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A Consciousness of Streets: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Partition

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Abstract

This largely speculative review historicises the current era of ‘Springs’ through the lens of partition. I offer a critique of political modernity¹ and the modern nation-state through analysis of the turn to border politics in colonial conquests, decolonisation efforts, Cold War politics and other instances of international relations across the long twentieth century. The pervasiveness of such plans across late modernity marks the beginning of the end of the nation as a single, reifiable, imaginable structure. With Ireland as exemplar, I posit national dividedness —a generally underestimated paradigm shaping our time— as spurring a decline in state authority and a new, radical “consciousness of streets.” Together with other defining political structures, it participates in transforming the postmodern map of nation into a conflicted network, an imagined community as metropolitan circuit. I take recourse to theories of partition and nation and work by geographers, historians and postcolonial theorists including Joseph Cleary, Benedict Anderson, Monica Duffy Toft, Étienne Balibar and Michel Foucault.

What becomes of the nation... the space modernity
has taught us to belong to?

Meena Alexander, *Poetics of Dislocation*

I. Imagined communities, real streets

Whereas violent, criminal actions of official nation-states have been seen across modernity as legitimate —however grotesque or damaging— those of so-called ‘terrorists,’ protestors and other counter-cultural actors are cast as unquestionably criminal. Now, in countries across the globe, this binary concerning political agency has been confused and the state provincialised, juxtaposed by paramilitary-states, true ‘terror’ groups, street demonstrators,

‘unofficial’ civil struggles, vigilante citizen-states with civilian barricades, searches and checkpoints, or radical ‘societies’ such as that which formed at New York’s Zuccotti Park in late 2011. As a marker of this, Time named “The Protester” its 2011 “Person of the Year.”² Kurt Anderson explains the magazine’s rationale: “[m]assive and effective street protest was a global oxymoron until—suddenly, shockingly—starting [in Dec. 2010], it became the defining trope of our times.”³ It was then, he says, that “the protestor... became a maker of history.” These phenomena index a significant socio-political shift in terms of not just agency but of the location of the citizen, of contemporary conceptions of community, and of a now “rejuvenated and enlarged... idea of democracy” (Anderson). In locations across the globe, new awarenesses about power and agency and novel imaginings of the polis are playing out. Today’s citizen-cum-state agent stands at an intersection of congresses, carries new expectations of the political, the democratic, the meaning(s) of freedom. On a public radio programme covering the protests that broke out in Ukraine in early 2014, Stephen Sestanovich points to this. In responding to a question about whether he believed pro-Western protestors would ultimately negotiate with the state, he did not really answer; sounding mildly bewildered, perhaps face-to-face with the issue theorised here, Sestanovich said simply “the street has its own... consciousness”⁴ now.

Streets are a borderlands of power and powerlessness, meeting place of the masses in unified revolt *and* stage and spectacle of state force. They are deeply symbolic politically, not merely in the most obvious way —being redolent with protest— but as so many “outsides,” to use Meena Alexander’s words, of the “space modernity has taught us to belong to,” namely the domestic, the factory, the corporate skyscraper. Such a consciousness was not, for Michel Foucault, one of streets *per se*, but of what they mean and how they are experienced: a territorialisation registered as “simultaneity” and “juxtaposition,” as the “side-by-side” and the “intersection,” a sense that regions inevitably overlap in ostensible noncooperation with official infrastructural boundary lines (22). The defining variables of this contemporary “epoch of space” proliferate (Foucault 22) and are indexed by the large-scale movement whereby civilians are reconstellating community, place and self in the movement from desks and factories and kitchens to a borderlands of the street, and amassing there a

crossing of collectivities with multiple points of connection, all in defiance of the state. This development begs questions of breadth and origin. What is the *longue durée* of this *zeitgeist* of the streets? We recognise its appearances, but how historicise, how theorise such inclinations? The roots of such praxes are obviously multifaceted, involving local specificities and, more broadly, issues of climate change, economic flows, and technological advancements, starting with the World Wide Web.

There is still more to this partitionist⁵ intersectional consciousness, however. An instructive touchstone was seen in the twenty-year commemorations of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 2009. Noam Chomsky spoke that year of the paradigmatic weight of Germany's division and subsequent reunification, spectacularly dramatised in the wall's dismantling. He cites German Chancellor Angela Merkel's discernment that the significance of the event lay in the way it crystallised the chief concern of the present moment: the collective endeavour, she said, to "overcome the walls of our time." Merkel's comment is easily corroborated by her immediate European Union context. But Berlin as a historical hallmark is underscored in its use as a global metonym for other revolutions in other places.⁶ And Chomsky pushes the issue —of deconstructing rather than reifying borders— further in noting Timothy Ash's aligned proposition that, owing to the same incident, 1989 was "the biggest year in world history since 1945" (Ash). The 2009 remembrances came together as an object lesson of the conceptual link between histories of geopolitical metamorphosis and changing conceptions of communal and individual agency. The archetypal wall of the modern era is, of course, the border of the nation-state, and the modality of its devolution the streets civilians occupied in order to abolish the reified border in Germany. There is no denying, as Merkel and Chomsky suggest, that, in numerous contexts, the imagining of community central to the consolidation of the polis is transitioning in the direction of a will to overcome rather than confirm national structures. The wall arrested global attention in 1989, and again in '09, because it functioned as a sign of not merely the specter of capital and a continuing fidelity to the nation-state, but of their exhaustion also. Signalling new awarenesses about power and where we find or should find it, the so-called fall of the Berlin wall is a common misnomer: it did not fall but was forcibly taken down in one of the most

remarkably radical political-postmodern moments of the late twentieth century.

