of . . . the prevalence of ‘sectarian attitudes’ amongst rank and file officers, given that the sensitive nature of the issue would inevitably set alarm bells ringing within the organisation. Indeed after months of delay and numerous letters from the Force Information Office stating that my request was still ‘under consideration’ it soon became clear that there was no possibility of me being granted any kind of formal access to the organisation, and certainly no possibility whatsoever of being granted permission to conduct interviews with rank and file officers. (Ellison 1997: 96)

As a result of this dead end Ellison almost gave up the project completely, only reconsidering when he coincidentally met a serving RUC officer at a party who offered to be interviewed. Later he secured an interview with a senior officer who he knew personally. ‘By this stage’, he writes:

I had refined my research proposal to an examination of the official discourse of professionalism articulated by the RUC . . . I was acutely aware that if I was to be successful my proposal should be framed in a 'neutral' manner and not make any explicit reference to what the force hierarchy would regard as sensitive or controversial issues. (1997: 98)

By these means he was able to interview a number of senior officers, but he continued to meet rank and file officers without going through the hierarchy.

The Northern Ireland Office too has set out a research agenda for community relations work which rules out conceptualisations which do not accept the inevitability or desirability of the Northern Ireland state (Central Community Relations Unit 1991). More restrictively, in one publicised case the Fair Employment Agency intervened in research on sectarianism in the civil service. The FEA rewrote the independent consultants' report to suggest that past patterns of inequality were improving. The consultants' analysis had suggested they were getting worse and were affecting recent appointments (Miller, 1986). Later the FEA threatened to sue an academic journal if it published an article by the consultant (Taylor 1988: 131).

One step away from the central state are the Research Councils. In 30 years of the troubles, the relevant British research council, the ESRC, has funded one modest initiative on Northern Ireland, the priorities of which were drawn up with the NIO. Its terms of reference ruled out the investigation of the war as a research question and it funded no projects which examined either the impact of conflict or the contemporary experience of discrimination (Wainwright and Miller 1986, 1987; Miller 1988).

However, the research policies of state institutions are perhaps the least of the problems of critical researchers. The Official Secrets Act and especially emergency legislation such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) affects what can be disclosed and is used by state organisations to refuse access to, or seize, perfectly anodyne material. But it is direct contact with the police, army or special branch which can most hamper research. Academic researchers are vulnerable to the emergency legislation. Many (including the author) have been stopped, held and questioned under the PTA (see also Butler 1995). Doing research on the ground also brings potential danger from the actions of the security services. Harassment is 'a way of life' for residents of nationalist areas (McVeigh 1994), and so researchers can be subject to harassment too.

Sluka records that the house where he was staying was raided shortly after he left and the occupant asked questions about his whereabouts. After he left Belfast he was threatened by loyalists (1989: 39, 32). Rona Fields, records being 'gassed along with the people of the Bogside and Creggan in Derry' (1973:26) as well as being brought in for IRA 'interrogation'. Perhaps one of the key reasons why so few researchers venture into empirical research on the security forces or in

nationalist or loyalists areas is that it can be dangerous. Sluka refers to the 'general atmosphere of oppressiveness' in West Belfast, by which he means the constant watchfulness for army patrols or other danger:

During my stay in Belfast I got away to London for a week. While there I noticed how relaxed life felt. My friends and I laughed when one of them said 'Isn't it great not having any Brits around!' And this in the heart of London. Of course what he meant was that there were no soldiers to watch out for. I found that, like my Irish companions, I too had been keeping my eyes open for Army patrols. (1989: 35)

Added to this general atmosphere Sluka reports a:

feeling of never being quite safe. There was always that slight fear when encountering a patrol that it might be the one that arrests you. And then there was always the possibility that something might go wrong and you might get a visit from the IRA or INLA. Living in the Lower Falls also meant accepting the possibility of sectarian attacks by Loyalist assassins, of being caught in a bomb blast, or in cross fire during an ambush or gun battle. It means getting used to constant surveillance and being stopped and questioned on the streets by heavily armed soldiers. And it means getting used to having guns pointed at you and having soldiers peering at you through the sights of their rifles. (1989: 35)<sup>16</sup>

However, it can also be the case that once researchers living or operating in nationalist areas become known to the 'security forces' that their treatment can become quite cordial. Both Fields and Sluka note the familiarity of local army patrols with their work and Fields suggests the changing pattern of treatment showed 'there had been some order given that I was to be treated courteously' (Fields 1973: 23).

Fields reports that a dozen rolls of exposed film were confiscated from her students by the army (1973: 23). This points to the need that academics doing research on controversial areas have to take precautions that their research data is not confiscated or allowed to fall into the hands of state personnel. Apart from hampering research and potentially laying researchers open to the extremely wide provisions of emergency legislation which impose a proactive duty to report information to the police, such data can also have a harmful impact on research subjects in terms of surveillance and intelligence-gathering. Some researchers therefore take the precaution of immediately copying data and lodging both the copies and the originals with trusted sources outside Northern Ireland (e.g. Feldman 1991: 11; Ellison 1997).

