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# **Territoriality and Order in the North of Ireland**

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## **Abstract**

This article draws on the recent academic literature on territoriality and power to analyze territorial strategies for the maintenance of public order in the north of Ireland. It argues that these strategies were decisively shaped by the distinctive relationship between the informal internal ethnonational boundaries which were a central focus of Frank Wright's work and the external boundary of the Northern Ireland state. As a consequence, the 'internal' issue of policing was immediately and inextricably bound up with the outer boundary of the state, even at the level of everyday policing practices. It traces the way in which the state in Northern Ireland adopted particular territorial strategies to secure the external border and adapt to internal territorial unevenness from the outset. It argues that order was necessarily maintained through a limited recognition of the distinctive ethnonational character of particular areas within the state, and by distinctive territorial strategies for the maintenance of order in such areas. Internal unevenness in sovereign control strictly limited the possibilities for internal territorial homogenisation and hindered the related naturalisation of the external boundary and the state itself.

Keywords: policing, territoriality, ethnic conflict, Northern Ireland

## **Internal order, external border**

The intersection between territoriality, order and violence was a central focus in the work of Frank Wright. This article draws on the recent academic literature on territoriality and power to address this intersection. It analyzes territorial strategies for the maintenance of public order in the north of Ireland and argues that these strategies were decisively shaped by the distinctive relationship between informal internal ethnonational boundaries and the external boundary of the Northern Ireland state. As a consequence, the 'internal' issue of policing was immediately and inextricably bound up with the outer boundary of the state, even at the level of everyday policing practices. It traces the way in which the state in Northern Ireland adopted particular territorial strategies to secure the external border and adapt to internal territorial unevenness from the outset. It argues that order was necessarily maintained through a limited recognition of the distinctive ethnonational character of particular areas within the state, and by distinctive territorial strategies for the maintenance of order in such areas. Despite the international border, the all-Ireland context continued to shape internal order in the North. Internal unevenness in sovereign control strictly limited the possibilities for internal territorial homogenisation and hindered the related naturalisation of the external boundary and the state itself.

## **Territoriality and order in the work of Frank Wright**

From the first sentence of *Northern Ireland: a Comparative Analysis* Frank Wright's central concern with space, place and territory is clear. The book begins with the words "The places I call ethnic frontiers..." and the spatial contrast Wright presents in

that first paragraph between the densely concentrated power of the metropolis and the distant blurred space of the ethnic frontier is the central organising metaphor of the book. For Wright, the relationship between a metropolitan ‘sanctuary’ and the ‘chronic territorial force fields’ of ethnic shatter-zones far from the centres of power is critical to understanding social relationships at a variety of scales. Throughout the book the concepts of frontier, territory and territoriality recur on almost every page and Wright explicitly frames his discussion of class, sectarianism, conflict and power in relation to powerful territorial frameworks that shape and structure social relationships at a variety of scales. One of Wright’s central achievements is to illuminate the relationship between territorial frameworks and power at a variety of scales, in local ethnic spaces, local and regional administrative frameworks and the international territorial frameworks in which the relationship between territory and power is formally recognised in the concept of sovereignty. In comparing Ulster, Upper Silesia and Algeria, Wright emphasized that the tensions in these ‘ethnic frontiers’ were not simply generated locally but were inextricably linked with metropolitan power.

Despite the achievements of the book, Wright does not present a sustained theoretical argument around the key concept of territoriality. One of the main reasons for this is the relative sparseness of the literature on the politics of human territoriality available at the time. In his discussion of theories of territoriality, for example, Wright engages with the sometimes crude socio-biological arguments of Ardrey’s “Territorial Imperative” (Ardrey, 1966). This text scarcely touches on the central issues that dominate current debate on territoriality within sociology and political studies and is not concerned to any great degree with the politics of territory. It is a text that few of those currently writing on territoriality feel it necessary to engage with. Wright is

diverted to an engagement with Ardrey primarily because few other social science works on the subject had been published by that time.

Since then, the publication of several well-regarded key works on human territoriality has contributed to the development of a much more fully elaborated, much more subtle and much more rigorous body of theoretical work, mainly produced by geographers working at the intersection with political studies and sociology. There is the work of Robert Sack, for example, whose classic *Human Territoriality: its theory and history* characterises territoriality as a uniquely powerful strategy for exerting power, as a profoundly political concept (Sack, 1986). Sack defines territoriality as “the attempts by an individual or group to affect, influence or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area”, ultimately as “a primary geographical expression of social power” (1986: 5, 19). Territorial behaviour, in this view, is an attempt to shape or control actions by bounding space and by enforcing control over bounded spaces. The work provides powerful conceptual tools for understanding the relationship between power and boundaries, concepts that can usefully be deployed to address some of the central concerns of Frank Wright’s work.

