

## The pre-1969 historiography of the Northern Ireland conflict: a reappraisal

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**ABSTRACT.** *This article contributes to the mapping of the 'pathways of transmission' of the Northern Ireland 'problem' by drawing attention to three problematic aspects of John Whyte's appraisal of the pre-1969 historiography, in Interpreting Northern Ireland (1990): that the work of T. W. Moody and J. C. Beckett and their fellow historians before 1969 was 'lightweight' and 'bland'; that they effectively ignored Ulster's history of sectarian rioting until Andrew Boyd's book Holy war in Belfast (1969) brought it 'back into the consciousness of historians'; and that the 'external conflict paradigm' was 'dominant' in their discourse. These are examined in sections II–V. The content of the pre-1969 historiography is examined in section I and a preliminary reappraisal is offered in section VI.*

There is an apparently intractable problem with the historiography of the Northern Ireland conflict. Before 1969 there was general agreement or consensus that there was a Northern Ireland conflict/question/problem. There was also an academic consensus about what that conflict/question/problem was about, expressed most authoritatively by Denis Barritt and Charles Carter in *The Northern Ireland problem* (1962). With the re-eruption of communal violence in 1969, that academic consensus broke down and was replaced by a 'meta-conflict' – a 'conflict about what the conflict was about' – which persists.<sup>1</sup> In December 2013 it was reported to the government of Northern Ireland by Richard Haas and Meghan O'Sullivan that 'we cannot yet agree on the causes of the conflict, a mutual understanding of those events, or even at times the terminology to describe them'.<sup>2</sup> Why was it that despite sustained academic effort since 1969 across all relevant disciplines, resulting in a vast historiography, consensus about what the Northern Ireland conflict was about had still not re-emerged, fifteen years after the signing of the Good Friday / Belfast Agreement?

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<sup>1</sup> John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: broken images* (Oxford, 1995), pp 1, 355.

<sup>2</sup> [Richard Haas and Meghan O'Sullivan,] *Proposed Agreement 31 December 2013: an agreement among the parties of the Northern Ireland Executive on parades, select commemorations, and related protests; flags and emblems; and contending with the past*, <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/haass.pdf>, accessed 7 July 2014.

In this regard there have been calls for greater attention to be paid to how the Northern Ireland ‘problem’ has been ‘problematized’; for its ‘genealogy’ or ‘pathways of transmission’ to be comprehensively mapped; and for the ‘languages of conflict’ and our ‘modes of analysis’ to be further scrutinized.<sup>3</sup> In responding to these calls the influential and somewhat problematic role of one book in particular must be highlighted: John Whyte’s *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (1990).<sup>4</sup> The aim of this article is to make a further contribution to the mapping of the ‘pathways of transmission’ of the Northern Ireland ‘problem’ by drawing attention to three problematic aspects of Whyte’s appraisal of the pre-1969 historiography and offering a reappraisal. These are: that the work of T. W. Moody and J. C. Beckett and their fellow historians before 1969 was ‘lightweight’ and ‘bland’; that they effectively ignored Ulster’s history of sectarian rioting until Andrew Boyd’s book *Holy war in Belfast* (1969) brought it ‘back into the consciousness of historians’; and that the ‘external conflict paradigm’ was ‘dominant’ in their discourse. These are examined in sections II–V, preceded by an examination of the content of the pre-1969 historiography and followed by a preliminary reappraisal.

Henry Patterson has warned that ‘until it has been more deeply researched, many of the conclusions that have been drawn about the “Troubles” period must remain provisional since they are based on assumptions about the 1950s which may turn out to have shaky foundations’.<sup>5</sup> Here the focus is on the assumptions which Whyte made about the pre-1969 historiography with a view to better understanding why his appraisal has had such lasting influence and distorting effect. Given the nature of Whyte’s book and the circumstances in which he wrote, his treatment of the pre-1969 historiography was necessarily cursory compared with his treatment of later publications. Here the pre-1969 historiography is examined in its own right, rather than simply as a prelude to what followed. A clearer picture emerges of how consensus about the Northern Ireland ‘problem’ was achieved before 1969, and how, in the re-eruption of communal violence, it was lost.

## I

The shape of the historiography of the Northern Ireland conflict is familiar in outline – a watershed in 1969 dividing two unevenly matched parts, with the ‘lightweight’ pre-1969 literature explaining the conflict mainly in terms of

<sup>3</sup> Marysia Zalewski and John Barry (eds), *Intervening in Northern Ireland: critically rethinking representations of the conflict* (London, 2007), also published as a Special Issue of *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, ix, no. 4 (Dec. 2006); Richard Bourke, ‘Languages of conflict and the Northern Ireland Troubles’ in *Journal of Modern History*, lxxxviii, no. 3 (Sept. 2011), pp 544–78.

<sup>4</sup> John Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (Oxford, 1990); Brian Lambkin, ‘The historiography of the conflict in Northern Ireland and the reception of Andrew Boyd’s *Holy war in Belfast* (1969)’ in *R.I.A. Proc.*, cxiv C (2014), pp 1–32; idem, ‘Academic antagonism and the “resetting” of the Northern Ireland “problem”, 1969–1970: Owen Dudley Edwards v Hugh Trevor-Roper’ in *Irish Political Studies* (published online, August 2014). John Henry (J. H.) Whyte (1928–90) was professor of Irish Politics in Queen’s University Belfast, 1982–5 and in University College Dublin 1985–90.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Patterson, ‘Brian Maginess and the limits of liberal Unionism’ in *Irish Review*, xxv (1999/2000), pp 95–112, at p. 97.

conflict between Britain and Ireland, and the ‘heavyweight’ post-1969 literature explaining it mainly in terms of conflict between the two communities in Northern Ireland. Before 1969 comparatively little had been written. After the explosion of communal violence in 1969, there was an accompanying ‘explosion’ of writing and the body of published material became vast.<sup>6</sup> Its scale may be gauged from the University of Ulster’s CAIN bibliographic database of materials relevant to the Northern Ireland conflict. It contains 232 items for the twenty years before 1969 and 4,159 for the twenty years after, with a peak of 440 in 1971.<sup>7</sup> Whyte’s book was the first to authoritatively survey that literature, in 1990.<sup>8</sup> As an organizing principle for dealing with so much material, Whyte highlighted a key question which divided authors, ‘how far is the Northern Ireland conflict religious?’<sup>9</sup> He also highlighted what he called a ‘paradigm shift’ between opposing models of conflict interpretation; from ‘the external-conflict paradigm’ (conflict between Britain and the Republic of Ireland), which was ‘dominant’ before 1969, to the ‘internal-conflict paradigm’ (conflict between the two communities in Northern Ireland), which became ‘dominant’ soon after 1969. Not only was there conflict between the paradigms, there was also conflict within them. Whyte concluded:

the fact that disagreement continues about the nature of the conflict shows that the [internal conflict] paradigm has not solved all the difficulties. Perhaps the time has come when we should start looking for a new paradigm.<sup>10</sup>

That was the state of affairs for which John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary later coined the term ‘meta-conflict’.<sup>11</sup> By the late 1970s ‘conflict about the conflict’ had become as intractable as the violent conflict.<sup>12</sup> Whyte having pointed to the need for a new paradigm which would synthesise the opposing paradigms, McGarry and O’Leary offered one in *Explaining Northern Ireland: broken images*, which was published in 1995:

Adequate explanation of Northern Ireland requires, in short, the synthesis of the key endogenous [internal] and exogenous [external]

<sup>6</sup> Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p. viii.

<sup>7</sup> CAIN (Conflict Archive on the INternet), <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/bibdb/index.html>, accessed 8/07/14.

<sup>8</sup> Whyte’s book was based on a series of preceding articles: ‘Interpretations of the Northern Ireland problem: an appraisal’ in *Economic and Social Review*, ix (1978), pp 257–82; ‘Why is the Northern Ireland problem so intractable?’ in *Parliamentary Affairs*, xxxiv (1981), pp 422–35; *Is research on the Northern Ireland problem worthwhile?: an inaugural lecture delivered before the Queen’s University of Belfast on 18 January 1983* (Belfast, 1983); ‘How much discrimination was there under the Unionist regime, 1921–1968?’ in Tom Gallagher and James O’Connell (eds), *Contemporary Irish studies* (Manchester, 1983), pp 1–35; ‘How is the boundary maintained between the two communities in Northern Ireland?’ in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, ix (1986), pp 219–34; ‘Interpretations of the Northern Ireland problem’ in Charles Townshend (ed.), *Consensus in Ireland: approaches and recessions* (Oxford, 1988), pp 24–46.

<sup>9</sup> Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p. 103.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>11</sup> McGarry and O’Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, pp 1, 355.