Researchers who have displeased the RUC have found that displeasure can turn to harassment. Graham Ellison, himself from a Protestant background in Northern Ireland, found that on one occasion an interview with an RUC officer in a Co. Fermanagh pub led to violence and threats

the respondent took exception to my line of questioning and stormed off, stating that I was 'asking too many personal questions'. I became rather nervous when I saw my respondent chatting to three or four men and pointing over in my direction. At this stage I decided that it was probably better to leave the pub as quickly as possible. To get to the exit I had to walk past my respondent and his friends who were standing along a narrow passageway. As I walked past, one of them turned sharply around and 'elbowed' me in the face. I became even more concerned when I saw my respondent and his friends following me from the pub. As I was making my way to a public phone box at the other end of the street to call for a taxi, a car drew up alongside me and a voice shouted 'fuck off you fenian IRA bastard'. (1997: 105)

One researcher even found himself on the receiving end of crank phone calls from the Chief Constable of the RUC.<sup>17</sup> More important than harassment, perhaps is the targeting of researchers by the powerful in public attacks. Critical academics can be attacked by state officials and effectively dismissed as propagandists, as in the statement by Les Rogers, chair of the Police Federation of Northern Ireland who has complained of 'parasitic and irrelevant academics' who 'lionise' paramilitaries (*Irish News*, 7 June 1995, cited in Rolston, forthcoming). Even studies of apparently innocuous topics, such as unemployment and investment, can draw responses from government ministers which smear academics as supporters of Sinn Féin. This happened to Bill Rolston at the hands of Northern Ireland Economy Minister Richard Needham, thus potentially putting his life in danger (cited in Rolston, forthcoming). Graham Ellison's study of sectarianism in the RUC also drew responses from the RUC hierarchy. Following the appearance of a short 'and heavily edited' extract from the research in the *Irish News* in October 1996:

the initial reaction of the RUC was to suggest to a journalist (who subsequently contacted me) that I had not actually conducted the research at all. It was at this point that I faxed the journalist copies of official correspondence I had received from the RUC over ... a number of years (I also faxed copies to the RUC Chief constable and the RUC's Information Office ... I added that unless the innuendo stopped I would be forced to contact the University of Ulster's legal department) ... Nonetheless, while the RUC made no official comment, nor has anything appeared in writing, I have been informed by a number of reliable sources that certain members of the RUC hierarchy have privately attacked the methodology of the study, branding it 'unrepresentative' and 'anecdotal'. (1997: 103)

We should note here that both paramilitary organisations and nationalist and unionist communities can be suspicious of social researchers as either agents of the state or as carrying out research which might be of use to the state or distort their experiences. This can also lead to refusal of access, non-co-operation and on occasion threats against researchers (see Taylor, 1988b).

## ***Academic hierarchies and interpretative frameworks***

Although the state can be a serious limitation on critical research, more serious pressure comes from within disciplines and academic institutions in Britain and Ireland. Universities in the North are clearly the most pressured, since they are closest to the conflict. Although the universities are supposed to be havens of tranquillity, where politics are left at the door, there is a sense in which the conflict is also played out in academic institutions. The very structure and organisation of the universities in the North reflects particular balances of power and privilege. Sectarianism remains a serious issue. The hierarchy and senior appointments at Queen's University remain dominated by Protestants (Taylor 1988b). Although there has been something of a change in the balance in recent years (Fair Employment Commission 1989; Queen's University 1993), the latest figures for Queen's do show a continuing bias in employment towards Protestants, and in some cases, such as in the medicine faculty, there was actually a decline in the proportion of Catholics in relation to Protestants between 1987 and 1992 from 19.9 to 11 per cent (Smyth 1994: 49).

More importantly, however, there are continued cases of alleged discrimination, as the cases taken by the Fair Employment Commission against Queen's and the University of Ulster show. In the year to 31 March 1997 there were at least three separate cases where Catholics settled claims in their favour against Queen's University receiving payouts of between £6,500 and £30,000 (FEC 1997). These settlements were all made by Queen's without accepting liability, which was allegedly condemned by an internal report as 'chequebook diplomacy' – 'paying out damages ... in advance of a hearing to avoid unfavourable publicity' (*Irish News*, 28 July 1997).

Other recent happenings include; the disciplining of a porter at the University of Ulster after a complaint that he was harassing students by whistling the 'Billy Boys', which includes the delightful line 'We're up to our necks in Fenian blood, surrender or you die' (*Irish News*, 5 September 1997) and a booking for a dinner of the Queen's Masonic Lodge (with 165 people) at Queen's University made by a Professor of Chemistry (the booking cancelled after being revealed in the *Irish News* (27 February 1997)). Other sources tell of an application for a course from an ex-republican prisoner being deliberately 'lost' (as well as the documented attempts to disallow applications from ex-prisoners (Smyth 1994)), and a well known senior academic, whose penchant for anti-Catholic and anti-Irish jokes during lectures is legendary. Unsurprisingly his work in the field of geography suggests that discrimination against Catholics is not a significant factor in their secondary status.<sup>18</sup>

Academic staff applying for posts, particularly in some parts of some Northern Ireland universities, can find appointments slipping out of their grasp as less qualified candidates, who happen not to have

origins in the nationalist community or to have any record of critical work on Northern Ireland are appointed. In such cases academics who might in other circumstances be discriminated against – such as feminist scholars – can be thought a safer bet providing they are not Irish.<sup>19</sup> Religious and political discrimination also have a marked impact on internal promotion procedures, both at Queen's and the University of Ulster. At the time of writing Queen's alone has 60 cases outstanding against it (McGill 1998).

