

## Introduction: The Tragedy of Two Lunatics

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You remember that village where the border ran  
Down the middle of the street,  
With the butcher and baker in different states?  
Today he remarked how a shower of rain  
Had stopped so cleanly across Golightly's lane  
It might have been a wall of glass  
That has toppled over. He stood there, for ages,  
To wonder which side, if any, he should be on.<sup>1</sup>

### 'The Tragedy of Two Lunatics'

During the early evening of Thursday 3 December 1925, the British prime minister, Stanley Baldwin, made a hurried address to the House of Commons to outline his government's response to the worrying political situation in Ireland. Although he spoke for barely twenty minutes, he was able in that short time to assure the house that, after ten years of violence and political upheaval, the outstanding issues of the divisive Irish question, which had dogged British politics for two generations, had finally been settled.

The ink on the brief agreement he read was barely dry, having been signed a short distance away in his Westminster office less than an hour before. Joining him at that meeting had been his chancellor of the exchequer, Winston Churchill, the only senior British political figure remaining in office from the days of the Ulster Crisis thirteen years earlier.<sup>2</sup> Also in attendance were the premiers of the two new Irish states; Northern Ireland's James Craig and William Cosgrave, the leader of the recently established Irish Free State. By 1925, the two men headed exhausted and deeply compromised regimes. Both had recently steered their embryonic states through the trauma of bitter civil wars, and now faced the monumental task of building effective

<sup>1</sup> Paul Muldoon 'The Boundary Commission', in *Why Brownlee Left* (London, 1980), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill's pivotal role in the Irish policy of successive British governments has been explored insightfully in Paul Bew's recent *Churchill and Ireland* (Oxford, 2016).

2 Introduction: The Tragedy of Two Lunatics

governments in their impoverished states in the face of strident opposition from political and religious minorities. That afternoon in Baldwin's office would be the last time they, or any two Irish leaders, met face to face for the next forty years.

The presence of the final two individuals at the impromptu conference, Richard Feetham and Joseph Fisher, had been demanded by the latest crisis to beset the ailing partition settlement. Feetham, a senior South African colonial judge, had been appointed chairman of an Irish Boundary Commission the previous year. Along with representatives from the two new Irish governments, Feetham, who had never set foot in Ireland before, was handed the formidable task of deciding how best to adjust the new three-year old border so as 'to reflect the wishes of the inhabitants, as far as economic and geographic conditions'<sup>3</sup> would allow. For months, they, and their tiny retinues of staff, had toured around the frontier, taking soundings at public meetings and poring over a bewildering array of maps and statistics in order to come to their decision.

However, four weeks prior to the meeting in Baldwin's office, as they prepared the commission's report for final publication, its confidential findings found their way into the right-wing British press. Unbeknown to those attending the meeting, it was Fisher, erstwhile newspaper editor and the Belfast government's de facto representative on the commission, who is now believed to have been the source of the leak. The fact that he had been parachuted in at the last minute when the uncooperative unionist government refused to nominate its own member of the commission, added to the surreal atmosphere which pervaded the whole affair.

The most damaging aspect of the subsequent scandalous news report, published in the *Morning Post* on 7 November, was the inclusion of a hand-drawn map which, although crude, was uncannily accurate in reflecting the commission's final decision. It showed that, despite suffering some slight trims at the edges, Northern Ireland would remain largely as it had been envisioned in 1919, even unexpectedly gaining some territory from the Free State in the shape of a significant chunk of Donegal to the west of the majority Catholic city of Derry.

To southern nationalist eyes this was not the way the commission had meant to play out. For years Irish nationalist propaganda had poured scorn on the perfidy of the northern state and the injustice of the border, enclosing as it did hundreds of thousands of Catholics within its jurisdiction. Even in its most conservative estimates, the expectation had been that the commission

<sup>3</sup> 'Final Text of the Articles of Agreement between Great Britain and Ireland', London, 6 December 1921, [www.difp.ie/docs/1921/Anglo-Irish-Treaty/214.htm](http://www.difp.ie/docs/1921/Anglo-Irish-Treaty/214.htm).

would award them the majority-Catholic counties of Fermanagh and Tyrone (what Herbert Asquith once called ‘the Alsace-Lorraine of Ireland’), Derry city and large southern sections of the counties of Down and Armagh.