<sup>12</sup> Whyte, ‘Why is the Northern Ireland problem so intractable?’.

causes. The major endogenous cause at play has been the presence of two ethno-national communities within one territory whose boundaries were ill-chosen and have been perpetually contested. However, the relationships between these two communities have been consistently affected by a variety of exogenous causes, the most important of which have been the constitutional evolution and public policies of the British and Irish states.<sup>13</sup>

McGarry and O'Leary's synthesis of internal and external causes in this way may be seen as not so different from that offered in 1962 by Barritt and Carter in their conclusion to *The Northern Ireland problem*, which looked forward to progress in *both* internal *and* external relations. Turning first to internal relations, they had warned:

In the long run, the constitutional settlement and the Protestant religion cannot be protected by discrimination or the manipulation of small legal advantages, but only by actions which are just and generous in intention. In the long run, those who put their trust in private military action, and those who take no trouble to understand the strong beliefs and valuable contribution of the Ulster Protestants, are bound to fail.

Then with regard to external relations, Barritt and Carter expressed hope for a new economic, political and religious configuration:

Within some greater economic or even political unity of Western Europe, and within a Christian Church more conscious of its unity than of its divisions, both sides might realize what is valid in their desires, and the interaction of Protestant and Catholic might create a finer community than either could achieve by their own dominance.<sup>14</sup>

What Barritt and Carter envisaged in broad terms in 1962 as 'greater economic or even political unity' McGarry and O'Leary specified more particularly in 1995 in the form of what eventually became known as the 'three-strand' solution adopted by the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement of 1998 ('two-communities', North–South, and East–West relationships).

In *Interpreting Northern Ireland* Whyte cited 531 bibliographical items of which 34 (6 per cent) were published before 1969,<sup>15</sup> which may be broken down as follows: 1920s (2); 1930s (1); 1940s (5); 1950s (13); 1960s (13).<sup>16</sup> A majority of these (19) would clearly fit as expressions of what Whyte considered an 'external conflict paradigm', and could indeed be sub-classified, using his categories, as 'traditional nationalist' (11), 'traditional unionist' (7), and 'Marxist' (2). Only a minority of items (perhaps seven) would fit as with what Whyte classified as expressions of 'the internal conflict paradigm', and

<sup>13</sup> Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, pp 257–9; McGarry and O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, p. 363.

<sup>14</sup> D. P. Barritt and C. F. Carter, *The Northern Ireland problem* (Oxford, 1962), p 155.

<sup>15</sup> For comparison, it is worth noting that Patrick Buckland in *A history of Northern Ireland* (Dublin, 1981), although referring to fewer bibliographical items (128) had given greater weight to the pre-1969 historiography: 28 items (22 per cent).

<sup>16</sup> Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, pp v, 269–96.

then only insofar as they provided useful information about Catholic–Protestant relations.<sup>17</sup> An even smaller number stand out in that, to some extent, they not only avoided propaganda and polemic but also comprehended both the external and internal conflict paradigms,<sup>18</sup> of which the most substantial were the two volumes of *Ulster since 1800*, edited by T. W. Moody and J. C. Beckett (London, 1954; 1957) and Denis Barritt and Charles Carter’s *The Northern Ireland problem* (Oxford, 1962). The last mentioned was the first to “set” the Northern Ireland “problem” as such (as distinct from the previous “Ulster Question”, to which the answer had been “Partition”). According to Barritt and Carter, the Northern Ireland conflict or ‘problem’ was not a single conflict but ‘racial, religious, political, economic, and social conflicts all rolled into one’.<sup>19</sup>

In this way Barritt and Carter gave a simple, uncontroversial answer to the key question which Whyte found to be so controversial after 1969 – ‘how far is the Northern Ireland conflict religious?’ Of the eleven other items published between 1962 and 1969 listed by Whyte, none engaged directly with Barritt and Carter to challenge or offer an alternative to their comprehensive setting of the “problem”.<sup>20</sup> Thus, in the absence of opposition from any alternative ‘re-setting’, Barritt and Carter’s was the “default setting” of “the Northern Ireland problem”, comprehending *both* external *and* internal conflict paradigms. The importance of *The Northern Ireland problem* in the historiography is indicated by Whyte’s recommendation, nearly thirty years on, that it ‘remains one of the best books to put into the hands of an outsider beginning to study Northern Ireland’.<sup>21</sup>

Whyte reckoned that the key question dividing authors of the pre-1969 historiography was ‘how discriminatory is the unionist regime?’ and that that subject, was ‘almost the only area of Northern Ireland society and politics which had been at all extensively explored’.<sup>22</sup> But so far as the work of historians in general was concerned Whyte concluded:

When the troubles began in 1968, the only recent history of Ulster available was to be found in the two volumes entitled *Ulster since 1800* (1954, 1957). These had originated as two series of lectures broadcast on B.B.C. Northern Ireland, and, although they were by reputable historians

<sup>17</sup> These would include John M. Moge’s *Rural life in Northern Ireland: five regional studies* (1947), written on behalf of the Northern Ireland Council of Social Service. Whyte’s bibliography also included some pre-1969 items offering international comparative evidence such as Robert R. Alford, *Party and society: the Anglo-American democracies* (London, 1964).

<sup>18</sup> Whyte referred to an article and book by Emrys Jones, ‘The distribution and segregation of Roman Catholics in Belfast’ in *Sociological Review*, iv (1956), pp 167–89 and *A social geography of Belfast* (London, 1960), which are counted here as relating to the ‘internal conflict paradigm’. However, Jones comprehended both internal and external conflict paradigms in ‘Problems of partition and segregation in Northern Ireland’ in *Journal of Conflict Resolution* [Chicago], iv (1960), pp 96–105.

<sup>19</sup> Barritt and Carter, *The Northern Ireland problem*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Only one of these cited *The Northern Ireland problem*, and then only as a source about industrialisation: R. J. Lawrence, *The Government of Northern Ireland: public finance and public services 1921–1964* (Oxford, 1965), p. 29, n.3.

<sup>21</sup> Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

[T.W. Moody and J.C. Beckett] they contained no great weight of scholarship, being based on the meagre material then available. When reread thirty years later, the main impression left by them is one of blandness. For instance, the sectarian riots which repeatedly erupted in Belfast during the nineteenth century are barely mentioned – it was left for Andrew Boyd’s book *Holy war in Belfast* (1969) to bring these riots back into the consciousness of historians.<sup>23</sup>

In short, Whyte critiqued the pre-1969 historiography as, in effect, lightweight and bland. Whyte’s appraisal of the pre-1969 historiography and of the importance of Boyd’s book has been accepted uncritically, and this has resulted in a distortion of the post-1969 historiography in two respects.<sup>24</sup> First, the pre-1969 historiography has been largely overlooked because Whyte’s appraisal gave scholars the impression that they were thereby excused from any requirement to read what had been written about the “problem” in the 1950s and 1960s, other than Barritt and Carter’s *The Northern Ireland problem*.<sup>25</sup> Second, Whyte’s appraisal of the pre-1969 historiography of sectarian rioting as virtually non-existent gave scholars the misleading impression that ‘it was the outbreak of the “Troubles” in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s that first directed scholars’ attention towards these nineteenth-century riots’.<sup>26</sup> For these reasons a reappraisal of the pre-1969 historiography is required.

## II

In terms of Whyte’s appraisal of pre-1969 historical scholarship as having ‘contained no great weight’, he did acknowledge that historical scholarship at the time could scarcely have been otherwise because it was ‘based on the meagre material then available’. By this he meant that the preliminary work of the historical profession – collecting and archiving primary source material – was insufficiently advanced to support the writing of “weighty” scholarly work. As he explained further, ‘scholarly historical writing on any scale is a recent phenomenon in Ireland ... often dated to the founding of the journal *Irish Historical Studies* in 1938’.<sup>27</sup> There were few professional Irish historians and therefore ‘it was not until the 1950s or even 1960s that serious scholarly works on Irish history began to appear in any number’.<sup>28</sup> A further factor militated against the production of “weighty” work on the history of Northern Ireland (created 1921) in the form of the decision that *Irish Historical Studies* would exclude any discussion of Irish politics after 1900, a rule not relaxed until after 1969, with the introduction of a ‘thirty-year rule’ in the late 1970s.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>24</sup> Lambkin, ‘Historiography of the conflict’, pp 1–32.

<sup>25</sup> Lambkin, *Opposite religions still?*, pp 10–11.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Doyle, *Fighting like the devil for the sake of God: Protestants, Catholics and the origins of violence in Victorian Belfast* (Manchester, 2009), p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p. 122.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* On the state of the historiography of Ireland in general and Northern Ireland in particular from the 1930s to the 1970s, see J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985: politics and society* (Cambridge, 1989), pp 588–9, 596–7, 608, 620, 623.