That crisis was redolent not only of the retreat to German nationalism but also of an opening on to a somewhere, a something new. It was a Gramscian interregnum, the time when the present power structure loses its hegemonic force and false consciousness falters. In such periods, Antonio Gramsci believed, it was possible for “a ‘new [political] arrangement’ [to] be found,” for state subjects to “become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to” (quoted in Cleary 8-9). This is the time when protest is most likely to occur, “when rulers no longer rule and the ruled no longer wish to be ruled” (Bauman 51). Germany’s crumbled border evokes a lived, believed, historical (but little recognised) tethering between historical processes of national division in the modern era and the rising destabilisation of nationalist ideology. Since 1989, the year Ash says “changed everything,” we distinguish a willingness to acknowledge the shifts in citizens’ conceptions of the borders that are to house and home the modern subject. Barring local, situational particularities, this morphing of nation may be discernible in experiences of political place in various realigned nations. Border histories are meaningful in a broad sense, as so many nation-states became remapped through colonial or other rearrangements during the long twentieth century. Indeed, Joseph Cleary says partition is “the human equivalent of a tectonic shift in the settled political landscape of the late twentieth century,” indeed, a sweeping phenomenon of late modernity (1). Witnessing the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, Cleary realised how “the Irish experience of partition belonged to a much wider twentieth-century history” (2). Only then was it clear how the “spectre of... state division” (Cleary 2) haunts humanity on a worldwide scale. We have seen massive, sometimes catastrophic partition plans adopted in Germany, Ireland, South Asia, Palestine, Korea, Vietnam, Bosnia-Herzegovina, more recently in the Sudan, as elsewhere. Add to those the imperialist or other *de facto* realignments whereby European conquerors remapped locations under conquest —in view of their interests and unconcerned with realities on the ground, many of which continue to frame now former colonies. In this, we recognise numerous African nations, the Southwest Pacific (Timor and West Papua, for example), the Ukraine,

mentioned above, and other former Soviet Union states, as well as the island of Cyprus and its unofficial, contested unilateral annexation of the northern territory by Turkey.

Less random than it may seem, turning to Ukraine makes sense when we recall that, until 1989, Ukrainians had never lived as an independent state within the current borders. That they were redrawn through Russian imperialism, under both Stalin and Krushchev, is perhaps an overlooked factor underpinning the contemporary struggle. To what extent might the potential meaninglessness of those borders play a part in the current disposition of social relations, including the conflict? The conflict there is caused by a faultline within the nation between the East and the West, its eastern half identifying with Russia, the western with Catholic Poland, the E.U. and the West at large. Complex histories of border politics can be seen as a blueprint for contemporary political life, and partition as a defining though underestimated factor in that picture. Accounting in part for the emergence of Foucault's era of spatiality, then, is the high political border-work enacted across the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and which now haunts the twenty-first. In this view, the spatial consciousness he foresaw is less the register of a bygone entrenchment in homogenous space and more of a developing consciousness, in his words, "of other spaces." As the effects of partition discourses, divided nations are experienced as convened, contingent geographies and novel, intersected collectivities (Foucault *passim*). Even as the lived outcomes of realigned nations are unique, each having its own historicity and life, these effects are unavoidable. After partition, a series of complications emerges: "Should 'the nation'... be reformulated to include only the population resident within the territory... Or, should the state continue to define 'the nation' in terms of the wider trans-border community and/or territory that it also claims as 'its' own?" (Cleary 20). Such a transformation "invariably [triggers] complex reconstructions of national identity within and across the borders" (Cleary 20) as "signs of these erstwhile residents are ubiquitously present" (Mufti 224). The central, longstanding concern, post-partition, is "how to exercise conflicting claims to national self-determination in conditions where the communities involved are territorially interspersed" (Cleary 19).

The border brings “a change or loss of identity or the emergence of a dual or confused identity,” since, now, “two countries carry the same name” (Waterman 120). National consolidation relies on stable political and ontological borders, that is, the “finite... elastic boundaries beyond which lie other nations” (Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities* 7) and the newly “excluded... ‘other’” on the other side of the line (Cairns & Richards 9). Partition discourses cannot, therefore, achieve or construct only what they are designed to produce: the process exceeds itself and its movement is at least double. It is easier to recognise the entrenchment within nationalist ideology attending partition aftermaths, and this is the primary perception of such geopolitical solutions, politically as well as in the scholarship. But the other half, the ravelling, deconstructive effect, holds forth, it seems, long term. Shifting the borders provokes the need to re-imagine the imagined community of the nation, thus interfering with the selves housed and constituted by it. This destabilization is underwritten by the fact that the logic of the nation is the retaining wall for the modern subject but is structurally sound only in the singular and only in juxtaposition to perceptible others.⁷ The modern nation is understood, Benedict Anderson notes, as “both inherently limited and sovereign” (*Imagined Communities* 7), possessing an unalienable right to self-rule and haunted by “finitude” (Cheah *passim*), with the beginning and end points, to wit, the borders, that frame and distinguish it. In Europe, as “the French Revolution gave birth to the age of nations” (Glenny xxvi), that structure came to represent the “most universally legitimate value in the political life” of modernity (Anderson, *Imagined Communities* 3). The modern nation is experienced as a “deep [and] horizontal comradeship” that “commands... profound emotional legitimacy” and compels “colossal sacrifices” (*Imagined Communities* 4–7) and the powerful single thrust that gives it value and conceptual embodiment is the discursively constructed, abstract collective Anderson calls an “imagined community” (*Imagined Communities, passim*). Like an organised religion, hinged on its members’ “faithfulness,” national integrity depends on belonging to and imaginability of the group. It is based on the sense of “nation-ness,” a primary identification and ontological grounding in the territorially bordered group (*Imagined Communities, passim*). The legitimacy of the structure is also buttressed by a “subjective

antiquity" (*Imagined Communities* 5), the uncanny phenomenon whereby "nationalisms... figure themselves as ancient" (Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons* 21). But if linked back through antiquity, the nation cannot be broken and rearranged; thus, partition inevitably compromises the structure.

