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Abstract: Partition is an intrinsically abstract and simplistic blunt instrument applied on a complex mosaic of peculiarities that constitute reality. There are very few modern states that are ethnically or culturally homogenous. In this context, partition is a subjective territorial tactic that can treat or exacerbate symptoms of historical, political, and geographical difficulties. While exhibiting comparative scope, especially to the role of the British State and the dynamics of national majorities and minorities, the circumstances concerning the partitioning of Ireland deviate from patterns gleaned from other examples as the evolving bases of its partition between 1912 and 1925 mutated at various stages with regard to geography, political status, and function. However, Ireland served as an important historical precedent in illustrating the disparity between the original intent and eventual result of its partition. Indeed, one can extrapolate from the Irish example that partition is better understood as a catalytic tactical process that radically reconfigures the political and geographical dimensions of conflict rather than as a decisive political instrument solving it.



**DEDUCING RATIONALES AND POLITICAL TACTICS  
IN THE PARTITIONING OF IRELAND, 1912-1925**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Partition is an intrinsically abstract and simplistic blunt instrument applied on a complex mosaic of peculiarities that constitute reality. With few modern states exhibiting ethnic or cultural homogeneity, partition has served as a subjective territorial tactic that addresses symptoms of historical, political, and geographical difficulties. In this regard, the partition of Ireland retains an acute significance not only in its timing in functioning as a novel precedent for subsequent twentieth century examples (of which the British State variably but frequently featured), but also in how the British State deployed the partition instrument in such close geographical proximity to itself (or arguably *on* itself). This paper surveys the empirical evidence spanning the period in which partition was initially countenanced in 1912 and took geographical and functional shape until the boundary of partition was finally confirmed in 1925 before assessing how Ireland's partitioning process stands within the theoretical and comparative literature.

The partition of Ireland specifically concerns the process and result of originally dividing the island of Ireland into two distinct political entities. This was legally effected by the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, which initially facilitated *within the United Kingdom* the establishment of devolved governments for Northern and Southern Ireland—the former consisting of six counties separated from the remaining twenty six of the latter and which constitutes the respective territories of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland today. (See Figure 1).

**(insert figure 1 about here)**

The enactment of this legislation marked a watershed in distinguishing one period, 1912-1920, in which partition was contemplated and paved, from another, 1921-1925, in which partition initially functioned and became entrenched. Although the 1920 Government of Ireland Act – pejoratively branded in nationalist polemics as the ‘Partition Act’ (e.g. Gallagher 1957: 138) - established the territorial framework of partition, the prolonged constitutional flux of the period render attempts to date the partition of Ireland definitively somewhat problematic. With Waterman (1987: 151) having analysed partition as an ‘attribute and process’, other certain historical landmarks (e.g. the opening of the Northern Ireland Parliament (June 1921); the Anglo-Irish Treaty (December 1921); the Tripartite Boundary Agreement (December 1925)) can be regarded as punctuating the evolution of the partition process as well as also collectively constituting part of what Minghi classified as a stage of ‘active partitioning’ (cited in Waterman 1987: 162). The upshot of this process instituted an anomalous and asymmetric political arrangement with a devolved Northern Ireland entity that remained within the United Kingdom and an independent Irish Free State that comprised one of the dominions of the British Empire.

While the seal was set on the actual boundary of partition in 1925, partition has been an ever-pervasive theme in the politics of Northern Ireland and in conditioning British-Irish relations. However, it has lost a great deal of functional significance within the context of evolving European integration and especially since the signing of the Belfast (or Good Friday) Agreement in 1998. This consolidated a ‘post-partition’ paradigm in Ireland, which while exhibiting a remarkable degree of territorial stability has also been characterised by lasting controversies concerning the administration and constitutional

status of Northern Ireland. However, the purpose of this paper is threefold: first, to analyse how the partition of Ireland was conceptualised and executed; second, to ascertain how partition definitions and classifications have been applied to the Irish example; and third, to compare and extrapolate the Irish example with other prominent partition examples.

## **THE PARTITIONING OF IRELAND: THE EMPIRICAL FRAMEWORK**

### ***Partition Envisaged and Primed: 1912-1920***

The partition of Ireland emerged as a consequence of the evolving debate that derived from irreconcilable premises – Irish Home Rule and the Union of Great Britain and Ireland. To Irish nationalists, the perception and imperative was one of restoring autonomy to a discreet territorial entity. To Irish unionists (predominantly concentrated in the northern province of Ulster), the aim was to retain the island of Ireland within the Union, fearing Home Rule as a step towards complete separation. After the December general election in 1910, the Nationalist Party held the balance of power in the British House of Commons, with Home Rule being acknowledged as the price of its support for sustaining the Liberal administration. The ensuing political map of Ulster was illustrative of the geographical and political polarisation but, in alternatively adopting the finer territorial scale of district electoral divisions, the political landscape was much more intricate when one viewed the census returns of 1911 on religion, which was invariably assumed to be indicative of political persuasion (Catholic/nationalist and Protestant/unionist). (See Figures 2 and 3).

**(insert figure 2 about here)**

**(insert figure 3 about here)**

The initial stage of the partition debate was actually bipartisan in the common belief that Ireland could not be partitioned at all. Firstly, it was thought that the economic implications of partition would wreck Home Rule entirely; secondly, the principle of partition mutually ran contrary to the nationalist claim that Ireland was a single and united nation and to the unionist claim that the Union was immutable; and thirdly, there was certainly no real precedent in principle, location, or function within Ireland for partition where even the four historic Irish provinces (Connacht, Leinster, Munster, and Ulster) had served no significant administrative purpose.

A discourse concerning the mutual delimitation of unionists and nationalists commenced when a simple parliamentary amendment to the Home Rule Bill was proposed in 1912 to exclude the four majority Protestant counties of Ulster (Antrim, Armagh, Down, and Londonderry) from the scope of an Irish Home Rule parliament. (See Table 1).

Aggregating counties appeared to be a crude and simplistic method of delimitation but the Irish county had acquired wide currency in terms of local territorial identity. The representation of religious demography and electoral geography became constantly viewed through the county lens, which successively conditioned how partition was territorially conceptualised regardless of the status of the entities it was distinguishing.

**(insert table 1 about here)**

The ramifications of the failed amendment were profound not only in primarily converting the previously inconceivable into the debatable but then also in highlighting the unlikelihood of reaching a mutually acceptable compromise via parliamentary means. However, the steady progress of the Bill induced the Unionist leadership into realising

that excluding some, or all, of Ulster's nine counties could not prevent Home Rule for the rest of Ireland. (Stewart 1967: 81-82). So salvaging a feasible Ulster exclusion became the objective rather than a tactic and a more intense debate was initiated into how a 'statutory Ulster' could be delimited. A further complication throughout was that it was unclear whether such a partition was to be an indefinite phenomenon or a temporary measure with the excluded area automatically included in Home Rule after a set period.

The introduction of the concept of 'county option' (allowing each Ulster county a plebiscite on temporary exclusion from Home Rule) presaged a further rise in the political temperature with Unionists dismissive of what was tantamount to a mere stay of execution for four counties and growing fears of the possible coercion of unionists in Ulster. (See Stewart 1967). Despite the fact that there was no shortage of ideas on how 'statutory Ulster' could be composed (e.g. using counties, parliamentary constituencies, or poor law unions), the Unionists were keenest on a permanent 'clean cut' of six counties (i.e. Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Tyrone) but Nationalists refused to cede areas such as Tyrone and Fermanagh where they possessed majorities. (Gwynn 1950: 115-131). However, the government resolved to effect a county option plan that would formalise permanent four county exclusion. Nevertheless, matters were disrupted by the deteriorating European situation that prefaced the United Kingdom's eventual entry into World War I. An uneasy consensus was reached in order to concentrate on the war effort and the Home Rule Bill was placed on the Statute Book in September 1914 but on the proviso that its legal effect as well as an Ulster provision would only follow the conclusion of the war. Although the war dominated the British

political agenda, the military failure of the republican Easter Rising of 1916 helped transform Home Rule supporters into separatists and compelled the government to address Ireland's political malaise. The government obtained Nationalist and Unionist assent to a six county exclusion but the plan floundered upon ambiguities concerning whether the partition would be temporary or indefinite. (Gwynn 1950: 156).

Nevertheless, a crucial precedent was established, with six counties acting as the initial benchmark whenever the territorial basis of partition was subsequently discussed.

The end of the war had instituted the term 'national self-determination' into the political zeitgeist. The coalition of separatists in Ireland that had merged under the Sinn Féin party campaigned under this ideal when challenging the Nationalist Party at the overdue general election in 1918. The election served to update the political geography of nationalism and unionism. While the Nationalist Party was reduced to a rump of six seats, Sinn Féin and Unionists could claim success. At an all Ireland level, Sinn Féin achieved a resounding result in terms of its 73 (out of 103) seats. Unionists claimed 23 (out of 37) seats in Ulster. (Walker 1992: 4-9) (See Figure 4). However, Sinn Féin could not claim to represent all of Irish opinion any more than Unionists could for Ulster. Barring the exceptions of West Belfast and Derry city, the respective ideologies represented contiguous areas in Ulster. Furnished with its solid electoral mandate, Sinn Féin pursued claims that the Irish nation deserved international recognition but the question of nationality in Ireland was effectively recognised as an internal British matter. (Pakenham 1992: 35).

**(insert figure 4 about here)**

The urgency for Britain to address the Irish issue was made more acute when the Sinn Féiners elected in the 1918 election, committed to abstain from the House of Commons, formed their own assembly (Dáil Éireann) in Dublin in early 1919. This coincided with the start of a military guerrilla campaign waged by the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which heralded the War of Independence. As a government committee drafted new legislation for Ireland, it became clear that a partitionist remedy was being sought but there was uncertainty over where the partition cut could be incised and the relationship between the two ensuing entities. Addressing this latter point, a 'Council of Ireland' was devised to administer matters of mutual interest. (Gwynn 1950: 186-187). This proposal was indicative of intent to foster and to facilitate future Irish unity. As regards area, plebiscites and county option were ruled out in the expectation that electoral contests were likely to inflame tensions, irreparably divide Irish opinion, and negate the prospect of Irish unity. The committee believed that the northern area should comprise nine counties on grounds of administrative convenience and in a bid to maintain an approximate religious balance (a 7:9 ratio between Catholics and Protestants in its population) so militate any apparent religious basis for partition. (See Fraser 1994: 182). The Ulster Unionists lobbied intensely for a 'Northern Ireland' consisting of six counties despite government concerns that this would tailor a 2:1 unionist majority that would be seen as more permanently divisive. However, the government realised that it was absolutely necessary to procure Ulster Unionist acquiescence if partition was to have any credibility.