<sup>29</sup> On the avoidance by *Irish Historical Studies* of contemporary Irish history until the 1970s, see Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985*, p. 589; Ronan Fanning, “‘The great enchantment’”:

As a contributor to *Irish Historical Studies*, Whyte was well aware of the value of that rule in guaranteeing scholarly impartiality and objectivity.<sup>30</sup> He was also aware of its negative effect, as explained by Joseph Lee in 1989:

Understandable, if regrettable, though the editorial instinct was, it probably helped discourage the development of systematic historical thinking about the twentieth century, thus in effect abandoning the contemporary terrain to thinkers versed in other disciplines, or in no discipline at all. It was no coincidence that a journalist, Tim Pat Coogan, editor of the *Irish Press*, could validly claim that his *Ireland since the Rising*, published in 1966, was the first attempt at a general survey of contemporary Irish history.<sup>31</sup>

Lee's observation suggests a close parallel between the case of Coogan and that of the trade unionist and journalist, Andrew Boyd, who could validly claim that his *Holy war in Belfast* (1969) was the first attempt at a history of sectarian rioting.<sup>32</sup> It also suggests the parallel case of the economists, Denis Barritt and Charles Carter, who could validly claim that *The Northern Ireland problem* (1962) was the first attempt to 'find out just what the problem is ... in the dispassionate and impartial light of truth'.<sup>33</sup>

Previous histories included D. A. Chart's *A history of Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1927), which deliberately avoided any reference to sectarian rioting, especially that of the early 1920s. Chart, writing in the immediate wake of the Troubles of the early 1920s, explained that his aim was to write 'without reopening recent controversies and recalling many painful memories'.<sup>34</sup> Published nearly twenty years later, *Ulster since 1800* originated as two series

uses and abuses of modern Irish history' in James Dooge (ed.), *Ireland in the contemporary world: essays in honour of Garret FitzGerald* (Dublin, 1986), pp 131–47; Ciaran Brady (ed.), *Interpreting Irish history: the debate on historical revisionism* (Dublin, 1994), pp 149–51; and D. George Boyce and Alan O'Day (eds), *The making of modern Irish history: revisionism and the revisionist controversy* (London, 1996), pp 106, 163–5, 218–19, 223–4, 232–34. F.S.L. Lyons pushed at the boundary with 'The Irish Unionist Party and the devolution crisis of 1904–5' in *I.H.S.*, vi (1948–9), pp 1–22.

<sup>30</sup> Whyte, 'Bishop Moriarty on disestablishment and the union, 1868' in *I.H.S.*, x (1956), pp 193–9; 'Daniel O'Connell and the repeal party' in *I.H.S.*, xi (1958), pp 297–316.

<sup>31</sup> Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985*, p. 589.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Boyd, *Holy war in Belfast* (Tralee, 1969), inside back cover: 'it is the first account ever written of the many religious riots that have swept through Belfast, generation after generation'.

<sup>33</sup> Barritt and Carter, *Northern Ireland problem*, p. 2. Denis Barritt (1914–93) and Charles Carter (1919–2002) were colleagues in the department of Economics at the Queen's University of Belfast; Barritt was a research officer (1955–64), recruited by Carter who was professor of Economics (1952–9).

<sup>34</sup> D. A. Chart, *A history of Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1927), p. 24. Chart (1878–1960) was the deputy keeper of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland from its inception in 1924 to his retirement in 1948. On history texts, including Chart's, which was widely used in schools, see B. J. Mulcahy, 'A study of the relationship between Ireland and England as portrayed in Irish post-primary school history textbooks, published since 1922, and dealing with the period 1800 to the present' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Hull, 1988); K.C. Barton and Alan McCully, 'History teaching and the perpetuation of memories: the Northern Ireland experience', in Ed Cairns and

of lectures by ‘reputable historians’ broadcast on B.B.C. Northern Ireland radio. The two collections – ‘a political and economic survey’ (twelve talks) followed by ‘a social survey’ (twenty-two talks) – were aimed at a popular audience and published by the B.B.C. as small paperbacks of 133 and 240 pages, retailing at three shillings and sixpence and six shillings respectively.<sup>35</sup> The editors were both senior professional historians who were heavily involved in *Irish Historical Studies*.<sup>36</sup> They drew attention especially to the importance of their ‘social survey’ as an intervention in the historiography by emphasising three points: that ‘the field of social history is wider and less clearly defined than that of political and economic history’; that ‘the social history of Ireland has been neglected’; and that ‘much of the work embodied in these talks is of a pioneer character’. In short, they said, ‘the series as a whole represents the first scholarly attempt to outline the social history of modern Ulster’.<sup>37</sup>

The history of sectarian rioting and more generally that of the community divide between Catholics and Protestants was more than ‘barely mentioned’ in *Ulster since 1800*. In the second volume (1957), Moody reminded readers of how the first volume (1954) had outlined ‘the growth ... of irreconcilable conflict’ and of ‘the culmination of this conflict in the partition of Ulster and of Ireland’. He indicated the continuing conflict within Northern Ireland in the mid-1950s by saying that ‘religion continues to have the same measureless importance’ and that ‘the cleavage between Protestants and Catholics and the general balance of religious forces remain much as they were a century or more ago’.<sup>38</sup> He referred to the growth of trade unionism being ‘impeded by sectarian conflict among industrial workers’. Again he referred to ‘a social fact that has changed remarkably little in the last 350 years – the fundamental cleavage in Ulster society broadly defined by the distinction between protestants and catholics’, and also how ‘in a more decisive sense than elsewhere in Ireland, *religious conflict has been identified with political, economic, and cultural conflict*’ (emphasis added).<sup>39</sup> Moody claimed that ‘the colonial element has dominated the political, economic, and intellectual life of Ulster since the seventeenth century’ and that ‘after three and a half centuries the fundamental cleavage remains, and the larger the social unit the wider is the gulf’.<sup>40</sup> Addressing the challenge of dealing with the present conflict (both within Northern Ireland and between the two parts of the island), Moody ‘set’ the Northern Ireland ‘problem’ by referring to ‘two kinds of

M. D. Roe (eds), *The role of memory in ethnic conflict* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp 107–124; Margaret E. Smith, *Reckoning with the past* (Lanham MD, 2005), pp 132–5.

<sup>35</sup> T. W. Moody and J. C. Beckett (eds), *Ulster since 1800: a political and economic survey* (London, 1954); T. W. Moody and J. C. Beckett (eds), *Ulster since 1800: second series, a social survey* (London, 1957).

<sup>36</sup> Theodore William (T. W.) Moody (1907–84) was founding editor with Robert Dudley (R. D.) Edwards in 1938 of *Irish Historical Studies* and professor of Modern History in Trinity College Dublin 1940–77. James Camlin (J. C.) Beckett (1912–96) became a member of the committee of management of *Irish Historical Studies* in 1945 and was professor of Irish History in Queen’s University Belfast, 1958–75.

<sup>37</sup> Moody and Beckett (eds), *Ulster since 1800, social survey*, Preface.

<sup>38</sup> T. W. Moody, ‘The social history of modern Ulster’, in Moody and Beckett (eds), *Ulster since 1800 ... a social survey*, pp 224, 225.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.



approach [internal/external] to the problem of bridging this gulf' and stating quite starkly that 'the problem of a divided society thus remains unsolved'. In his closing sentences Moody also urged the need to address the problem of 'partition' – both physical (external) and mental (internal) – by dealing with the past historically:

It would be well if Irishmen were to study historical facts more and to cherish historical myths less. In the study of our past we can discover truth about ourselves, and in doing so we can mitigate that ultimate partition which divides Irishmen so grievously in the mind and in the heart.<sup>41</sup>

In similar terms, Moody's co-editor Beckett had pointed to the problem in his introductory essay:

At the close of the eighteenth century the division between Roman Catholic and Protestant remained, as it had been at the beginning, of basic significance in the life of Ulster. So deeply did this division run that it might be said, with little exaggeration, to cut the population into two distinct groups, living side by side under the same government, yet forming separate and almost self-contained societies.<sup>42</sup>

Two other contributors to this volume, Emrys Jones and F.S.L. Lyons, similarly addressed the history of the community divide, sectarian rioting and the current state of conflict within Northern Ireland.<sup>43</sup>

In the compass of such a short book on the whole social history of Ulster, it would seem unreasonable to expect much more space to have been devoted to the history of the community divide and sectarian rioting than was actually given, as compared for example with its post-1969 treatment by Jonathan Bardon in his much more extensive *A history of Ulster* (1992).<sup>44</sup> As this review of the contents of *Ulster since 1800* (1957) makes clear, it contained all the elements of Barritt and Carter's subsequent 'setting' of the 'problem' as 'racial, religious, political, economic, and social conflicts all rolled into one'.

While Whyte's assertion that Moody and Beckett's was 'the only recent history of Ulster' pre-1969 is strictly true, his ambiguous wording – that 'the only recent history of Ulster was to be found in the two volumes entitled *Ulster since 1800* (1954, 1957)' – is misleading to the extent that it suggests there were no other recent books in which the history of Ulster was to be found. In fact two other history books, not referred to by Whyte, were published after 1957 and before 1969, which referred to the 'problem' of the community divide and

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 230–35. Beckett had previously written that 'the real partition of Ireland is not on the map but in the minds of men' in *A short history of Ireland* (London, 1952), p. 192. On the influence of this, see Mary Burgess, 'Mapping the narrow ground: geography, history and partition', in *Field Day Review*, i (2005), pp 121–132 at p. 121.