The paradigm has developed the aspect of "sanctification" (Foucault 23) which accounts for the fact that, "[in] the last century..., millions died in wars and... other violence" related to this structure (Toft 10). The claim to immutability "endowed all it touched with a 'slice of eternity'" (Mosse 9), which means every instance of a border shift wreaks havoc on the ontology of nation-ness. Exacerbating these disturbances, the tragic flaw of state division has been a consistent failure to take account of the functional, lived meaning of the territory to its residents (Toft 3-4). The most recalcitrant aspect of this "territorial meaning," says Monica Duffy Toft, is that homelands are seen as *indivisible*: "simultaneously a divisible, quantifiable object and an indivisible and romantic subject" (Toft 127), "both a material resource—an object that can be divided and exchanged—and a nonmaterial value—a subject that can be neither divided nor exchanged" (Toft 10). The particulars of this conception vary, playing out uniquely in affected geographies. But because a homeland is indivisible-yet-divided, the post-partition subject is ward of a state-in-question and home doubles as a place of exile. Whereas Stanley Waterman insists "[p]olitical maps, once altered, are readily accepted by the majority of the world's states as *faits accomplis*" (119), the citizens imagining that community into existence do not necessarily follow suit. In a material sense, the area is reorganised, renamed and "re-nationed," and officially recognised as such. But whether those most affected by it concede the change—in terms of identity, alterity, ontology, loyalty, whether, in other words, partition's interpellating hail succeeds—is another question entirely. The borders can be changed but identifications with and conceptions of the nation do not necessarily follow the newly drawn maps.

When Étienne Balibar suggests that "disintegration"—read: partition—produces "pathological phenomena," we think of this: notwithstanding that the geopolitical solution relies on a nationalist edifice, its aim being to inaugurate successor states and stimulate revised experiences of nation-ness, the move to reify new nations uncreates them at the same time. While provoking an

entrenched, hyper-nationalism, reorganising the collective into multiple novel groups does not only establish and consolidate; of necessity, it will undermine and un-define too. This is explicable in part because, for many if not most residents, the new borders are erroneous, temporary homelands in an otherwise continuous epic tale, failed, false definers of nation and self. In the symmetrical remaking that is partition, therefore, a ravelling inheres, a break in the discourse of the nation. Salman Rushdie speaks to this in *Imaginary Homelands*, describing post-partition identity as “at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools” (15). The borders cutting through previously defined territories are, now, a no man’s “street” between home and nation as between public and private memory. Under the weight of the rupture, the borders demarcating a homeland understood as (both) indivisible and timeless falter and begin their collapse. Hence, Toft concludes, divided nations stand disjunct and self-alienated (*passim*). Vazira Zamindar describes them as fundamentally uncertain (3), and Gyan Pandey notes the deep ambiguity of such societies (195). How is it possible for residents to “believe in” and imagine themselves “placed” there? How is the subject interpellated by a “border country” (Hughes 2), one “not so much enclosed by its borders as defined by them” (Hughes 3)? What happens to the sense of nation-ness when the borders ‘fail’ by means of redefinition and the necessary distinctions between national selves and national others are no longer distinguishable?

A partitioned nation is a deconstructive thing, a house that does not ‘house.’ It leaves the citizen with many questions —those heavy perhaps insoluble questions Zamindar asks regarding the partition of South Asia: “Where, indeed, is India? Where is Pakistan? Who is an Indian? Who is a Pakistani” (2)? Misha Glenny says the border politics imposed by the West and the ‘great’ powers in the Balkan peninsular area prompt aligned quandaries: “Any serious consideration of the... peninsula runs up against the unanswerable question of borders. Which countries belong there? A still more sensitive question is — which peoples does it embrace” (xxii)? The nation is, it seems, rigorously “complicated by the nearness” of its others (Kiely 12), and historical memory is, now, not so much, as Luke Gibbons has it, a “Third World” remembrance (3) as the recollection of other nations, of other spaces” of who we once were, who

and exactly where we ought to be located. Striated and frayed, rather than the devout member of Benedict Anderson's discursively described collective, or the ensconced resident of Toft's indivisible territory, the post-partition subject is polyfilial, her nation an inscrutable junction of selves, and of 'other(s)' who are now uncannily *like* her unknowable self. Reminiscent of Foucault's 1967 speculations about predilections of the postmodern era,⁸ Anderson's later nation theorising, *The Spectre of Comparisons* (1998), looks at how the nation is transitioning out of a singularity and into what he terms a "long-distance" nationalism. As with Jacques Derrida's formulations in *Specters of Marx* (1994), Anderson views the globalisation of capital as the principal impetus for contemporary shifts in conceptions of political community. He interprets the impacts of multi-national corporations and other international economic circuits as trends converting singular nations into interconnected multi-part structures. But whereas Anderson sees this conceptual shift rooted in the internationalization of capital, I view it as a specific effect of dynamics *in and of the nation*, chiefly the turn to geopolitical partitioning in locations on every continent in the latter half of the modern era.⁹

I offer, as one facet in a complex nexus, the geo-logic of partition which locates the subject at an affiliation of cross-border communal imaginings. Although such "supranational affiliations" (Sarkar 4) are formed in part by economic movements, such as the impoverishment of capital, other aspects of the change are distinctly political. The spirit and indeed the "anxiety of our era" (Foucault 23) may have less to do with some innocuous change in a (probably non-existent) "universal" metaphysics of space and time, may be less a function of the rise and fall of capital than thought, and may be undergirded, instead or in addition, by fault lines of the nation. Despite Anderson's originally having insisted that the "'end of the era of nationalism' is not remotely in sight" (1991: 3), perhaps it is, in fact. As Zygmunt Bauman says, "power wedded seemingly forever to the politics of the territorial nation-state as its sole operating agency is by now dying" (50). Yes, and it is dying faster in response to histories of national fracturing. How has partition served to de-constitute nationalism and incite a post-national, queering realignment of polity, power, community and connection, to turn the surmounting of divides into a ubiquitous contemporary idea? How does it function as specter of a zeitgeist in which protestors are

pivotal agents and the streets pivot of political agency? To what extent has a 'consciousness of streets' been prompted by incidents that render the walls and meanings of nation undecidable?