Most controversially the removal of bilingual signs from the students union following a report by Capita Management Consultants (*Irish News*, 20 August 1997) was met by a three to one student vote in favour of their reintroduction (*Irish News*, 9 December 1997). Queen's University's ruling Senate refused to re-erect the signs for what they tried to suggest were equal opportunity reasons 'the presence of the signs may constitute a chill factor for the majority of Protestant students, and as such run counter to the policy of providing a neutral working environment for its staff, student and visitors' (*Irish News*, 17 December 1997). In the Orwellian world of Northern Ireland public life 'neutral' here means the continued dominance of the sectarianism implicit in British/Protestant universalism.

These anecdotal cases do seem to be part of a larger pattern, if the evidence of the Fair Employment Commission investigations into Queen's and the University of Ulster are anything to go by (see McVeigh 1995c). Queen's has been in the forefront of the fair employment crisis in the North, with three of the five most senior Catholic administrators taking cases against the university (Smyth 1994: 14). The extent to which a similar picture exists at the University of Ulster is unclear, because less academic research has been conducted on it. Any account of the University of Ulster would have to take into account the separate and much shorter history of the institution compared with Queen's. As things stand Protestants proportionately outnumber Catholics among the staff and especially at senior academic level and the university has yet to acknowledge an Irish dimension to the institution. Unlike Queen's, there have never been Irish language signs in the Jordanstown students' union and such matters are routinely ruled off the agenda for discussion.<sup>20</sup> The situation is more complex than can be explained by a simple Protestant conspiracy theory or by assigning blame to 'prejudiced individuals', as some Irish nationalists and the past and present Queen's hierarchy respectively attempt. There are clear examples of bigotry, sectarianism, Orangeism and conspiracy, but Cathal Smyth provides a more sophisticated analysis which emphasises the shared culture and assumptions of the university hierarchy and many academics. As Smyth argues in his perceptive and devastating critique:

From an equal opportunities perspective those with real power to take decisions within the university are male, Protestant and share a similar, relatively narrow background and outlook, making them not only unrepresentative of wider society but ill-equipped to understand or effectively deal with the fair employment agenda. (1994: 22)

The impact of the dominant culture in the universities and in wider public life in Northern Ireland is such that political and religious discrimination is not always or only the responsibility of Northern Ireland Protestants. There are cases where staff with origins in the nationalist community or of British origin have been party to political discrimination. There are even cases where academics who have in the past written work which might be regarded as critical on Northern Ireland have become involved in such actions. Defending against such cases can also mean threatening colleagues by invoking 'loyalty'.<sup>21</sup> This does show the extent to which what is being discussed here is neither a few isolated examples or a widespread pattern of Orangeism in the universities, but is a more fundamental structure of power which can win the active consent of even non-Protestant staff. In their crisis the Queen's University hierarchy have stuck to denial, blaming prejudiced individuals or the victims of discrimination, leading to a 'defensive reluctance' in dealing with the issue. The university view is summed up by Smyth:

The discrimination that did take place, mostly indirect, occasionally direct ... has been processed and will be recorded as mere 'procedural irregularity', the FET cases similarly as 'taking advantage of sloppiness in documentation'.  
(1994: 37)

The new Vice Chancellor, George Bain, exemplifies this approach rather than challenging it, when he tries to explain the large number of cases against Queen's in terms of personal prejudice – people he would 'sack ... they should be dealt with extremely harshly' and in terms of taking advantage of the procedures: 'some people take cases because they are disappointed or because they hope to get a settlement' (McGill 1998).

## *Impacts on research*

This kind of atmosphere has knock-on effects on the types of research which are deemed possible or acceptable and on the public role of intellectuals. Taylor (1987) notes three responses for liberal academics – turning inwards, ineffectual involvement and conscious retreat. He also notes that those who have taken public stands on civil liberties issues have experienced 'difficulties gaining acceptance by Protestant elements in [Queen's] University' (1987:32).

Such pressures also impact on the topics which are thought legitimate for both students and academics to study. An early example is the pressure put on Bernadette Devlin as a student to alter the focus of her psychology thesis:

In 1969 she had wanted to do her psychology thesis on police methods in minority communities and was met with the objection that she could not do such research in Northern Ireland because it would not be 'valid objective research'.  
(Fields 1980: 18)

Although there have been many changes in the universities and in research culture in the last thirty years, such problems still seem to occur. In talking with undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as lecturing staff (working or formerly working in Irish or British universities), I have come across recurrent patterns of such discouragement. All the following are recent (in the last ten years) cases known to me. Some students are pressurised to tackle less contentious PhD topics, in one case studying Irish landscapes was suggested in preference to politics and propaganda. Writing about the North, drawing on their own experiences and making use of colonial conceptualisations can all be frowned upon, even by lecturers whose origins are in the nationalist community. In some British universities (including those in Scotland and Wales) such work can be severely penalised or even failed by unsympathetic lecturers or external examiners. Involvement in work on Northern Ireland can in the view of some senior British academics hamper career development and promotion prospects. One senior academic (in a friendly caution to the author) reports that writing about Northern Ireland had, over the years, brought the sound of 'slamming doors' to his ears. In other cases the development of PhD or research projects can be seriously diverted, to such an extent that the relevant researchers leave academia or change supervisors.