More recent work has developed the concept of territoriality further while also modifying and critiquing Sack’s approach (Agnew et al., 2000, Agnew, 1994, Johnston, 2001, Paasi, 1996, Paasi, 1998, Paasi, 1999). In *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness*, geographer Anssi Paasi outlines an ambitious theory of what he calls ‘the institutionalisation of regions’, based on a case study of the Finnish-Russian border. Paasi emphasises ‘the production and reproduction of socio-spatial

consciousness', the way in which boundaries are deployed to shape and secure collective identities and solidarities (1996). Like Sack, Paasi too provides a rich and subtle theoretical approach to the relationship between identity, power and territory that can usefully be related to some of the central themes of Frank Wright's work.

Frank Wright's work, comparative and territorial as it is, and concerned as it is with the relationships between power and space at a variety of scales, provides a legacy that can be built on to push forward broader theoretical work on territoriality as political strategy and on the politics of boundaries. I deliberately repeat the word politics and political to emphasize that the territorial dimensions to inter-ethnic relations and the maintenance of order, as Wright so clearly recognised, are not merely a curious spatial dimension to the political, safely left to the geographers, but are questions fundamental to the understanding of power and the political. One of Wright's central concerns was the intersection between territory, violence and order and the article focuses on this intersection, looking at territorial dimensions to policing in the north of Ireland.

### **Territoriality and policing**

Policing is central to the modern state project of asserting exclusive territorial sovereignty through the homogenisation of internal space and the clear separation of the internal from the external (Giddens, 1996). The development of centrally controlled and regulated police forces from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards was aimed at making the coercive authority of the central state present everywhere in the state. Modern states sought to assert their authority in a territorially even way, sovereignty being ideally even and territorial unevenness in the maintenance of order within state



boundaries undermining the supposed universality of key concepts such as citizenship and justice. As Agnew and Corbridge put it, states "...involve the creation of unified and homogenous spaces" (Agnew and Corbridge, 1995). The increasing evenness of sovereign control was facilitated by technological advances in communication and transportation (Mann, 1986). As the source of coercive power within state boundaries, increasingly clearly delineated from the external coercive functions of the military, modern policing was also central to the increasingly clear and rigid demarcation and naturalisation of external boundaries through its filling out of the spaces of everyday life within those boundaries (Giddens, 1996). As such, policing is central to the creation of an internal 'domestic' space, a space of political order distinguished from the supposed anarchy of the international system beyond its boundaries.

Policing in this sense does not merely utilise territorial strategies for the maintenance of order. Policing is itself a central modern territorial strategy for exerting power, for naturalising and legitimating the external territorial boundaries of states through evenly filling out and asserting state authority throughout those internal spaces. It is central to what Paasi calls the 'institutionalization' of state territory (1996). The kinds of evenness that police forces attempt to enforce, and the extent to which they acknowledge and accept and adapt to the inevitable unevenness of space, provide a way not only to understand policing, but also to understand the politics of states at a very fundamental level. In particular, day-to-day territorial strategies for policing can reveal much about the way in which external boundaries shape internal spaces.

## **Mapping the police force onto the state**

Ireland occupied a central place in the early development of policing, a site for metropolitan experiment where the Irish Constabulary (later the Royal Irish Constabulary, henceforth RIC), was established in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as one of the first modern centralised police forces (Ellison and Smyth, 2000: 8-9). The overwhelmingly Catholic composition of the force reflected the balance of population in Ireland as a whole and the policy of circulating police officers throughout the island ensured that this national balance was reproduced throughout the country. This created a distinct mismatch between police and local population throughout the large areas of the northern province of Ulster where Protestants of British origin formed a majority of the population. The modern centralising project of the British state in Ireland threatened the local and regional dominance of Protestant and Conservative forces in large areas of Ulster. Wright outlines the strength of opposition to the centralising drive in policing and justice in Ireland by local Conservative forces in Ulster as far back as the 1830s (Wright, 1987). There was intense resistance to this centralising drive in Belfast where in 1865 the Irish Constabulary (later the Royal Irish Constabulary, hereafter RIC) replaced a municipal force that had been almost exclusively Protestant (Weitzer, 1995, Radford, 2007). The RIC was accused of partiality towards the Catholic minority in the city and when Home Rule for Ireland appeared imminent in the mid 1880s “Protestant rioting against Catholics turned to full-scale warfare against the Constabulary who, it was believed, were present in force to impose Home Rule” (Wright 1987: 46). The appeal of the unionist-controlled Belfast Corporation to the authorities to ‘have the police made more local’ represented a push for a return to the days when there was a fit between Protestant predominance in the local population and the composition of the police force in the

city (Radford, 2007). There was some official acknowledgement of the need to respond to this unevenness and late-19<sup>th</sup>c deployment practices ensured that there was a disproportionately large Protestant representation among RIC members stationed in Belfast, if not large enough to placate the local majority (Weitzer 1995: 27-31).