II. Partition and the unimaginable imagined community: Where is Ireland?

Just as "[s]overeignty is nowadays... unanchored and free-floating" (Bauman 50), the nation is, nowadays, aporia. And even as this discussion has been perhaps distressingly wide-ranging thus far, I do not claim a totalising applicability for these formulations: the effects of partition and other remappings are distinct in distinct locales, the "stakes... very different in different places" (Anderson, K.). We witness unambiguous variances, both the differences and the disproportionate impacts, in places such as Palestine and Hispanola, Ireland and Cyprus. Any national remapping occurs as both peculiarity and commonality; but every one, also, involves a set of shared effects. Each event, to use Ash's phrase, has occurred as part of "the global dance of old and new superpowers" (Ash). Therefore, unpacking critical points of connection vis-à-vis partition histories and partitionist discourses is a critical intellectual endeavour, particularly if looking to suss out the long-term impacts or to ascertain the beyonds of partition in political praxis. I hold that there is a perceptible correlation, across late modernity, between the rise of border politics, the decline of nation-state authority, and the rise of a post-national political consciousness and forms of affiliated community. I argue for a view of partition, in its long-term effects, as one of the roots of the protest making itself heard in the streets of the twenty-first century. Ireland's partition, a place where the protestor has long occupied the status of de facto person of the year, is not only exemplary but deeply instructive.

Even as the nation is still politically necessary in some locations —and Ireland might be one of them— partition histories have nonetheless introduced profound and broad-ranging transformations in the meaning and constitution of political community. The commemorations of Berlin in '09 and the rise of conflict in Ukraine in '14 constitute fraught border histories with analogous vicissitudes: Germany was one of several Cold War partitions; Ukraine was imperially remapped; and Ireland endured a colonial partition, a negotiated division that came about through a negotiated (if incomplete) dismissal of Empire. The imperially imposed, redrawn borders of all three are and were, to residents, unreal at a certain level, unknowable and unthinkable, certainly

unimaginable in Anderson's frame. To unpack the present *zeitgeist*, I leave Germany, Ukraine and other rearranged nations aside in order to look at a place with both an older history of dividedness and a pervasive consciousness of streets. With Ireland as prototype, I suggest that a paradigm of streets is suggestive of a post-national, late modern consciousness of dividedness, a 'partitionist' ideology of [Foucault's] 'other spaces,' not in the sense of favouring partition but one in which the nation is imagined as Samuel Beckett's political purgatory —a conflicted system of incompatible disunions and alienating rifts.

Gerry Adams described the Irish border recently as "an awful flaw... an awful wound in the psychic of [the] island and nation."¹⁰ The critical speculation here: how does the border persist as wound? If division is the specter haunting the nation, what are its long-term effects on community, place and identity, as on conceptions of nation, agency and the democratic? In the photographs above, taken during the Troubles, note that members of citizens' armies or paramilitary groups have installed themselves in the street, as 'states,' have set up checkpoints and searches, mimicking (and perhaps also mocking) the official apparatus. They do this in the names of opposing causes.



The image on the left is of a group of Nationalists working to free the North and reunify the island; on the right are Unionists or Loyalists, committed to maintaining the link with the Crown. None, we note, act in official state capacities. Irish civilians have, in multiple guises, functioned as state agents, accessed alternative forms of agency, and been lauded, historically, for their appropriation.¹¹ In the North, since partition, protest on both sides of the communal and political divides has been a way of life. Distinct forms of civilian revolt surrounded the official (though officially unrecognised) war,

including multiple civil rights organisations, paramilitary groups, and citizen's armies, and this has persisted in the time after the Good Friday accord when the conflict is understood to have ended. Thus co-opted, the state structure continuously deconstructs, exists as excess and fringe, in streets adjudicated by civilians.

These visual histories elicit Zamindar's questions: Where is the Irish state? "Who" is the state? What can that place and that identity "mean" after 1922, particularly north of the border?¹² What subject can be (truly) housed by a territory that has its "meaning" because of a traumatizing instance of political estrangement and succession? Famously described by Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney as "fork-tongued on the border bit" (52), in the Irish politico-communal cosmos, the interpellating power of the nation is extreme. But this also means that the deleterious impacts of the border will have been rigorous. Dividing the nation into a North and a South inspired an intense crisis in likewise alienating residents from its grounding force, in the North uniquely and outstandingly. Along with proffering novel states and new maps to materialize and codify them—in Ireland, the Irish Free State (now the Republic) and the newly concocted 'Northern Ireland' which would remain within the British commonwealth — the rupture represents a break in the subject's groundedness, causes both a cleaving to *and* a distancing from the nation, an emerging post-nationalism defined by a "borderland life" (Nash & Reid, 267). Implicit in Heaney's "fork" metaphor, the breakup and rearrangement of this geography both consolidated and deconstructed the sense of Irish "nation-ness" (Anderson, *Imagined Communities passim*). Ireland's extra-national political relationships are recast by the strange mirror- effects of partition, as the imagined community is re-gathered and reconstellated—*constellatus*: "arranged like a star," or like Heaney's "fork"—by a consciousness of (not borders, precisely, but of) a borderlands of the street. This small island off the coasts of Europe and the British mainland was divided in 1922 by the Anglo-Irish Treaty. For centuries, Ireland had been fully colonised by the British. After the implementation of the Government of Ireland Act and its partition plan, the six-county northeastern area was cordoned off and christened 'Northern Ireland,' while the remaining twenty-six counties achieved the long sought sovereignty.¹³ From 1968 to 1994, this statelet served as the final battlefield in a longstanding struggle against Empire. The 'Troubles' (proper) raged for twenty-five years, until 1994 when cease-fires were finally called and the Peace Talks commenced which culminated in the Good Friday Agreement (1998).

