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**IMPERIAL DISINTEGRATION AND THE CREATION
OF THE IRISH BORDER: IMPERIALISM AND
NATIONALISM 1885-1925**

James Anderson and Liam O'Dowd

WORKING PAPER 3

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ABSTRACT

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This paper outlines the complex interactions of imperialism and nationalism during the 40-year period leading to the creation of the Irish border. It seeks to relocate partition in a historical and comparative context characterised by the wider struggle between the two frequently antagonistic but sometimes interwoven ideologies. In distinguishing the contrasting principles of border creation implicit in imperialism and nationalism, it challenges explanations which see the creation of the border solely in terms of divisions internal to Ireland or in terms of a simplified narrative about Irish Protestants and Catholics, unionists and nationalists or the geographical distribution of different religions and cultures in Ireland.

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IMPERIAL DISINTEGRATION AND THE CREATION OF THE IRISH BORDER: IMPERIALISM AND NATIONALISM 1885-1925

James Anderson and Liam O'Dowd

1. STATE BORDERS, IMPERIALISM AND NATIONALISM

State borders shape and are shaped by the social formations they divide and contain. Territorial "containers" and social "contents" are mutually constitutive. To understand the changing nature of state borders we therefore need to understand political, economic and cultural changes within the states directly involved, and broader changes in the international system of states. Conversely, the mapping of changing frontiers throws light on social change defined in similarly broad terms. Hence in studying the Irish border we need to situate it in the context of British and Irish societies as they have evolved and interacted since the genesis of the border in the late nineteenth century. The creation of the border and subsequent changes in its permeability have to be seen as reflecting wider changes in the global configuration of states and societies. In particular, they can be seen in terms of imperialism and nationalism and the increasing challenge of the former by the latter which coincided with Ireland's partition.

The creation and subsequent development of the Irish border has reflected the broad historical trajectory of changing relations between states and societies since the late nineteenth century: from the "age of imperialism" up to the first world war, to an era of imperialism's partial disintegration with strengthening nationalism after the war, through the inter-war phase of autarky and the post-war "high noon" of the national state in the 1950s and 1960s, to the current era of "globalisation" and integration in an expanding European Union (Anderson and O'Dowd, 1999). This frames our approach to the Irish border. The interactions of nationalism and imperialism and the disintegration of imperialism—gradual and uneven in the British case— provide the key to understanding how and why the Irish border was created and the subsequent development of the partitioned island. The emergence of the so-called "new imperialism" in the last decade, with its increasing challenges to the predominantly nationalist terms of reference established in the twentieth century, has some similarities or parallels with the earlier "age of imperialism" going back to the nineteenth century, and lends this historical-developmental and comparative approach additional contemporary significance. These parallels include the increasing diversity and differential permeability of borders in an EU where the metaphor of "empire" has now a growing currency.

In this draft paper we focus on some of the interactions of imperialism and nationalism during the 40-year period of Ireland's border creation—the period from the first popular election expressing a clear Irish majority in favour of home rule and the first home rule crisis of 1885-6, through the two subsequent home rule crises of 1892 and 1912, and the various different partition proposals from 1912 to the establish-

ment of the present border-line in 1920, and its confirmation in the boundary commission controversy of 1925. A narrative sequence helps in countering later myths, which see the process of border creation as a simple story of Irish Protestants and Catholics, unionists and nationalists, or the geographical distribution of their different religions and cultures in Ireland (Heslinga, 1962), or the allegedly distinct economic interests of an Ulster industrial bourgeoisie (Gibbon, 1972). In such idealist or mechanical materialist accounts there is a tendency to see the eventual partition outcome as pre-determined before the historical process even started; and their geographies are also suspect, confusing "Ulster" with "Protestant" when nearly half the population was Catholic, or urban industrial Belfast with an entire province which like the rest of Ireland was largely rural (Anderson, 1988). Moreover, in concentrating on purely local causes and aspirations, these myths or mistaken theories downplay or ignore supposedly "external" factors, most notably imperialism. In fact, the first proposal for partition in the 1880s came from a politician in Britain very much associated with imperialism; it met with a marked lack of interest in Ireland including Ulster; and when politicians in the Imperial Parliament in London initiated serious partition proposals in 1912 most of Ireland was opposed on principle—nationalist principle—while the more pro-imperialist Ulster unionists initially went along with the idea as a means of blocking home rule for the whole island. The Irish border was a "British idea"—partition, a classic imperial expedient, generally makes more sense from afar than up close, as something to be imposed by external power rather than voluntarily entered into by those directly affected.[1] Contrary to later conventional wisdom, for decades no significant faction in Ireland wanted a border, while the border which eventually materialised was a first choice for none of the Irish factions, whether for or against home rule, Protestant or Catholic, rural or urban.