The limited success of this regional resistance to the modern centralising project of the British state in Ireland illustrates how the territorial strategies for the maintenance of order deployed by the police did not stand above or outside local and regional sectarian territoriality but were decisively shaped by them. The struggle to create a correspondence between Protestant preponderance in the north of Ireland and the policing of that region thus predated the struggle against home rule and the establishment of a Northern Ireland state. The establishment of the new state however, would provide a powerful mechanism for legitimating and organising the intensification and completion of that process.

When it finally became clear in the early 20th century that the nationalist goal of an autonomous Irish home rule parliament could no longer be prevented, Ulster unionists proposed that Ulster be excluded from the jurisdiction of the new parliament. A truncated Ulster state, minus those strongly nationalist counties that would have ensured an uncomfortably small unionist majority in the new state, came into existence in 1921. The creation of the new entity of Northern Ireland was a territorial strategy, aimed at reversing the balance of power between unionist and nationalist in this northern region of Ireland by asserting the primacy of the regional boundary of Ulster as a framework for decision-making on the fundamental issue of sovereign control and for the exercise of political power. The establishment of a Northern

Ireland state would provide a means to naturalise and legitimate a local and regional dominance that had been increasingly undermined by administrative centralisation in Ireland in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Ethnonational territorial unevenness in Ireland provided the basis for the drawing of a new border dividing the island, providing direct illustration of the threat that such unevenness could present to the territorial integrity of a political unit. The new boundary was the key mechanism for achieving a transformation of the political balance of power within the area it bounded. But it was not a sufficient mechanism for reversing existing national-scale relationships in the maintenance of order within the territory. The primacy of the regional border also had to be asserted in relation to the composition of the police force.

The first concerted moves to create a fit between policing and unionist dominance in the territory of the new state began before Northern Ireland had been established. Although control over policing throughout Ireland continued to be centralised in Dublin the establishment in late 1920 of an Ulster Special Constabulary (hereafter USC), ostensibly to assist the RIC in combating the IRA, was crucial to the institutionalisation of the new territory. Despite the expectations of some in the British administration, the new force was strictly limited to the six counties that would become Northern Ireland, thus institutionalising the boundaries of the new state before it had come into existence (Farrell 1983: 36-51). With the establishment of the USC, policing in the six counties was abruptly transformed, now dominated by an almost exclusively Protestant regional force. It was a crucial first step in creating a correspondence between policing and population in the new entity.

In the initial plans for the partition of Ireland the RIC was simply to be divided into two forces operating on the two sides of the Irish border. The new Northern Ireland would have inherited a Catholic-dominated police force (Farrell, 1983: 13, 186). The fact that this initial settlement was superseded and that the RIC was to be abolished did not remove this possibility entirely. If police officers serving in the northern counties at the time of partition had simply remained in post to serve in a new northern police force, this predominantly Protestant state would have a predominantly Catholic police force, a danger heightened by the possibility that large numbers of Catholic RIC members serving south of the border might seek to move north, if for no other reason than to guarantee their pensions and retain their secure jobs. The first challenge faced by the new state in relation to policing was thus a macro-territorial one – how to create a fit between the Protestant and unionist identity of the new regional state and an existing police force that reflected a national balance between Protestant and Catholic in Ireland as a whole. While the new police force emphasised its continuity with the RIC to assert its credentials in the area of ‘banal’ and ‘apolitical’ policing, the new state required not continuity but rupture.

The Stormont committee established to advise on the new force recommended a major innovation in Irish policing; a religious quota in recruitment. One third of places would be allocated to serving Catholic members of the RIC, and to other Catholic applicants if RIC members did not fill the quota. One third would be reserved for USC members and one third for Protestant RIC members. The quota for Catholic applicants has frequently been cited as evidence of conciliation and an attempt at inclusion. Certainly the desire to present a conciliatory face to the new Irish

Free State and the British government at a time of great uncertainty provided strong motivation for ensuring Catholic participation in the force. Many Unionist committee members strongly opposed the quota (Farrell, 1983; 188-90). But rather than characterising this simply as a move aimed at moderating the Protestant unionist character of the new state, we might characterise it also as a move away from the existing situation where the region was policed by a predominantly Catholic force.