In response to the leaked report, all hell was let loose in the South. Public opinion, mediated through a vociferous nationalist press, was outraged. Not only would the Free State not gain the third of Ulster territory that they had expected, but would actually lose significant areas of the north-west, further impoverishing and isolating the region. Feetham, it appeared, had viewed his remit to be one of shortening and rationalising the sprawling border between the two states, rather than attempting any wholesale dismemberment of the new Northern Ireland. The Dublin representative on the body, Eoin MacNeill, who was not present at the December meeting, resigned from the commission on 17 November. One week later, the humiliated minister of education would resign from the Free State government all together. Even so, Feetham and Fisher technically had the power to publish the report regardless, a situation which Cosgrave felt would have led to the collapse of his government and potentially the Free State itself.

In response, a frantic series of meetings were organised at the prime ministerial residence at Chequers to hammer out some form of compromise, with the Dublin government calling forcefully for the report to be suppressed. Kevin O’Higgins, the uncompromising Free State minister for justice, who himself was to be assassinated eighteen months later in Dublin, excoriated the commission’s methodology and pro-unionist bias, while an exasperated Cosgrave requested that the report be ‘buried or burned’.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, after much debate, a hasty trade-off was agreed. The border was to remain unchanged, circling six of Ulster’s nine counties, just as it had been envisioned in the Government of Ireland Act of 1920. To sweeten the pill of partition, the Free State government was to be alleviated of its responsibility for paying off the British war debt, as had been outlined in Article 5 of the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty. O’Higgins was well-aware that his government would be open to accusations of selling the Northern Catholic minority, which he described candidly as ‘more than a half truth’.<sup>5</sup> However, he also suspected that any areas transferred would prove to be a constant source of dissent whichever side was awarded them, so perhaps would be more trouble than they were worth. To this end, the Council of Ireland, part of the original partition act and

<sup>4</sup> G. J. Hand, *Report of the Irish Boundary Commission 1925* (Dublin, 1969), p. ix.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Draft notes on a conference held in the Board Room, Treasury, Whitehall, London, 1 December 1925’, National Archives of Ireland (NAI), Department of the Taoiseach, S4720A.

4 Introduction: The Tragedy of Two Lunatics

once painted as an embryonic all-Ireland government in waiting, was to be abolished. Its powers were devolved to the two new administrations and this last gesture to Irish unity quietly discarded.

It was decided that the findings of the Boundary Commission itself should not be made public, much to the chagrin of Feetham who never got over the disparagement of his lovingly prepared report which he had gone at with such conservative diligence. Churchill, however, ever the historian, expressed the opinion that the report should be retained for posterity, at the government's discretion, 'as it may prove of interest to later generations'<sup>6</sup>. In the end, it would not be made public until 1969, just in time for the irrationality of partition to once again play out in the violence of the 'Troubles'.

It was perhaps fitting that the final act of the partition drama should end in such confusion and farce. The crisis of November 1925 was not the first time the agreement looked to be on the verge of collapse. Far from it. Since its unveiling by the then-prime minister David Lloyd George in December 1919, the partition plan had gone through numerous crises and hasty amendments. Behind the myriad of calculations loomed the deep confusion and expediency of the plan, to get out of Ireland with as little trouble or cost as possible. In every sense this was an attempt at partition on the cheap. In the end, the process of dividing Ireland would cost a fortune. Due to the poor fundamentals of the plan, money would be poured into Ireland in the intervening six years merely to hold the fragile settlement together, both from the threat of violence and to compensate or subdue forgotten and marginalised groups.

Baldwin ended his impromptu speech by expressing the hope that the agreement be passed by the three governments as soon as possible, 'before anyone could change their mind again', according to the *Guardian*.<sup>7</sup> He was not to be disappointed. The new settlement and the dissolution of the Boundary Commission was accepted and passed within two weeks. As he was leaving the Commons, a backbench Tory MP expressed the opinion that news of this final resolution 'will have been heard with relief and pleasure by the whole of the English-speaking world'.<sup>8</sup> The chaotic and bloody process of partitioning Ireland was finally over.

