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## **“Graffiti Scrawls: ‘This is not your country’”: Belfast Murals as Modern Ideological Battlefields**

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### **Citation**

Hughes, A. (2024). *“Graffiti Scrawls: ‘This is not your country’”: Belfast Murals as Modern Ideological Battlefields*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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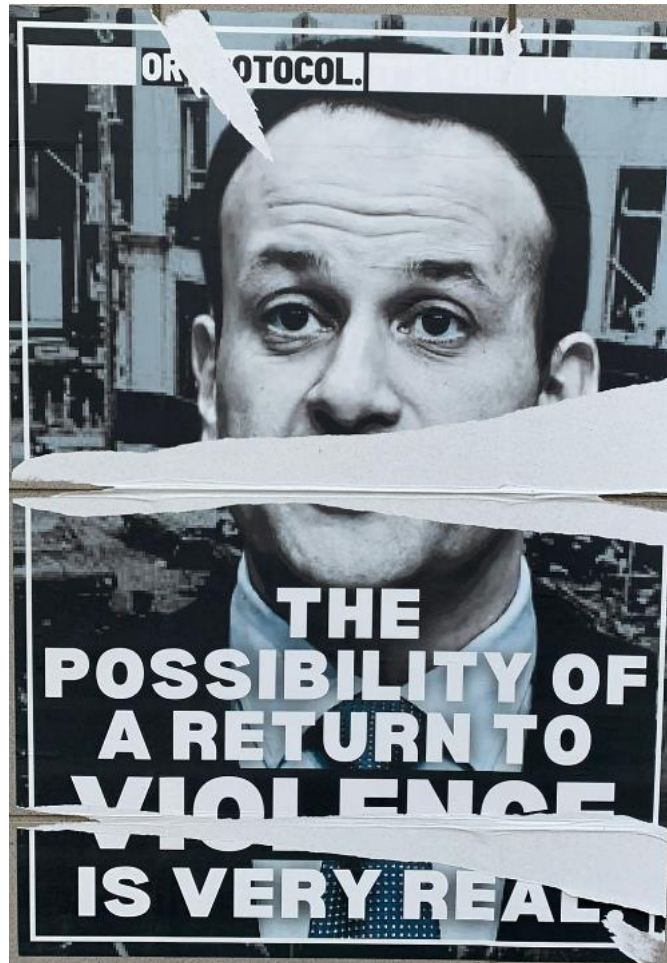
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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



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## “Graffiti Scrawls: ‘This is not your country’”: Belfast Murals as Modern Ideological Battlefields



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MA International Studies: Global Conflict in the Modern Era

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16 January 2024

Word count: 15.867

# **Table of Contents**

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Historical Background.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Data &amp; Narrative.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>4.1-4.5: Nationalist Murals.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>4.6-4.10: Unionist Murals.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Appendixes.....</b>	<b>52</b>

# Introduction

The official tourism website for Northern Ireland advertises the murals in Belfast as follows: *“The first thing you’ll notice when you set foot on the streets of Belfast is the walls. Historically, this art has reflected the divisions in the city. But in recent years, something transformative has been bubbling across the walls of Belfast, with a growth in mural art of a less divisive nature”* (Discover Northern Ireland, n.d.).

Though the number of apolitical artworks in Belfast is increasing following their commissions by the city council, murals produced by communities remain dominant. Local artists deem these non-affiliated works as attempts to cleanse history to appeal to international audiences (Jolliffe & Skinner, 2017). Murals function as identity markers of a neighbourhood’s inhabitants. The Protestant Unionists raise Union Jacks, paint Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) logos on their homes, and erect shrines to the 36<sup>th</sup> Ulster Division. The Catholic Irish raise the Irish Tricolour flag, street signs are written in English and Gaeilge, and murals feature Celtic mythical heroes. Belfast’s walls are a reminder that though The Troubles is considered over; the sectarian divide of Northern Irish society persists.

## ***Speaking about the Conflict: Terminology***

The distinction between Northern Irish groups is determined by their use of violence, though some studies on the conflict conflate terminology. Unionism is an ideology that supports the continued union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Unionists often identify as Protestants and support political parties such as the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Loyalism is a strand of Unionism prioritizing ‘loyalty’ to the British monarchy. Those who endorse violence committed by Unionists are considered Loyalists. Whilst not all Unionists identify as Loyalists, Loyalists are all Unionists (McAuley, 2004). Nationalism refers to the political movement of Irish Catholics who aspire for Irish reunification. Republicans share these aspirations but condone the use of violence to achieve them (Ward, 2016). Not all Nationalists identify as Republicans, but all Republicans are Nationalists. No perfect categorization of these communities exists, but this thesis will use Nationalist and Unionist as they contain but are not limited to strands within the ideologies.