<sup>42</sup> Beckett, 'Introduction', Moody and Beckett (eds), *Ulster since 1800 ... a social survey*, p. 24.

<sup>43</sup> Emrys Jones, 'Belfast' in Moody and Beckett (eds), *Ulster since 1800 ... a social survey*, pp 97–8; F.S.L. Lyons, 'The twentieth century', *ibid.*, pp 54–61 at p. 61.

<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Bardon *A History of Ulster* (1992) discusses rioting in Belfast in 1829 (p. 247), 1857 (pp 306, 349–52), 1864 (pp 350–2), 1872 (pp 356–7), 1886 (pp 380–2, 404), 1912 (p. 436), 1920–2 (pp 467–74, 482, 489, 491, 494), 1935 (pp 539–41), 1964 (p. 632); and Derry in 1868–70 and 1899 (p. 396).

specifically to the history of sectarian rioting: *Two centuries of Irish history* (1966) and *Belfast: the origin and growth of an industrial city* (1967). Both were published by the B.B.C. as continuations of the series begun with *Ulster since 1800* (1954, 1957). These are now considered alongside a third history book not referred to by Whyte, Benedict Kiely's *Counties of contention* (1945).

### III

In the spring of 1965, B.B.C. Northern Ireland broadcast on Monday mornings a series of eleven, weekly, twenty-minute radio programmes, *Two centuries of Irish history*, which was intended 'primarily for the 14–15 age group in secondary schools within the Province', with the aim: 'to make clearer the events that led to the creation of Northern Ireland'.<sup>45</sup> There was a repeat broadcast in the autumn, and a hardback book of the series was published in 1966, edited by James Hawthorne.<sup>46</sup> Two of the six contributors referred specifically to the community divide and to the history of sectarian rioting.<sup>47</sup> Between February and June 1967, B.B.C. Northern Ireland broadcast a further series of sixteen half-hour radio programmes, *Belfast: the origin and growth of an industrial city*. A hardback book of the series was published later that year, edited jointly by J. C. Beckett (who had become professor of Irish History at Queen's University Belfast in 1958) and R. E. Glasscock (then also at Queen's as lecturer in Geography).<sup>48</sup> The author of the Preface, radio producer John Boyd (no relation to Andrew Boyd), referred to it as the B.B.C.'s 'fourth venture into the historical field'<sup>49</sup> and claimed it as 'an original contribution to Irish historical study', which contained 'a re-assessment of existing evidence' and 'the results of much new research'. It was aimed at 'the general reader', and its purpose was to 'trace the history of Belfast from its origins to the present day', in the hope that 'a rounded picture of an urban society finally emerges'. More than half of the material in the book was concerned with 'the last 150 years'.<sup>50</sup>

Four of the sixteen contributors to Beckett and Glasscock's *Belfast* referred specifically to the history of sectarian rioting, among them J. J. Campbell, principal lecturer in Education at St Joseph's College of Education Belfast.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>45</sup> James Hawthorne, *Two centuries of Irish history* (London, 1966), p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Hawthorne, a schoolteacher, had been recruited by B.B.C. Northern Ireland in 1960 as its first specialist schools producer: James Hawthorne, 'Above suspicion or controversy? The development of the B.B.C.'s Irish history programme for schools in Northern Ireland' in Martin McLoone (ed.), *Broadcasting in a divided community: seventy years of the B.B.C. in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1996), pp 51–65, at p. 51.

<sup>47</sup> David Hammond, 'Ulster will fight' in Hawthorne, *Two centuries*, pp 95–104; Martin Wallace, 'Northern Ireland', *ibid.*, pp 128–9.

<sup>48</sup> J. C. Beckett and R. E. Glasscock (eds), *Belfast: the origin and growth of an industrial city* (London, 1967). Beckett gave his inaugural lecture as the first professor of Irish History in Queen's on 13 March 1963: J. C. Beckett, *The study of Irish History* (Belfast, 1963), p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> See also John Boyd, *The middle of my journey* (Belfast, 1990), pp 201–2.

<sup>50</sup> Beckett and Glasscock, *Belfast*, pp vii–viii.

<sup>51</sup> The other chapters were Emrys Jones, 'Late Victorian Belfast: 1850–1900' (at pp 118–19); J. W. Boyle, 'Belfast and the origins of Northern Ireland' (p. 132); J. C. Beckett, 'Belfast: a general survey' (p. 188).

Campbell referred in his chapter, 'Between the wars', to 'periodic sectarian rioting' and described 'the story' of Belfast 1918–39 as 'an uneasy and unsuccessful attempt to establish, or perhaps it would be more correct to say impose, a pattern of community relations'. He rehearsed the litany of sectarian riots, reminding readers that Belfast had been 'the scene of periodic sectarian rioting – in 1857, 1864, 1872, 1886, 1893, 1898 and 1912'. Campbell had examined at least one of the nineteenth-century government reports of inquiry into rioting. He said that he had read 'accounts of those riots' and found them to make 'melancholy reading, whether in the files of newspapers or in the pages of a government commission's report'. He also made a connection between the riots of the nineteenth century and those of the recent past. Those accounts were 'melancholy', Campbell explained, 'because of the sameness of the pattern which emerges' and 'by its similarity to the pattern of the troubles of the twenties and the thirties'. He also saw similarity with 'even more recent times in the city',<sup>52</sup> a reference to the rioting in 1964 in Divis Street, Belfast, regarding which Bardon has reckoned that 'it was remarkable that no lives were lost, for such sectarian rioting had not been seen in Belfast since 1935'.<sup>53</sup>

The third book, Benedict Kiely's *Counties of contention: A study of the origins and implications of the partition of Ireland* (1945) pre-dated *Ulster since 1800* (1954, 1957). It is relevant here for its pioneering treatment of both the history of sectarian rioting and the 'problem' of Northern Ireland.<sup>54</sup> Kiely (1919–2007), like Coogan and Boyd later, was not a professional academic, but a journalist and critic with the *Irish Independent*. He wrote this book at the suggestion of Father Senan, editor of the *Capuchin Annual*, who had published J. J. Campbell's *Orange terror: the partition of Ireland* in 1943, a book banned by the Northern Ireland government.<sup>55</sup> Commenting on the publication of Kiely's book, the *Irish Times* thought Kiely's approach remarkable for being 'sincerely designed to find the compromise of understanding that would end the misunderstandings of the past, teach Irishmen to live peacefully with each other, and solve forever the thing that Englishmen have known for generations as "the Irish problem"'.<sup>56</sup> That Kiely's book was considered by contemporaries as making a 'weighty' contribution to the historiography was evident from the reviews it received in such journals as *Studies*, *Irish Monthly*, *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* and *Irish Historical Studies*. Kiely dealt at length with the history of sectarian rioting, devoting a whole chapter to 'the problem of Belfast and its bitter streets'.<sup>57</sup> Taking the long view, Kiely saw 'this parade of

<sup>52</sup> Campbell, 'Between the wars', p. 144. In contrast to Andrew Boyd who was born in 1921, Campbell (1910–79) had personal memories of the violence of the 1920s from living in Belfast's Oldpark Road, to which he referred, under the pen name 'Ultach', in 'The real case against partition' in *Capuchin Annual* (Dublin, 1943), pp 284–5, 289, 306, 311.

<sup>53</sup> Bardon, *History of Ulster*, p. 632.

<sup>54</sup> Benedict Kiely, *Counties of contention: a study of the origins and implications of the partition of Ireland* (Cork, 1945, 2004), p. 186 (reissued with a foreword by John Hume to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the Mercier Press).

<sup>55</sup> *Irish Times*, 29 Jan. 1977. The episode is discussed in detail by Kiely in *Counties of contention*, pp 172–83. The pamphlet went through four reprints August–September 1943.

<sup>56</sup> *Irish Times*, 14 Apr. 1945; see also 2 Jun. 1945.