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The failure of those who instigated and sustained the partition project to grasp the crucial role it would play in shaping the social, political and cultural character of modern Ireland has been mirrored to some extent in

<sup>6</sup> Hand, *Boundary Commission*, p. xi.    <sup>7</sup> Editorial, *Guardian*, 27 December 1925, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> Hansard, HC vol 122, cols 875–979 (25 December 1925).

popular and academic reconstructions of the period. Historical understandings of partition have remained as ambiguous as those which pervaded the minds of the partitioners back in the early 1920s. While the division of the island into two antithetical states represents the most fundamental change in twentieth-century Ireland, partition as a topic sits very much on the periphery of historical scholarship.

There are very few dedicated histories of partition amid the healthy abundance of modern Irish historical writing on the revolutionary period, and the subject remains a notably under-researched area. This is particularly striking, as the partition experience of other postcolonial states has inspired a rich and vigorous historiography. For example, the partitions of Palestine and India, especially the latter, have been the subject of reams of historical analysis and inspired the creation of several schools and research centres devoted to their study. Much like these other instances in Asia and the Middle East, partition seems to define the Irish experience in the twentieth century. As a historical process they share many similarities: a rapid postwar decolonisation set against the backdrop of nationalist ‘revolution’, followed by an ill-conceived and clumsy attempt to transfer power, and midwived by a cynical and war-weary British establishment. All of these partitions were made workable only through repeated short-term modifications to the plan and unspeakable acts of violence, leaving behind embittered minorities and a legacy of acrimony and political instability. While the recent ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland has played a key role in shaping the agendas and perspectives of a whole generation of modern Irish historians, this has not led to any subsequent sustained analysis of the causes, course and consequences of partition.

Indeed, rather than any sustained analysis of partition, historians have discovered amid the chaotic political and social changes which engulfed Ireland during the decade which spanned the First World War, an ‘Irish revolution’, a period which saw the rise of advanced forms of nationalism and the subsequent violent upheavals of separatist rebellion. The foundation myths which emerged to shape the new southern state were firmly based around nationalist sentiment and the perceived historic evils of British rule. Partition was both subsumed within and oddly sidelined in this process.

For all the concern of the current generation of Irish historians to understand the origins and dynamics of communal conflict in Northern Ireland, partition has escaped convincing assimilation into broadly accepted narratives. By its very nature, partition, much like the frontier itself, sits in a no-man’s land between competing national histories. As a topic, it challenges objective statist accounts and the homogeneous communal identities they demand. It is often allowed to metaphorically fall between these emerging

6 Introduction: The Tragedy of Two Lunatics

cracks, or, as one Indian historian has written, partition ‘folds into a black impenetrable line . . . and simply disappears’.<sup>9</sup>

Partition certainly occupies an uncertain place in historical narratives of the period, even for historians whose primary focus is on the north-east. Although the creation of Northern Ireland retains a relatively more significant profile in the narrative of Ulster Protestant history, its link with that broader context remains deeply ambiguous. Recent centenary commemorations in Ulster, for example, have focused on the earlier Ulster Crisis and First World War, with its mass mobilisations of Ulster Volunteers and Covenanters, or the sacrifice of the 36th Ulster Division at the Somme, rather than the foundation of the six-county state itself. The fact that the establishment of Northern Ireland entailed a partition, not only of Ireland, but also Ulster itself, not to mention the overall Irish Protestant population, has confounded simplistic narrative categorisation. The experience of the ‘Troubles’, subsequent power-sharing, development of cross-border bodies and the open borders implicit in European Union membership, not to mention Brexit, have made this historiographical placement all the more problematic.