The eventual Government of Ireland Act was enacted in 1920 without any Ulster Unionist or Nationalist votes cast in its favour. Sinn Féin MPs had already refused to take their seats, the few Nationalist MPs voted against it, while Ulster Unionists abstained, fully conscious that it would be forsaking fellow Ulster Unionists in the predominantly Catholic counties of Cavan, Donegal, and Monaghan. (See Gwynn 1950: 188-191). The Act facilitated the devolution of powers to two parliaments administered by geographically imprecise 'Northern' and 'Southern' governments. Northern unionists acquiesced in being converted into 'Home Rulers' and southern nationalists ignored what previously would have satisfied earlier political demands. In institutional and administrative terms, Northern and Southern Ireland were to closely resemble, if not replicate, each other. However, much of the apparent symmetry was illusory. Both devolved administrations were to possess the same powers (including bicameral chambers and reduced representation at Westminster) but partition represented a cut into two uneven parts rather than a cut into approximately equal halves. In terms of population and territorial size, the new Northern Ireland was dwarfed by Southern Ireland, but in proportional terms, the balance of industry over agriculture, and of urban over rural areas, was skewed towards the North. However, the political balance was perhaps the most salient. The 'South' was 9:1 nationalist while the 'North' was 2:1 unionist. In anticipation of charges that partition would serve as a permanent instrument, the government could emphasise the channel for future reunion represented by the Council of Ireland (to comprise equal numbers of Northern and Southern members), which although only initially endowed with control over railways, fisheries, and animal regulations could be augmented with further power by mutual consent.

### **Partition Implemented and Confirmed: 1921-1925**

The passing of the Government of Ireland Act was the seminal juncture at which the partition of Ireland was formalised. The Act provided for elections to take place in both North and South in May 1921. Elections in the South did not take place as every Sinn Féin candidate was unopposed and a second Dáil Éireann was convened. The Northern elections returned all 40 Unionist candidates, with Sinn Féin and Nationalists winning six seats each. (Walker 1992: 45-46). The asymmetric and staggered character of the partition was demonstrated as the new Northern administration began to function, while the South still endured the War of Independence, and was still nominally governed from London. Sinn Féin's Northern policy was largely neglected, as it was preoccupied with pursuing its ideal of an independent republic, while the reality of partition was rapidly becoming a *fait accompli*. Indeed, Ulster Unionists were now in a dominant tactical position whereby they had been awarded an advantageous territorial settlement and the likely incumbency of governmental machinery to entrench the new partition paradigm.

The opening of the new Northern Ireland Parliament and conflict fatigue prompted both a truce in hostilities and eventual wide-ranging talks between the Sinn Féin leadership and the British government. Both sides generally acknowledged that as 'Ulster' could not be coerced, it in turn could not coerce other units. To bypass the possibility of public sympathy for Sinn Féin if partition rather than status and empire thwarted any agreement, Prime Minister David Lloyd George conceived the idea of a boundary commission. The leader of the Irish delegation, Arthur Griffith, automatically assumed that a boundary

commission and his preference for a plebiscite were very much the same and thought that such a commission would deliver many nationalists from the Northern jurisdiction and ‘ would give us most of Tyrone and Fermanagh and part of Armagh, Londonderry, Down etc. ’ (Pakenham 1992: 167). Yet, while this extensive territorial adjustment pervaded the delegation’s thinking, the wording of the Boundary Commission clause (Article 12) in the eventual Anglo-Irish Treaty was only explicit in its ambiguity: –

a Commission...shall determine in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants, so far as may be compatible with economic and geographic conditions, the boundaries between Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland, and for the purposes of the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, and of this instrument, the boundary of Northern Ireland shall be such as may be determined by such Commission.<sup>1</sup>

Despite partially mimicking the spirit and wording of boundary instruments contained in the Treaty of Versailles, the clause appeared to place a premium on ‘economic and geographic’ factors above that of the ‘wishes of the inhabitants’ and there was no stipulated procedure as to how (or even when) to ascertain these wishes.<sup>2</sup> Even so, nationalists strongly believed the Commission would reduce the Northern area so as to make it unviable.

The upshot of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921 was an anomalous tripartite relationship. The degree of independence achieved for the newly styled Irish Free State was achieved at the price of a degree of partition. The South was to become a Dominion (analogous to Canada and Australia) within the British Commonwealth, while the North (still retaining its devolved government) was to be maintained within the United

Kingdom. The perturbed Northern Prime Minister, James Craig, received a private assurance from Lloyd George that the Commission would involve a small-scale exchange of territories and merely tidy anomalies and inconvenient sectors of the original boundary. (See Kennedy 1988: 69). However, the divergence of expectation became manifest in early 1922, when Craig found the substantial territorial expectations of his Free State counterpart, Michael Collins, impossible to countenance. Collins was to bemoan the Northern government's local government and electoral reforms as well as control of law and order, which were seen as securing Unionist domination at all levels of administration and entrenching a partition before the Boundary Commission could operate. However, the fatal distractions of the debilitating civil war prevented the Free State from addressing them and with Collins' own death in August 1922, the Free State adopted a passive northern policy, placing its trust in the operation of the Boundary Commission.

The passage of time was ensuring that partition was acquiring an ever-hardening inertia. While the final position of the boundary had yet to be confirmed or even considered, its functional dimension was actually being stereotyped by the Free State with its imposition of a customs barrier in April 1923. From the Free State perspective, it had a treble purpose in raising revenue for the exchequer, symbolically asserting its independence, and applying economic pressure on the Northern administration. Indeed, the imposition of tariffs was counterproductive to the Free State's aspiration to abolish partition, and a curious one considering the Boundary Commission had yet to consider its remit and the direct economic hardship inflicted on mainly nationalist border areas. Considering the

faith that the Free State was placing in the Commission, it was significantly reluctant to establish it on account of the destabilising civil war but after its conclusion in May 1923, it tried to expedite matters by nominating its Boundary Commissioner. Britain, too, had entered a period of political instability and successive governments were reluctant to traverse Irish controversies again. Nevertheless, the Northern government possessed a significant power for further delay as Article 12 stipulated that it was to appoint its own Commissioner but there was no provision catering for its refusal to do so. Hence, lengthy recourse to law and new legislation eventually allowed a British Labour government to appoint a Commissioner on Northern Ireland's behalf.

Almost three years after the signing of the Treaty did the Boundary Commission hold its first meeting in London in November 1924 under the chairmanship of Richard Feetham, a South African judge. The chairman would be crucial in casting decisions in the likely event of his fellow Commissioners cancelling each other out. In some respects, the Commission resembled international precedents in employing staff that were involved with the Upper Silesia Commission (involving Germany and Poland), but in others it was a pale imitation particularly in terms of its powers and resources as reflected in the chairman's reluctance to conduct plebiscites and the Commission's small secretariat. Crucial in framing any eventual award would be how the Commission would interpret its own terms of reference. It was affirmed that the Commission was free to decide on its own methods for ascertaining 'the wishes of the inhabitants' – which it did by precluding any plebiscitary method and by adapting a fine territorial scale derived from the 1911 census. This contrasted markedly with its assessment of contemporary 'economic and

geographical' conditions, garnered from local and private hearings, which had already been indelibly shaped by the original imposition of partition in 1920 as well as by the customs frontier. This served to support repeated unionist arguments that border areas were not economically oriented across the border but aligned and integrated within Northern Ireland and comprised part of Belfast's economic hinterland. (See *Report* 1969 and Andrews 1960).

With there being no public indication of the Commission's thinking, anticipation and speculation were both rife and variable. These peaked when an inspired forecast map appeared in the unionist sympathetic newspaper, the *Morning Post*, in November 1925 that plunged the entire political situation into crisis, especially placing the Free State government in jeopardy. Although the forecast was not strictly accurate, it acquired substantial currency in public opinion. (See Figure 5). In the Free State, the shock of the meagre territorial gains forecast was overwhelmed by the prospects of having to cede territory especially in the east Donegal area around Derry city. There was an cumulative threat to the Free State government of a parliamentary defeat, the exploitation of the situation by Treaty opponents, and even the possibility of the armed forces resisting territorial transfers.

**(insert figure 5 about here)**

There was urgency to halt the publication of the Commission's award that would otherwise have immediate legal effect, so the Free State engaged in hastily arranged talks with the British and Northern Ireland governments. These culminated in a Tripartite Boundary Agreement signed in December 1925, which contained three main elements.

Firstly, the Boundary Commission's report would be suppressed and the existing boundary would remain unchanged; secondly, a financial settlement would relieve the Free State of liabilities owed to the British government; and thirdly, the Council of Ireland was consigned to history with its powers transferred to the respective Irish governments and substituted by a mere aspiration to co-operate on matters of mutual concern. The Commission's report, not publicly released until 1969, would have awarded the Free State 31,319 people and 282 square miles of territory but taken 7,594 people and 78 square miles. (See *Report* 1969: 143 and See Figure 6). Even if the Commission's award was to have been implemented, the political temperature would have been raised to uncontrollable levels and the prospect for a settlement made more remote. However, this view does not detract from the Commission's worth as a catalyst in the signing of the Boundary Agreement and in the process helped to suppress territory and boundaries as significant features in the partition question.