<sup>57</sup> Kiely, *Counties of contention*, pp 112–13, 115, 116–26.

riots and speeches going back beyond the making of the Border, beyond the long three-tiered debate on the question of Home Rule, back to the agrarian disturbances of the eighteenth century'.<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, in the light of Whyte's view that it was Boyd's work which had served 'to bring these riots back into the consciousness of historians', the reviewer in *Irish Historical Studies* commented that 'there is little in [*Counties of contention*] that has not been said before', indicating that the information given by Kiely on the history of sectarian rioting came as no surprise.<sup>59</sup> On that topic, the reviewer probably had in mind Campbell's *Orange terror*, which was one of Kiely's main sources.<sup>60</sup> Another indication that contemporaries believed they possessed a "weighty" (pre-1945) historiography is that this reviewer was critical of Kiely's 'list of authorities', which included twenty-eight items: he thought it 'of mixed quality' and noted that Kiely himself admitted that it was 'not only incomplete but insignificant'.<sup>61</sup>

Considering how recently the Irish historical profession had got underway and the pioneering nature of the scholarship of Moody and Beckett and their colleagues, Whyte's claim that the pre-1969 historiography 'contained no great weight of scholarship' seems unduly harsh. Whyte also overlooked the fact that the two volumes of *Ulster since 1800* (1954, 1957), on which he based his judgement, were followed by two further volumes, making a four-part B.B.C. series. Three of the four volumes (as well as Kiely's *Counties of contention*) made specific reference to the internal problem of Northern Ireland's community divide, and to the history of sectarian rioting, in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Not only this, Whyte seems also to have overlooked the evidence presented by Barritt and Carter in *The Northern Ireland problem* (1962). Drawing on Emrys Jones's *A social geography of Belfast* (1960), they pointed out that in the nineteenth century 'the divisions [between Catholics and Protestants] were hardening in Ulster' and, echoing Kiely, Campbell and Jones, they rehearsed the litany: 'riots were part of the pattern of life in the second half of the century – they occurred in 1857, 1864, 1872, and then (intensified by the Home Rule struggle) in 1886, 1893, and 1898'.<sup>62</sup>

In terms of the public mood of the 1950s the senior civil servant Patrick Shea (1908–86) later recalled that he had given up in 1958 on the play which he had written to 'recreate the Orange and Green conflict which for generations periodically disfigured our community':

Sectarian violence was a thing of the past; we had learned sense. A Belfast audience would not come to the theatre to be reminded of the sins of their forefathers, sins of which, thank God, our community was no longer capable. There was no point in wasting further time on what was clearly a non-starter.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>59</sup> James A. MacCauley, 'Counties of contention' in *I.H.S.*, v no. 17 (Mar., 1946), pp 105–7, at p. 105.

<sup>60</sup> Kiely, *Counties of contention*, pp 128, 157, 171–83.

<sup>61</sup> MacCauley, 'Counties', p. 107. Kiely, *Counties of contention*, p. 188.

<sup>62</sup> Barritt and Carter, *Northern Ireland problem*, p. 71. See Jones, *Social geography*, pp xiii, 172, 190, 191; see also pp 53, 76.

<sup>63</sup> Patrick Shea, *Voices and the sound of drums: an Irish autobiography* (Belfast, 1981), p. 175; see also Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster: a history* (Belfast, 2000), p. 443.

This would seem to support Whyte's view that the tradition of sectarian violence had effectively been forgotten. However, Shea's assessment needs to be set against the struggle of Sam Thompson (1916–65) to get his stage play on the same theme, *Over the bridge*, performed a year later. In 1959 the board of directors of the Ulster Group Theatre refused to produce it on the grounds that it was 'full of grossly vicious phrases and situations which would undoubtedly offend and affront every section of the public', explaining that their policy of dealing with the past was 'to keep political and religious controversies off our stage'. The opposition notwithstanding, *Over the bridge* eventually played in 1960 to an estimated audience of 42,000.<sup>64</sup> That not all heard or remembered the warning it gave from history was demonstrated by the general reaction of shock and surprise with which Andrew Boyd's *Holy war in Belfast* was received when it was published in August 1969.<sup>65</sup> However, the pre-1969 historiography cannot fairly be accused of failing to take note of the sequence of episodes of sectarian rioting.

#### IV

What, then, of Whyte's contention, also based on his reading of the two volumes of *Ulster since 1800*, that 'the main impression left by them is one of blandness'. Certainly there was nothing 'bland' about the view taken by Kiely in 1945 of the lesson to be learned from the history of sectarian rioting – that unless decisive action was taken, there would be further eruptions of violence:

No citizens could congratulate themselves on the uncouth, vicious thing that comes to life at intervals to burn and kill and destroy. The remedy is in the power of the young people of Belfast; and there are signs that a minority of those young people, Catholic and Protestant, are realising their responsibility and power. ... Somewhere among them may be the inspiration that will end forever the bitter legend.<sup>66</sup>

Whyte, however, overlooked Kiely and based his judgement of 'blandness' in the pre-1969 historiography on his reading of Moody and Beckett's *Ulster since 1800*, supporting it by reference to the work of Rex Cathcart:

We know, from Cathcart's history of the B.B.C. in Northern Ireland (1984), that this blandness was not accidental. In the 1950s the B.B.C. was following a policy of bringing both sides of society together. This meant that 'the positive aspects of community relations were emphasised and the negative underplayed'.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Michael Parker, *Northern Ireland literature 1956–2006: the imprint of history*, volume 1 (Basingstoke, 2007), pp 5–16.

<sup>65</sup> Lambkin, 'Historiography of the conflict', pp 9–10; Dennis Kennedy, 'Waging holy war in Belfast: History, 1857–1969' in *Irish Times*, 1 Sept. 1969.

<sup>66</sup> Kiely, *Counties of contention*, p. 130.

<sup>67</sup> Whyte, *Interpreting*, p. 123; Rex Cathcart, *The most contrary region: The B.B.C. in Northern Ireland, 1924–1984* (Belfast, 1984), pp 201, 263; see also Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, p. 408.

Cathcart (1928–94), a friend and former student of Moody, was familiar with the leading roles that Moody and Beckett had played in the B.B.C.’s four-part series on the history of Ulster, Northern Ireland and Belfast, not least from his work in schools broadcasting in Northern Ireland (1967–73).<sup>68</sup> Writing post-1969, Cathcart went to the nub of the matter when he asked: ‘in its drive to develop a consensus, to extend the middle ground, had the B.B.C. failed to alert the population to the real division which remained and to the extremes on both sides?’<sup>69</sup> James Hawthorne, the editor of *Two centuries of Irish history* (1966), who went on to become controller of B.B.C. Northern Ireland (1978–87), also writing post-1969, confirmed that there was such a policy, and that it could be traced back to an internal statement made in 1930:

The B.B.C. should reflect the sentiments of the people, who have always retained ... unswerving loyalty to British ideals and British culture. Northern Ireland relies on broadcasting to strengthen its common loyalties with Britain.<sup>70</sup>

Cathcart’s answer to his own question was that in the mid-1960s there was ‘a measure of euphoria in broadcasting circles’ and a belief that ‘rapprochement *externally and internally* in Northern Ireland seemed to have been achieved’ (emphasis added).<sup>71</sup> So far as the B.B.C.’s four-part history series was concerned, Cathcart was clear that Moody had been largely influential in getting it going, and that he had further lobbied the B.B.C. (in vain as it turned out) for a northern version of the annual Thomas Davis (broadcast and published) lecture series, which he had succeeded in having launched on Radio Éireann in 1953.<sup>72</sup> As noted already, Moody had been instrumental with Dudley Edwards in establishing the rule of *Irish Historical Studies* in not dealing with Irish history after 1900, and his pioneering work in public history with the Thomas Davis series needs to be understood in that context. Writing pre-1969 in *Irish Historical Studies*, another historian, F. X. Martin, explained the constraints then operating on twentieth-century Irish historiography:

... up to 1963 ... there was an obvious unspoken decision to fight shy of Irish history in the present century, dealing as it inescapably would with the rising of 1916 (an event which was not to be questioned or analysed except in a laudatory fashion) and the civil war of 1922–3 (which was still

<sup>68</sup> Obituary, *The Independent*, 16 Sept. 1994.

<sup>69</sup> Cathcart, *Most contrary region*, pp viii, 263.

<sup>70</sup> James Hawthorne, *Reporting violence – lessons from Northern Ireland?* (Belfast, 1981), p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> Cathcart, *Most contrary region*, p. 201. This could be considered further evidence of the pre-1969 consensus about Barritt and Carter’s ‘setting’ of the ‘problem’.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 176–7; Smith, *Reckoning with the past*, pp 135–6. Two Thomas Davis lecture series, broadcast in 1962 and 1967, included lectures on the history of Northern Ireland by David Kennedy: ‘Catholics in Northern Ireland, 1926–39’ in Frank McManus (ed.), *The years of the great test, 1926–39* (Cork, 1967), pp 138–60, and ‘Ulster during the war and after’ in Kevin B. Nowlan and T. Desmond Williams (eds), *Ireland in the war years and after* (Dublin, 1969), pp 52–66. The editors of the latter commented: ‘Until much more source material is made available, especially from state archives, in Ireland and elsewhere, it will be difficult to write definitive accounts of certain aspects of our recent history... A beginning, however, must be made’, *ibid.*, p. ix.

a raw memory for most of the surviving participants). In the series “The shaping of modern Ireland”, broadcast in 1956 under the editorship of Dr Conor Cruise O’Brien, the nettle was tentatively clutched but the object of that series was the background to 1916 and not the rising or subsequent events.<sup>73</sup>

Notwithstanding these constraints, examination of the most “weighty”, scholarly volume of the four-part B.B.C. series, *Belfast: the origin of the city* (1967), reveals little evidence of ‘blandness’ or lack of challenge in its presentation of the history of sectarian rioting.