In retrospect it might seem clear that there was never any prospect of large-scale Catholic recruitment to the RUC but during a period of uncertainty, in the midst of an Irish Civil war, with the prospect of a Boundary Commission that might significantly reduce the territory of Northern Ireland, it was by no means a foregone conclusion that the vast majority of Ireland's 10,000 RIC members would shun the RUC as a possible employer. The great majority of people in Ireland with the police training and experience that the new force might be expected to demand of applicants were Catholic. The quota was a conciliatory measure but also acted as a bulwark against any danger that a large influx of RIC members would create a predominantly Catholic force. Both of the Catholic members of the police committee opposed the quota on this basis. A senior civil servant opposed to the quota noted at the time "The effect of the Committee's recommendation will in all probability result in a considerable number of eligible Catholic members of the RIC being shut out from the new force" (Farrell, 1983). There was intense unionist opposition to even this one third quota and within months of the establishment of the force 'Catholic' spaces were opened up to USC recruits (Ryder, 2000: 60).

The quota served to ensure that the existing balance within the police force was overturned and that unionist dominance of the state and preponderance in the population was replicated within the police force. As it happened, the new force had limited attractiveness to many serving Catholic members of the RIC and the Catholic proportion never rose above 20%, steadily declining to 11% by the late 1960s (Farrell, 1983: 191).

Both communities in the north would now face an overwhelmingly Protestant-dominated police force, supported by an exclusively Protestant Special Constabulary. This was not an inevitable consequence of the establishment of a new state, but an active achievement of that state, bolstering the transfer of political authority and legitimacy to the regional scale with a rescaling of the composition of the police force to reflect the regional political dominance and preponderance in the population of the unionist majority. It was a strategy aimed at institutionalising the territory of the new state by creating a correspondence between unionist political control of the new unit and the maintenance of internal order within that territory.

### **Dealing with internal unevenness**

Unionist predominance in population at the regional scale was not evenly spread across the territory of Northern Ireland. Just as there had been a mismatch between a centralised Irish police force and local Protestant-dominated spaces in Ulster, so too was there a mismatch between the new regional police force and local spaces dominated by Catholic and nationalist majorities. These local spaces included many rural areas that were almost exclusively Catholic and nationalist. They also included large urban districts throughout the North, including most of the second city of Derry. They were spaces in which the new state enjoyed little legitimacy and where political

opposition to its very existence was repeatedly expressed through the ballot box. The threat that these sub-regional spaces presented to the new state's sovereign control and legitimacy were dramatised by the decision of two of Northern Ireland's six county councils and several other local authorities to declare allegiance to the Irish government in Dublin in late 1921 (Bardon, 2001; 499-500). These spaces presented a direct, ongoing threat to the territorial integrity and legitimacy of Northern Ireland.

Policing would be formally organised in such a way as to create a rough correspondence between people and police at the regional level, for Northern Ireland as a whole, but would be fixed at that scale with a strongly centralised police force covering the entire region. There was strong resistance to any form of policing that would permit a match between the ethnonational composition of the police force and the local population in Catholic majority areas. The experience of violence in Belfast during the Irish War of Independence had provided direct evidence of the challenge that such a match might present to the state in times of crisis. As loyalists engaged in sectarian attacks in Belfast in 1921 and 1922, often acting in cooperation with USC members, the RIC became identified with the nationalist community to an increasing degree. During this strange interregnum when Northern Ireland already existed but policing on its territory remained the responsibility of the all-Ireland RIC, Loyalists accused RIC members in north Belfast of cooperating with the IRA while RIC members in the district reported to the new Irish government in Dublin on collusion between loyalists and the USC (Ryder, 2004). By early 1922 several RIC stations in north and west Belfast were strongly associated with the Catholic communities in which they were based, one north Belfast station being referred to colloquially as the 'Fenian barracks'. RIC members in these barracks maintained friendly relations with



the local Catholic communities in which they were based and aroused the hostility and suspicion of the USC and of many Protestant RIC members (Wilson, 2010). The tensions in north Belfast between loyalist B-Specials<sup>i</sup> and Catholic RIC members provided a clear illustration of the danger to unionist control and the northern state that a concentration of Catholic police officers in predominantly Catholic districts might present. It created a local fit between people and police of the kind that could present a direct challenge to the exercise of state control. Shooting exchanges between Catholic RUC members and B-Specials in the small and predominantly Catholic border town of Newtownhamilton in 1922 provided another indicator of the challenge to the state that might be presented by such a concentration of Catholic officers in particular districts (Farrell, 1983; 191).