However, rather than detailing a narrative account of the long drawn-out process which eventually resulted in the border,[2] we concentrate here on a more thematic outline of the wider historical struggle for dominance between imperialism and nationalism, seen as opposing principles or rationales of state territoriality, of borders and border creation. Ireland in 1885-1925 has to be analysed in its wider historical context both of contemporary ideas and of contemporary events happening elsewhere. So-called "internal" factors have to be analysed as they interacted with so-called "external" ones; and here it is important to appreciate that imperialism was

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[1] There was a long tradition of boundary commissions and partitions in the British imperial establishment. In 1905, Lord Curzon of Kedleston (Viceroy of India, 1898-1905 and British Foreign Secretary, 1919-24) noted that as Viceroy he had conducted five boundary commissions (Curzon, 1905). O'Leary (2001: 13) discusses British partitions in Ireland, Palestine and India where boundary commissions were set up. He sees the British empire as a "procedural partitionist" in the twentieth century in that it sought the involvement of "affected parties" and as much reciprocal consent as possible while using judges and technical experts in appraising claims. In some instances, these methods allow the proceduralists to claim that it was not they or British governments that caused partition but the refractory natives. O'Leary quotes Austen Chamberlain in the House of Commons in 1920 who maintained that it was not "we who are dividing Ireland, not we who make party coincide with religious difference". Unlike proceduralists, paternalist partitionists assume that local parties are incapable of reaching agreement and advocate rapid and decisive external arbitration of boundary lines.

[2] See Gallagher (1957), Laffan (1983), Phoenix (1994) and Jackson (2001) for narrative accounts of the complex events which culminated in partition.

not simply an "external" British or indeed world phenomenon (which it was), but that in the case of Ireland it had become to a large extent internalised. Not only was defence of the British Empire and of Ireland's favourable position in the empire a strong theme in Irish unionism, but, perhaps more surprisingly or less acknowledged, imperialist conceptions and indeed support for British imperialism were internalised within what was for long the dominant faction of Irish nationalism as well.

Thus while in general terms imperialism and nationalism embodied opposing principles of statehood, the struggle between them was to a substantial extent played out within and between the various Irish factions—both within Irish unionism which would transmute into Ulster unionism and a particularly virulent strand of British nationalism, and within Irish nationalism where it was only quite late in the process (after 1916) that the overtly anti-imperialist faction came to predominance. Indeed, rather than being a simple story or straight fight between "Irish nationalism" and "British imperialism", the conflict over home rule and the early partition proposals up to 1916 was essentially a conflict between different interpretations of how British imperialism should find expression in Ireland, and how the main factions in Ireland would share in the fruits of imperialism.

Against this, it might be argued that those British imperial masters who expressed outright opposition to Irish home rule from the start were the more far-sighted in seeing that nationalism was incompatible with empire, as also, from their opposing perspective, did the anti-imperialist Irish nationalists. More specifically, the "inflexible" imperialists saw Irish home rule as "setting a bad example" which would encourage nationalist opposition elsewhere in the empire; and arguably their main concern was not Ireland but the "jewel in the crown", India, where the National Congress established in the 1880s did indeed take direct encouragement from Ireland's home rulers.[3] On the other hand, it is an open question whether it was the more inflexible faction of supposedly far-sighted British imperialists, as distinct from those imperialists willing to compromise with nationalism and grant home rule with or without partition, who in fact created the conditions in which anti-imperialist nationalism eventually came to the fore—inflexible imperialism breeding inflexible nationalism and creating as much as fore-seeing the conditions of its own defeat through its active involvement in "self-fulfilling prophesy".

Thus the Irish case is particularly instructive in part because it represents such a lengthy struggle between imperialist and national modes of statehood and border creation, and because it pitted an initially "anti-imperialist" nationalism against the world's then leading imperialism, and that it did so right at the heart of empire. Not surprisingly, it was a struggle characterised by numerous ambiguities and compromises, its comparative resonances deriving both from Ireland's geopolitical position and the timing of its partition. Part of the heartland of the hegemonic world empire of the time, it was also closely connected to a rising and avowedly anti-imperial world power, the USA. Although Ireland's founding nationalism was inspired by the French Revolution and had attempted to separate from Britain and establish an in-

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[3] For a sense of the parliamentary debates on home rule and the empire, see O'Day, 2001.

dependent republic in the failed rebellion of 1798, by the 1880s its dominant nationalism would have been satisfied with a very limited form of self-government and a share in the empire. While a majority of the Irish were colonised "natives" in their own country, Irish people both Protestant and Catholic took part in Britain's imperial enterprise overseas with varying degrees of enthusiasm, contributing colonial administrators, soldiers, settlers and missionaries, and constituting a source of cheap labour for the expanding capitalist economies of Britain and its empire as well as the USA.