The defining moment in all-Irish twentieth-century history was paradoxically, then, a time of birth and death: for Nationalists, a moment of joy and relief because the British Empire had been (mostly) defeated, and one of frustration and loss because the victory was partial. From the other political perspective, of Unionism or Loyalism, it was a time of terror and desperation because decolonisation was (mostly) successful, but also one of relief and triumph owing to the ‘victorious’ retention, by the Crown, of the economically robust North. This reorganisation of the island represented a falling off of the imperial structure that had always been their chief identification. It was the opening episode in the twentieth-century in which those doing the work of the Empire in Ireland, descending from or otherwise affiliated with the Crown, witnessed a withering in its reach. From the opposing anti-colonial standpoint, partition meant the surrender of a long sought freedom —the four ‘green fields’ (Irish provinces) where the native population would no longer suffer the tyranny and affront of British dominion. Left under control of the Empire, the long, good fight that was to have ended would unfortunately carry on. Always before six of the nine counties comprising the province of Ulster, always before the majority population of the island, now, the primordial adversary would constitute the majority population (by a small margin) within the bizarre six-county territory they were now to call home. Moreover, long before 1922, Northern nationalists had been joined in common cause and united ‘Irishness’ with those of the twenty-six counties now comprising the Republic, locked into the antediluvian configuration of coloniser and colonised; afterwards, they would be traumatically disowned, as if by brothers and sisters, left to fend for themselves against the group that had been a shared enemy, the British state and its subjects. Now, they gain another opponent, the Irish nationalist in favour of partition and, at the same time, are forced to go on contending with the ancient foe for the foreseeable exiled future.

These residents are displaced not merely within the margins of a single location, overshadowed and rendered politically powerless by a dominant other; they stand disjunct in terms of the remembered bond with those on the other side of the border, citizens of the Irish Free State. Within the North, too, the word “citizen has radically different meanings on either side of the Peace Line” (Scarlata 21) even as these divided places are all “almost identical culturally, ethnically and linguistically” (Waterman 123). Toft’s issues of indivisibility and territorial meaning were of utmost importance in this division: “political and communal perceptions” of the land were “vastly different”

(Hennessey xi) and the inaugurated place, Northern Ireland, had never before been 'imagined' by residents of any political leaning. Now, they would be located at a conceptual crossroads of refutable and refuted structures as the "nation" transitioned from a single boundaried place to one "fork-tongued on the border bit" (Heaney 52). Multiple temporalities crowd and "fork" the Irish nation(s), a structure that, in postcolonial thought, is always-already liminal and spectral. Several relevant worlds, each subtending the others, constellate post-partition Ireland: the Republic comprising roughly three-quarters of the population, the three former provinces plus (in a partition within the partition) three of Ulster's counties; the dismembered Northern territory and its bifurcated, antagonistic worlds: the largely Catholic, Nationalist collectivity and the Loyalist, mostly Protestant domain whose extraordinarily irreconcilable differences remain corporeal and robust. With these, because imperialism brought Ireland to this impasse, stands a fourth world whose relevancy in this schema continues: the partially-deposed colonial mainland, Ireland's uninvited guest and nearest neighbour.

After partition, Benedict Kiely thus declared, the Irish would write a "forked" tale of not two cities but four (4). However, the post-partition epic is yet more convoluted. Additional registers of nation-ness turn the imagining into something more like an imagined cosmology or webbing rather than a single community: memories of nations and empires past and of hoped-for political futures where unresolved issues are settled and a habitable "house" manifest. Specters of "the dead and the unborn" (Harrison ix) overlay the four symbolic "cities" Kiely spoke of: the *immediate* pre-partition state —the whole island as a fully dominated imperial terrain, occupied, administered and ruled by Anglo-Irish settler-ascendants and other subjects of the Crown— and, the much older, pre-colonial 'authentic' Irish nation, imagined with force by Yeats, Pearse and other (Irish) Renaissance-era writers. In addition, apparitions of Ireland's 'future' appertain: the Republican Nationalist's dream of a fully reunified, sovereign land —in which the border, the Northern limb and the colonial presence are all eliminated— or, the Loyalist's hope of a self-governing, fully sovereign 'Ulster' where the six counties are neither part of the colonial construct nor subsumed within a "threatening" all-Ireland union.¹⁴ These willed, wished for nations are cosmologically relevant in that they comprise presences in Irish political life; they are reified in the work of paramilitary organisations to reunify the island or create an independent Ulster, of political

parties whose aim is to bring those dreamed states to fruition, and by simple discourses of daily life: the tradition of mural-making, the proliferate flags and painted curbstones, the graffiti, the political funerals and festivals, and especially marching season, commemorating Ireland's conclusive defeat by the Empire.¹⁵

Geopoliticians' attempts to establish the nationalist structure anew require not just a recognition of its "inadequacies and illegitimacies," but the experience of being "confronted... with a double-edged historical loss: the sublation of the nation form by new spatial imaginations" (Sarkar 4). Thus, Cleary recalls how viewing "the debacle in Yugoslavia was like watching a grisly montage of past or possible versions of one's own national history" (3). Because of the long-standing post-colonial condition, combined with persistent nationalist or imperialist ideologies, there have always been degrees of fragmentation in Irish political life. But in the time since the break in the nation and creation of the North, that multiplicity is exponentially augmented. Following Kiely, other Irish commentators recognise the splintered status of this nation. Daniel Corkery said, after partition, the Irish nation "gives no footing" (quoted in Kiberd 555); Willy Maley recalls a 1978 speech by F.S.L. Lyons "outlin[ing] four different cultures in modern Ireland--English, Anglo-Irish, Catholic/Gaelic and Scottish Presbyterian" (16); and Paul Diehl sees a "constellatus," too, noting how, in representing Ireland, literary writers often use "geographical contiguity to define a population of 'politically relevant' dyads" (viii). These observers all recognise how the split was not a simple bifurcation: not merely realignment, a "disunion" of place and people (Kiely 10). In and with local peculiarities, partition must work against its founding (nationalist) rationale because its realignment calls up specters of "*pasts* and *futures*" (Chakrabarty 46): "haunting ghosts" subtend the imagining (Hochberg 2) and "[t]he claim on lost ground keeps cropping up" (Alexander 34). The rearranged structure is thus unimaginable: a failure before the fact, guaranteed by insurmountable difficulties in how the community is conceived, the indivisibility and sense of nation-ness attached to it, and (important here) the constitution of citizens as subjects of the state.