It is important to recognise that it is not simply the lingering of Orangeism in the Northern Ireland university hierarchies that hampers critical research. The contribution of liberal objectivity is a more important factor. Objectivity meant either ignoring the conflict or adopting views which had an elective affinity with state policy. As Rolston puts it:

In the name of cosmopolitanism and objectivity the university in its staffing practices and academic approach to the social and human sciences retreated from the local. It was all done in the spirit of academic impartiality, but became in effect the rewarding of those whose origins and concerns were as far removed as possible from what was seen as the archaic quagmire of Northern Ireland politics. (Rolston forthcoming)

Indeed McVeigh has argued that academia in the North is still run on colonial lines:

At its worst . . . academia in Ireland is still like a colonial Big House. Serviced by Irish labourers, an intellectual ascendancy theorises the real concerns of the world. Most of the time this means what is going on across the water or in the US or in Europe, or anywhere other than Ireland. (McVeigh 1995c: 116)

This means that the pressing social issues of contemporary Ireland are ignored or under-theorised and that fundamental issues such as the structuring forces of sectarianism and especially of colonialism are played down or simply invisible in teaching practice or research monographs.<sup>22</sup> It can also mean that Irish researchers can disappear altogether from future presentations of their work by their supervisors. Thus, sociologists such as John Brewer can write a critique of the

ethnographic method based on an ethnography undertaken by his research assistant. Although, readers of his piece in *Sociology* are told that he didn't carry out the research himself (Brewer 1994), in the text he refers to 'my ethnography' (1994: 237) and reference to the original book appears as authored by 'Brewer' rather than in its original form 'Brewer with Magee' (1991).

The reluctance of many academics to tackle Northern Ireland stems in part from the high proportion of British academics in university departments in the North of Ireland and a corresponding closure around theorising colonial and sectarian relations. Liam O'Dowd recalls of his return to Ireland and Queen's University in the 1970s:

I was Irish, most of my colleagues at the University were English. While I saw the conflict against a backdrop of historical colonial conflict in Ireland, they knew little of that history and were seldom interested in it. Our students from both communities had suffered a kind of enforced intellectual marginality. The conflict in which their families and communities were embroiled was being represented to them by the media as irrational and incomprehensible, as a struggle between secular humanism and religious fanaticism, between peace and violence, even between good and evil. They had experienced an education system which, if it taught them any history, generally denied them their own. They were ill-prepared to understand what was happening against the background of British and Irish history, and even less able to relate it to the world beyond the British Isles.

(O'Dowd 1990: 36-7)

Since academics tend not to live in the nationalist or loyalist ghettos, they tend not to experience routine harassment in everyday life. Bill Rolston recalls his own experience as a student:

I lived in a working class area where political violence was an everyday occurrence and felt increasingly passionate about the politics with which I was confronted every day. As a human being, I could not escape from the 'troubles'. On one occasion I remember trying to leave my home as members of the British paratroop regiment searched every house in the street. I remonstrated with one sandy-haired, very angry paratrooper who pointed a rubber bullet gun at me and assured me that he would not hesitate using it if I did not get back in the house. Twenty minutes later the same soldier fired a rubber bullet at a neighbour, Emma Groves, blinding her for life. But as a student I was expected to leave these experiences behind. With the exception of a few lectures on social mobility, there was little reference to the society in which I lived and even less reference to the 'troubles'.

(Rolston forthcoming)

The lack of interest in and experience of the conflict by academics and, therefore, the lack of empirical studies which situate the conflict in relation to other similar conflicts feeds through into a vacuum in teaching practice and fails to enlighten students except in terms already anointed by official sources and the media. Bill Rolston recalls his return to Belfast in 1970 and his decision to go to Queen's to study sociology:

The Social Studies department at Queen's University, offering an Honours sociology degree, was established in 1969. When I joined it as an undergraduate student, it was still in its infancy. In my naiveté I believed that my timing was impeccable. Here was a political conflict begging for serious commentary and research, an emerging base within a discipline which could critically examine the conflict, and me willing and eager to put these two elements together and become immersed in critical social research . . . but as time went on, it became clear to me that those issues which interested me, which I regarded as crying out for research and interpretation, were not in the mainstream of my discipline at least as it was developing in Ireland. None of the lecturers in the Department were local and few had specific knowledge of the North. (Rolston, forthcoming)

Such a state of affairs increases the difficulty of doing empirically based research in the first place. O'Dowd recalls the sensation of scales falling from his eyes when he first read Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* in the mid-1970s:

Reading Memmi was to induce a shock of recognition. His book was a reminder that the most militant protagonists of the Irish conflict spoke the language of the 'colonizer and the colonized'. This made them appear less an anachronism than a part of the wider history of twentieth century decolonization . . . Even if the conflict was not 'purely colonial', Memmi raised the question of why so many of those not directly involved in the struggle were striving to deny it any colonial dimension. (O'Dowd 1990: 38)

In British universities studying Ireland is discouraged especially if such study leads the student to look beyond the narrow horizons of much contemporary social science and see 'inappropriate' parallels with other conflicts. Even university departments with a liberal/radical reputation appear to suffer from this. South African political refugee Mercy Zani-Merriman studied for a masters degree in the Peace Studies Department at Bradford University. In conversation with fellow students she pointed out to 'her new liberal acquaintances – eager for tales of oppression in South Africa – rather awkward similarities between her country and Northern Ireland.' She reports that they said 'It's so different' and she says that 'Even my supervisor discouraged me' (cited in Beckett 1996). While some work on Ireland has been done at Bradford (e.g. von Tangen Page 1996; Jacobson 1997), adverts for the department which make a feature of research on 'regions in conflict' mention 'especially former Yugoslavia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America', but not Ireland.<sup>23</sup> Discouraging work which locates Ireland and Northern Ireland in their colonial context is quite routine in British and Irish universities as can be seen from examining almost any text book or monograph on Northern Ireland.<sup>24</sup>

## ***Impacts on conceptualisation***

The ideological exclusion zone also works to distort the research that is done on the North. In conducting his ethnography of the BBC, Philip Schlesinger refers to his own inability during his early fieldwork to formulate proper research questions on the significance of Northern Ireland. He refers to this process as one of captivation by the organisation which he was researching:

I became partially socialised, and this explains why at one point it became so difficult to generate problems for investigation ... When the fieldwork first began the BBC had been assailed by the British government for screening *The Question of Ulster*, and a debate was under way concerning the censorship of news from Northern Ireland. I realised that this was of importance, but certainly had no strategy for investigating the BBC's handling of Northern Ireland coverage, other than wishing to talk to people about it ... Quite rapidly it ceased to be a matter for investigation ... I began to steer away from the subject because I had to some extent adopted the Corporation's view of it as taboo. (Schlesinger 1980: 353-4)

This illustrates the way in which frameworks of understanding and information gathering are closely bound up with one another and also crucially with censorship and information control. Schlesinger did in the end write a separate chapter on Northern Ireland:

When, finally, I came to write a separate chapter on Northern Ireland in Autumn 1976, I found that the suppression effect had led me to under-utilise material gathered in my earliest field notes. (Schlesinger 1980: 354)<sup>25</sup>

Apart from the dangers of captivation by any organisation on which detailed research is carried out, the lack of an alternative framework for understanding either the conflict in Northern Ireland or the role of the media in a semi-colonial situation at that time made even *thinking* constructively about Northern Ireland difficult.

This has knock-on effects on the type of methods adopted for conducting research on the troubles. The problem for political scientist Paul Arthur was who to speak to. His worries betray the dominant ideology for researching the troubles:

Should we lend credence to terrorist organisations by interviewing and publicising spokesmen for their front organisations?

This revealing formulation, accepts the official definition of 'terrorism' and, more importantly, appears to regard the function of research as to lend credence to its subjects. However, Arthur gives no indication that he also worried about lending credence to the British government by interviewing and publicising statements by their officials. More revealing still is Arthur's answer to his own question:

At an early stage of my research I made a value judgement that I would not talk to anyone from Provisional Sinn Féin but that I would interview a spokesman for the UDA. The decision was based on the well-publicised position of Sinn Féin that it unequivocally supported the armed struggle of the IRA, whereas the UDA appeared to be entering a political phase by probing the potential support for Ulster independence. Time will tell whether the latter was no more than a smoke screen to gain respectability so as to avoid proscription by the authorities. Subsequently I decided to use their material only as 'background'. In either case one is erring on the side of caution and is open to the charge of self-censorship. (Arthur 1987: 214)

It seems to me that one is open to a great deal more than the charge of self-censorship. Arthur clearly operates a hierarchy of legitimate voices, at the top of which is the British state. Somewhere below are loyalist paramilitaries and at the bottom is Irish republicanism. It is methodologically inadequate to examine a conflict by reference only to one side of the conflict (British state personnel). It is doubly inadequate to confer only with actors the analyst regards as legitimate, since this categorisation already betrays an inability to analyse the conflict dispassionately. Were a researcher to have investigated the conflict in Apartheid South Africa by interviewing only state personnel and (on background terms) members of the Afrikaner resistance (AWB), while leaving out the ANC or PAC, we would want to accuse the researcher of more than self-censorship and judge their findings accordingly. We might also remember that this piece was written and the research practice it describes undertaken some years before broadcasters were banned from transmitting the sound of Sinn Féin interviews (Miller 1995). Thus, some academics were pre-empting state censorship by a number of years.