Therefore to the extent that nationalism "won" the struggle with imperialism, it did so "on points" not by "knockout", and even after partition in 1920 imperialism continued to be a potent and sometimes dominant factor, as the 1925 boundary commission controversy made clear. While Britain's rival imperialisms of the first world war—the defeated Prussian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires—were broken up along nationalist lines at the end of the war, the British empire as one of the victors lived on, albeit in significantly weakened condition, until after the second world war with continuing significance for post-partition Ireland, North and South. So, not only have imperialism and its partial disintegration provided the wider external context of Irish developments, they have been part and parcel of the struggle within Ireland. And this struggle from 1885 to 1925 can tell us a lot about the emergent, but never fully realised, dominance of national over imperial principles of statehood and state borders.

In the next section we describe these opposing principles or ideologies and very briefly outline their general historical trajectories in practice up to the first world war. Then, in this context, section 3 focuses in more detail on the formative phase of imperialism in Ireland and its manifestations in ideas and practice. Section 4 considers the outcome of the struggle between imperialism and nationalism in Ireland: the creation of the border. It goes on to its political consequences and its role as a signpost to the slow if partial disintegration of imperialism generally.

2. NATIONALISM AND IMPERIALISM UP TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR

At the beginning of our period British imperialism was still very much "in command", but (as became clearer in hindsight) it was under increasing pressure both from rival imperialisms and from the increasingly popular and more democratic forces of nationalism. While both imperialism and nationalism used *ad hoc* justifications, each constituted a distinct if fluctuating ideology or doctrine which provided different rationales for state territoriality and border delineation. In practical material terms, they had been locked in an historical political and military struggle for dominance for over a century—since the American colonies broke free from the British empire in the 1770s, and especially since the French Revolution of the 1790s had spread ideals of national self-determination across Europe, including Ireland.

Imperialism and nationalism as ideologies

The core principle of imperialism was territorial aggrandizement, typically justified in terms of a "civilising mission". Its criteria for border creation and change are gener-

ally more diverse and *ad hoc* than those of national states, and (even) less democratic but more accepting of social and cultural heterogeneity. Nationalists typically engage in considerable "cultural work" in constructing, or attempting to construct, homogeneous "nations". This is especially—and necessarily—the case where "nation" precedes "state", when culture or ethnicity provide the only available delimiting markers,[4] and the carving out of a new national territorial entity (through separation and/or unification from and of existing empires, states or parts of states) is nationalism's first task (as in the paradigmatic cases of multi-state "Italy" and "Germany" in the 1860s) (Anderson,1986). But it is also the case where "state" pre-dates "nation", as in paradigmatic revolutionary France, which in the 1790s firmly established the nationalist principle that the borders of the state and "political" nation should coincide geographically with those of the "cultural" nation. Thus, while nationalists may use various criteria as the opportunity arises to justify their claims to bounded homelands, they have recourse to a core doctrine or ideal which asserts that "nations" are the primary divisions of humanity, that each has the democratic right to self-expression—and self-protection—in its own state, and that nations thus constitute the rightful basis for legitimate statehood. It should go without saying that putting this ideal into practice leads to major problems, particularly where different "nations" share or claim the same space (and here Ireland is far from unique). Imperialists, such as the British Lord Acton in the nineteenth century, have been well aware of these problems and have seen their own imperialist multi-national territories as the solution.

In complete contrast to nationalist principles (if not practice), in imperialism the borders of empire were often very diverse, enclosing a wide variety of different types of political possessions, and frequently a consequence (until the rise of nationalism, a generally accepted consequence) of a multiplicity of factors—piecemeal colonial settlement, *ad hoc* geographical discovery, military or commercial adventurism, dynastic marriage, financial purchase or barter, or even voluntary federation. The British empire, for example, incorporated a ramshackle collection of polities with different powers and responsibilities, and different relationships to settler and colonial administrations. Tribes and ethnic groups were co-opted, privileged or marginalised according to the shifting dictates of territorial aggrandizement—which in turn facilitated trade and enabled the extraction of tribute, slaves, cheap labour, military recruits and natural resources.

Historically, empires have been much more tolerant of contested, multi-cultural frontier zones where central imperial control is patchy. Here, settlers have been allowed varying degrees of freedom to forge political control using means often rejected by the imperial centre. Modern national states, on the other hand, have tended to clearly demarcate precise boundary lines circumscribing national sovereignty, with a

much greater emphasis on the cultural (and often ethnic) homogeneity of "the nation" and a corresponding tendency to want to exclude cultural difference.