Ireland, post-partition, aligns therefore with Foucault's notion of a "heterotopia of compensation" (27). Speculating that "colonies have... functioned... in this manner," he outlines a geographical space designed to be "other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill-constructed, and jumbled" (27). The geography of Ireland after partition stands as an excellent exemplar. For the British, the statelet reifies an imperial self-idealisation and the requisite Anglo supremacy

achieved initially through plantation schemes. To lose Ireland *in toto* would mean losing a painstakingly wrought imperial identity. The fervent call to cordon off and retain the tiny enclave in 1921 was rooted in the will to maintain this utopian romanticisation and force Ireland to continue functioning in the compensatory manner Foucault theorises. Just at the moment when the imperial structure has come under threat, partition constitutes a break initiating an imperial “re-iteration,” consolidated by six Irish counties populated more than otherwise by citizens identified with the Crown rather than those determined to dismantle that connection. A minuscule, fabricated space was enough to keep the colonial dream intact. For the population there, the imposition of the border therefore drove the colonial stakes deeper, ratcheting up the fight to free the six counties and the struggle to retain them for the Crown in equal measure, as well as the antimonies bolstering each. The brazen intensity of the fight to preserve this tiny geography —writ large in the Loyalist catchphrase, “*Not one inch!*”— is a clear effect of this Foucauldian psychology.

Having lost the gravity of nation and nation-ness —that singular imagined collectivity with its mandatory othering borders— subjects hold on to entrenched political factions as to life itself. Loyalists cling to the tiny terrain and nationalists fight to regain control of it with the cogency of Heaney’s atypically grotesque lines: “Long sucking the hind tit / Cold as a witch’s and as hard to swallow” (52). Fully dissatisfied with the political present, communities of the North are sunk deep in imperialist and nationalist pasts, taking dogged recourse to a time when things made sense, when the nation was the nation or the Empire was the Empire. But this national, historical vexation is also register of Irish futures: the levers of grievance, of unachieved justice, of reparation, of historically valid claims to territory and resources that are not let go of as long as the nation is incomplete and a livable homeland unrealised. Their janus-faced struggles are as dramatisation of the border’s double movement, entrenched within and decidedly outside and against. The structuring logic of partition is experienced, rather, as a Foucauldian “configuration” of *places* (22), as a Heaneyian ‘forking’ of contradictory-yet-contingent identifications and collectivities. Over time, this citizen no longer sees herself in deference to the infrastructure of the official state because “how to reconcile commitments to the state in which they actually live with commitments to their ethno-national kin in the ‘parent’ nation-state” remains unanswerable (Cleary 20). Here is a tiny “anti-nation” comprised of several competing and in some cases specifically imaginary imagined communities, state and civilian are

indistinguishable actors and agents, and the streets, rather than the borders, anchor, place and house the subject.

The Irish border transforms the conception of homeland in the way theorised by Bauman: “scattered between [a] multiplicity of centers and, for that reason, eminently questionable and open to contest” (50). As a key outcome, the nation-state does not “wither”¹⁶ but abides as fray and surplus. As Lloyd notes, “[c]ontrol of narratives is a crucial function of the state apparatus since its political and legal frameworks can only gain consent and legitimacy if the tale they tell monopolises the field of probabilities” (6). In Ireland we find not just two successor states with multiple discourses and contending narratives, but various states *within* each state, each one vying to define the (Northern) Irish future. Alternative state structures operate in dispute and contradiction and the territory stands as a strangely peculiar interior to the already “anomalous” Ireland (Lloyd *passim*). Uncannily prised, the singular, boundaried structure is fragmented beyond conceptual ‘recognition’ as multiple imaginings hover, the ‘pieces’ segregated though proximate, distinct though contingent. Nationalist interpellation shifts from a unified, solitary structure toward a Foucauldian complex of proximate, contingent relations; it locates subjects at a crossing rather than in the single housing structure of modernity, “an ensemble of relations that makes them appear as juxtaposed, set off against one another, implicated by each other” (Foucault 22) which do not cohere as world or place. If “world” is a place of the mind, then, after division, there are simply too many “Irelands” to keep in the conceptual air. Subjects live in a time “when the internal map of place is torn, when what we are faced with are not fixed settlements but pinhole scatterings” (Alexander 6-7), when identities are forced to diagonally straddle “unreal” borders that “cut through existing networks of ethnicity and kinship... [and] are shaped by cross-border contacts and migrations” (Nash & Reid 268). Always before a national geography in political turmoil, now Ireland is aporetic mélange of geography, history, ontology, nation.

III: Ireland and Its Discontents

It is said that a house divided cannot stand. It would seem *this* may be the critical lesson of the late modern phenomenon of national partition. As a discourse that “brings about new nationalisms and new realities” (Waterman 128), the meaning of partition does not “fold neatly into our paradigm of sovereign nation-states” (Zamindar 4). Zamindar’s questions, cited earlier, haunt Irish political life: Where is Ireland? Who

is Irish? Where is the nation-state? How is it made manifest, and by whom? And this is not merely an Irish political conundrum, or a South Asian circumstance. We have seen European and non-European nations subsisting in the throes of national unravelling as “formal” communities break and live out the “existential crisis” of realigned borders (Balibar). Despite critical distinctions that clearly appertain to the various instances of border realignments cited, they share these effects, albeit differently and unevenly. A divided nation is by definition an impossible place: a historical aporia, a political *Finnegans Wake*, at least for some protracted time. In keeping with this rather sober appraisal of the impacts of division in Ireland, Belfast poet Medbh McGuckian once insisted that “Ireland *cannot*... be cut in two, like a tree” (Morris 69). Indeed, as we see, it cannot be. Speaking of the precipitous rise of social inequalities in Europe, Balibar notes the way cultural factors come into play, such as gender and ethnic background; he insists on their aggravation by “wrong remedies applied to the crisis in the interest of [only] some sectors of society.” In this, he addresses strictly contemporary crises, of and in the European Union. But partition is patently decipherable as a historical “wrong remedy,” utilised, analogously, in times of crisis and adopted for the benefit of elites, often to the specific detriment of subaltern and other disenfranchised residents. It is a form of political schizophrenia, an interregnum insinuating a “pathological” (Balibar) unfettering through which nation and citizen are clearly transformed.