On the very next page Arthur goes on to contend that the researcher:

needs to be aware that he is not used as a megaphone to convey others' prejudices. Perhaps the only means to overcome this is to interview as widely as possible. (1987: 215)

Bizarrely, he appears already to have forgotten his admission that he himself had limited his interviewing for political reasons. Unsurprisingly when we turn to Arthur's published work such as his text book *Government and Politics of Northern Ireland* (1980) we find that it is almost entirely confined within the dominant paradigm, containing references to the importance of the 'ghosts of history' (p.15) and stating that 'any solution will have to be found *within* Northern Ireland' (p.141, his emphasis) a suggestion that openly takes sides and is now not regarded as a sensible proposition by any serious observer.

However, Arthur is to be commended for openly admitting his research practice. Others feel able to write extensively on the activities of the republican movement without so much as speaking to a single member of Sinn Féin or the IRA and then neglect to mention this in their published work, as is the case with counter-insurgency writer Joanne Wright (1990).<sup>26</sup>

## Researching Northern Ireland

The most striking feature of the mainstream writing on Northern Ireland is that it tends to ignore inconvenient empirical data and research. In particular, the lack of attention to the repressive apparatus of the state and the literature on it is instructive (e.g. Ackroyd *et al.* 1980; Bloch and Fitzgerald 1983; Faligot 1983; Hillyard 1993; Lindsay 1981; O'Connell 1993; Watson 1978). There is very little research on the role of the British Army in Northern Ireland. Hockey's (1986) ethnography touches on the North, and Arthur's (1987) interviews with soldiers who have done tours of duty there are two examples. Some of such research has itself been limited in its ability to focus effectively on the levels of policy or even on routine sectarianism in the RUC (Brewer with Magee 1991). Admittedly, such research has itself been the poor relation of research on 'terrorism', for some of the reasons outlined above. Furthermore, although some of this literature might have limitations in data or conceptualisation, these of themselves are not reasons for ignoring the topic altogether. Perhaps more strikingly for liberal scholars in other parts of the world, obvious topics such as civil liberties and human rights and sources such as Amnesty International (e.g. 1994) and the Committee on the Administration of Justice (e.g. Dickson 1990, 1993; see also Human Rights Watch 1991, National Council for Civil Liberties 1993) which are – by and large – easily available tend to be ignored or even, in the well-worn pattern adopted by oppressive regimes everywhere, dismissed as partisan.

More widely, there is a very large amount of literature and empirical data on conflicts which are broadly comparable in some respects to Northern Ireland, whether these be communal conflicts or domestic revolutions where colonialism has played a more minor role in recent times (Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chile) or those where colonialism is more important such as South Africa (e.g. Naidoo 1989) or Palestine (Said 1981, 1993; Said and Hitchens 1988). Yet such work is rarely cited in discussions of Northern Ireland. Although the broader literature on colonialism and imperialism has itself neglected Ireland (Clayton, this volume), this could also prove enlightening. Closer to home, there is space for revisiting the work of past Irish theorists and activists. Connolly is one of the most obvious and one of the most disdained, but the political and cultural writings of other key figures in decolonisation also deserve more respect than they currently receive. For my money McSwiney's brief writings on aesthetics, theatre and propaganda remain more sophisticated than much of the current obsession with style which informs postmodernism (e.g. McSwiney 1964).

Some work requires not so much revisitation but new acquaintance. In 1973 Penguin published Rona Fields's *A Society on the Run*. A psychologist, Fields had empirically examined the 'psychic damage brought on by political, military and social violence'. She included material on the impact on the British Army, on internees, on women and on children. She was the first and only mental health researcher to

gain access to Long Kesh internment camp and her book is one of the few to have examined such things from the perspective of psychology. It provides an interesting parallel with Fanon's work on the impact of colonialism on mental health (Fanon 1967). Such parallels have not been widely taken up. Fields's chapter on the impact of the war on women was pathbreaking in both attention to the topic and in her conclusions where she compares feminists in the North to 'their peers in the history of the women's movement in Ireland, Britain, USA, China and Vietnam' (1973:164). However, Fields's work is rarely referred to in books on psychology and the North or in books on Northern Ireland in general. A key reason for this is that the book was first censored and then withdrawn and 10,000 copies pulped as a result of what Fields called 'a massive effort on the part of the governments involved to suppress my findings' (Campaign for Free Speech on Ireland 1979: 27). Although it was later published by an academic publisher in Philadelphia, it has remained obscure and is not cited in the major surveys of the literature on the North (McGarry and O'Leary 1995; Whyte 1990).

The ideological exclusion zone which has affected Northern Ireland has meant that British social science has not learnt enough from the conflict in Ireland. Equally, it has meant that discussions of Northern Ireland have not learnt enough from broader developments in social theory. Of course whether recent developments in social theory would necessarily enrich understandings of the troubles, elevate them to the rarefied atmosphere of high theory or founder on the rock of uncomfortable empirical realities, is a somewhat separate question. Clancy *et al.* observe that postmodernism has had relatively little influence on Irish sociology (Clancy *et al.* 1995). It had been more popular in textually based disciplines such as literary criticism and – as Des Bell observes (this volume) – in the service of revisionist relativism (see e.g. Kearney 1997). The few examples of studies on Northern Ireland making use of the cultural and discursive turns in social science illustrate the limitations of some recent developments in social and cultural theory. One study taking up Althusserian notions of ideology as interpellation (somewhat belatedly it has to be said) illustrates the problems of importing theory and grafting it on the conflict (Finlayson 1996). The high unintelligibility factor of much left-bank theory also sadly affects two pieces of participant observation research (Arextaga 1997; Feldman 1991). Although both authors do show a strong commitment to explaining the conflict and to grounding their work in the empirical, the tendency is for it to become preoccupied with the elaboration of theory rather than the object of study. They can become lost in post-structuralist or Foucauldian mists, unable any more to discern clearly the wood of the conflict for the trees of conceptualisation. Much contemporary social and cultural theory has lost itself in arcane language games and theoreticist speculation (Philo and Miller 1998) and the desirability of applying this to the Northern Ireland conflict (or anywhere else) seems to me less than compelling.