On the other hand, while less exclusive, imperialism is inclusive on the basis of a more overt and elaborate hierarchy from "superior" to "inferior" (a hierarchy sometimes mirrored in the hierarchical status accorded to the empire's constituent territories).[5] The intellectual justification of the imperial and colonial enterprise rests not on the myth of the nation and its homeland, but on the myth of the imperial state and its civilising mission. In its most developed form the imperial state is the superior carrier and institutionalisation of ideologies of racial, cultural and religious superiority over "native barbarians"—its superiority rendered self-evident by its successful territorial expansion.[6]

But, in contradictory or self-defeating fashion, European imperial states were also the carriers of nationalism with its ideal of self-determination: they brought with them forms of capitalist and democratic organisation that came to be partially adopted, extended or distorted by anti-colonial elites seeking their own independence.

Nationalism versus imperialism in practice

While the war of independence established the American Republic in 1776 and spread the idea of national liberation from empire (ironic now considering the USA's leading role in the "new imperialism"), it was the French Revolution which first spread the practice of national opposition to imperialism across Europe. Ireland was an early beneficiary, its first nationalist and republican organisation established in Belfast in 1791, two years after the beginning of the French revolution. But with its military defeat in 1798, Ireland in 1801 was fully incorporated into a new Union of Britain and Ireland (largely because of continuing British fears that Ireland provided an ally and gateway for revolutionary France). And with the final defeat in 1815 of (a no-longer revolutionary) France by Britain and its imperial allies on the continent, much of nationalism's advances ceased or were thrown into reverse. In Spanish America liberation from the Spanish empire proceeded with the wholesale creation of new states and new borders largely on nationalist lines, but in Europe the multi-national empires of Britain, the Habsburgs, Romanovs and Ottomans proved much more resilient. While nationalism continued to make advances in Europe, typically in association with aspirations for democracy, and with periodic rebellions and armed

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[4] For some Irish cultural nationalists, the nation did precede the state; for others, the proto-state presided over by the Irish parliament until 1801 and by the Dublin Castle administration until 1921, was the key marker of nationality. Of course, the latter coincided with the island of Ireland. At times separatist, this "state nationalism" was also imperial in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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[5] See Cannadine's (2002) argument on how a hierarchical "ornamentalism" centred on the "imperialized monarchy" (1850-1950) tied together the extraordinarily diverse, and often exotic, political elements of the empire.

[6] Seamus Deane (1983) has noted that the political language of civilians and barbarians has survived throughout the last four centuries of Irish history, i.e., the distinction between those within and without the law. Similarly, Frank Wright (1996) has used the term (Protestant) citizens and (Catholic) natives in his neglected study of Ulster's ethnic frontier before the home rule campaigns. More durable distinctions between the "loyal" and the "disloyal" still resonate in contemporary Northern Ireland politics, even if loyalists sometimes feel it necessary to break the law to maintain the constitution. Of course, the distinction is not always dichotomous as "barbarians", "natives" and "disloyalists" are often differentiated in terms of their "respectability" or "trustworthiness".

uprisings as in 1848 (including the "Young Ireland" and "Fenian" risings), the European empires were arguably in an even stronger position by the 1880s.

Imperialism reached its zenith in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, just as the House Commons began grappling with demands for Irish home rule. Europe was dominated by the great empires, and much of the rest of world was controlled, directly or indirectly by them. In this period, the domestic territories of Russia, Germany, Italy and the US expanded considerably, as did the overseas territories of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium and Japan. These powers assumed territorial control of virtually all of Africa, all of Australia, most of Asia and much of North America. Whereas just over 300 European sovereigns were represented at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, in 1899 at the Hague Peace Conference only 26 states appeared—six of them non-European (Caplow, 1998). Taking a longer time frame, the history of state formation in Europe before the early twentieth century involved the consolidation of hundreds of small political units of diverse kinds (Tilly, 1990), although it is possible also to detect cyclical patterns of consolidation and fragmentation. Moving beyond the "high noon" of nationalism to the contemporary EU, to the extent that it is developing state-like qualities, it might be seen as the harbinger of a renewed phase of European state consolidation. Alternatively, if it becomes more empire-like—if that metaphor approaches reality—the EU might encourage a return to more heterogeneous, diverse or fragmentary polities, even perhaps the break-up of some national states, but all under the umbrella of its overarching transnational polity**.**

But to return to the central issue of this paper: with both the advance of nationalism over the preceding century and the consolidation of imperialism, the stage was set for a protracted if not epic struggle, and nowhere more so than in Ireland which combined one of the earliest anti-imperialisms with a place in the leading imperial heartland.

3. THE FORMATIVE IMPERIAL PHASE IN IRELAND—IDEAS AND PRACTICE

For at least four centuries Ireland had constituted the marches, ethnic frontier or borderlands of the English state (Scotland and Wales playing the same role in various time periods). Ireland was the site of early English experiments in colonial settlement (Brady and Gillespie, 1986). Subsequently, it was also the arena of a lengthy process of nation-building which sought to identify a separate Irish nation with the island as a shared homeland. From the end of the eighteenth century onwards, these claims for a separate national identity were linked to various demands for either an independent or an autonomous Irish state.

