

SOP77041: Theories of Conflict

Duration: Michaelmas Term
ECTS: 10 credits
Lecturer: Dr Roderick Condon (condonro@tcd.ie)

Module Description

This module considers the nature of conflict in contemporary society through an exploration of key theories and substantive themes. With regard to the former, the module considers conflict theory in sociology, with particular concern for Marxism, as well as the perspective of the field of peace and conflict studies. Key here is a distinction, not so easily maintained as it initially appears, between social conflict and violent conflict. Parallel to this is the distinction between forms of conflict induced by colonialism and racial capitalism, and ethnic conflict, with a focus on the latter dominating the perspective of peacebuilding. This allows us to critically question the assertion that conflict is rooted in ethno-national identity/difference and its associated “solution” of separation. The problem here is a failure to address important roots of conflict in colonial violence and capitalism. As we will see, this problem is not only one of political practice but also one that extends into social scientific thought too.

With regard to substantive themes, the module gives particular consideration to the question of violence, in theory and in praxis; to the themes of capitalism and colonialism; to issues of ethnicity, nationalism, and war; to the problem of conflict resolution; and, to the potential of narrative methods such as autoethnography and oral history to address the concerns of victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and beneficiaries. In approaching these themes, the module focuses on The Troubles and subsequent Irish/British peace process and Good Friday Agreement reached in 1998 as a core case study.

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this module students should be able to:

- Understand the central assumptions, perspectives, and problems of conflict theory as well as deploy it in social analysis
- Think deeply and critically about the question of violence as it is understood in theory and in praxis and be able to both differentiate and relate its different forms
- Critically unpack the notion that conflict is produced by identity/difference with a view towards the underlying violence is the unfolding of capitalist modernity in Europe and its projection onto the rest of the world through colonialism
- Understand The Troubles and Irish/British peace process and other case studies from this perspective
- Recognize the need for social science to be reflexive and critical

Working Methods

The module is delivered through 11 two-hour seminars consisting of a lecturing input, student presentations, and group discussion. Students are expected to read and prepare in advance and participate in class.

Assessment

The module is assessed in two components:

- 3000 words end of term written assignment (80%)
- Student presentation (20%)

The deadline for the written assignment is Friday 12 December 2025. Further details will be discussed in the first seminar.

Recommended Readings

Required and recommended readings will be provided for each week's topic on Blackboard. In addition to this, the following is considered a core reading to which we will frequently refer:

- Fraser, N. (2022) *Cannibal Capitalism*. London: Verso.

On The Troubles, the following is recommended for background information (available as ebook from the university library):

- Finn D. (2019) *One Man's Terrorist: A Political History of the IRA*. London: Verso. [see, in particular: Introduction, ch1&2, and Epilogue]