Avoiding a formalised fit between police and population at the local scale through a centralised police force represented continuity with the centralised history of the RIC and was easy to justify and explain in those terms. In direct contrast with the RIC and the RUC, the 'Specials' were locally recruited and constables served in their home areas, making the local scale much more important in the formal organisational structures of the auxiliary police. The local scale was also central to the day-to-day operation of the B-specials. The force was valued precisely because of the local knowledge and local embeddedness of its members, features that directly contradicted modern policing procedures aimed at circulating members away from their home districts to prevent favouritism and their enmeshing in local disputes. If Catholics were to join this force in proportion to their share of the general population this organisational structure could create many Catholic-dominated local units. This

would create a correspondence between population and policing at the local scale in areas with significant Catholic populations.

In 1922 the Stormont Government and the newly established Irish Free State signed the 'Craig-Collins' pact aimed at improving relations between the two. The pact provided that new B-Special units made up of a mixture of Catholic and Protestant members, would be established to operate in mixed districts of Belfast. This proposal would have created a correspondence between the auxiliary police force and people at local level in mixed areas of Belfast to replace the existing dispensation in which an entirely Protestant USC operated in a religiously mixed city. The intensity of Unionist resistance to this element of the pact reflected resistance to any attempt to dilute unionist and loyalist dominance in the USC. The Unionist government quickly rejected this clause, but did agree instead that Catholic B-Specials could be recruited to serve in Catholic areas of Belfast. (Farrell, 1983; 104-113, 147). It was the closest the new state came to permitting a formal fit between police and people in Catholic areas and it was done as a fallback from the agreement that envisaged large-scale Catholic participation in the B-Specials in much of Belfast. Nonetheless, the proposed scheme showed a readiness to tolerate very significant levels of territorial unevenness in policing in the interests of the maintenance of order. The fact that these proposals came to nothing reflects the difficulty with any scheme that created such a correspondence. Any fit between policing and population at the local level that created police districts, stations or units identified with local Catholic majorities, raised the danger of eroding state sovereignty by institutionalising local territories that were mismatched with the state. Given the relationship of the minority to the

neighbouring Irish state this threat to internal sovereign control was also ultimately a threat to the external boundaries of the state.

It is important to note that the new state had no difficulty with the principle of locally recruited special constables patrolling their local areas, nor to local units being exclusively composed of members of one religion. This was the case with the USC everywhere in Northern Ireland. Everywhere, policing would reflect the regional scale dominance of the unionist majority, even in predominantly nationalist local spaces.

But ultimately these mismatched local spaces could not be policed on the same basis as other areas of the state. Territorial strategies for maintaining order combined measures to avoid formal recognition of ethnonational territoriality in policing structures with a working acceptance of the need to police unevenly. Together these constituted a set of meso-level territorial strategies for maintaining order in the state that complemented the macro-level creation of a correspondence between the composition of the police force and the dominance of the unionist majority in the state as a whole.

### **Limited recognition**

There would be no systematic formalised match between composition of the police and the population at the local scale but informal practices were adopted to ensure a minimalist connection between population and police at that scale. Total alienation of such areas from the state had to be avoided and that required a certain limited recognition of their distinctive character. It was especially important for the state not only to conciliate such areas, albeit to a minimalist degree, but also to be in a position

to control them, and Catholic constables connected to the majority community in such areas were sometimes in a better position to obtain the information and intelligence necessary for effective law enforcement. In this sense Catholic RUC officers were in an utterly ambiguous position. As Catholics with some limited power within a Protestant state they were a source of possible danger to the state, objects of suspicion in times of crisis. But as policemen connected to the Catholic community they were also crucial to penetrating the minority community and gathering intelligence. They were simultaneously at the forefront of efforts to erode minority resistance and dissent while also being associated with that dissent to some degree. The difficulties inherent in this position in times of crisis are illustrated by the experience of Catholic officers such as Frank Lagan, whose extensive connections with the Catholic community in Derry in the early 1970s made him an object of suspicion and resentment among loyalist politicians and many rank and file RUC members (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005). The tension and the sense of resentment associated with this position is eloquently sketched in Denis Donoghue's memoir of his childhood as the son of a Catholic RUC member who had transferred in from the RIC (Donoghue, 1991).

Thus from the very beginning it was accepted that the deployment of RUC officers should reflect local population composition to some degree. This practice had a precursor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century deployment practices that ensured that Protestants were well represented among RIC members stationed in Belfast. The Stormont Home Affairs Minister explicitly invoked this pre-existing RIC practice in the early 1920s in explaining why a senior Catholic officer had been transferred out of Belfast. If the officer remained in Belfast he would have to be promoted to one of the most senior positions in the city and the minister argued that "it would be rather difficult to break

through the rule (which has been in operation for a very considerable time) to have Protestants in the ranks of commissioner and assistant commissioner” (Farrell, 1983; 194). Deployment practices aimed to ensure that there would be some Catholics among those officers stationed in predominantly Catholic districts. The disproportionately large Protestant majority in the RUC guaranteed however that Catholic officers would nowhere constitute a majority. .