**(insert figure 6 about here)**

### **Partition Postscript: Constitutional Legacies**

As both Irish entities focussed on consolidating their respective administrations, the following decades were punctuated by legal alterations to the constitutional position. After assuming power in the Free State in 1932, Eamon de Valera set about dismantling the Treaty settlement but his only significant policy on partition was contained in the 1937 Constitution of Ireland (*Bunreacht na hÉireann*) which nominally espoused territorial claims to the entire island of Ireland but which were otherwise not acted upon. However, partition was more effectively entrenched by the later declaration of the Republic of Ireland (and its consequent withdrawal from the British Commonwealth) in

1949. This elicited a British response, the Ireland Act, which enshrined a right of veto to the Northern Ireland parliament with regard to any prospect of unifying with the Republic. Constitutional governance rather than the territorial framework of partition became subject to greater scrutiny following the outbreak of the ‘Troubles’ in 1969. Although the British government countenanced the concept of a repartition to redraw the boundary in the early 1970s, this did not garner any substantial support. The constitutional framework between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland was already being altered with both states entering the European Economic Community in 1973. With regard to Northern Ireland, the principle of the consent of its population to Irish unity was enshrined in consequent agreements such as the abortive Sunningdale Agreement (1974), the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985), the Downing Street Declaration (1993), and the Belfast (or Good Friday) Agreement (1998).

### **PLACING IRELAND’S PARTITION: THEORETICAL AND COMPARATIVE CONTEXTS**

This section surveys how the partition of Ireland has been referenced in the theoretical literature concerning generic definitions and classifications before engaging the more empirical comparative literature that has identified common and analogous themes between Ireland and other case studies. The subject of partition has attracted a distinctive academic literature that has been predominantly furnished by geographers, historians, and political scientists. While Ireland does ordinarily feature within the general partition canon, scrutiny of the partitioning of Ireland between 1912, when partition was first seriously considered, and 1925, when the Irish Border was finally confirmed in position,

has yet to elicit a full treatment in a geographical monograph. Although it has featured within certain works (e.g. Heslinga 1962; Boal and Douglas 1982; Pringle 1985), the significance of the period has been somewhat eclipsed by more comprehensive description and analysis devoted to partition's pre-twentieth century heritage and its subsequent enduring legacies.

### **Ireland and the Question of Definition**

The literature exploring partition definitions and classifications has been incisively discussed elsewhere (e.g. Henderson and Lebow 1974; Waterman 1987; O'Leary 2006a; O'Leary 2006b). Nevertheless, the significance of the partition of Ireland has been explicitly avouched in noteworthy partition definitions. Waterman (1987: 155) has cited an *Oxford English Dictionary* supplement referring to partition as 'the division of a country into two or more nations; specifically (a) the division of Ireland into Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic...' Although this is an understandably preliminary definition for a general readership (but woefully crude for political geographers), Ireland has also figured as an exemplar in more precise academic definitions. Pounds (1964: 162) has offered a bespoke application of partition: '[i]n Ireland partition means the division of the geographical unit of Ireland into two separate political units'. Elsewhere, Murphy (1985: 53-54) alludes to Ireland in outlining a definition of the partition process, whereby:-

a piece of territory associated with a single political system and set of laws is divided into two or more areas associated with political systems and/or laws which differ, at least to a degree, from one another. In its most dramatic form

partitioning involves the division of one sovereign political unit into two separate sovereign political units (e.g., the separation of Ireland from the United Kingdom)...

As previously mentioned, the partition of Ireland exemplifies the difficulty of dating its origin even though it is usually attributed to one of two years -1920 and 1921. For example, Lebow (1974: 205), Douglas (1982: 106), and O'Leary (2006a: 3) cite 1920 as the date of partition while Waterman (1987: 152), Kumar (1997: 26), and Kaufmann (1998: 127) name 1921. This lack of consensus demonstrates the differing emphasis one can place on a specific event and attests to the thesis that partition may be conceived as a cumulative process than as one definitive political action or event.

The issue of definition also patently extends to the use of nomenclature. (Indeed, as a preliminary semantic one may observe that the partition of Ireland was officially a partition of the United Kingdom or unofficially a partition of the province of Ulster). This is particularly significant with regard to how the names of geographical entities may be politically construed. Northern Ireland is the legally correct term for the northern entity (despite not containing the island of Ireland's most northerly point) but has been euphemistically coined the 'Six Counties' in nationalist circles or sometimes in unionist circles as 'Ulster' which properly refers to the historic nine county province. The 'Twenty Six Counties' of the southern entity has been officially styled successively as 'Southern Ireland' (1920), the 'Irish Free State' (1921-22); 'Ireland' (1937); and, the 'Republic of Ireland' (1949). (see Whyte 1990: xi for Irish contexts on political

nomenclature). With literal geographical distinctions absent in the latter three official titles, which otherwise could be interpreted as a diminution in claims to legitimacy and constitutional title, it has been common practice to resort to unofficial geographical shorthand to circumvent the formal political branding and help distinguish partition's product entities. (To wit as an example, West Germany was the 'Federal Republic of Germany' while East Germany was the 'German Democratic Republic'.) Hence, using the terms 'North' (to refer to Northern Ireland) and the 'South' (to refer to the Republic of Ireland and its previous incarnations) have been generally accepted and understood.

### **Ireland: a Partition of its Time?**

In initially considering the meaning of partition, Mansergh (1997 [1976]: 33) has demonstrated the differing senses in which the term 'partition' has been historically employed, e.g.: the episodic partition of Poland; the 'progressive partition from within' of the Ottoman empire; and the partition or 'scramble' for Africa. Ireland's partition may suggest *prima facie* that it was part of a decolonisation process analogous and contemporaneous with the demise of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires after World War I. Kumar (1997: 25) has detected two rationales for the partitions resulting from the fall of colonial empires, namely: 'Wilsonian national self-determination, applied to Poland and Romania, and the British colonial policy of identifying irreconcilable nationhoods, applied in Ireland, India, and, as a delayed response, Cyprus and Palestine.' Both types adopted ethnic identity as the key determinant, but while Wilsonian ideas supported ethnic self-determination as freedom from colonial rule, the British reluctantly espoused partition as a lesser evil to avoid constant civil war. (ibid.).

However, as Irish nationalists were keen to stress national self-determination in political rhetoric and appealed for recognition of their claims on the world stage, Ireland was considered an internal concern for the British to address. Meanwhile, the British were conscious that Ireland could not be completely immune from the principles then shaping post-World War I Europe, as exemplified with Versailles principles manifesting themselves in the wording of Article 12 of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Nevertheless, these principles bore considerably more of a British imprint than being actually conditioned by an internationally standardised regime with supervisory powers of enforcement. Hence, Britain could shape the partition settlement in accordance with its own interests and the balance of forces within Ireland alone.

The concept of national self-determination was an appealing and simple concept in the abstract, but a problematic one to apply in reality. Despite possessing consensual overtones, it was entirely contingent on how it was territorially calibrated and consequently placed an overwhelming premium on simple majorities. The key quandary in implementing national self-determination was addressing areas where conflicting national groups were intricately dispersed. Considering the ensuing proportions of the minority groups within Ireland's partition entities and the non-recourse to democratic practice in both the Government of Ireland Act and the Irish Boundary Commission, Ireland's partition had the thinnest of Versailles veneers.

### **Ireland: Partitioned Country or Divided Nation?**

A formative categorisation contained in Henderson *et al.* (1974) distinguishes partition case studies between divided nations and partitioned countries. Ireland is classified as a partitioned country, which is defined as ‘resulting from internal causes; by reason of ethnic, linguistic, or religious conflict between or among groups residing within one political unit’ and are frequently associated with imperial disintegration. (Henderson and Lebow 1974: 434). In contrast, a divided nation exhibits ‘marked ethnic homogeneity, a common historical tradition and experience of successful political unity, [and] that have been subsequently divided into two separate political units.’ (ibid.).<sup>3</sup> They proceed to note that the ‘length of historical experience’ and the fostering of historical appeals and myth creation have played the key roles in sustaining division in Ireland (1974: 452).

Waterman (1987: 160) takes up the partitioned countries typology and observes that they are predicated on the logic of resolving conflict by separating hostile ethnic groups, and addressing political demands by endowing them with a state structure. Furthermore, it is discerned that the ‘the mixing of different ethnic groups, [and the] location of the border between them is hardly ever satisfactory and almost always problematic’ (ibid.).

Elsewhere, he notes Henderson and Lebow’s stress on internal factors with regard to ethnic conflict in Palestine, India, and Cyprus but explains that the Irish case is somewhat complicated as matters are conditioned by whether one considers Ireland to consist of one or two nations. (Waterman 1989: 121; see Boal 1980; Anderson 1980; Whyte 1990; Gallagher 1995 for elaboration on this debate). Waterman (1984: 104) has referred to the partitioned country and divided nation distinction as being ‘nebulous’ with respect to

Ireland with its particular idiosyncrasies reflected in Waterman's own comparative classification of Ireland's separation as 'Partition/Division?' (Waterman 1987: 166). While serving as a rudimentary means of classification, rendering particular cases as a divided nation or a partitioned country lacks sophistication in illuminating the rationales and tactics involved in partition.