But the comprehensive military defeat of separatist republican nationalism in 1798, confirmed by the defeat of smaller rising in 1803, was followed by a determined bid by the British political class to assimilate Ireland. However, in practice assimilation was predicated on maintaining the social and religious hierarchy which had characterized eighteenth century Ireland, and on preserving the existing governing apparatus in Dublin Castle to administer the whole island.

Not surprisingly, full assimilation into the British state was never completely realised—in part because of the structure of that state, because of the role of Protestantism (and the Episcopal state Church) in its national ideology (see Colley, 1992), and because of the nature of British colonialism, which preferred to operate indirectly through the co-optation of native elites and the limited plantation of settlers in different parts of the country. A highly localised and durable Gaelic culture and society had also proved stubbornly, if intermittently, resistant to British control. While the founders of Irish nationalism were predominantly of settler ancestry, the last and most systematic of the settler plantations would help provide imperialism with an imprecise territorial framework for the opposition to home rule and for the eventual emergence of Northern Ireland as a separate political unit.[7]

Even when Ireland was fully incorporated into the UK by the Act of Union in 1801, colonial control was narrowly based and exercised largely through elements of the minority Protestant "ascendancy" community in the island as a whole, its local controls breeding local resentments.[8] The history of nineteenth century Ulster reveals the degree to which state attempts to impose the rule of law were compromised by popular antagonisms rooted in religious, colonial and class distinctions (Wright, 1996). The 1801 settlement ended in 1920-21 with the partition of Ireland and the creation of a new border which has now lasted for over 80 years—one of the oldest in contemporary Europe. But, significantly, it has also remained one of the most contested, the "thirty years war" since the 1960s culminating in the signing of the Belfast Agreement of 1998, which marks the latest attempt to reconfigure the Irish border on a more democratic and consensual basis. Ireland's fraught post-partition history clearly owes a lot to the forces mobilised or developed during the long home rule and partition process, and to the way in which partition was imposed.

However, throughout the nineteenth century, the meaning of imperialism and nationalism had changed and developed. Only with the Act of Union (1801) did Westminster become the "Imperial Parliament". Before the 1860s, the term "*The* British Empire" referred only to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (elsewhere

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[7] The borderland characteristics of Ireland as a whole were intimately linked to religion and geopolitics. From the Reformation onwards Ireland is a place where the "new" Protestantism of Northern Europe co-exists and clashes with the "old" Catholicism of Southern Europe. The intensity of the British government's control of Ireland and its wish to exploit it economically varied with the concern that Ireland might be used as "back-door" through which Britain could be attacked by its main rivals, the Catholic powers of Spain and France. The less-than-successful attempts at British and Irish nation and state-building in Ireland in the last three centuries have also created a form of ethnogenesis of which religion was a large part. From the early nineteenth century onwards a newly consolidated Irish Catholic Church (itself favoured by the state as an opponent of more "extreme" forms of Irish nationalism) became increasingly intertwined with the broad nationalist movement and particularly its more "moderate" and pro-imperial factions. Likewise, adherence to various forms of Protestantism fused with forms of unionist, pro-British and imperialist politics. Religion was also combined in complex and often mutually supporting ways with "settler-native" mentalities, class differences and differential statuses within the structures of the British empire and state.

[8] This ascendancy or landlord class, based largely on its ownership of most of the land and very largely Episcopalian Protestant in religion, reached its apogee in the late eighteenth century. With subordinate classes largely excluded from politics as was typical of the time, the ascendancy conceived of itself as "the Irish nation", excluding the Catholic population who were seen as denizens rather than citizens to use modern terminology, and partly excluding Presbyterian and other non-Episcopalian Protestants.

Great Britain had an empire, as in "the British Empire in India"). So threats to the dismemberment of the empire had referred to the break-up of the UK—England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland (Lustick, 1993: 68), and there were still echoes of this "threat to empire" in the home rule proposals of the 1880s. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the whole British political class had seen the Act of Union as a final solution to Ireland's political fate. Against this background Whigs and Radicals wanted reform, not repeal of the Union as advocated by O'Connell. Lustick (1993: 65) quotes Peel on the integrity of the UK (Empire):

> one of those truths which lie too deep for argument; truths, to the establishment of which, the evidence of the senses, or the feelings of the heart, have contributed more the slow process of reasoning; which are graven in deeper characters than any that reasoning can either impress or efface.