The continuation of the informal RIC practice of ethnationally sensitive deployment was articulated at the outset by one member of the Stormont committee that dealt with the establishment of the RUC who accepted that “in policing counties, cities and districts consideration should be given to the proportion of Protestants and Catholics in such counties and districts” (Ryder 2004: 36). The informal practice of deploying Catholic constables to predominantly Catholic areas such as south Armagh, west Belfast and Derry is confirmed by RUC officers who testified to the Hunt Commission on policing in 1969 that “Some postings were regarded unofficially as either Catholic or Protestant” (Ryder 2004: 146). Ryder also cites correspondence that suggests that there was an understanding by Nationalist politicians in the 1930s that the two most senior RUC posts in the religiously mixed town of Lurgan would be filled by one Catholic and one Protestant, citing 1931 correspondence that refers to this as ‘the usual practice’ and showing that the Unionist Home Affairs Minister treated this as a legitimate expectation (2004). These deployment practices constituted a limited recognition of the distinctive ethnonational character of certain local spaces but care was also taken to ensure that this recognition did not result in Catholic predominance in crucial areas. Thus when three Unionist MPs met with the Unionist Home Affairs minister in the early 1920s to complain that fully one third of RUC

officers in the main barracks in Derry were Catholic they were reassured that this problem would be resolved as officers were redeployed over time (Farrell, 1983; 194).

### **Recognising ethnonational territorial boundaries**

Political and police authorities in Northern Ireland shared a certain limited recognition that the state's authority could only be maintained if it was exercised unevenly. To attempt to evenly assert the British, unionist and Protestant character of the state in local spaces dominated by nationalists carried the danger of provoking violence and severely undermining state legitimacy in those spaces. The informal recognition of distinctively nationalist districts constituted by the deployment of Catholic RUC officers to these districts was allied to a recognition of their distinctiveness in everyday policing practices.

The RUC is renowned for its actions throughout the 1950s and 1960s in attempting to assert sovereign evenness, by ensuring that loyal parades be allowed to march anywhere within the territory of the state, and that displays of disloyalty be challenged and repressed wherever they occurred, most notably through the prevention of public displays of the Irish flag (Farrell, 1980; 233-4). But there is strong evidence that the RUC often carried out this role with some reluctance and that these occasions of overt repression represented a deviation from established policing practice (Patterson, 1999). In practice the RUC gave a grudging working acknowledgement to the distinctive political character of predominantly Catholic rural and urban areas. On many occasions they permitted Republican meetings and protests and the display of Irish nationalist symbols in predominantly Catholic areas, while

strictly preventing any attempt to extend these actions and displays into urban centres. While this has correctly been characterised as a policy of limiting oppositional protest to ‘ghetto’ spaces, and a clear illustration of the identification between policing and unionist ideology, it was also a recognition of informal ethnonational boundaries within the state, and an acknowledgement of the distinctive character of areas associated with the minority. This recognition did not derive from a commitment to the equality of the two national identities but from an immediate practical concern to minimise the disruption of order. Nonetheless, it constituted a form of recognition of state unevenness and was an important aspect of the state’s territorial strategies for the maintenance of internal order.

The practice of unevenly exerting state authority could be strongly and openly endorsed, even by as staunch and unrelenting a Unionist as the former Prime Minister, Sir Basil Brooke. “We all know...that some well-recognised routes and areas are definitely Unionist or Nationalist and the commonsense thing is to allow each side to have its meetings and processions in its own areas” Brooke stated in 1953, explicitly endorsing territorial variation in policing practices (Walker, 2004). In many of the most infamous cases in which the Unionist Government directed the RUC to act with a heavy hand, it was against the advice of senior RUC commanders. When the government introduced the 1954 Flags and Emblems Act, for example, it did so against the direct opposition of the Inspector General of the RUC (Patterson 1999). The limited informal recognition given to the distinctive character of Catholic areas by the RUC was correctly recognised by hardline loyalists as compromising the even exercise of state sovereignty and identified as a key pressure point on which government was vulnerable. The most celebrated cases of RUC use of force to evenly