### **Ireland: Conceptualising Process, Method, and Rationale**

Another classification by Murphy (1985) has a specific geographical perspective. Partitioning is described as 'an explicit political or legal response to a social problem which is both a product of geographical circumstances, and an agent of change in the human landscape' (Murphy, 1985: 55). He outlines four basic types of partitioning that have occurred during the twentieth century: the division of a sovereign country into two separate sovereign countries (e.g., Pakistan and Bangladesh); the internal political division of a country along ethnic lines to create a political structure based on ethnically defined regions (e.g., Belgium); the creation of small semi-autonomous regions within a country for ethnic minorities (e.g., the Kurdish area in Iraq); and, the *de facto* division of a politically organised area into ethnic regions which are beyond the control of a central authority (e.g., Cyprus; Murphy, 1985: 56). An important qualification to these categories is that they apply to specific cases of ethnic or cultural cleavages and not to ideological examples of 'divided nations'. Murphy classifies 'the separation of the Ireland from the United Kingdom' as falling within the first category. However, he cites initially that 'Partitioning of this sort generally follows a period of intense conflict between two ethnic groups of substantial numbers occupying discrete territories of significant size.' (Murphy

1985: 56). Although this cannot be said to apply to the Irish case study, it is followed by what can be regarded as a more congruent account of Ireland's processual experience:-

The ethnic group challenging central government control [Irish nationalists *vis-à-vis* the British government] tends to dominate a piece of territory which is significant in proportion to the country's total land area [the island of Ireland]. The challenging ethnic group usually is able to exert sufficient pressure on the government but is incapable of seizing power for itself. At the same time, the position of the challenging ethnic group is sufficiently strong politically within its territory that the central government cannot simply impose its will by force [the Truce and Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921]. The challenging ethnic group and its associated territory typically occupy a peripheral economic and physical position within the state [Ireland within the United Kingdom], and it is this peripheral position which both encourages the development of cultural conflict and renders the group and its territory dispensable to the previously existing state. (Murphy 1985: 56-57)

O'Leary (2006a: 12-13) makes an external/internal partition distinction to which he has applied the Irish example. With reference to the creation of Northern Ireland he describes that 'an internal partition may be organised to promote the autonomy of a particular group that has no previously recognised jurisdiction'. This was buttressed by an intent to keep both Irish nationalists and Ulster Unionists within the United Kingdom by separately bestowing devolution to them. Conversely, external partitions 'necessarily involve both the modification of prior homeland jurisdictions, and the attempted or actual transformation of the status of the existing sovereign border.' While the internal category

tallies with the features of the 1920 Government of Ireland Act and the fact that the United Kingdom was actually partitioning itself, one may apply the external label to the effect of the subsequent 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty, as it involved the upgrade of the status of the extant boundary and catered for boundary modifications via the Boundary Commission.

O’Leary has also formulated a conceptual frame to analyse the role of the partitionist (2006b: 5-8). Partition processes involving multi-national states may be distinguished between two types of external partitionists—‘proceduralists’ and ‘paternalists’. Proceduralists act as consultative facilitators and tend to offer legal and technical assistance to the partition process. They are characterised by a professed claim of dispassionate and benevolent neutrality with the ultimate aim of a settlement based on consent rather than coercion. Alternatively, paternalists adopt a role in a bid to enforce peaceful resolution by judging that it is otherwise unlikely to occur. Paternalists suggest that third-party or external involvement would be swift, lasting, and effective in reducing conflict. O’Leary asserts that the ‘British Empire was a procedural partitionist in the twentieth century’ (2006b: 5). British resort to boundary commissions particularly in Ireland and India ostensibly served as fair and consensual partitionist processes. But as is acknowledged, there is generic scope for fusion between the two categories (2006b: 5). One may again associate the Government of Ireland Act and the Anglo-Irish Treaty as respectively according with these typologies. Thus in identifying the manner in which the Government of Ireland Act was passed without any Irish MP voting for it (with Ulster Unionists acquiescing through abstention) and with no nationalist consent to its terms,

Britain acted as a ‘paternalist’ in establishing a *fait accompli*. The subsequent Anglo-Irish Treaty elicited conditional Irish nationalist consent to partition on a ‘procedural’ basis. The categories devised by O’Leary to classify types of external or internal ‘partition’ and procedural or paternal ‘partitionist’ are better conceptualised in a processual or progressive context than as definitive dialectics when applied to the Irish example.

### **Ireland, Palestine, and India: A British Partitionist Model for Decolonisation?**

In comparative analyses, the partition of Ireland has been most prominently associated with India and Palestine with particular regard to the shared themes of decolonisation and British involvement (Hachey 1973: 232). Indeed, all three occurred in the wake of a world war when Britain’s status as a world power had been eroded. Fraser (1984 and 1994) has explored the three cases while Mansergh (1997 [1976]) has produced a seminal discussion of Ireland and India that appears to confirm a close resemblance in motive and structural logic. There appears to be general agreement in the literature that the partition of Ireland constituted a novel precedent which the British were later inclined to follow reluctantly in Palestine and India by weight of political circumstances. O’Leary (2006a: 17) contextualises the Irish example with the new boundary regimes instituted by the League of Nations as encouraging ‘some imperial elites to think of partition as a viable strategy in Palestine and India.’ Nevertheless, the partition of Ireland, India, and Palestine never possessed an instinctive appeal for British governments of differing complexions but resulted from an exasperating fatigue when the ideal of a fluent transition of power to feasible successors and institutions within established boundaries proved elusive. However, in each case, some form of partition had been variably countenanced in

significant advance of its actuality. Ireland first encountered the possibility in 1912, Palestine via the Peel Commission in 1937, and India had experienced the abortive partition of Bengal experiment of 1905.

In terms of actors and rationales, both Waterman (1987: 160) and Fraser (1994: 185-186) have respectively referred to how partition has generated acute difficulties with regard to the imposition of a boundary and to the creation of new minorities finding themselves trapped on the 'wrong side'. Each of Ireland, India, and Palestine shared Britain's common recognition of a 'two nation' identity. The partition process had minority support (e.g. Ulster Unionists, the Muslim League, and the Jewish Agency) that was sufficient to deny the resolve of their respective opponents to assume control of the entire colonial territory as 'Sinn Fein, the Indian National Congress, and the Arab Higher Committee were undoubtedly reflecting majority opinion in their respective countries in rejecting it [partition].' (Fraser 1984: 195). The relative minorities in the three cases varied from one third to one fifth of the total population, but while one could discern approximate geographical heartlands for the minority in Ireland and India, the minority in Palestine was less aggregated.

Both Ireland and Palestine exhibited a legacy of substantial colonial settlement under British rule that was largely absent in the case of India. In explicitly comparing the Irish and Palestinian cases, Waterman (1984: 110) notes the respective majority view that partition is regarded as a temporary expedient until a final settlement is reached. The role of the British government is identified as profound to the apparent internal motivation

and generation of the partition solution in Ireland. External forces prompted partition proposals in Palestine and third parties often regard it as permanent. (ibid.). In actual execution, the boundary of partition in both cases was conceptualised with an inadequate appreciation of the geography of local areas and of the ensuing difficulties faced by their inhabitants. Notably, both in Ireland and Palestine, the assertion to territory has underscored constitutional claims. While the Free State nominally asserted a territorial claim to the entire island of Ireland in the 1937 constitution, both the Palestinian National Charter (1964) and the Declaration of the State of Israel (1948) affirmed territorial claims based on the bounds of the British Mandate in Palestine. One may also draw a parallel in that both Ulster Unionists and Jewish groups were prepared to fight the British than assume minority status in any successor to the colonial unit and that in the event, the regimes resulting from partition became violently challenged by nationalists in the Northern Ireland Troubles and by Palestinians via the intifada. Indeed, the Northern Irish nationalists and Palestinians had been expected to tolerate the same fate that Ulster Unionists and Jews refused to countenance for themselves. (See Cleary 2002: 35). As a corollary, a significant distinction in terms of grievance between the two cases relates to the fact that while a minority of all Irish nationalists endured an unwanted partition settlement, no Palestinian state was established for any Palestinians at all.

Two historians, Mansergh (1997 [1976]) and McMahon (2000), draw extensive parallels between Ireland and India. McMahon adopts a meticulous empirical narrative while Mansergh utilises a tripartite structural framework to explain the relations of the different actors. Ireland and India are deemed to be domestic partitions in that they occurred

‘within a single polity’ which Mansergh proceeds to identify as the ‘the British imperial system.’ They are classified under ‘partitions which arise when dependencies unified either previous to, or under, imperial rule divide, or are divided, in the process of becoming once more independent.’ (See Mansergh (1997 [1976]: 33-34). The crux of Mansergh’s work concerns the tripartite structure which contained a nationalist majority at its base that idealised independence and unity but was compelled to choose the former over the latter. The growth of their respective campaigns exploited democratic channels to demonstrate their electoral strength (e.g. the Sinn Féin triumph in the 1918 general election and the Congress Party success in the 1937 provincial elections). The kickback of such advances was the apparent mobilised sense of threat they represented to minorities. Furthermore, the leaders of majority parties tended to shun compromise on fears that this would dilute their own national claims, and in the process not only recognise the existence of a second nation but also risk being outflanked by diehards.

The second part of the tripartite structure concerns the minority community which in both Ireland and India ‘belonged to a ruling, or a former ruling, race.’ (Mansergh 1997 [1976]: 42). Ulster Protestants and Muslims did not share the religion or traditions of the majority and regarded themselves not as a minority but as distinct and distinguishable entity.

Under Muhammad Ali Jinnah’s leadership, the Muslim League would not be drawn on exact definitions of Pakistan unlike the Ulster Unionists who intensively lobbied for and exacted the six counties of Northern Ireland. Thus, in Ireland, ‘the boundaries of the area to be excluded were determined in accord with the wishes of the minority, the possibility of reference to a boundary commission (which met but proved abortive) being appended

later; in India by boundary commissions making recommendations in the light of the ‘national’ allegiance of the inhabitants by district, and not by province as desired by the minority, at the time of transfer.’ (Mansergh 1997[1976]: 60). The Congress Party, as Sinn Féin had similarly believed of Northern Ireland following a boundary commission, thought that Pakistan would be too weak or ‘moth-eaten’ to survive. (McMahon 2000: 158). In one case (Ireland) acceptance of a settlement was obtained under threat of renewal of military action, while in the other (India) by free volition of the parties concerned. (Mansergh 1997 [1976]: 60). However, while Mansergh claims that both settlements were Dominion based, it would be more correct to point out that both were Commonwealth based as India and Pakistan were endowed with republic status, something that the British significantly refused to countenance with respect to Ireland in 1921.

The third element of the tripartite structure concerned the imperial power. Its position was not seeking but pragmatically controlling the levers of power as would accord with past commitments, political circumstances, and ultimately its own best interests. Mansergh discerned the tendency for the imperial power and minority to be drawn together in resisting nationalist majority demands and thereby a lack of commitment to majority rule. (Mansergh 1997[1976]: 48). While this manifested itself in Ireland with the calculated decision to deal with the Ulster Unionist minority before the Irish nationalist majority, in India the overall settlement was made with both majority and minority simultaneously. (Mansergh 1997[1976]: 60). Majority leaders like de Valera and Gandhi took a dislike to the tripartite structure but while the former saw Ulster Unionists as

redundant interlopers, the latter deemed the British were fulfilling this role in India. (Mansergh 1997[1976]: 55).