Certainly, in retellings of the period there has been a tendency to reduce modern Irish history to a teleological biography of the southern nation state, focusing in particular on the growth and inner workings of the nationalist movement, its triumphs and failures, and the conversion experiences of its leaders and adherents.<sup>10</sup> The repeated revisiting of iconic events such as the Easter Rising demonstrates how dominant this nationalist narrative remains.<sup>11</sup> Historians themselves have inadvertently fuelled popular misconceptions by using nationalist frameworks and periodisation to place partition safely within the broader national story. Of course, without partition, the narrative presents a more straightforward and relatable story; a typical nationalist triptych of suffering, struggle and deliverance, followed by a focus on the challenges and achievements of state formation.<sup>12</sup> However, as Lindsay Crawford, the Canadian unionist wrote in 1920:

<sup>9</sup> Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia* (New York, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Roy Foster’s recent book *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890–1923* (London, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> The two most prominent major studies of the Easter Rising are F. McGarry, *The Rising: Easter 1916* (Oxford, 2011) and C. Townshend, *Easter 1916: The Irish Rebellion* (London, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Notable, for example, is the periodisation of the Irish Revolution which ends in 1923 with the end of the southern civil war, rather than with the more logical 1925 with the final settlement of the boundary issue. Popular portrayals of the period are similarly southern-centric. See, for example, the recent RTE documentary based on the *Atlas of the Irish Revolution* (Cork, 2017) ends in 1921 with the termination of the War of Independence, thus avoiding more ambiguous and divisive topics such as the Irish Civil War and partition itself.

‘The Irish Question is an Ulster Question. If there were no Ulster, the Irish question could be solved overnight.’<sup>13</sup>

While the history of partition would become in subsequent decades largely a battle between contrary narratives of revolutionary deliverance and resistance, for much of the partition period itself, both Irish unionism and Irish nationalism were themselves only works in progress and remained in a state of flux.<sup>14</sup> These two dominant revolutionary parties of the partition period would be responsible for constructing the states which emerged. Often themselves merely a bundle of assumptions and prejudices in search of legitimacy, they further distorted or evaded key questions as to how and why the island was divided. Indeed, successive governments in both new Irish capitals have worked hard to instil statist narratives and set limits to their new empires through the control of historical archives and in the institution of a host of political and cultural symbols. In 1928, D. A. Chart, the deputy keeper of public records in Belfast, felt already well-enough equipped to write a full biography of the new Ulster state entitled *A History of Northern Ireland*, despite it’s having existed for barely six years. This ambitious feat was achieved by ranging back centuries to uncover an ‘old country’, a historic Ulster which, through the use of historical slight of hand, Chart made co-terminus with the recently and arbitrarily drawn boundary line. Indeed, ironically, despite the book’s title, little mention was made of Northern Ireland’s recent history and the opposition and violence which had threatened unionist hegemony or the use of state-sponsored coercion and discrimination to maintain it.<sup>15</sup>

Hindsight has done much to lessen the dramatic impact of partition. Looking back, the division of the island and the creation of a separate state in Ulster has become for many almost a historical inevitability. To this end, historians have scoured the pre-partition landscape for evidence to confirm the development of ‘two nations’ in Ireland, both shaped by

<sup>13</sup> L. Crawford, *The Problem of Ulster* (Toronto, 1920), p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Compare, for example, the two radically contradictory takes on the period from Brian Follis in his *A State under Siege: The Establishment of Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 1995) and Michael Farrell’s, *Arming the Protestants: The Formation of the Ulster Special Constabulary and the Royal Ulster Constabulary 1920–1927* (London, 1983).

<sup>15</sup> D. A. Chart, *A History of Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1928). A similar partitionist assumption has underlain many works from southern historians writing modern histories of ‘Ireland’. A good example of this is Dermot Keogh’s *Twentieth Century Ireland: Revolution and State Building* (Dublin, 2005), which, despite its avowed aim of writing a history of Ireland and offering a ‘narrative of inclusion’, goes on to state in the next line, ‘This book does not deal with the politics of Northern Ireland except in so far as they impinge on the life of the Saorstatz’ p. 15. For a good summary of the problems posed by two-nations history see Paul Bew’s ‘Against Partitionist History’ in his *Ideology and the Irish Question: Ulster Unionism and Irish Nationalism, 1912–1916* (Oxford, 1998).