exert sovereignty were the product of a struggle within unionism over the evenness of sovereign control. When right-wing loyalist Rev. John Brown declared in 1960 that “There is no such thing as a nationalist area of Northern Ireland”, he was responding not to nationalist claims but to Unionist government statements and RUC practices that acknowledged that there were such areas. When the Rev. Ian Paisley stated in 1964 “I don’t accept that any area of Ulster is republican ... I intend to see that the Union Jack flies everywhere” he was launching a frontal attack on policing practice and on the Unionist government acceptance of territorially uneven policing, rather than on republicanism per se (Taylor, 1998). The fact that the right wing of the Unionist party and extreme loyalists outside the party regularly applied pressure on the Unionist government and the RUC to assert state sovereignty evenly illustrates the significance and embeddedness of this policy of limited toleration. There was a public recognition of the implications of informal policing practices for the territorial integrity of the state, although loyalists were incorrect if they assumed that territorially-even policing was possible without creating large-scale disorder.

As many senior RUC officers and Unionist ministers were well aware, the price for forcefully asserting the state's British and Protestant character in mainly Catholic areas was increased public disorder and intensified popular hostility to the police force and the state. The seizure of an Irish flag in west Belfast by the RUC in 1964 in response to loyalist pressure for action is a case in point. This action provoked the worst rioting in decades and serving as an important precursor to the collapse of public order in 1969. It is notable that the RUC made no attempt to intervene when Republicans marched through the same area with the Irish flag only a few days later (Farrell, 1980; 233-4).



As conflict escalated from late 1968, recognition of predominantly nationalist areas became increasingly institutionalised and formalised with the establishment of large no-go areas in 1969 and again in 1971-72. In response to the increasingly apparent difficulties in maintaining state authority in the predominantly Catholic city of Derry, serious consideration was given by British government officials in 1969 to the establishment of a municipal police force for the city, a force that might well have been Catholic-dominated. The idea resurfaced in 1973 as a proposal to establish a locally-recruited police force for the working-class Catholic areas of Creggan and the Bogside (Ó Dochartaigh, 2005). The fact that nothing came of these measures is indicative of the structural difficulties for the state of allowing such a fit between people and police in predominantly Catholic areas. Later still, the limited recognition of nationalist areas accorded in RUC practice prior to 1969 took on a more formalised and much more negative shape with the delineation in the mid to late 1970s of many predominantly nationalist areas, in Derry, south Armagh and Belfast, as zones of continuing military primacy, distinguished from more peaceful areas of the state where police primacy was restored (O'Dowd et al., 1980; 198-9). 'No-go' areas, in one form or another, persisted long after the barricades were removed. They were delineated not only by the sympathies of their inhabitants and the intensified potential for attacks on the police and army within certain spaces, but also by routine policing practices and procedures that marked these as distinctive territories. The direct relationship between these territorially uneven policing practices and the maintenance of the external border were evident in the intermittent consideration given by British governments after 1969 to the option of ceding certain predominantly nationalist areas to the Republic of Ireland (Hennessey, 2007; 317).

The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 expressed support for policing in ‘partnerships with the community at all levels, and with the maximum delegation of authority and responsibility’. This implicitly addressed the mismatch between the police force and nationalist-dominated local areas, suggesting an openness to measures that might create a stronger fit between policing and local population in predominantly nationalist areas through an intensified localisation of policing.

In the wake of the Good Friday Agreement two of the most influential academic advocates of radical reform explicitly advocated that a close fit be created between police and population at the local scale, proposing a two-tier police service and suggesting that local police forces should recruit many of their members locally and aim to be representative of local populations (McGarry and O’Leary, 1999; 84, 92). This would have created several local police forces strongly identified with local nationalist majorities. Ultimately the Patten Commission on policing established under the Good Friday Agreement steered away from such measures and the British government minimised measures that would have localised policing to a greater degree.

Proposals for reforms that might result in nationalist-dominated policing of predominantly nationalist areas provoked strong unionist opposition. The intensity of unionist resistance to the localisation of policing in the 1990s reflected an ongoing tension between unionist dominance at the regional scale and continued nationalist predominance in extensive local spaces within Northern Ireland. Given that the state continues to be identified with one community, there remain deep structural pressure

against any measures that would intensify or reinforce the institutionalisation of local nationalist-dominated areas, whether it be through the localisation of policing or the creation of stronger and larger local government jurisdictions. The ethnonational unevenness of Northern Ireland, related as it is to the external boundary of the state, continues to decisively shape the frameworks for the maintenance of internal order.