Mansergh's emphasis on a structural logic to the partitions in Ireland and India offsets accusations of malign British designs to 'divide and rule' and accentuates pragmatic motivations in managing conflicting national claims and divesting power in as controllable and stable a manner as possible. While acknowledging his application of structural constraints, in Ireland there was significant latitude for decisions made at an individual level in each apex of the triangle which manifested themselves in the precipitate and some anomalous features of the partition. (e.g. the hesitations over six or nine counties; the 'Council of Ireland' paradox). Indeed, Ireland's partition was an exemplar of the impromptu and flexible improvisation of British statecraft. Furthermore, in structural terms, as partition was not finalised until 1925, the substantial minority of nationalists in Northern Ireland constituted an important additional element to the triangular equation that is often overlooked.

Despite the apparent similarities of Ireland, Palestine, and India, isolating a generic British partition model does not bear complete scrutiny. Nigeria, Sudan, Burma, and Sri Lanka, were all arguably as ripe for partition but (influenced by political expediency) were judged to possess sufficient cohesion to foster both independence and unity. Garnering a comparative perspective is hampered by the fact that other imperial decolonisation processes (e.g. the French in Algeria, the Belgians in Congo) were not typically accompanied by a partition. Also, the actual British withdrawal in the three

cases differed. In Palestine, it was chaotic; in India, organised to the point of celebration; and, in Ireland, it was phased and a median of the other two. While the context of withdrawal in each was consistent with leaving British strategic interests unscathed Ireland was the only one to have a direct impact on the British body politic and Palestine was the only one to escalate into a wider regional conflict (with India and Ireland largely self-contained). Furthermore, Ireland was spared the extensive scale of expulsions and refugee movements that India and Palestine were to experience and is now not bedevilled by substantial unsettled questions akin to the Kashmir dispute or to the establishment of a Palestinian state.

### **Contemporary Retrospectives**

Other empirically based comparisons tend to include the more recent cases of Cyprus and Bosnia. With regard to the former, Kumar (1997: 24) is of the opinion that the partitions in Cyprus, India, Palestine, and Ireland, rather than separating irreconcilable ethnic groups, fomented further violence and forced mass migration. (This is echoed in Kaufmann (1998: 155) except Bosnia replaces Cyprus in the list). It appears to be deeply ironic that while minority leaders in Ireland, Palestine, India and Cyprus did not start as partition advocates and as ‘presumed beneficiaries’ the Ulster Unionists, Pakistanis, Israelis, and Turkish Cypriots still champion partition, yet Ireland, India, Israel, Greek Cyprus have all fared better than their counterpart. (See O’Leary 2006b: 24, 22) As an overview, Kaufmann (1998: 152) pinpoints that as successor states the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (of course, the latter does not constitute a state), like India, Israel, and Cyprus, have political institutions that clearly meet democratic qualifications.

While this is undoubtedly the case in Northern Ireland today, Kaufmann notably neglects to refer to the gerrymandering of local government and discrimination that its devolved government had presided over between the 1920s and 1960s. Yet, one may agree with O'Leary's assertion that Ireland has had the most successful state building, development and democratisation experience compared with the instability that blighted Northern Ireland for so long (2006b: 21-22).

A fundamental issue perennially concerns whether partition can be judged a success based on the violence accompanying or stemming from it. Quantifying the human cost of partition is problematic as bare figures often derive from variable and questionable sources. One source cites death toll estimates attributed to the 'Formation of Northern Ireland, 1920-1922' ranging from 544 to 232. (O'Leary and McGarry 1996: 21). If one ascribes the 'Troubles' as a product of Ireland's partition then one may add its death toll total of 3,585 from 1969 until December 1997. (Bloomfield 1998: 11). Overall, in terms of sheer numbers and of proportion to the population, O'Leary is of the opinion that the 'partition of Ireland was accompanied by the least violence amid twentieth century partitions.' (O'Leary 2006b: 17). Kumar is sceptical of the view that the partitions of Ireland and Cyprus can be said to have worked, even in the lesser evil sense considering that they have necessitated protracted military presences (1997: 28-29). O'Leary has noted that the inter-state tensions that have bedevilled Cyprus and Ireland and the examples of the Middle East and South Asia have done little to show that partition proved to be a 'realistic' settlement of security dilemma (2006a: 19). The case of India has dwarfed other partition examples in terms of magnitude as it could arguably be

divided into even more states and additionally one may note that Indians generally do not share the orthodox aspirations of nationalists in Ireland and Cyprus for reunification. But even these orthodox aspirations may be circumvented by future demographic and geopolitical trends and/or assuaged by consociational political arrangements (O'Leary 2006a: 24) as well as being tempered by common membership of regional political or economic bodies. The consociation path is evident in Ireland today and although contemplated in the 1970s, a territorial reconfiguration via repartition has never been a likely possibility. Elsewhere, the tranquil separation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia was considerably smoothed by their relative ethnic homogeneity thereby precluding delimitation of another boundary afresh.

## **OVERVIEW**

The partition of Ireland exemplifies how the basic principle of separating and distinguishing national antagonists varies with regard to original intent and eventual result as well as poses substantial challenges concerning the delimitation and administration of boundaries. However, when juxtaposed with definitions and classifications as well as compared with other prominent empirical examples of partition, the partitioning process in Ireland exhibits extremely significant anomalies. When conceived in 1912, the initial concept of an *internal* partition was political anathema to the contending doctrines of Irish Home Rule and Unionism respectively. Nominally, the proposed scheme for Irish Home Rule was remarkably modest but it aroused acute political feeling and rhetoric that reflected ranging claims that it was negating the Irish nation or that it would presage Ireland's withdrawal from the United Kingdom. Yet, once

countenanced, the idea of partition acquired currency as facilitating a compromise and ensuing debate centred on how partition could be effected, both in spatial and temporal terms (See Table 2), on an intricately tessellated territory of respective Home Rule and Unionist supporters. Such debate was tethered to an intensely contested period of party politics that was sensitive to the flow of events. When initially executed in 1920, partition nominally produced two devolutionary administrations that were to remain within the United Kingdom but it contained a key contradictory premise. The Council of Ireland represented an open channel for reunification between the two new entities but the delimitation of political boundary, without paralleling Versailles reference to local inhabitants, was heavily skewed in favour of Unionists who were keen to entrench control in the new Northern Ireland and halt any prospect of unification. Despite it only being an internal partition and only operative in the North (with it proving unenforceable in the South), the 1920 Government of Ireland Act instigated a crucial territorial and functional partition precedent with a momentum that rendered it a *fait accompli* unlikely to be removed completely but necessitating subsequent revision. Until this point, the partition of Ireland had been a widely trailed and recognised concept, if not a universally acclaimed one, having been integrated with the evolution of ideological rationales and the cut and thrust of political tactics that were variably conditioned by fluid political circumstances in Ireland, Britain, and Europe.

**(insert table 2 about here)**

From 1920 onwards, the distinguishing feature of Ireland's partition process was that it continued in a partial, asymmetrical, and elongated fashion. Charting its development in both territorial and functional terms illustrates how the envisaged or executed partition

regimes undergo a corrective mutation of which the 1920 Government of Ireland Act marked a constitutional apex. (See Table 2). The Act served as the template for the subsequent Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921 that not only upgraded the status of the boundary by creating the dominion of the Irish Free State but also mortgaged the reconfiguration of the boundary to the ostensible arbitration of the Irish Boundary Commission. Such a provision had been agreed to by the Irish negotiators upon the misplaced expectation that reducing Northern Ireland's territory would hasten its disintegration and increase subsequent prospects for unity. Yet, the delay in establishing the Commission enabled partition to become further entrenched as the Free State imposed a customs barrier and the Northern Ireland administration initiated local government and electoral reforms that helped stereotype it. The abortive episode of the Boundary Commission catalysed the 1925 Tripartite Boundary Agreement whereby each of the governments of Northern Ireland, the Irish Free State, and the United Kingdom all judged that the *status quo* (barring the abolition of the Council of Ireland that never met) would best serve their respective political interests. Such a tripolar consensus had hitherto proved politically impractical and elusive. In all, during the active partitioning phase of 1912-1925, Ireland required at least three strokes of the legislative axe (in 1920, 1921, and 1925 respectively) to effectively seal partition. This was despite the consequence that Northern Ireland was not a state and the Irish Free State, although given considerable latitude as a British dominion, both domestically and on the international stage, did not remove the symbolic shackles of the British Empire until 1949 when it became a republic.

The partition of Ireland eludes some basic applications of terms and classifications devised within the academic discourse of partition. As with the divided opinion on the actual date or the precise instrument of Ireland's partition, rather than being deemed a single political act, partition is better conceptualised as a process that 'is non-continuous and takes place over an historical time-scale.' (Waterman, 1987: 151). The Irish example highlights the perennial difficulty of attempting to be definitive. The application of Henderson *et al.*'s partitioned country/divided nation typology is conditioned by whether Ireland consists of one nation or not. Similarly, the common presence of the third party in partitions is not strictly applicable to Ireland as Britain was both an external and internal party in the Irish equation. Indeed, the partition of Ireland could be described as an internal partition of the United Kingdom or an external one which upgraded, and provided for alterations of, the partition boundary. Similarly, elements of both O'Leary's procedural and paternalist models may be applied to Britain's partitionist role especially with regard to the Government of Ireland Act and the Anglo-Irish Treaty successively. The most apposite of the theoretical applications discussed is Murphy's conceptualisation of partition as a geographical process, which closely approximates the paving of Ireland's partition experience.