J. J. Campbell, the contributor who referred to the history of sectarian rioting in greatest detail, was quite candid about why he chose to withhold giving more detail: ‘the full tale of those times must remain to be told when it can no longer recall feelings of bitterness and provoke outbursts of justification and recrimination’. The time, according to Campbell, was not yet ripe for the kind of treatment that Andrew Boyd was shortly to give the story of sectarian rioting in *Holy war in Belfast*. His judgement was informed by personal experience of attempting to tell the ‘full tale’ of partition. In 1943, as noted already, he had published the controversial article and pamphlet, *Orange terror*, under the pseudonym ‘Ultach’.<sup>74</sup> Mindful of the response then, he advised restraint in 1967. As he observed optimistically, ‘nearly every commentator considers that if left alone by agitators the ordinary people of Belfast would find it easy to live together in peace and harmony’.<sup>75</sup>

The joint-editor, J. C. Beckett, saw himself in the liberal Protestant tradition and he indicated clearly his hope for it in the future:

... the pre-industrial character of Belfast has not wholly disappeared; it was overlaid, not destroyed, by the changes of the nineteenth century ... the traditions of an earlier age are preserved in some of its institutions, notably in the Society for Promoting Knowledge (better known as the Linen Hall Library), founded in 1788, and the Belfast Literary Society, founded in 1801, both of which have functioned in uninterrupted succession since their first establishment.<sup>76</sup>

Having given an historical explanation as to why there had been ‘no urge towards integration strong enough to break down the barriers’, Beckett concluded that ‘Belfast remains a divided community’. Then, on behalf of all the contributors, he added:

in recent years there has been a growing readiness, on all sides, to recognize that *the division is not only an evil but an evil that ought to be remedied*; and this recognition may mark the beginning of a *genuine integration of the whole community* (emphasis added).<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> F. X. Martin, ‘The Thomas Davis lectures, 1953–67’ in *I.H.S.*, xvi (1967), pp 276–302, at p. 280.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Ultach’ (J. J. Campbell), *Orange terror: the partition of Ireland* (Dublin, 1943). Campbell was then a teacher in St Malachy’s College, Belfast.

<sup>75</sup> Campbell, ‘Between the wars’, p. 146.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 191–2.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

There was nothing ‘bland’ about Beckett calling sectarian division ‘an evil that ought to be remedied’ and declaring unambiguously in favour of ‘genuine integration’. There was nothing ‘bland’ either about Beckett’s participation as a regular contributor to B.B.C. Northern Ireland’s long-running and influential peripatetic panel discussion series *Your questions*, first broadcast on radio in 1954 (produced by the already mentioned John Boyd), which ran for 150 editions and eventually transferred to television. Beckett and the other regular panelists, liberal nationalist J. J. Campbell, Northern Ireland Labour Party activist Charles Brett, and Jack Sayers, editor of the *Belfast Telegraph*, were all ‘proponents of the need for the political renovation of the North through a more constructive engagement between nationalism and unionism’, viewing the ‘problem’ of Northern Ireland as ‘both external and internal’. The programmes were characterised by ‘occasional rows, not much petulance, a good deal of humour, some political crossfire, and a general air of tolerance’, with most heat generated perhaps by the key pre-1969 question identified by Whyte: ‘how discriminatory is the Unionist regime?’ – an internal rather than external issue.<sup>78</sup> Clearly an effort was made to achieve a ‘cross-community’ balance in selecting the panellists of *Your questions*, and also in assembling the teams of scholars who contributed to the four B.B.C. publications discussed above. Combined, there were twenty-eight contributors to the two volumes of *Ulster since 1800* (1954, 1957) and *Belfast: origins and growth of a city* (1967). Of these, probably five would have been perceived as of a Catholic/Nationalist background and commitment: J. J. Campbell (St Joseph’s College of Education), K. B. Nowlan (U.C.D.), B. Kennedy and D. Kennedy (St Malachy’s College), and T. P. O’Neill (National Library of Ireland).<sup>79</sup> This indicates under-representation and helps to explain why the pre-1969 historiography later came to be characterised as predominantly ‘pro-Unionist’. However, it is hard to identify many others in the community of scholars of a Catholic/Nationalist background active at that time with a specialist interest in the history of Northern Ireland and to argue that editors like Moody and Beckett might have chosen better balanced teams. In the light of all the evidence presented above, the view that the pre-1969 historiography of the Northern Ireland conflict was characterised by ‘blandness’ or lack of ‘challenge’ is not sustainable.

A coda to this survey of items not considered by Whyte in the pre-August 1969 historiography is provided by the pioneering three-volume secondary school textbook series, *A History of Ireland*, which was published by Gill and Macmillan in the summer of 1969, in time for the new school year.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Henry Patterson, *Ireland since 1939: the persistence of conflict* (Dublin, 2006), p. 182; John Boyd, *The middle of my journey* (Belfast, 1990), pp 162–8. See also Andrew Gailey, *Crying in the wilderness: Jack Sayers: a liberal editor in Ulster, 1939–69* (Belfast, 1995), pp 64–6.

<sup>79</sup> Not all of the other contributors would necessarily have held unionist positions. They were: J. C. Beckett, R. Black, W. Black, F. Boal, K. Connell, E. Evans, R. Glasscock, K. S. Isles, E. Jones, D. Neill, B. Wilson (Q.U.B.); F.S.L. Lyons, R.B. McDowell, T. W. Moody (T.C.D.); J. Boyle (Mount Allison, New Brunswick); E.R.R. Green (Manchester); J. L. McCracken (Magee College); J. M. Moge (Oxford); and D. Bleakley, G. Camblin, C.E.B. Brett, J. Hewitt, H. Shearman.

<sup>80</sup> It was widely used in schools, north and south, in the 1970s and 1980s: Smith, *Reckoning with the past*, p. 133.



In the third volume, *The birth of modern Ireland* by Mark Tierney and Margaret MacCurtain, three of its twenty-one chapters were devoted to Ulster and its ‘problem’, whose roots ‘lay very deep’ and were ‘partly economic, partly religious and partly political’. In the concluding paragraphs (sub-headed ‘Problems in Northern Ireland’ and ‘New directions’), MacCurtain stressed the ‘internal problem’: she referred to ‘the civil rights movement’ which ‘in the late ‘sixties drew the attention of the world to *the problems and tensions within the boundaries of Northern Ireland*’ (emphasis added); and in terms of external relations she described Northern Ireland as ‘a distinct region possessing its own character, history, accent and type of politics’.<sup>81</sup> Thus, this secondary school textbook – which was probably the last item of the pre-1969 historiography before the *Holy war in Belfast* watershed – presented the history of Northern Ireland, particularly the themes of community division and sectarian rioting, in a way that was challenging, not bland, and within both the ‘external’ and the ‘internal’ conflict paradigms. In doing so the authors were reflecting the state of the pre-1969 historiography.

## V

Given all this, why did John Whyte characterise the pre-1969 historiography of the Northern Ireland conflict as, in effect, “lightweight” and “bland”; assert that Boyd’s book had brought ‘these riots back into the consciousness of historians’; and conclude that the ‘external conflict paradigm’ was dominant?<sup>82</sup> In those three respects, it would seem that Whyte allowed himself to be influenced unduly by the requirements of his interpretive framework. As noted already, that framework was one of ‘paradigm shift’ between opposing ‘external’ and ‘internal’ paradigms or models of conflict interpretation, with the former dominant before 1969. Whyte’s brilliant insight was that the problem of how to gain intellectual control of the vast (mainly post-1969) historiography of the Northern Ireland conflict and its rival interpretations could be solved by adapting the ‘paradigm shift’ framework of Thomas S. Kuhn’s *The structure of scientific revolutions* (second edition 1970, first edition 1962).<sup>83</sup> Accordingly, he identified two competing ‘external’ and ‘internal’ conflict paradigms and set out to demonstrate a shift between them. He decided that before 1969 the ‘external-conflict paradigm’ (conflict between Britain and the Republic of Ireland about Northern Ireland) was ‘dominant’; and that after 1969, the ‘internal-conflict paradigm’ (conflict between the two communities within Northern Ireland) soon became dominant. That shift resulted in intractable conflict between (and within) the two paradigms. So Whyte identified the need for a new paradigm, or for the two conflicting paradigms to be synthesised.<sup>84</sup> Having committed himself to that framework, Whyte was predisposed to overlook the fact that Barritt and Carter had presented just such a synthesis in *The Northern Ireland problem* (1962), and

<sup>81</sup> Mark Tierney and Margaret MacCurtain, *The birth of modern Ireland* (Dublin, 1969), pp 61, 113, 207, 218.

<sup>82</sup> Whyte, *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, p. 123.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 172, 257–9.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

that their paradigm (*both* external *and* internal conflict), rather than ‘the external conflict paradigm’, was dominant before 1969.