8 Introduction: The Tragedy of Two Lunatics

incompatible social, cultural and political trajectories. Such arguments view Irish history through a rear-view mirror. There was as much difference between Leinster and the west of Ireland in terms of culture, economy, history and language as there was between Ulster and the rest of Ireland, making, with the use of identical criteria, three ‘nations’ in Ireland. This dangerous historicist interpretation has influenced some of the most iconic historical works of modern Irish history, many of which have been implicitly partitionist in their assumptions. In his seminal 1962 monograph, *The Irish Border as a Cultural Divide: A Contribution to the Study of Regionalism in the British Isles*, Dutch historical geographer Marcus Heslinga shaped much later scholarship with his contention that the Irish border represents an extension of a deeper millennium-old cultural divide in the British Isles. In the words of one of his admirers, Heslinga painted the border and the ‘Ulster’ it contained as ‘a cross channel extension of the Scottish border, marking off . . . the *scoticized* part of Ireland from the most anglicized part’, with, in the author’s own words, ‘the intervening seas . . . only a geological creation of yesterday’.<sup>16</sup> During the following decade, A. T. Q. Stewart’s *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster, 1609–1979*, arguably the most influential contribution to the study of Ulster distinctiveness, expanded on Heslinga’s work by drawing ‘on the hidden patterns of the past’ to highlight Ulster’s singular historical destiny.<sup>17</sup>

Writing in the shadow of the Northern Irish ‘Troubles’, Stewart and many subsequent historians, presented a paradigm which saw Ulster as a place of enduring and endemic sectarian strife, and partition less its cause than its result. As such, it was obliquely suggested that partition rather than exacerbating violence and division, actually acted to hold these darker forces of division at bay. As Stewart himself wrote: ‘Whatever the “Ulster Question” is in Irish history, it is not the question of partition.’<sup>18</sup> In a broader sense, they were keen to challenge nationalist shibboleths about the island’s assumed political unity which saw partition as, in the words of John Redmond, ‘an unnatural abomination and a blasphemy’.<sup>19</sup> As such, they presupposed the existence of two distinct

<sup>16</sup> M. W. Heslinga, *The Irish Border as a Cultural Divide: A Contribution to the Study of Regionalism in the British Isles* (Assen, 1962). For an admiring overview of the work and influence of Heslinga, see A. Green, ‘Homage to Heslinga’ in *Forging the Smithy: National Identity and Representation in Anglo-Irish Literary History* (Amsterdam, 1995) pp. 145–9.

<sup>17</sup> A. T. Q. Stewart, *The Narrow Ground: Aspects of Ulster, 1609–1979* (London, 1977).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in John Bowman, *De Valera and the Ulster Question, 1917–1973* (Oxford, 1982), p. 14.



pre-partition national entities in Ireland.<sup>20</sup> However, the inherent paradox of such arguments against an illusory nationalist historical geography was that they were achieved by the championing of a similarly imagined portrayal of unionism in the six north-eastern counties of Ulster. As Mary Burgess has insightfully observed, such perspectives must be seen in the light of ‘a long and complex effort by unionists to manufacture a sense in which the Northern Irish state has always “really” existed . . . the myth of the always-and-ever separateness of Ulster’.<sup>21</sup>

Such pro-partitionist arguments are nothing new. They have had a long and well-rehearsed history in the political discourse surrounding the Irish Question, stretching back to the failed attempts to introduce Home Rule to Ireland in the late-Victorian era. Indeed, many of these arguments were employed by leading politicians seeking support for the idea of dividing Ireland during the genesis of the partition plan itself. In 1912, Liberal MP Thomas Agar-Robartes, the first politician to seriously propose a partitionist answer to the Irish Question, claimed in the House of Commons:

I think everyone will admit that Ireland consists of two nations different in sentiment, character, history, and religion. I maintain it is absolutely impossible to fuse these two incongruous elements together. It is as impossible as to try to reconcile the irreconcilable.<sup>22</sup>

Similar assumptions were expressed by most of the leading government figures of the day, including Lloyd George who, in the spring of 1917, made a comparison worthy of Heslinga, claiming in a Common’s speech that the Protestant population of Ulster were, ‘as alien in blood, in religious faith, in traditions, in outlook from the rest of Ireland as the inhabitants of Fife or Aberdeen’.<sup>23</sup> From Thomas McKnight’s *Ulster as It Is*, published in 1896 shortly after the collapse of the Second Home Rule