## In conclusion

The colonial dimension is a fundamental part of the conflict in Ireland and this has been ignored by the vast majority of academics writing on Northern Ireland, especially those from a British or unionist background or from a certain segment of Northern or Southern society. But the problem is more general than this and is difficult to explain without recourse to some version of the theory of hegemony. The dominant (in the sense of most numerous and in the sense of powerful) explanations of the Northern Ireland conflict are indelibly marked by colonial and neo-colonial ideology. That is the use of evidence and what counts as evidence is filtered by a model which discounts colonial explanations, fundamentally distorting most writing on the subject. This means that inconvenient data or studies are ignored or dismissed as 'half-baked' (Foster 1986:3).

This state of affairs relates both to the winning of consent by the state and to the material and cultural interests of academics. But in the specific case of Northern Ireland it also relates to state coercion and to the continuing existence of sectarianism as a structural factor in Northern Ireland, some of which manifests itself in the universities in the North, in terms of employment practice, sectarian harassment, managerial culture and the ethos of social and human sciences.

The argument here has concentrated on the outcome of academic production and tried to give a sense of some of the varying and complex factors which underlie the rarity of colonial models. At present there is very little research on academic production on and in Northern Ireland. As O'Dowd points out, the argument that there is a divorce of intellectuals from centres of political and economic power is convenient for intellectuals: 'The positing of such a divorce may be self-serving, by enabling intelligentsia's to avoid confronting and analysing the material conditions of their own existence' (1996b: 21). Extensive empirical research would be useful and could open up repressed questions of ideology (Ruane 1992) and hegemony and the extent of their usefulness in a colonial situation more fruitfully.

The material fact of partition has severely impacted on the fact and tone of commentary and has *de facto* deepened divisions between what we now call 'Ulster unionists' (rather than Irish Protestants) and the rest of the Irish. The most important argument of this chapter is that writing on Northern Ireland has been fundamentally distorted by the colonial relationships which are of major importance in the origins and current form of the conflict in Ireland.

## Notes

1. In some passages he appears to assume that ideas and theories are the simple motors of academic developments rather than accepting that changes in academic production relate to changes in ideal and material

- interests. Thus he argues that traditional nationalist, unionist and Marxist analyses attract the allegiance of only a minority of students of the conflict, as if the popularity of ideas in academia related simply to their intrinsic worth.
2. Discussing Northern Ireland as a colony does not *necessarily* lead to decolonisation as a policy prescription, although, given the history of most settler colonies in the twentieth century (where the natives were not more or less exterminated), it would not be a surprise for it to be raised as a possibility.
  3. The later 526-page *Post-colonial Studies Reader* (Ashcroft *et al.* 1995) does include one three-page excerpt on Ireland, which discusses Shakespeare's *Henry V* (from Cairns and Richards 1988). But there is no mention of the literature or literary criticism of Ireland during decolonisation, after British disengagement, or of the North.
  4. We should also note that the same holds true, arguably to a greater extent amongst Catholics, although nationalists in the North seem to have been researched much less heavily than unionists (Ruane and Todd, this volume, 1996; see also Phoenix 1994; O'Connor 1993).
  5. Some writers on the left have even advanced the argument that unionism constitutes a nascent brand of nationalism. Tom Nairn, for example, argued that the development of an 'Ulster nationalism' was the only way out of sectarianism for unionism (1977). In his more recent work he has returned to the question, asserting that new unionist politicians from the UUP, DUP and PUP sound collectively like the voice of 'a new civic nationalism' compared with Sinn Féin's new version of 'assimilative nationalism' (Nairn 1997:165). Indeed, some commentators have seen hopeful signs in the emergence of the PUP on a stated 'political socialist and unionist' platform (for a discussion see Price 1995). However, the problem with Nairn's analysis is that it pays little attention to the actual policies of the main unionist parties (UUP and DUP), or to their continued sectarian make-up. If it is civic nationalism, it is a civic nationalism which mysteriously excludes non-unionist, or 'disloyal' opinion.
  6. Information from Northern Ireland Information Service source, March 1998.
  7. Apparently, according to the blurb on the back, 'this book is special: the approach is distinctively that of an historian, rather than a political scientist or a journalist; and the author is uniquely well-placed to write with insight, authority and compassion'. This is because Wichert is 'both an outsider and an insider: herself a German national, she has lived in Northern Ireland for 20 years'. Although this study prides itself that it is more 'objective' and more empathetic (rather than sympathetic) than those of political scientists or journalists Wichert shows little awareness of her inability to understand the conflict and the closest she gets to objectivity is a lack of interest in the conflict. Her much vaunted historical viewpoint involves no real sense of the history of the relationship between Britain and Ireland or of the more general history of imperialism and colonialism. She starts the book arguing that her analysis is better than those of journalists and social scientists because she recognises that the conflict 'included a great deal of "irrational" behaviour and assumptions' (p. 3) and closes it by bemoaning the failure of the Irish to 'subscribe to democratic and constitutional modes of politics' (p.203). This is no Olympian detachment or understanding and empathy. It is patronising, victim-blaming and wrong about Northern Ireland.