Barritt and Carter’s ‘*both* external *and* internal conflict’ paradigm had emerged from their reading of the pre-1962 historiography. It was to be found expressed in *Ulster since 1800* (1957) where, as noted already, Moody addressed ‘the problem of a divided society’ in terms of both the ‘gulf’ between the two parts of Ireland and that between ‘the two religions’ within Northern Ireland, where ‘religious conflict has been identified with political, economic, and cultural conflict’.<sup>85</sup> Although Barritt and Carter did not cite *Ulster since 1800*, their formulation of ‘the problem’ as ‘racial, religious, political, economic, and social conflicts all rolled into one’ was clearly modelled on this depiction by Moody. Although they did not cite it either, Barritt and Carter could also have found their paradigm outlined in another item of the pre-1969 historiography: the collection of essays, *Ulster under Home Rule*, edited by Thomas Wilson in 1955, which was sub-titled ‘a study of the political and economic problems of Northern Ireland’. Two of ‘Ulster’s special problems’, as identified by Wilson, were ‘Partition’ (external) and ‘the sectarian problem’ (internal). In addressing both, Wilson emphasised the intractability of the former and the tractability of the latter:

It may be that the border could be better drawn, but unfortunately it would be over-optimistic to suppose that any readjustment would produce an acceptable solution ... The really interesting questions, then, are whether the minority receives fair treatment and whether it, in turn, is prepared to co-operate with the majority in making the State work as well as may be.<sup>86</sup>

Barritt and Carter can therefore be seen as following Wilson’s analysis of the ‘problem’ (in both its external and internal aspects) and also the ‘solution’ which he proposed (from a Unionist perspective):

If Eire politicians could be persuaded to abandon their agitation about the Border, and if the Nationalists in the North could be induced to accept the fact that there is no immediate prospect whatsoever of ending partition, a new alignment of forces would gradually appear at Stormont. There can be no doubt that from the nationalists’ own point of view this would be the best way of ensuring that their domestic grievances – including ‘gerrymandering’ – were fully investigated and, where substantiated, reformed.<sup>87</sup>

In total Barritt and Carter cited twenty-five pre-1962 bibliographical items. If just over half (thirteen) were ‘propaganda’ works written from a nationalist or unionist perspective, including Gallagher’s *The indivisible island* and Carson’s *Ulster and the Irish Republic*; and just under half (twelve) were ‘academic’ works, six of them relating directly to Northern Ireland, the others introduced

<sup>85</sup> Moody, ‘Social history of modern Ulster’, pp 232–3.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Wilson, ‘Conclusion: devolution and partition’ in T. Wilson (ed.), *Ulster under Home Rule* (Oxford, 1955), pp 183–211, at pp 189, 193, 202, 204.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

comparative or other more general purposes. Of these six, one was Moody and Beckett's institutional history *Queen's Belfast*, while four of the five other 'academic' studies of Northern Ireland adopted a 'both external and internal conflict' view of the "problem", two of them authored by Emrys Jones, one of Moody and Beckett's contributors;<sup>88</sup> the other two were by Rosemary Harris.<sup>89</sup> If Barritt and Carter were influenced by the 'both external and internal conflict paradigm' as expressed in the studies by Jones and Harris, and in Moody and Beckett's *Ulster since 1800* (1957), it is possible that they were also influenced by Kiely's *Counties of contention*. Kiely was clear that there was a 'problem': 'the search for a solution in the present reminds one wearily that there is a problem to be solved'.<sup>90</sup> Describing himself to his readers as a nationalist, Kiely was also clear that the problem was not only the 'external' one of 'partition' but also the 'internal' one of 'division' within Northern Ireland:

Personally, if I were given the choice to-morrow between the continuance of partition and a one-government Ireland ruling the Protestants of Ulster against *their* will, I would choose a partitioned Ireland. That may seem the last and thinnest thing in milk and water, but it is really wise, wide-visioned politics. For the partition of a nation is not done with when a few wooden huts [on the Border] are knocked down. That would not unite me with the men from Sandy Row, any more than the fact of those huts standing erect cuts off a man in Ballydehob, County Cork, from a man in Ballycastle, County Antrim.<sup>91</sup>

Thus Benedict Kiely negotiated both the 'external' and 'internal' aspects of the problem in 1945. Although he declined to offer his 'pet solution', his statement of the problem in those terms broadly implied his preferred solution: improving *both* north–south relations *and* relations between the two communities within Northern Ireland.

It is important to note that Kiely's view of the dual nature of the 'problem' was not new. In 1938 a British government report had pointed out:

If the Government of Northern Ireland wish partition to continue, they must make greater efforts than they have made at present to win over the Catholic minority, just as on his side Mr. de Valera, if he wishes to end partition, can only do so by winning over the Northern Protestants. At present both sides are showing a lamentable lack of statesmanship and foresight.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Barritt and Carter, *Northern Ireland problem*, pp 71, 73. For Jones's contributions see note 18 above.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 55, 59, 61; Rosemary Harris, 'The selection of leaders in Ballybeg, Northern Ireland' in *Sociological Review* ix, no. 2 (July 1961), pp 137–49, at p. 138. The other study by Harris was her unpublished M.A. thesis for London University (1954), eventually published in 1972 as *Prejudice and tolerance in Ulster: a study of neighbours and 'strangers' in a border community* (Manchester, 1972). The fifth study cited by Barritt and Carter was 'Juvenile delinquency in areas of Belfast', an unpublished B.Ed. dissertation for Queen's University (1953) by F.A.W. Carter.

<sup>90</sup> Kiely, *Counties of contention*, p. 186.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Elliott, *Catholics of Ulster*, p. 386.

In the 1950s liberal Protestants, such as Brian Maginess, and Catholics, such as Cyril Nicholson, justified their efforts to promote better community relations within Northern Ireland in terms of Kiely's and Moody and Beckett's 'both external and internal' statement of the problem, which was eventually expressed more authoritatively by Barritt and Carter in *The Northern Ireland problem*.<sup>93</sup> The reforming efforts of the unionist government of Terence O'Neill in the 1960s were motivated by the same analysis of 'dual' or 'parallel' problems. During O'Neill's premiership, as Henry Patterson has observed, there was 'a very brief historical moment when timely and rather minimalist concessions might have tied the Nationalist Party and the Catholic middle class into a more positive, if still subordinate, relationship to the Unionist state'.<sup>94</sup> That the moment was not grasped does not detract from the dominance of Barritt and Carter's 'both external and internal conflict' paradigm within which the 'problem' was understood by at least some contemporaries. Although the moment most favourable to cross-community engagement had passed, Barritt and Carter's paradigm also framed the remarkably positive cross-community response to O'Neill's 'Crossroads speech' on 9 December 1968.<sup>95</sup> Evidently, many continued clinging to the belief remarked on by Cathcart – that 'rapprochement externally and internally in Northern Ireland seemed to have been achieved' – until events forced most to recognise that it was no longer tenable. In the re-eruption of communal violence between 1969 and the worst year of the 'Troubles', 1972, no authoritative voice emerged to replace that of O'Neill and sustain Barritt and Carter's now discredited 'default setting', which was abandoned by most. Not least, it was abandoned by the new interpreters of the conflict, especially Andrew Boyd, Hugh Trevor-Roper, Liam de Paor and Owen Dudley Edwards, who opened up the 'meta-conflict' by offering rival 're-settings' of the 'problem'.<sup>96</sup>

Given this evidence for the dominance of Barritt and Carter's 'both external and internal conflict' paradigm before 1969, it is important to consider further how Whyte came to think that the 'external conflict paradigm' was 'dominant'. He seems to have based his view largely on the contrast between the perceived "thickness" in the historiography of works relating to the 'external conflict' and the relative "thinness" of works relating to the 'internal conflict'. Having assumed that greater historiographical "thickness" indicated the 'dominance' of the 'external conflict paradigm', Whyte was pre-disposed to overlook the importance of his own observation that the key question of the pre-1969 historiography – 'how discriminatory is the Unionist regime?' – was focused *not* on the 'external conflict' but on the 'internal conflict'. Notwithstanding his high regard for *The Northern Ireland problem*, Whyte further overlooked the fact that Barritt and Carter had effectively synthesised

<sup>93</sup> Patterson, *Ireland since 1939*, pp 120, 180, 127, 136.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>95</sup> John Cole, 'Introduction' in Terence O'Neill, *Ulster at the crossroads* (London, 1969), p. 24. Cole's reference to sectarian rioting in the thirties is significant in that his 'Introduction' is dated May 1969, before the publication in August of Boyd's *Holy war in Belfast*. See also Marc Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the crossroads* (Basingstoke, 2000), p. 172.