By the 1880s, however, with the huge extension of the (still male only) electoral franchise, they could not stop Ireland's political future being debated in terms of an at least partial repeal of the Union. And the debates over home rule were essentially about two ways of preserving a now re-defined empire. Irish home rule could be defined as imperialist, and Chamberlain and Rhodes subscribed £10,000 to Parnell's party as they saw the Irish problem as soluble within a larger imperial federation. But in effect, Ireland had been demoted from being an integral part of the mother country of empire to one of a panoply of English empire possessions—thus undermining the hegemonic notion of Ireland as a permanent part of the British state (Lustick, 1993: 71-77, 148, 179).[9]

This change at the level of ideas and perceptions was important background to the practical struggle over home rule and partition between the 1880s and 1920s. By the third home rule crisis of 1912 the struggle had eventually polarised into two broad political coalitions. One, mainly concentrated in, but not confined to, North-East Ulster, was on the side of imperial aggrandizement and consolidation. It was imbued with the myth of the British imperial state, its Protestant and monarchical trappings and its global civilising mission. Its leadership was closely identified with the Conservative party in Britain, and its mass support identified with the popular imperialism of the time.[10] The other coalition, nationalist, and by 1912 very largely Catholic, subscribed to the myth of nation and to a semi-autonomous or fully inde-

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9 By the mid-1800s, the failures of imperial policies of assimilation and reform led English political economists and proponents of evolutionary theory to re-emphasise the distinctiveness of Ireland, its economy, land system, religious and racial character (Boylan and Foley, 1992) This distinctiveness was further elaborated and highlighted by the various Celticist revivals and in particular by the literary revival after 1880.

[10] Hennessey (1993), for example, has shown how Ulster Unionism, at its inception in the late nineteenth century, was able to identify itself as part of a popular imperial nationalism throughout the UK. This identification with popular imperialism was sometimes projected backwards in time by claiming allegiance to the ancient British "constitution". The unique value and ancient provenance of the "constitution" was summed up by an speaker at the Orange celebrations in 1883: "Unlike the Constitutions of neighboring states, it was not the growth of yesterday or today; it was the slow product of ages; it was a masterpiece of wisdom, whose inherent virtues had enabled it to withstand the shocks and strife of centuries" (*Northern Whig*, 13 July 1993, quoted in Hennessey, 1993: 28). The speaker went to assert that the English people (eliding English and British) would assuredly crush the home rule conspiracy which was "sapping the very foundations of the glorious fabric of the State".

pendent all-Ireland state. Politically allied with the British Liberals (a party which had split over the home rule issue) for most of the period, the nationalist coalition initially sought home rule within a re-modelled empire. Its radical edge, tracing its lineage to the separatist nationalism of 1798, sought an independent republican Irish state. In the form of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (later the IRA) it had inspired the 1916 rising and the Anglo-Irish war of 1919-21, but had failed to prevent the border being put in place. Thereafter, as Sinn Féin split over the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the Northern Ireland administration consolidated its position and pro-Treaty nationalists, more accommodating to imperialism, established the government of the Irish Free State and supported the emerging British commonwealth.

An overriding characteristic of the complex interplay between imperialism and nationalism in Ireland was the huge asymmetry of power between the two main groups in Ireland, in terms of their control of material resources and their capacity to coerce, and their different bases of support in Britain. Despite its majority status in Ireland, the nationalist coalition was generally the weaker. However, imperial willingness to coerce was limited by liberal-conservative divisions in Britain over the future of the empire, and by external support, especially from the USA, for Irish nationalism. The basic asymmetry was also to some extent offset by the development of a differentiated and internationally influential intellectual renaissance which included the Gaelic League, the Irish literary revival, Plunkett and Russell's co-operative movement, and the beginnings of a modern labour and trade union movement. This movement drew from all sections of Irish society, North and South, unionist and nationalist, Catholic and Protestant, moderating these political divisions though without superseding them for long.

As the power struggle over home rule intensified, it transmuted into a conflict over partition when the unelected House of Lords in London lost its power to veto the third home rule bill of 1912 (though significantly, and perhaps crucially, it was still able to delay its implementation, and then the first world war intervened). Partition was on the political agenda from 1912 and crystallized as a struggle over the partial and temporary exclusion of Ulster or parts of Ulster from the provisions for a home rule parliament in Dublin—the issue reduced to a question of territorial boundaries, of whether or not decisions about borders were imposed or taken democratically.

