



Conflict Studies 1 | SOU44011

Year	Senior Sophister
ECTS Credits	10
Contact Hours	22
Pre-requisite	
Semester	1
Module Leader & Lecturer	Dr. Andrew Finlay
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Module Outline:

In the aftermath of sustained intra-state political violence there is often a metaconflict about the conflict, i.e., disputation over the causes, nature, and consequences of the violence. Metaconflicts are fought over the rival collective memories and social theories developed by distinct social groups to frame and transmit their understandings of the conflict and who is to blame. Peace processes typically seek to address metaconflicts via 'transitional justice' processes which seek to discover the truth of the violence, address the needs of victims and promote reconciliation between victims and perpetrators.

The peace agreement signed in Belfast on Good Friday 1998 (GFA) has surprisingly little to say about victims, and there has been no 'Truth and Reconciliation Commission' (TRC) here. Since 1998 a meta-conflict about the conflict has raged unchecked; it has intensified since Brexit amid renewed calls for a referendum on Irish unity. The lack of a TRC reflects the consociational nature of the GFA which is based on the idea that the conflict was between two communities, equal and opposite, each with its own identity and associated regime of truth.

In the absence of a TRC there has been no societal reckoning with the past, instead grass roots commemoration and storytelling has flourished. Individual narratives express real trauma, loss and a longing for truth and justice that will never come, but through processes of silencing and appropriation, memory and narrative becomes part of the metaconflict, reflecting the communal binary between so-called 'cultural Catholics' and 'cultural Protestants'.

The social and human sciences are not above the metaconflict, they are part of it, and therefore cannot arbitrate. What then is a sociologist to do? Rather than assess truth claims, maybe we need to step back, gain reflexivity, explore how the communal binary and associated regimes of truth, memory, and narrative are socially constructed; maybe consider other narratives that unsettle the communal binary? Especially given that the votes of such others will be crucial in a putative referendum on a united Ireland.



Module Learning Objectives:

- Appreciate that in every armed conflict there is a meta-conflict about the conflict.
- Recognise the GFA as a binary arrangement between ‘two communities’ each with its own ‘identity’ and regime of truth about the conflict.
- Understand the challenges that metaconflict presents to people trying to deal with the aftermath of political violence.
- Understand the challenge that conflict and metaconflict presents to social science (‘crisis of representation’) and reflexivity as a response to that.
- Critically assess the role of narrative and memory in the aftermath of violent conflict.
- Contrast narratives based in the lived experience of political violence with the sanitised abstractions of social theory.

Assessment:

- 100% Reflexive assignment of 3,000-words

Recommended Reading List:

- Finlay, A. (2011) *Governing Ethnic Conflict*, Routledge [eBook tcd library accessible from home]
- Alexander, J. [et al] (2004) *Cultural Trauma*, polity [chapter 1]
- Finn D. (2019) *One Man's Terrorist: A Political History of the IRA*, Verso
- McAtackney, L and Ó Catháin M [eds] (2023) *The Routledge Handbook of the Northern Ireland Conflict and Peace*. Routledge.
- Mamdani, M. (2020) *Neither Settler nor Native*, Harvard University Press, [Introduction and conclusion] [eBook tcd library]
- If your knowledge of Irish history is scant, it is well worth viewing: “Once upon a time in Northern Ireland, on RTE Player”.