The more empirically based comparative analyses of Ireland and other case studies have elicited some illuminating insights. Considering the undeniable influence of the British State in the prominent cases of Palestine and India, the importance of the partition of Ireland lies in the historical precedent that it set. The parallels with India are particularly extensive with regard to how the triangular party structure and the intricate political

geography manifested themselves. However, if as Mansergh contends, the principles, actors, and dynamics were similar, the details and results were significantly different. This was attributable to the sheer proximity of Ireland to Britain and the fact that their history and politics had been so inextricably linked. The particular idiosyncrasies of Ireland's partition ensured that it contrasted with more conventional partition norms. Not only did it entrench an anomalous tripartite relationship with Britain at its apex but also that each of the two product entities did not possess full independence or in fact the same constitutional status. Given the acquiescence in the location of the partition boundary, there is currency in assuming that political maps, once altered, are readily accepted as *faits accomplis* that are only contested by those with a direct interest. (Waterman 1989: 119). Indeed, with an eye on ameliorating partition's impacts, a salutary lesson of the Irish example, (as shown by rejection of the Boundary Commission and other opportunities to repartition Ireland, and the recent facilitation of cross border political structures), appears to argue that any substantial alterations to partition regimes are more likely to be made successfully in constitutional rather than territorial terms.

Although partition can be aimed at achieving a peaceful resolution of conflict in a swift and practicable manner, it can embody imperfections that can trigger other grounds for conflict. The longevity of the Northern Ireland problem derives significantly from the inadequacies of the original Government of Ireland Act, which incorporated a curious anomaly in partitioning Ireland as well as providing for its reunification. Indeed, while the concept of partition has attracted generic epithets such as 'divide and rule', or 'divide and quit' or 'divide and forced to stay', the anomalous Irish example exhibits elements of

all three. Both Pounds (1964: 161) and Mansergh (1997[1976]: 33) have noted that partition has acquired a 'pejorative' reputation and, for nationalist and liberal sensibilities, it has attracted a stigma of infamy that is only inadequately mitigated by its perceived transience. However, one can argue that there is an instinctive impulse to separate and distinguish antagonists whatever the context and partition has been prominently deployed at inter-state level in seeking to achieve this. It has an established heritage in serving to condense and contain conflict, to address democratic and self-determination ideals, and, for imperial powers, to afford an acceptable exit strategy. However, in habitually substituting one majority/minority situation for another, partition retains a potent capacity to exacerbate conflict as much as curb it. Indeed, one can extrapolate from the Irish example that partition is better understood as a catalytic tactical process that radically reconfigures the political and geographical dimensions of conflict rather than as a decisive political instrument solving it.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Article 12, Articles of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland as signed in London, 6 December 1921

<sup>2</sup> Article 88, Annex 5 of the Treaty of Versailles relates to how in Upper Silesia “regard will be paid to the wishes of the inhabitants as shown by the vote, and to the geographical and economic conditions of the locality.” The Versailles Treaty catered for the meticulous conduct of plebiscites by “communes.” The “as shown by the vote” condition is clearly excised for the Irish adaptation. See <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/imt/partiii.htm> [accessed 08-08-2007] for “Political Clauses for Europe” of the Treaty of Versailles.

<sup>3</sup> Classified as ‘divided nations’ are Germany; Korea; China; Vietnam; Cambodia and Laos; and, Mongolia. Examples of ‘partitioned countries’ are Ireland; India and Pakistan; India, Pakistan and Bangladesh; Ruanda-Urundi (Rwanda-Burundi); and, Palestine-Eretz Israel. (See Henderson *et al.*, 1974).

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**Table 1. Percentage religious composition of Ulster counties in 1911**

| County                     | Catholic % | Non-Catholic % |
|----------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Antrim                     | 20.5       | 79.5           |
| Belfast County Borough     | 24.1       | 75.9           |
| Down                       | 31.6       | 68.4           |
| Londonderry                | 41.5       | 58.5           |
| Armagh                     | 45.3       | 54.7           |
| Tyrone                     | 55.4       | 44.6           |
| Londonderry County Borough | 56.2       | 43.8           |
| Fermanagh                  | 56.2       | 43.8           |
| Monaghan                   | 74.7       | 25.3           |
| Donegal                    | 78.9       | 21.1           |
| Cavan                      | 81.5       | 18.5           |

Source: *Census of Ireland, 1911* (1913)

**Table 2. The evolving bases of partition, 1912-25**

**Failed amendment to Home Rule Bill, 1912 (indefinite partition)**

|                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>South</i></p> <p>A devolved Irish parliament<br/>28 counties<br/>Reduced membership in Westminster<br/>Remains part of the United Kingdom</p> | <p><i>North</i></p> <p>Retains <i>status quo</i><br/>4 counties<br/>Unaltered membership in Westminster<br/>Remains part of the United Kingdom</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Lloyd George proposals, 1916 (uncertain future status)**

|                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>South</i></p> <p>A devolved Irish parliament<br/>26 counties<br/>Reduced membership in Westminster<br/>Remains part of the United Kingdom</p> | <p><i>North</i></p> <p>Retains <i>status quo</i><br/>6 counties<br/>Unaltered membership in Westminster<br/>Remains part of the United Kingdom</p> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Government of Ireland Act, 1920 (indefinite partition)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>South</i></p> <p>A devolved Irish parliament<br/>26 counties<br/>Reduced membership in Westminster<br/>Representation in Council of Ireland<br/>Remains part of the United Kingdom</p> | <p><i>North</i></p> <p>A devolved parliament<br/>6 counties<br/>Reduced membership in Westminster<br/>Representation in Council of Ireland<br/>Remains part of the United Kingdom</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Anglo-Irish Treaty, 1921 (indefinite partition)**

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>South</i></p> <p>A dominion parliament<br/>26 counties (subject to<br/>Boundary Commission)<br/>No membership in Westminster<br/>Representation in Council of Ireland<br/>Becomes part of the Commonwealth</p> | <p><i>North</i></p> <p>A devolved parliament<br/>6 counties (subject to<br/>Boundary Commission)<br/>Reduced membership in Westminster<br/>Representation in Council of Ireland<br/>Remains part of the United Kingdom</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Tripartite Boundary Agreement, 1925 (indefinite partition)**

|                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>South</i></p> <p>A dominion parliament<br/>26 counties<br/>No membership in Westminster<br/>No Council of Ireland<br/>Remains part of the Commonwealth</p> | <p><i>North</i></p> <p>A devolved parliament<br/>6 counties<br/>Reduced membership in Westminster<br/>No Council of Ireland<br/>Remains part of the United Kingdom</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## Figure Captions

Figure 1 Map of Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland

Figure 2: Electoral Victories in Ulster at December 1910 General Election. Source: adapted from Walker (1978: 177-182)

Figure 3:- Distribution of Catholics and Protestants in Ulster Counties in 1911 by District Electoral Division. Source: adapted from *Census of Ireland, 1911* (1913); Davies (1984: 81); and, Foster (1988: 464)

Figure 4 Unionist victories in Ulster (shaded constituencies) at the 1918 General Election. Source: adapted from Walker (1992: 4-9)

Figure 5. 'The Boundary Position' Forecast Source: *Morning Post* (London), 7 November 1925

Figure 6. Irish Boundary Commission Proposals. Source: adapted from Douglas (1982: 112).

## Duplicate Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Article 12, Articles of Agreement for a Treaty between Great Britain and Ireland as signed in London, 6 December 1921

<sup>2</sup> Article 88, Annex 5 of the Treaty of Versailles relates to how in Upper Silesia “regard will be paid to the wishes of the inhabitants as shown by the vote, and to the geographical and economic conditions of the locality.” The Versailles Treaty catered for the meticulous conduct of plebiscites by “communes.” The “as shown by the vote” condition is clearly excised for the Irish adaptation. See <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/imt/partiii.htm> [accessed 08-08-2007] for “Political Clauses for Europe” of the Treaty of Versailles.

<sup>3</sup> Classified as ‘divided nations’ are Germany; Korea; China; Vietnam; Cambodia and Laos; and, Mongolia. Examples of ‘partitioned countries’ are Ireland; India and Pakistan; India, Pakistan and Bangladesh; Ruanda-Urundi (Rwanda-Burundi); and, Palestine-Eretz Israel. (See Henderson *et al.*, 1974).