8. The subtitle for this section is taken from a paper by Paddy Hillyard (1995). The contents of this section also draw heavily on Hillyard's paper.
9. For the record here is the paragraph:

In terms of their consequences for day-to-day behaviour, religious differences are much more marked in Northern Ireland than anywhere else in Britain. The clashes between Protestants and Catholics which occur there only involve a minority from either faith, but are often acute and violent. The influence of religion in Northern Ireland is not easy to disentangle from other factors involved in the antagonisms there. The belief in a 'united Ireland', in which Eire and Northern Ireland would become one state, is generally held among Catholics, and rejected by Protestants, in the North. But political considerations and ideas of nationalism play an important role alongside religious beliefs. (p.474)

Hillyard notes that of more than 1000 references in the back of the book, there is not a single one on Northern Ireland (1995: 3). To be fair Giddens does also include a paragraph on 'Irish immigrants in England' (pp.263-4) and has a section on 'Terrorism' (pp.361-8) which, however, relies almost entirely on counter-insurgency writers for references, rather than on sociological work.

10. The paragraph on religion noted above is still there (p.462), the section on 'terrorism' has been removed and is not replaced with anything more sociological. The other reference, in full, is as follows: 'grammar schools are still usual in Northern Ireland' (p.406).
11. Of 1,755 killings by the IRA between 1969 and 1993, 1,006 or 57.3 per cent were members (or former members) of British forces (471 British Army, 227 UDR, 285 RUC and 23 prison warders). Even subtracting all former members of the security forces (59) leaves serving British forces as 54 per cent of IRA killings. The IRA were also responsible for killing 33 civilians working for the security forces, 24 Loyalist military activists and 9 loyalist political activists, together with 133 sectarian killings of Protestant civilians. Collectively these killings constitute 11.3 per cent of their victims. Of 357 killings by British forces 141 (39.5 per cent) were republican military activists, of which 123 were killed by the British Army (as opposed to the UDR or RUC). British forces were responsible for killing 194 civilians in this period (54.3 per cent of their total victims) (see Sutton 1994: 195-205).
12. Moore concludes: 'Within British Labour circles, Ireland clearly is an issue apart' (1991: 79).
13. See also the responses to this piece by Hazelkorn and Patterson (1995) and by Blackburn (1995).
14. Incidentally, she is wrong to identify Irish Studies as simply following a 'narrow nationalist' agenda as a perusal of the academic journals in the area will testify.
15. Although Whyte also identified 17 per cent as Marxist, a category which he judged divided two to one 'revisionist' to 'traditional'. Some of the revisionists would fall into the unionist or neutral camp in the categories here and some of the traditional Marxist analyses would fall into the nationalist camp. However, a proportion of both might be included under the rubric of critical research.
16. Lee also briefly notes the 'stress' of living in and researching the North (1992:138).
17. Information from source at the university concerned, January 1998.
18. Information from former lecturer, Queen's University, February 1998.

19. Information from former and current lecturers, University of Ulster, and candidates allegedly discriminated against, 1994–8.
20. Information from students' representatives, March 1998.
21. Information from well-placed sources at a university in Northern Ireland. Strangely enough, in the recent published work of such people ethnic conflict is preferred to colonialism as an explanation of the 'troubles'.
22. It is also the case that it is extremely difficult to teach adequate courses on colonialism or sectarianism since there can be pressure from a variety of sources, not least from some students. This raises the deeper and more intractable issue, which has been emphasised to me by some academics working in the North. This is the question of how to teach adequately about a conflict in the middle of the conflict. Clearly even raising the issue of studying the conflict can be painful for people with first-hand experiences of the conflict and nerve endings can sometimes be raw. However, rather than tackle such issues head-on, discuss the matter openly and give guidance to staff, the universities in the North have tended to retreat behind the façade of neutrality.
23. See the advert in *Guardian Higher Education* 3 February 1998, pxxxv.
24. Of course, this is also due to the reluctance of academic publishers, in Britain especially, to take on Irish books, partly for 'market' reasons, but also partly because they are seen as potentially controversial and legally tricky (Rolston and Miller 1996).
25. The chapter on Northern Ireland is in his *Putting 'Reality' Together: BBC News* (2nd edn, 1987), London: Methuen (first published by Constable in 1978).
26. Wright claims to have carried out some of her research at the Linenhall Library, itself only a ten-minute taxi ride from the Republican Press Centre which was then in the Falls Road.