Implemented in situations of intense and prolonged social inequality y—circumstances of colonialism and occupation, of competition among the so-called ‘great’ powers— the ‘work’ of partition gives rise to the effects Balibar theorises: it “introduces a bifurcation with respect to an ongoing process of transformation.” He points, unwittingly, to the precise place of Ireland within the wider E.U. in noting the “mass precariousness and insecurity... in places like Greece, Spain”—*add Ireland*— in which the “inequalities are themselves unequally distributed... thus forming a second degree of inequality, or inequality within inequality.” In Ireland, a history of colonialism and the division it caused have produced this precise state of affairs which gets iterated at economic, social and political levels. The island occupies a unique position within the E.U. owing to centuries of intra-European settler colonialism and the 1922 sundering that freed only twenty-six of thirty-two counties and divided a long-oppressed people. Historically colonised versus historically colonising European nations have unequal relations of necessity: the Empire was initiated for purposes of filling the coffers of the monarchy, and it achieved that goal. What this means, from the

other (economic) side, is that colonised nations are left economically fragile, their natural resources drained and with no long-term economic stimulus or buffer set up by exiting empires. In Ireland, partition rendered these effects still more injurious in terms of these (largely undocumented) economic effects of the retention of (part of) Ulster by the Crown. The six counties had become the island's most fiscally robust as "Belfast underwent its dramatic nineteenth-century conversion into an outcrop of the British industrial system" (Fraser 9). Along with the history of colonialism, what was the cost, to Ireland, of the border politics surrounding decolonization? Ireland as Celtic Tiger was an epithet the nation could entertain for a mere thirteen years. And that fact isn't only outtake of *contemporary* fiscal realities: it is the consequence, too, of the take-over of Irish trade by the imperial construct for multiple, continuous centuries.

Colonial history and an imperially constructed 'deep' brokenness —political, economic, cultural, social— locate Ireland, today, in a unique position within the E.U., alter its relation to the swath of European and non-European nations as to the world at large. When Balibar speaks to inequalities within inequalities within particular E.U. nations, we recognise how, for this member-state, that will have a curious resonance, a place where the positionality of people and state is marked by the border histories outlined, by "relationships of economic prosperity and political power with the adjacent state, but also with other regions of [its] own since border regions are by their nature geographically peripheral" (O'Dowd, quoted in Nash & Reid 267). What is more, the "cross-border complexities of difference, hybridity and commonality co-exist with the continuous negotiation of social and cultural categories of nation, ethnicity and gender" (Nash & Reid 268). Proximities recur all through Ireland's international relations and we are therefore unsurprised recalling the rise and precipitous fall of Ireland as "Celtic Tiger" —the economic boom from 1994 to 2007— as well as the demonstrations, sit-ins and strikes since 2008, the outrage in 2010 over austerity measures, and the interventions by the E.U., the European Central Bank and the IMF (from which they withdrew in 2013).

Though seeing little documented media coverage, all this was underwritten by sustained histories of partition¹⁷ and imperialism, as well as a longer history of Irish peculiarity. Ireland's political exceptionality is seen, for example, in the new Republic's complicated unwillingness to engage in World War II and official position of neutrality. Likewise, a full century ago, World War I presented republican activists with an opportunity to attack the British power structure while fulsomely distracted, carrying

off both touchstones of independence during that conflict: the Easter Rising of 1916 followed by independence (and partition) in 1921. The latter conjoined event is an international hallmark if seen as the twentieth-century moment initiating a domino effect: the ultimate fall of the then still global British Empire. It was in recalling Julia Kristeva's position that "*beginning*" (9, italics added) that same year—the close of World War I *and* the moment of the partition and concomitant freeing of (most of) Ireland—that we witness a global refugee crisis for the first time in the modern era — also, of course, the epoch of modern nationalism. In more recent Irish anomalies, note the referendum on gay marriage, passed by an overwhelming majority vote on May 25, 2015. In Fintan O'Toole's glowing summation, "[t]he overwhelming victory for the Yes side in the marriage equality referendum is not as good as it looks. It's much better. It looks extraordinary – *little Ireland becoming the first country in the world to support same sex marriage by direct popular vote*. But actually it's about the ordinary. Ireland has redefined what it means to be an ordinary human being." Indeed, he concludes, Ireland has shown the world—which I suspect they did in 1921 as well—that 'the unthinkable is perfectly attainable.'

To continue O'Toole's hair-splitting rhetoric, it isn't merely that which is unthinkable, it is also that which is *odd*. An oddness that continues when we come back to the contemporary moment and to the context of E.U. politics. Notwithstanding the long term impacts on Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic of 'Brexit,' the United Kingdom's planned withdrawal from the E.U. (assuming it stands), less confounding, now, may be our remembrance of how, in 2008, Ireland was the sole member state holding up ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. Discontented, the Irish people waged a tiny intra-E.U. protest, a nation on the literal margin of the continent and in the throes of economic crisis as the then burgeoning economy had quickly lost steam. It is not unimportant that this Treaty was proposed for the purpose of establishing an E.U. president, changing voting processes, granting member states a seat, and augmenting parliamentary roles. It constituted, in other words, weighty material impacts on the meaning and future of power within the Union—facts people from a place like Ireland might struggle with, differently and unevenly, given the fact of a relationship of inequality to a quite powerful E.U. member state. Entering a political alliance is a different question from a British as opposed to an Irish vantage. However, the Treaty passed, finally, in 2009, concurrent with the dawn of the era of the Springs—though not without aid of Seamus Heaney. In an unprecedented move shortly before his death,

Heaney poetically prodded the Irish electorate to ratify the Treaty.¹⁸ He shocked the island, emerging (finally) as Percy Shelley's "unacknowledged legislator"¹⁹ by directly intervening in the political process. He wrote and read the poem "Beacons at Bealtaine," and even went so far as to appear in a stump video for the launch of the New Ireland for Europe Campaign, organized to support the Treaty's enactment.