Figure1

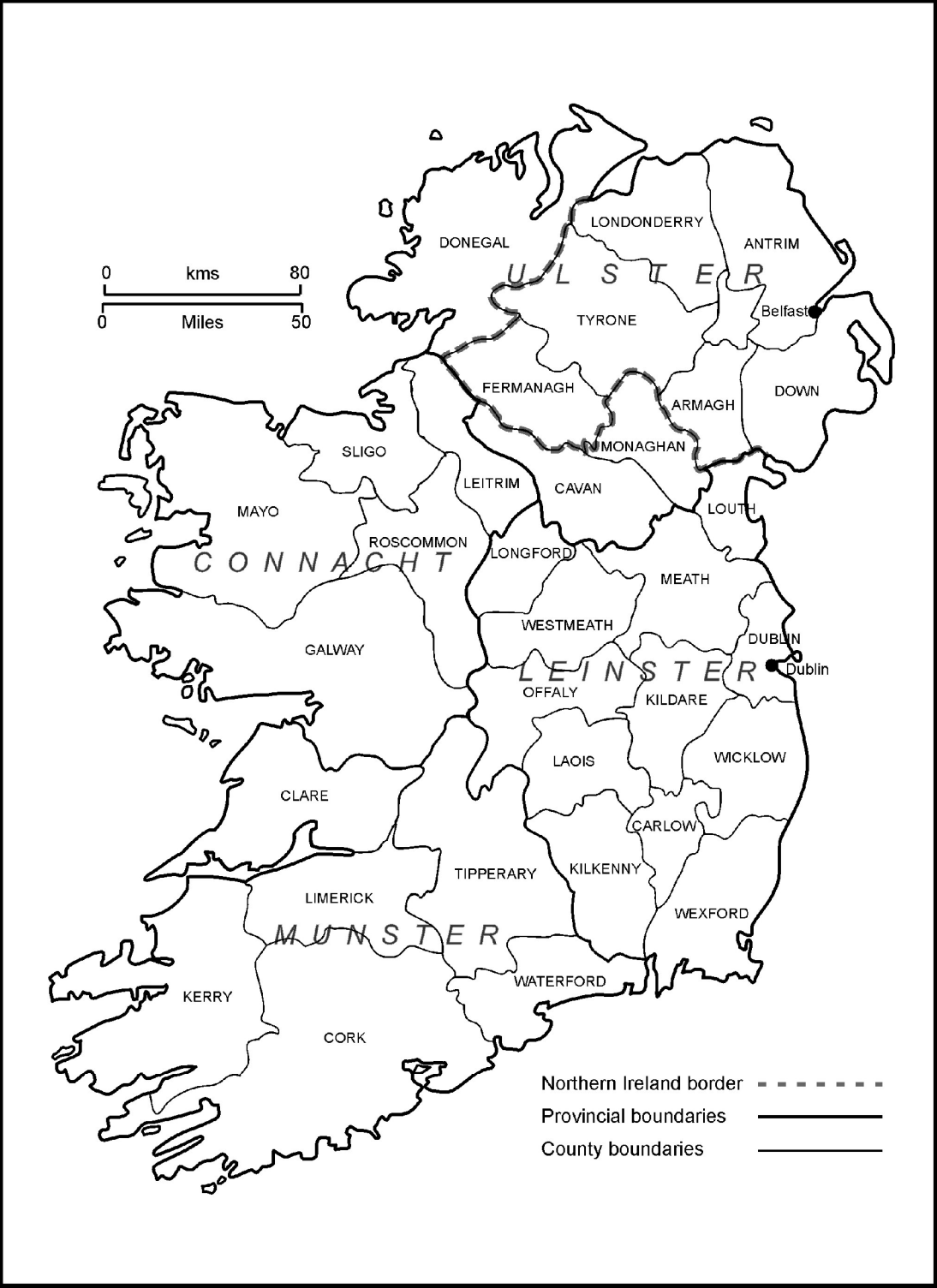


Figure2

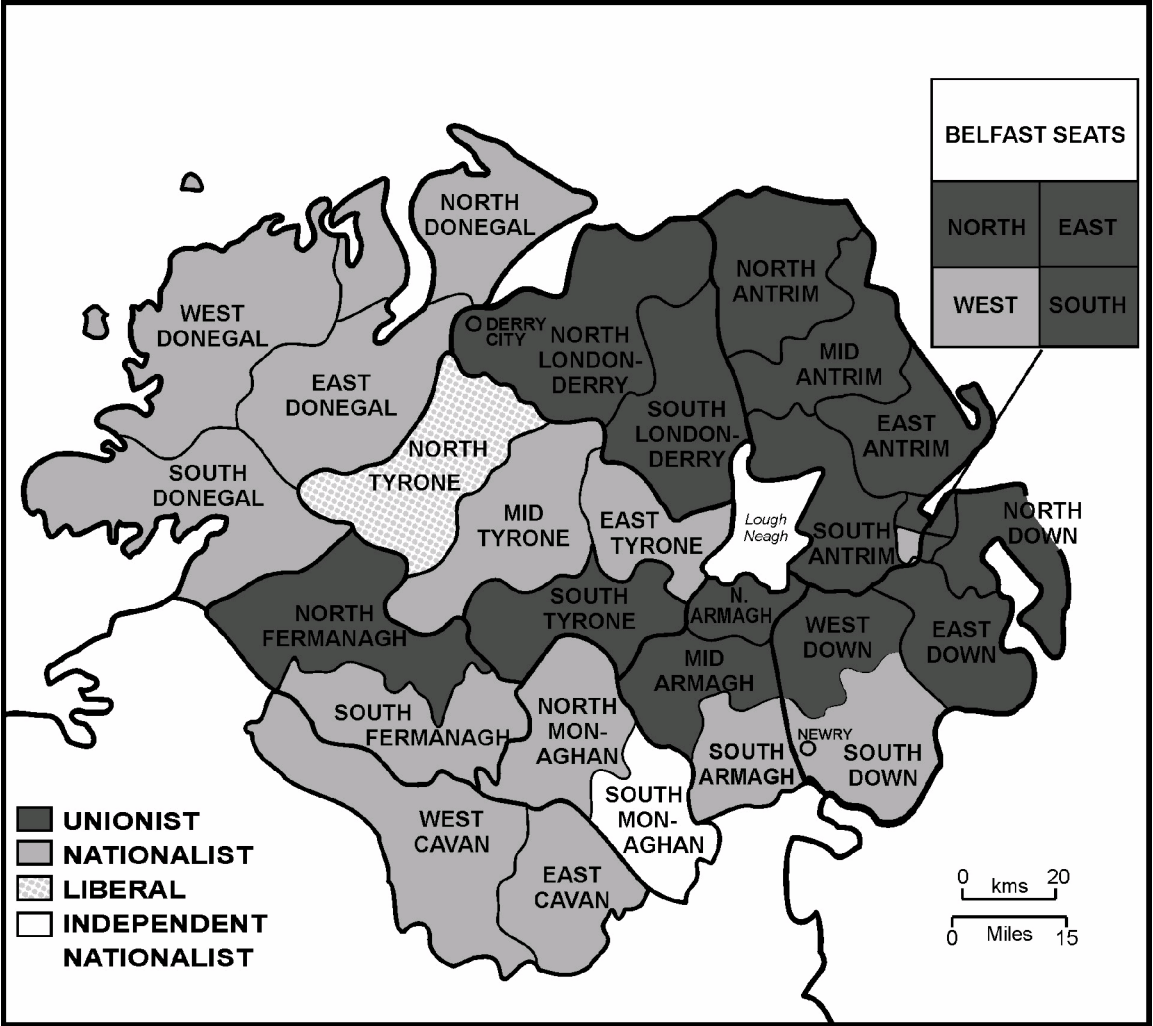


Figure3

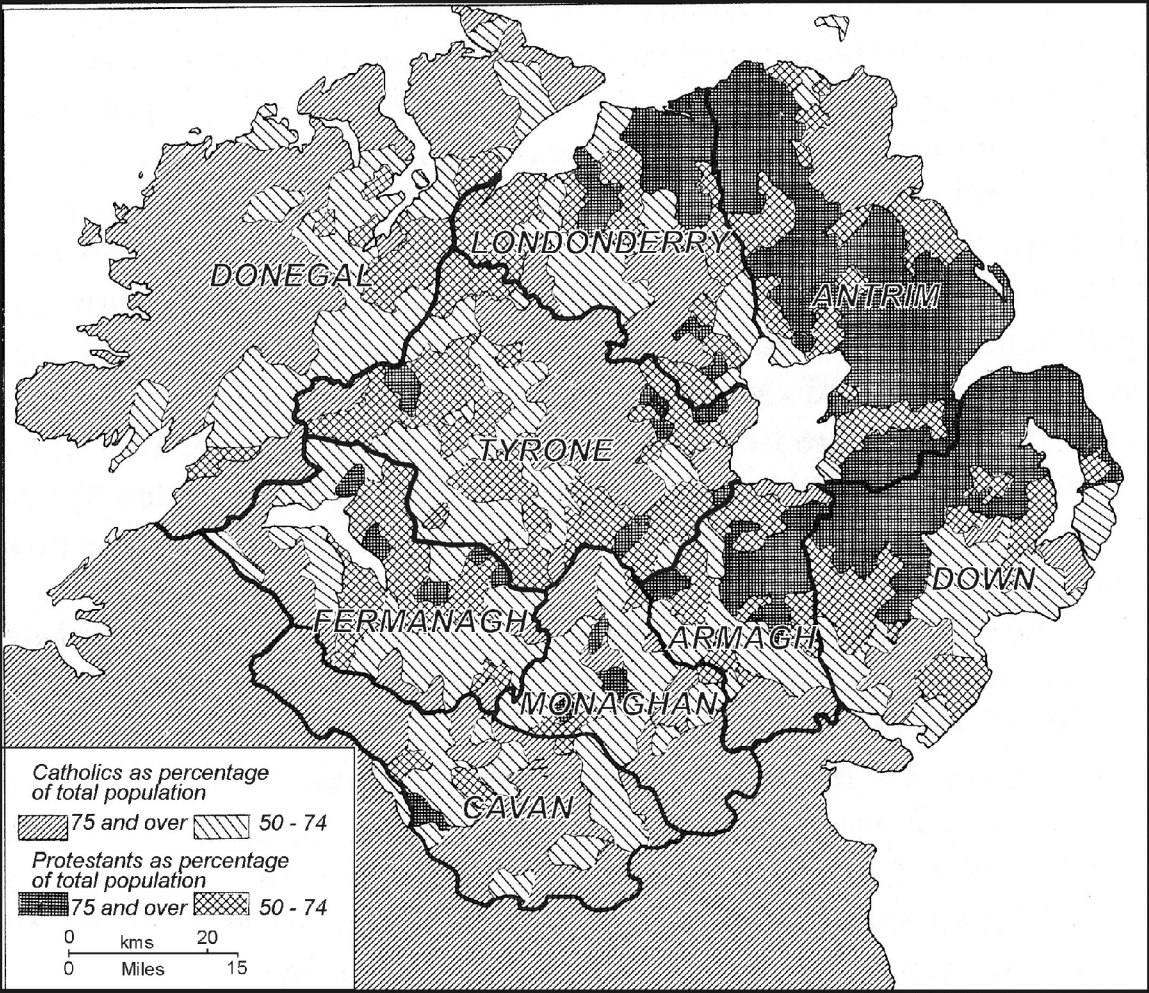


Figure4