4. PARTITION AS IMPERIAL OUTCOME AND SIGNPOST OF PARTIAL IMPERIAL DISINTEGRATION

The complex history of the period 1912-21 is well rehearsed in the narratives of Irish historians (see, for example, Laffan, 1983; Lee, 1989; Boyce and O'Day, 2001)—the gradual acceptance of the principle of partition by the major protagonists, the ebb and flow of negotiation, the sacrifice of principle to expediency and to the balance of coercive forces of the grounds, the debates, phoney and otherwise over a nine-, six-, or four-county Ulster, the role of article 12 of the Anglo-Irish treaty, and the belated setting up of what proved to be an ineffectual boundary commission. A parliament for Northern Ireland was not mooted by the British until 1919; the outcome was a typically ramshackle imperial arrangement—distinguishing three vastly

different jurisdictions with different degrees of power and autonomy. Ulster unionists had managed to maximize the territory which they could control with a "permanent" democratic majority in part because of their capacity to mobilize their concentrated territorial power in Ireland and their support from British political and military elites. However, as Jackson (2001) observes, success came at the price of the simplification, retreat and retrenchment of Irish unionism as a whole. The creation of the Irish Free State marked the defeat of the separatist, republican and anti-imperialist element of Irish nationalism, but it was an improvement on the terms of home rule for a 26-county area now provided with an opportunity for building an independent state, though at the price of a widening gulf between the two jurisdictions on the island (O'Halloran, 1987).

Overarching imperial ties were to be left intact (examples are the common currency, passport and labour market regime between Britain and Ireland). The differential integration of industrial and agricultural Ireland into the wider British economy shaped under the Union persisted, and the monarchy remained as the ceremonial head of the new political dispensation. Few of the protagonists of the time envisaged that the border created in 1920, and confirmed by the collapse of the Boundary Commission, would subsequently assume such permanency while transmuting into a fully fledged inter-state border.

The period reflected the close links between border creation, popular mobilization, war, and the dramatic extension of the popular franchise. Throughout, an archaic constitutional and political order struggled to come to terms with democratization and the new political nationalism. Viewed in an international context, partition was a product of the first great wave of European border construction associated with the imposition and brokering of borders by the victorious powers after the first world war (O'Dowd, 1994).[11] The treaties of Versailles, Trianon and Saint Germain set new borders throughout eastern and south-eastern Europe in the wake of the defeat of the German Empire and the collapse of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. The whole process was a strategic and selective response by the most powerful (victor) states to demands for national self-determination. The outcome was to prepare the ground for the second world war and another wave of border change and reconstruction—which was to be modified again in a third wave of state formation and border change after 1989.

Many of the borders created in the immediate aftermath of the first world war were to prove unsuccessful and/or conflictual subsequently. Between 1918 and 1920, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia were created and Nagorno-Karabakh was separated from Christian Armenia and given to Muslim Azerbaijan. In the same period, British governmental elites responsible for "resolving" the Irish question joined France in carving up the Middle East. Syria, Lebanon and the mandate territory

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[11] Of course, the Sinn Féin delegation was excluded by British interests from the Versailles conference. The latter marked the first attempt by the US to lay down principles for the political re-organisation of Europe through President Wilson's principles of national self-determination—principles which provided few practical guidelines for where national borders might be drawn and how many post-imperial successor states would be acceptable.

called Palestine, Transjordan, Iraq and Kuwait were products of an imperial policy of divide and rule which promoted some nationalities and ethnic groups at the expense of others, all in the interest of a world order dominated by the victorious powers. Most of the entities created were to have a prolonged history of conflict, erupting in particularly violent form in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

What is of interest here is not the precise differences or similarities between the various cases, rather it is the overall process by which borders came to be moved and delineated. Hansen (1981: 20-21) has identified two polar processes of border delimitation. One rests on the principles of democratic negotiation at international level based on bilateral discussions, without resort to force or the threat of force. The other pole rests on the imperialist principle of imposition which relies on resort to force or its threat and which is often linked to the elite privileging of key interests at the expense of weaker parties. There is great variation, however, in the degree to which overt force is important in border creation, as well as in terms of the suddenness with which borders are imposed and in the extent to which they override the wishes of inhabitants in border regions. They also vary widely in terms of the arrangements made subsequently for reconciling opposed groups to the new frontiers.

The imperialist credentials of those who imposed the Irish border can scarcely be questioned. While the boundary commission was a proceduralist device to allow consultation with those most affected, the delimitation of the border was not a matter of international negotiation. Nor was Ireland to be allowed a plebiscite on the exact line of the border. Such plebiscites were being held in several areas on Germany's borders in the aftermath of the first world war. The British government was presiding over a plebiscite in Schleswig-Holstein at very same time as it was denying one to Ireland. Yet, in 1919, Lloyd George observed that the British government had to grapple with "a series of Ulsters all over Europe". In 1920 he argued that Ulster was exactly like Silesia, which the Peace Conference had decided must be divided. But Ireland was not to be treated like Silesia, where a plebiscite was held subsequently and four neutral countries brought in to mediate partition when the majority voted for union with Germany and the minority with Poland (Phoenix, 1994: 62, 80) The Irish solution was to be an internal solution despite its comparative resonances.