## **Conclusion**

The establishment of the Northern Ireland state was a territorial strategy adopted by unionists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as attempts to prevent home rule for Ireland faltered. It was a macro-level territorial move, an attempt, as Sack puts it "... to affect, influence or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area (1986: 5, 19). The establishment of this new boundary had to be complemented by meso-level territorial strategies to divide and fill internal spaces in ways that bolstered the macro-level strategy. Local nationalist majorities within the new state constituted a significant obstacle to the institutionalization of this new territory. Paasi argues that the fact that most states contain significant ethno-national minorities "...means that the institutionalization of state territories is typically a contested process" (Paasi, 2003). Local majorities that are not identified with a state create informally bounded spaces in tension with the official identity of states. Structures for policing in Northern Ireland were aimed at institutionalizing state territory by rejecting any formal arrangements that might create a correspondence between policing and local spaces dominated by the minority, thus exerting power through a particular territorial strategy for the maintenance of internal order. Deployment practices and policing practices that recognised and adapted to this unevenness modified this territorial strategy and

illustrated the limits to internal homogenisation and the related institutionalization of the new territory. These distinctive territorial strategies for the exercise of power illustrate the continuing influence of the external border and the all-Ireland context on the exercise of power within Northern Ireland.

Much of Frank Wright's work focused on the relationship between nationalist and unionist in pre-partition Ireland, a relationship in which he clearly identified the importance of territoriality. The creation of a new border in Ireland did not create two hermetically sealed territories in which the dynamics of inter-ethnic relations now had an exclusively internal logic. Territorial strategies for internal homogenisation within Northern Ireland reflected the continuing shaping influence of the Irish territorial context from which unionists had sought to escape.

The ethnonational unevenness of the state ensured that territorial strategies for maintaining order had to involve a recognition, however limited, of the distinctive character of areas dominated by the minority. This ensured that the connections between internal order and external contexts would remain direct and immediate. The tentative and weakly naturalised character of the state was expressed on a daily basis in the unevenness of policing practices within its territory.

Towards the end of his 'Comparative analysis' Wright argued "...unless both the British and Irish governments have both powers and responsibilities as guarantors of the respective communities, no legitimate authority is *ever* likely to emerge" (1986: 268). The Anglo Irish Agreement of 1985 and the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement of 1998 contributed to the development of such a basis for legitimate authority. Order

was to be secured not by securing and hardening the distinction between internal order and external forces but by softening the distinction between the two. Wright emphasised the central importance and responsibilities of the 'external' metropolitan powers associated with the two communities. He illustrated that local sectarian territorial struggles and violent confrontation were nested in wider territorial frameworks and could not be resolved without considering these international frameworks. The Good Friday Agreement shifted the context for the maintenance of internal order in Northern Ireland, and marked a move to a new set of territorial strategies for the maintenance of order, despite a continuing, if modified, structural logic militating against the creation of a strong fit between police and population at the local scale.

In developing the concept of the ethnic frontier Wright foregrounded the relationship between local territorial struggles and metropolitan power, arguing that "Northern Ireland is the frontier zone in which all that is conflictual in British-Irish relations has been concentrated" (Wright, 1989; 151). Operating as it does at the intersection between state structures and the maintenance of order the spaces of everyday life, policing is at the heart of contestation on the ethnic frontier. As Wright puts it, "In national conflicts, law, order and justice are not just some of the issues that happen to arise from other causes. National conflicts, once they are fully developed, revolve around these matters." (Wright 1989; 153)

Recent analyses of territoriality and policing have significantly advanced our understanding of territorial dimensions to the maintenance of order, but they understandably fall into the 'territorial trap' of treating the sovereign state as a natural and self-evident container for action and analysis (Herbert, 1997). This article

advances our understanding of policing and territoriality by illustrating the way in which external borders provide a macro-territorial framework that decisively shapes territorial strategies for the day-to-day maintenance of order at lower scales.. Policing is a key site for understanding the relationship between local struggles and metropolitan power. Whether in Kosovo, Chechnya, the West Bank, Iraq, or many other of those ethnic frontiers in which conflict is currently most intense, policing is a crucial arena of struggle that is directly and transparently linked to struggles over external boundaries.

This article provides an illustration of, and support for, the broader argument that the homogenisation of internal space and the related establishment and maintenance of a clear distinction between internal and external spaces is not a fixed feature of the international state system. It is an ongoing achievement imperfectly realised on the ground through routine everyday policing practices and distinctive territorial strategies for the maintenance of order. By looking at everyday policing practices we can identify some of the specific ways in which metropolitan power is bound up with local struggles on the ethnic frontier and the ways in which external boundaries are diffused throughout internal sovereign spaces.

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<sup>i</sup> The Ulster Special Constabulary (USC) initially consisted of A, B and C forces. The 'B-Specials' were the heart of the USC and the A and C Specials were later phased out.