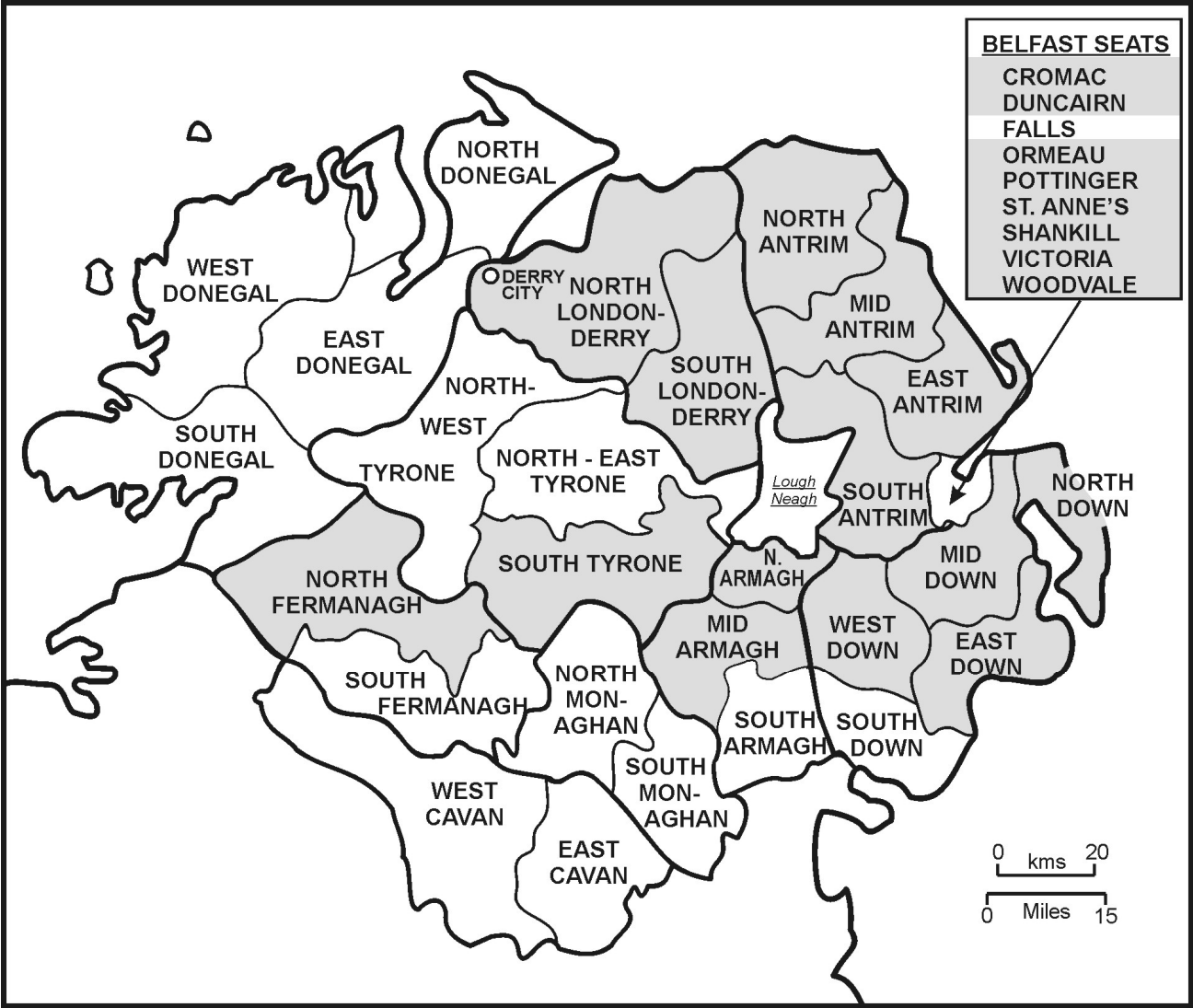


Figure5

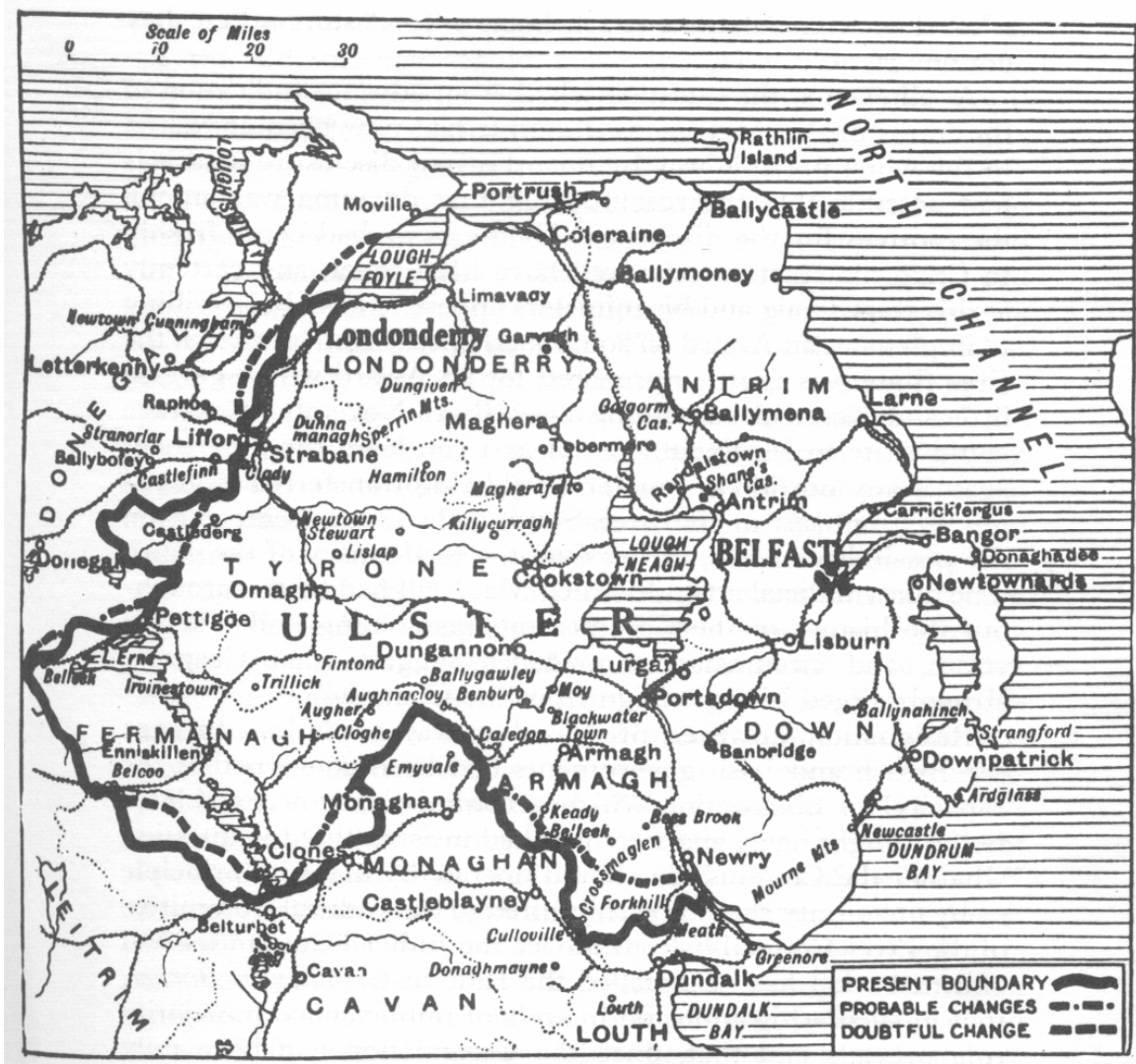


Figure6

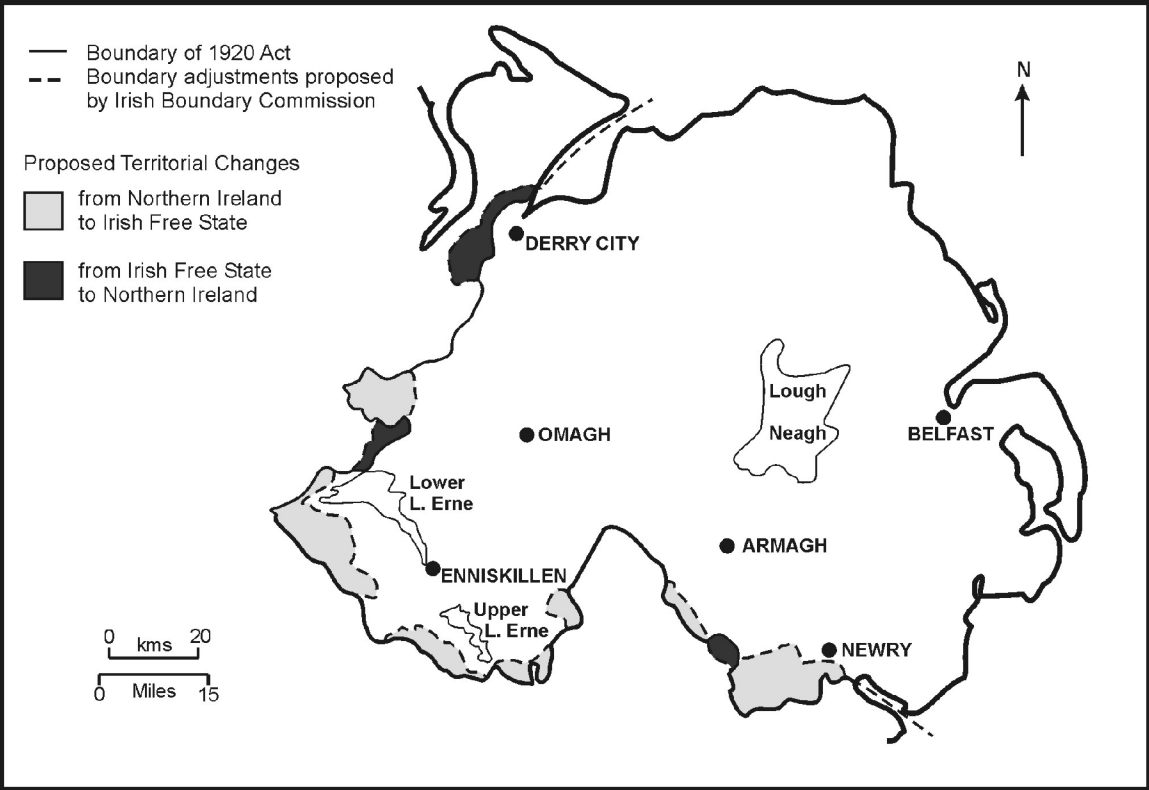


Figure2 colour for web