5. CONCLUSION

The gradual disintegration of the British Empire before and especially after the second world war, and the subsequent nationalisation of politics in the British and Irish states, have obscured the extent to which both home rule and partition were imperial solutions to imperial problems—a fact made clear in more recent detailed histories of the home rule crisis and the events leading to partition (Gallagher, 1957; Laffan, 1983; Phoenix, 1994; O'Callaghan, 1999). For example, in a recent comprehensive examination of the boundary commission (itself a peculiarly imperial instrument), Margaret O'Callaghan (1999: 32) confirms that contemporary documents clearly show that the division of Ireland was a chapter in British imperial history

post-Versailles, and also part of an emerging Commonwealth history. She urges the restoration of partition to its broader international context in the face of prevalent attempts to see it in terms internal to Ireland, or (even worse or more narrowly) Northern Ireland. Initially, the border denoted an "imperial frontier" rather than a sharply defined national boundary, although this was to change over time with state-building in the Irish Free State and with the transition of the United Kingdom from an imperial to a national (or multi-national) state.

The period 1912-25 also provides a kaleidoscope of memories shaken in different ways to reveal very different patterns and justifications for subsequent action. It has been typically a source of foundational myths for both jurisdictions in Ireland. The dominant motifs have been resistance and sacrifice. For Ulster Unionists resistance meant the signing of the Ulster covenant and the arming of the Ulster Volunteer Force and the sacrifice made at the Somme. For Irish nationalists, the 1916 Rising marked the sacrifice which in turn inspired the resistance of the subsequent guerrilla war against the British. Significantly, however, the most definitive outcome of the struggles of the time was the partition of Ireland. Yet remarkably, neither the establishment of the Government of Northern Ireland or the signing of the Anglo-Irish treaty were to become enshrined in popular political memory. One obvious reason is that the two legislative acts provoked immediate, if short-lived, civil wars in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State. They were a reminder of the extent to which the new boundaries depended on coercion and violence. The unequal balance of military and economic power between Ulster unionists and Irish nationalists ensured that cross-border military conflict was minimal, thereby ensuring that the new arrangements were stable.

The success of the two governments in consolidating the new arrangements was haunted by a sense of failure, however. For Ulster unionists, it was the failure to preserve the Union of 1801 and the abandonment of fellow unionists in the rest of Ireland—in Alvin Jackson's (2001: 134) words they had proved their willingness to "sacrifice territory, partners and principles in order to protect their own loyalist arcadia". Southern nationalists had failed to maintain the political integrity of the island and had abandoned northern nationalists to Ulster unionist domination. While the border was stable, it was a stability built in part on institutionalising deep "civil war" divisions with both jurisdictions. Significantly, too, the border is remembered as a partitioning of Ireland rather than the UK, even though by 1921 the latter had lost more of its territory than had a defeated Germany (Martin, 1999: 98). This was a measure of British contentment with Ireland as merely part of a British zone of influence that had continuing, if gradually eroding, imperialist trappings. It was also a measure of British preference for a combination of "indirect rule" and influence in a country no longer a central issue in British politics. Until the late 1960s at least, however, there also was a sustained official, if not popular, attempt to "forget" the historical details of how the border was created. The agreement (albeit for different reasons) of all three jurisdictions to suppress (until 1969) the 1925 report of the abortive boundary commission (Hand, 1969) set up by the Anglo-Irish Treaty reflects a common acceptance that the border owed more to the balance of power and coercion than to democratic legitimacy.

The Northern Ireland conflict, the peace process and the subsequent re-configuration of the border has shaken the kaleidoscope of memory again, however. A recognition of the imperial provenance of the border is a reminder of the dangers of assimilating Irish history to the self-serving "official" narratives of the elites who dominated the "two Irelands". It is also a reminder of where Irish history fits into a wider world history. As in many other territories divided by imperial powers, the subordinated, marginalized, and silenced were to re-emerge, or even to erupt in conflict subsequently, most notably in the last quarter of the twentieth century.[12] The search for solutions to these conflicts, including Ireland's, needs to take into account the lessons of the struggle between imperial and nationalist methods of border delimitation and legitimation in the period 1885-1925.

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[12] In the Irish case, of course, most notable was the political emergence of Northern Ireland nationalists from the 1960s onwards. Divided and marginalized by partition, they mounted a sustained and multi-faceted challenge to the 1920-21 settlement. But attempts to resolve the Northern Ireland conflict have also begun to shed new light on "historical deviants" marginalized or silenced by partition; these include: imperial nationalists, Irish Catholic soldiers in the British army, Catholic unionists, Protestant nationalists and republicans, and "border Protestants" and "border Catholics" . All are either finding new commemoration or voice. To these might be added, of course, the ongoing excavation of the history of others marginalized in the grand narratives of unionism an nationalism, women, urban and rural working class and diverse local communities throughout Ireland.

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