<sup>20</sup> A good example of such presuppositions can be found in M. Laffan, *The Partition of Ireland, 1912–1925* (Dundalgen, 1983), which sets out its stall on the first page with the sentence, ‘Ulster had always been different from the rest of the country’ (p. 1). See also Ian Adamson, *The Identity of Ulster: The Land, the Language and the People* (Belfast, 1982) and D. G. Pringle, *One Island, Two Nations: A Political Geographical Analysis of the National Conflict in Ireland* (Letchworth, 1985). See also F. S. L. Lyons, ‘Ulster: The Roots of Difference’, in *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland, 1890–1939* (Oxford, 1979). Stewart’s work should also be viewed as a response to a rise in nationalist anti-partition apologetics in the 1950s inspired by the work of the Anti-Partition League. See, in particular, Denis Gwynn’s seminal, *The History of Partition, 1912–1925* (London, 1950). Other similar works include A. J. Rose, *Partition and Ireland* (Dublin, 1955) and F. Gallagher, *The Indivisible Island* (Cork, 1957).

<sup>21</sup> M. Burgess, ‘Mapping the Narrow Ground: Geography, History and Partition’, *Field Day Review*, vol. 1 (2005), p. 124.

<sup>22</sup> Hansard, HC vol 39, cols 744–824 (11 June 1912).

<sup>23</sup> Hansard, HC vol 38, cols 424–42 (7 March 1917).

bill, through to William Money Penny's *The Two Irish Nations*, written in the summer of 1913 during the increasingly polarising atmosphere of the Ulster Crisis, such arguments, much like those made by Stewart and his contemporaries, cannot be divorced from the political context in which they were voiced and the central role they played in the virulent unionist propaganda campaigns against the threat of resurgent Irish nationalism.<sup>24</sup>

The power and longevity of the 'two nations' perspective has led to partition being portrayed as the logical, if crude, conferral of statehood on already homogeneous communities. As such, much of the dynamism has been taken out of the process itself. Historical writing on partition has largely focused on the pre-partition Ulster Crisis or the high politics of the period, a top-down process centred on Westminster and Whitehall.<sup>25</sup> While there is much value in this high politics approach, it has inadvertently led to a tendency to reduce partition to a dry and dusty act of administrative chicanery. While backs were turned and more momentous events occurred elsewhere, Ireland was partitioned from afar almost by stealth. The recent trend in Irish historical scholarship to examine the revolution from the bottom-up has made limited impact on the study of Ulster during the period and remains largely a twenty-six-county phenomenon.<sup>26</sup> While the focus of this study is on Ulster and the creation of Northern Ireland, it should be remembered that partition saw the founding of two states, not one. It was in the words of one contemporary journalist 'the tragedy of two lunatics'.<sup>27</sup> Historical narratives which continue to view the political upheavals which occurred in places as different as the mountains of Kerry and the grubby backstreets of West Belfast as part of subdivided national stories must be put aside. So central was partition to the Irish experience that it couldn't help but affect people right across the island, even those living hundreds of miles from the new

<sup>24</sup> T. McKnight, *Ulster as It Is* (London, 1896); W. Money Penny, *Two Irish Nations* (London, 1913).

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Laffan, *The Partition of Ireland, 1912–1925*; T. Hennessey, *Dividing Ireland: World War One and Partition* (Abingdon, 1998); G. Lewis, *Carson: The Man Who Divided Ireland* (London, 2004); A. T. Q. Stewart, *The Ulster Crisis: Resistance to Home Rule, 1912–14* (London, 1969); G. Boyce and A. O'Day, eds *The Ulster Crisis, 1885–1921* (London, 2005) and A. Jackson, *The Irish Party: Ulster Unionists in the House of Commons, 1884–1911* (Oxford, 1989).

<sup>26</sup> The most notable of the many recent local studies of the period are P. Hart, *The IRA and Its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork, 1916–1923* (Oxford, 1998); D. Fitzpatrick, *Politics and Irish Life, 1913–21: Provincial Experience of War and Revolution* (Cork, 1998); M. Farry, *Aftermath of Revolution: Sligo, 1921–23* (Dublin, 2000); M. Coleman, *County Longford and the Irish Revolution, 1910–1923* (Dublin, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> P. W. Wilson, 'The Irish Free State', *The North American Review*, vol. 215, no. 796 (March 1922), pp. 322–30.

border, not to mention its deep and abiding impact on the character of diaspora communities in Britain and North America.