<sup>96</sup> Lambkin, 'Historiography of the conflict', pp 15–17; *idem*, 'Academic antagonism'.

the ‘external’ and ‘internal’ conflict paradigms, and that consensus had developed around it in the 1960s. Whyte’s observation may be taken as accurate before 1945. It was true that ‘to the political generation before O’Neill’s, the exploitation of the Border issue seemed as natural as breathing’.<sup>97</sup> However, following Kiely’s intervention in 1945, and especially after the ending of the I.R.A. Border campaign in 1962, the issue of partition became increasingly ‘normalised’ or ‘marginalised’ in political discourse and consensus developed around Barritt and Carter’s ‘both external and internal conflict’ paradigm.<sup>98</sup>

That new consensus, as shown already, was expressed in the historical work overseen by Moody and Beckett. It is striking that neither Moody nor Beckett registered any sign of having been rattled by the publication of Andrew Boyd’s *Holy war in Belfast* or by the post-1969 criticism, as articulated by Cathcart about his colleagues in the B.B.C., that they had ‘failed to alert the population to the real division which remained and to the extremes on both sides’. In 1974 Moody followed other authors such as Liam de Paor, and Ian Budge and Cornelius O’Leary into the rapidly growing marketplace of conflict interpretation by publishing *The Ulster question, 1603–1973*.<sup>99</sup> However, there Moody simply included *Holy war in Belfast* in his select bibliography. Evidently he did not feel it necessary to take the opportunity to give greater prominence to the history of sectarian rioting in Belfast than in the previous publications for which he had been responsible. His only summary comment was that Belfast ‘earned a sombre notoriety from the 1830s as the scene of intermittent sectarian violence, in which protestant working men fought savagely with catholic working men while Irish police and British troops struggled in vain to keep the peace’.<sup>100</sup> Moody indicated in an introductory comment to his select bibliography that he was not greatly impressed by the current state of the historiography:

Some items are included not as scholarship but as documenting the passions, the prejudices and entrenched attitudes of Ulster history. Some are included because nothing else is available on their particular subjects. Much of the writing on recent events is inevitably partisan and unsympathetic.<sup>101</sup>

So far as the public shock caused by Boyd’s *Holy war in Belfast* was concerned, Moody evidently did not feel that he had any case to answer. The warning from history about the tradition of sectarian rioting, about the nature of the

<sup>97</sup> Cole, ‘Introduction’, p. 16.

<sup>98</sup> Margaret O’Callaghan, ‘Genealogies of partition: history, history-writing and “the Troubles” in Ireland’ in *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, ix, no. 4 (Dec. 2006), pp 619–34.

<sup>99</sup> T. W. Moody, *The Ulster question, 1603–1973* (Dublin, 1974), p. vii; Liam De Paor, *Divided Ulster* (London, 1970); Ian Budge and Cornelius O’Leary, *Belfast: approach to crisis: a study of Belfast politics, 1613–1970* (London, 1973).

<sup>100</sup> Moody, *Ulster question*, p. 20. Moody included Boyd’s book under ‘Belfast’ along with the volumes edited by Beckett and Glasscock, and by Budge and O’Leary, and Mary McNeill’s *The life and times of Mary Ann McCracken, 1770–1866: a Belfast panorama* (Dublin, 1960).

<sup>101</sup> Moody, *Ulster question*, p. 112.

problem and need for change had been given clearly and unequivocally, both in *Ulster since 1800* (1954, 1957) and in *Belfast: origins and growth of a city* (1967). Similarly, when Thomas Wilson revisited what he called ‘the Ulster problem’ in 1989, which by then he recognised was generally regarded as ‘insoluble’, he relied nevertheless on the same ‘both external and internal conflict’ analysis which he had put forward in *Ulster under Home Rule* (1955).<sup>102</sup> That the warnings of Moody and Beckett and their colleagues went largely unheeded suggests a shared belief in the 1950s and 1960s that the time was not yet ripe for ‘dealing with’ Belfast’s past of sectarian rioting. Indeed, Beckett’s decision to place his warning of the ‘evil’, not in his final paragraph where it would have had maximum effect but in the main body of his text, may be interpreted as an example of this tendency to deal with the difficult past by trusting to time as the healer and hoping for the gradual ‘fading’ of memories that were still ‘raw’. More trusting and hopeful than challenging, the strategy did not encourage further research and discussion, with the result that sectarianism, like partition, did not receive detailed attention in the pre-1969 historiography.

## VI

This review of the pre-1969 historiography of the Northern Ireland conflict has found that Whyte’s appraisal is no longer sustainable in three important respects. The work of Moody and Beckett and their fellow historians was not so much ‘lightweight’ and ‘bland’ as ‘pioneering’ and ‘challenging’. Andrew Boyd’s book *Holy war in Belfast* (1969) certainly highlighted the history of sectarian rioting in a way that had not been done before, but it did not bring that history ‘back into the consciousness of historians’. Most importantly, it was not the ‘external conflict paradigm’ that was ‘dominant’ in the discourse before 1969 but the ‘both external and internal conflict paradigm’. Whyte’s much wider and deeper reading of the post-1969 historiography enabled him to demonstrate convincingly that the ‘internal conflict paradigm’ (conflict between the two communities within Northern Ireland) was ‘dominant’ after 1969. It seems likely that his more superficial reading of the pre-1969 historiography suggested the balancing conclusion – elegant in terms of his theoretical model – that before 1969 the ‘external conflict paradigm’ (conflict between Britain and the Republic of Ireland) was ‘dominant’. In other words, Whyte fell into the temptation of what Fischer calls ‘restrospective symmetry, in which antecedents are defined in terms of consequents’.<sup>103</sup>

If this explanation is correct, Whyte’s predisposition to read the pre-1969 historiography in a particular way was conditioned not simply by pressure for theoretical elegance but also by the collapse of academic consensus about the Northern Ireland ‘problem’ in 1969. It has been argued here that the ‘external conflict paradigm’ was not dominant before 1969. No doubt it is counter-intuitive to find that the synthesis of the ‘external conflict’ and ‘internal conflict’ paradigms – called for by Whyte in 1990 and eventually provided by

<sup>102</sup> Tom Wilson, *Ulster: conflict and consent* (Belfast, 1989), pp ix, xvi, 151, 153, 157, 158.

<sup>103</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Historians’ fallacies: toward a logic of historical thought* (New York, 1970), p. 161.

McGarry and O’Leary in 1995 – had actually been achieved before 1969, and become dominant. Within the academy, Barritt and Carter’s ‘setting’ of the ‘problem’ in *The Northern Ireland problem* (1962) was uncontested, and outside it the need for some kind of reform, both ‘external’ and ‘internal’, was generally accepted. This is not to suggest that the re-emergence of communal violence in 1969 was not experienced as a great shock by most, if not all. Indeed, so shocking was the violence that it resulted in a general breakdown of trust, and not least trust in the pre-1969 historiography. The suddenness, scale and intensity of the violence seemed inexplicable. It called into question the adequacy of anything previously written about the “problem”. Andrew Boyd’s *Holy war in Belfast*, published in August 1969, indeed marked that breakdown of trust as a watershed in the historiography. Even if strictly speaking it did not break a silence about the history of sectarian rioting, that was how it was received by its readers, whose deep shock predisposed them to believe that they must have been deliberately kept in ignorance of the true nature of the ‘problem’, whatever that was.<sup>104</sup> The pre-1969 strategy of ‘dealing with the past’ – emphasising the positive and underplaying the negative aspects of community relations, while trusting to the gradual ‘fading’ of ‘raw’ memories – was discredited. New conflict interpreters appeared in the academy, notably Hugh Trevor-Roper, Owen Dudley Edwards and Liam de Paor, who tended to view their predecessors, including Moody and Beckett and Barritt and Carter, as tainted by association with the *ancien regime*, and to explain the ‘problem’ as if they were starting from scratch.<sup>105</sup> Ever since, conflict interpreters have tended to treat 1969 as ‘year zero’ and assume that the pre-1969 historiography contains little if anything of value to the continuing quest for consensus about ‘what the conflict was about’.

While the general effort continues to prevent the re-emergence of what Benedict Kiely in 1945 called ‘the uncouth vicious thing that comes to life to burn and kill and destroy’, the main historiographical problem remains: how to reduce further the intractability of the conflict about what the conflict was about, to a point where public consensus may re-emerge? Part of the effort to solve that problem needs to be a more thorough-going reappraisal of the pre-1969 historiography of the Northern Ireland conflict than has been attempted here.<sup>106</sup> This will mean a more detailed tracing to the present of the ‘genealogy’ or ‘pathways of transmission’ of the Northern Ireland ‘problem’, with the aim of promoting public understanding of how the ‘*both external and internal conflict paradigm*’ was won, lost, and regained.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Lambkin, ‘Historiography of the conflict’, pp 9–11.

<sup>105</sup> Lambkin, ‘Academic antagonism’.

<sup>106</sup> For example, the works of J. W. Boyle, C. D. Greaves and Peadar Livingstone need consideration.

<sup>107</sup> The first version of this paper was given to the Belfast Literary Society, 5 November 2012. I am grateful for comments and advice to Sir Peter Froggatt, Keith Jeffery and Dennis Kennedy, and also to Mark Adair, Barbara Boyd Graham, Patrick Fitzgerald, Johanne Devlin Trew, Kay Muhr, and the journal’s anonymous reviewers.