Just as Ireland is the atypical European victim of protracted colonialism, it was, we note, this tiny, divided island that, amongst all E.U. member states, caused the Treaty process to stall and nearly to fail. An altered relation to the E.U. is evidence of an altered relation to nation and state. This, I argue, is a specific effect of partition and the colonial history that brought it about. We can expect Ireland's marginal, anomalous position within the European ethos to mean continued distinctiveness within the Union. In refusing to "accommodate itself to the political choices framed" by the E.U. (Bruyneel 217), Ireland opens and acts through a "third space of sovereignty" (Bruyneel *passim*), an autonomy "resid[ing] neither simply inside nor outside" the political system but which is "unclear" because "inassimilable to the institutions and discourse" of the modern nation-state as to the European infrastructure more specifically (Bruyneel xvii). Note that it was historically 'unequal' Ireland, together with a handful of 'unequal' nations of the global south, which foisted an anomalously strong European state voice in defence of Gaza in the most recent 2014 siege by the Israeli state.²⁰ Despite obvious historical distinctions, perhaps the losers in the imperial scramble for domination, and the weighty (geo)political traumas they share, are giving rise to new post-national, post-imperial consciousnesses. Perhaps these collectivities will continue, like Ireland, to levy an alternative voice and vision into the fray of international politics. Perhaps, too, the unequal effects of border politics will continue to provoke citizens to occupy the streets in defiance of state power and in consolidation of other heretofore 'unimaginable,' post-national collectivities. Is the contemporary Irish voice we hear echo of some beyond of the colonial-nationalist paradigm that has long-defined Europe and its colonies? If partition disarticulates the integrity of the nation-state and fractures the relation between citizen and apparatus, what does it mean to consider geopolitics as initiator of a domino effect or explicator of the shifts in thought undergirding the current interregnum? Meena Alexander asks, "what happens when the hold of place is no longer necessary?" (7)— a question partition demands we alter or augment. What happens to political community when the hold of place is no longer

possible, and the subject falls between Rushdie's political "stools," landing in the streets of protest and revolt?

¹ "Political modernity": "the rule by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise" (Chakrabarty 4).

² *Time Magazine*, 14 Dec. 2011.

³ The era likely had its beginnings earlier than commentators generally concede. 2009 saw protests in Tehran following the regime's disavowal of the "anti-regime election results [when] millions of Iranians, especially young ones, protested for weeks" (Anderson); this ran parallel to risings in Ireland, China, London, the U.S. and elsewhere. The seasonal term marking the current era, 'Arab Spring,' came through the etymology of the 1989 'Springs'—the Berlin wall, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, the Autumn of Nations involving former Soviet states—which likewise saw as predecessor the much earlier moments of revolt in Prague (1968) and Hungary (1956) and the even older 'Spring of Nations' (1848).

⁴ "All Things Considered," 19 Feb. 2014.
<http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=3&islist=true&id=2&d=02-19-2014>

⁵ A term used by partition scholars to refer both to positions in favor of partition and an adjective referring to a state or condition of partition or being defined by such a structure.

⁶ Eltahawy described the Egyptian revolution as that nation's "Berlin wall" in an interview with Amy Goodman.

⁷ This will be especially true in a place like Ireland, where several centuries of imperialist assault were met by a deeply ingrained nationalism.

⁸ "Of Other Spaces" was not published until 1986; it was a transcription of lectures given, however, in 1967.

⁹ Perhaps initiated on the divided island of Hispaniola, housing Haiti and the Dominican Republic. I do not develop this here, but it is worth noting that a case may be made to place the speculations I offer here next to that history of partition and its long-term effects.

¹⁰ From a May 2011 press conference:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0o3RyD2734&feature=player_embedded

¹¹ In the last century alone, there are, among others, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, including beloved heroes Michael Collins, Padraig Pearse and other participants of the 1916 Rising, as well as members of the Provisional IRA in the North, especially those who died in the hunger strikes of the early '80's overseen by the Thatcher regime. Best known among them is Bobby Sands, elected as Member of the Parliament while imprisoned for paramilitary activity.

Maureen E. Ruprecht Fadem, A Consciousness of Streets

¹² I refer again to the questions prompted by partition according to historian/theorists Zamindar and Glenny.

¹³ The Anglo-Irish Treaty, freeing all but the six northeastern counties, was signed 12/6/21 though not ratified until a year later, following the Civil War fought to decide it. Partition passed by a vote of 64 to 57 in the newly formed Irish parliament.

¹⁴ I do not mean, in this, to obfuscate all the “betweens” bordering these imaginings, and all of the ways the society doesn’t conform to this construction, but rather, to arrive at a productive understanding of the territory and its “partition effects” (Zamindar 238), generalisations become necessary in ways that are admittedly reductive.

¹⁵ See Santino.

¹⁶ “Marx predicted that the creation of a new world market by modern industrial production would spell an end to ‘national one-sidedness and narrow mindedness’; the economic activity of the bourgeoisie, now compelled to ‘nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere’, necessarily lending a cosmopolitan character to both production and culture throughout the world” (Nolan 4 – 5).

¹⁷ See Nash and Reid re: understanding social and economic impacts of the border.

¹⁸ See Timothy Ash’s article of June 24 ’09, “It takes an Irish Poet to Remind us of the Grandeur of the European Project”:
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/jun/24/republic-of-ireland-eu-vote>.

¹⁹ A reference to Percy Shelley’s essay “A Defence of Poetry,” which he famously concludes with the claim that “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.”

²⁰ Along with other parties, the Northern Irish Sinn Féin party, historically affiliated with the nationalist, paramilitary group the Provisional IRA, now a major political force in the governments on both sides of the border, worked diligently from the first moments of the siege to resist and denounce it.

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Maureen E. Ruprecht Fadem, *A Consciousness of Streets*

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