This book seeks to interrupt these dominant and long-running narratives. In reality, partition was a chaotic, confused and, at times, surreal process, far removed from the ‘natural’ conferral of statehood on pre-existing homogeneous populations imagined by the partitioners and later historians. As such, this study looks to differentiate itself from earlier scholarship by going beyond the irredentist claims of all governments and examining the way partition was constructed and imagined by Irish people themselves. It was by definition a mass participation event where political decision-making was shaped by elections, demonstrations, popular refusal to participate in the new states’ institutions and the direct experience of savage and unprecedented acts of violence in defence or opposition to the new settlement. Partition was a period of deep contradictions, where idealism and self-sacrifice were intermingled with brutality and coercion. Dividing Ireland entailed a series of ill-conceived and ad hoc responses to unpredictable and unprecedented political developments, ushering in a human tragedy. Indeed, violence was to be the constant background noise to partition. Far from being a necessary evil reluctantly embraced by all sides to drive on the more enlightened goals of freedom and democracy, partition was, in a very real sense, brought about through violence and the threat of force.

Ireland is notable for the diversity of its violence; guerrilla ambushes, vigilante punishments, reprisal killings, political assassination, mass protests and urban rioting were all features of the Irish experience. Until relatively recently there has been a tendency by historians to favour examination of certain types of violence over others. While the minute details of provincial ambushes and the genesis and workings of revolutionary guerrilla warfare have been analysed in excruciating detail, this has been achieved at the expense of a focus on more unsavoury incidents such as mass rioting, communal expulsions and intimidation. Contained within these were numerous stories of murder, mutilation, arson and sectarian massacres which did not sit well with state foundation myths and their martial pretensions. Only recently, with the move towards local and county studies, have what Gemma Clark has dubbed ‘everyday violence’ in her recent study of the Irish Civil War been more fully explored.<sup>28</sup> However, there has been less extensive study of such experiences in Ulster, where this type of popular mass violence predominated. The vast majority of the violence of partition remains murky and largely forgotten and the memories of its victims uncollected, unlike those of the many paramilitaries who received the blessing of the new partition states.

<sup>28</sup> G. Clark, *Everyday Violence in the Irish Civil War* (Cambridge, 2017).

As such, this book also focuses on the too-often forgotten losers and victims of partition. The new settlements of 1922 saw the victory of the two most authoritarian parties in Ireland: Ulster unionists and pro-treaty Sinn Féin, both of whom asserted their new state power by coercion and force of arms, instilling their own statist narrative on events. This shared winner's history left many losers in its wake in the shape of political and religious minorities: Northern Catholics, Southern Protestants, socialists, republicans, moderate Home Rulers, refugees and a whole host of others who simply found themselves on the wrong side of the border or fell by the wayside in the rush to narrow Irish identity to a simple for or against duality. They are thus the great leftovers from partition and can also be considered its chief and most troubling legacy. Partition swept away a vast array of traditional institutions, mentalities and certainties. With partition, the Ireland people had known effectively ceased to exist and was replaced by two other entities. How people made sense of these changes and the way in which the new states communicated their legitimacy and asserted their new power over them is the chief aim of this study.<sup>29</sup>

By 1925, Ireland had been split into two oppositional states embodying rival religious and political identities, a state of affairs unthinkable only a decade before. All of these changes took place in the midst of desperate confusion and uncertainty, long before the states and their historians had managed to construct a meaningful narrative which could be sold to ordinary Irish people. The narratives which emerged, of nationalism and mass support in elections and political organisations, have proved the simple building blocks for the two versions of Ireland and their claims to legitimacy. Placing an X on a ballot paper, haranguing a speaker at a rally or lighting a candle for a dead martyr have been used simplistically to demonstrate that it was the people who demanded partition and turned it into an earthly reality. For people themselves, however, partition was not a final settlement, but rather the start of a far more disquieting journey which saw them decide how to rebuild their old familiar identities anew in the states which emerged in its aftermath.

<sup>29</sup> Some attention has begun to turn to minority groups in Ireland of late. See, for example, R. Bury, *Buried Lives: The Protestants of Southern Ireland* (Dublin, 2017); M. Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster: A History* (London, 2000).