

The closing pages offer the political speculation and exhortation too often found in social policy books. None the less, there is much of value here to an academic and general readership.

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Northern Ireland. A Comparative Analysis. By FRANK WRIGHT. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1988. £27.50.

Since 1969 some 5,000 serious publications have appeared on Northern Ireland. Frank Wright's is one of the more original attempts to explain the nature of its conflicts. His distinctive angle is to compare Northern Ireland with other 'ethnic frontier' societies situated within larger metropolitan empires. Thus the reader is treated to many suggestive comparisons and contrasts between the histories of Northern Ireland, Algeria, the southern states of the USA and several 'middle European' territories which were once ruled by the Hapsburgs (especially Poland and Czechoslovakia).

There are three novelties in his analysis. First, Wright develops a (non-Marxist) theory of the nature of imperialist development and its impact upon settler societies. The critical formative events in ethnic frontiers are by-products of capitalist modernisation and the assimilation (or non-assimilation) of natives. The complex gamut of possible relations between metropolitans, settlers and natives (or ex-slaves) are usefully, if sometimes confusingly, explored in several chapters of the book. Multiple hints on the aetiology and pathologies of nationalism, fascism, supremacism and pluralist reformism emerge in the course of Wright's discussions. These hints are often novel – notably his discussion of 'defiance actions' by dominant groups in the ethnic frontier and the analysis of 'representative violence' and 'communal deterrence' in such societies. The same applies to his discussion of the nature of civil rights movements in ethnic frontiers. However, regrettably, many of his ideas are mere intimations which are not very clearly articulated. Wright's prose is awkward and he often gets bogged down in narrative histories which fail to deliver any obvious analytical or comparative results. Moreover, the comparativist must justify his chosen objects of comparison. Why these particular case-studies rather than others? Why is Algeria more illuminating for analysing Northern Ireland than Palestine/Israel? Why the southern states of the USA rather than Azania/South Africa or Zimbabwe/Rhodesia? These defects detract from Wright's comparative endeavours. Authors with good ideas frequently fail to express them well on their first outing. Consequently Wright should be advised to rewrite the theory of the 'ethnic frontier in a metropolitan empire' in a journal article. He has many things worth saying better and more sharply.

The second novelty in Wright's book, given that it is expressly comparative, is a strange absence. He avoids the minefield of the theory of consociationalism – aside from some cursory discussion (pp.274ff.) and several interesting *obiter dicta*. Thus the politics and history of Northern Ireland are not systematically compared with those countries where consociational practices appear to have stabilised divided societies (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Canada, Holland, Venezuela), or with those where they have failed to do so (e.g. Cyprus, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Fiji). Since Wright displays considerable knowledge of the conceptual issues and the relevant countries' histories this neglect is irritating, not to say perplexing. The ambitious comparativist, like Wright, should not by-pass the best known comparative theory of potential relevance to Northern Ireland, especially since it seems to inform his favourable appraisal of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The latter is currently under considerable stress (summer 1988), but it cannot be understood without reference

to consociational theory since the British and Irish governments are engaged in an experiment in coercive consociationalism.

The third novelty in the analysis is that it is constantly informed by the work of René Girard, which (at least as Wright presents it) seems to involve a fusion of psychoanalysis, anthropology and literary criticism. It is somehow supposed to help us understand the judicial, sacrificial and violent dimensions of Northern Ireland's societies. If so, it would help if Wright were to elucidate its explanatory powers in comprehensible prose, as the 'Girardian' passages would figure high on anybody's index of unintelligibility. Girard and some vaguely suggested religious sentiments seem to be responsible for the mystical writing which shrouds key passages of the book and obscures the author's conclusions. Psychoanalysts and literary critics are well known for subtracting from the sum total of human knowledge the moment they hit the keys of their word-processors; political scientists, historians and historical sociologists have enough problems understanding Northern Ireland without importing these intellectual burdens.

Wright's book, despite its presentational flaws, deserves to be widely read, if not by undergraduates or the general public. Scholars interested in the politics of ethnically divided societies will find much to stimulate their analyses and inform their prescriptions. However, given the importance of his subject matter, the author should be encouraged to represent his arguments more lucidly to encourage understanding. After all, as he knows better than most, misunderstanding fosters conflict.

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Growth and Territorial Policies. The Italian Model of Social Capitalism. By RAFFAELLA Y. NANETTI. London: Pinter Publishers, 1988. Pp. 183. £20.00 (hardback).

Nanetti's book represents a new approach towards the study of Italy's second economic miracle, which dates from the late 1970s and which has produced diffused industrialisation and widespread entrepreneurship. Her thesis is that economic decentralisation has not developed outside the political system, but relies on a close interaction with local, and increasingly regional, institutions. Together, they form Italy's unique experiment in 'social capitalism'.

In the first part of the book, Nanetti analyses socio-economic and political changes in Italy since 1968–69. Against the traditional view that these changes were tearing the country apart, she successfully argues that they testify to the search for new forms of democracy by an increasingly pluralistic society. In the second part, the author produces evidence in support of her main thesis, largely in the form of numerous, if somewhat indiscriminate, examples of local and regional governments' involvement in economic matters.

Though her thesis is both interesting and challenging, the evidence seems insufficient to sustain it. In particular, the book does not measure the economic performance of the various regions in terms of the impact of local government policies. We already know from previous studies that the areas of diffused industrialisation correspond to the Communist and Catholic regions, and that these have more efficient political institutions. The real problem, however, is to establish whether an innovative decentralised administration can promote self-sustained economic growth in those regions where a traditional political subculture is largely absent. Here the book is inconclusive, although it offers some indications that this is being achieved in a few southern areas. Furthermore, I feel that Nanetti has underestimated the importance of the small business sector in the Italian economy in the 1950s and 1960s. Nevertheless,