## ***Maintaining Peace: Modern Incendiary Events***

Following the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), paramilitary activity has decreased but not halted, and Belfast’s Peace Wall’s gates still section off communities. Though the Northern Irish conflict is considered over, recent events expose the enduring societal tensions. According to the 2021 Census, 37% of Belfast’s population identify as Irish, 27% as British, and 17% as Northern Irish. 49% identify as Catholic, and 36% as Protestant or other Christian religions

(NISRA, 2021). In the Brexit vote of 2016, 39.3% voted Leave, most of whom live in Unionist areas, and 60.6%, voted Remain (BBC, 2016). The Brexit referendum's results revived anxiety on Irish influence in Northern Ireland through changing cross-border trade rules. The Northern Ireland Protocol states that no goods moving across the island's borders should be checked, despite Northern Ireland being outside the European Single Market. According to Unionists, this exception allows increased integration with Ireland and thus erodes Northern Irish sovereignty. Moreover, the Irish border discussion has generated support for Irish Unification, thereby 'qualifying' the issue as a threat to Unionism. Additionally, the ban on the year-round raising of the British flag in Belfast's city hall, and the 2022 Act which recognized Irish as an official language in Northern Ireland, revived core issues of the identity conflict (Rea, 2022). The continuation of the status quo is unrealistic, as even the DUP's founding members admit a United Ireland is inevitable (McBride, 2023).

Following The Troubles, Northern Irish society has been processing trauma whilst revitalizing its external reputation. The Northern Irish government aims to shed the country's association with conflict by creating a new reputation through tourism. Despite advertising attractions unaffiliated with conflict such as the Giants Causeway to construct a peaceful image of the country, the murals propagate sectarian imagery reaffirming social division. The murals thus challenge the country's rebranding, as they generate income for a vital sector, but also serve as reminders of Northern Irish conflict heritage.

### ***Murals and Commodifying Segregation: Walls and Continuing Division***

The Nationalist communities live in Falls Road and Short Strand, whereas Unionists live in Shankill Road and Crumlin Road (Figure 1).

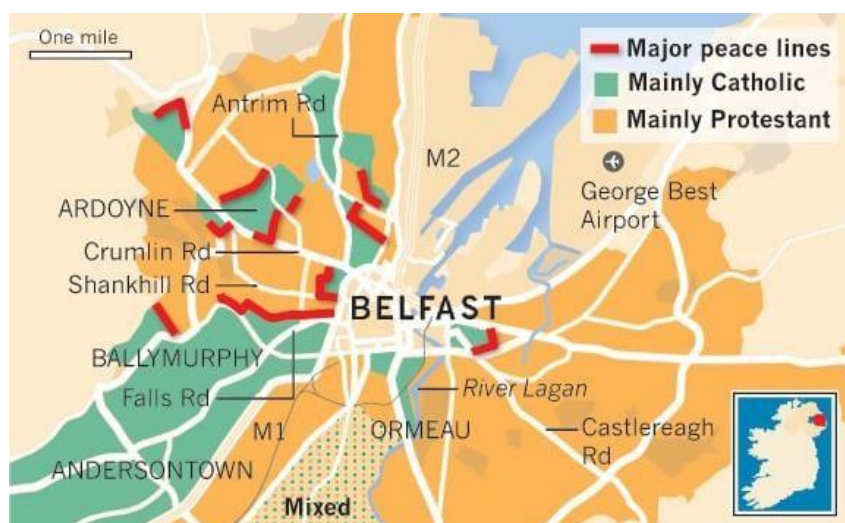


Figure 1: Belfast's Neighborhoods (Prospect, 2011).

Murals mark community territory and make meaning by incorporating community

symbols (Harnett, 2011). They are artifacts of politics and art, and this intertwining cannot be detangled. Murals respond to political events, and their continued presence maintain the community's values and narratives. Murals are defaced, repaired, and replaced. Their only permanent state is captured in photographs, though these solely capture surface-level information, and cannot inform the viewer about the represented communities (Buckley, 1998). Upon a mural's completion, its maker no longer controls its meaning as it becomes determined by a viewer's interpretation, which fluctuates according to the audience's sociopolitical context and time (Graham & Whelan, 2007). Transitional societies see communities compete for support from tourists for a 'side' to gain power through legitimization (Gorman & Mottair, 2010). Managing the conflict narrative has become an ideological duty and a business venture. Community-based touring companies host tours and install informational plaques alongside the murals to control narratives by providing context, and influence towards who the tourist feels sympathetic. As tourism influences the tourist's understanding of the post-conflict society, it has implications for the Northern Irish government's mission of rebranding the national image.

Northern Irish tour guides have often lived through The Troubles and can provide first-hand accounts of the murals' contents, leading to disagreement on whether these companies utilize 'dark tourism' or 'political tourism.' This categorization influences the industry's reputation, as 'dark tourism' refers to a touristic genre that commodifies trauma by focusing on sites and artifacts related to death (Wiedenhof Murphy, 2010). Due to these negative connotations, tour guides prefer 'political tourism', which informs tourists about general political events which can be related to societal traumas. Moreover, it is argued that if guides are comfortable with operating in environments where they have experienced trauma, exploitation of trauma cannot occur, thus tourism cannot be 'dark' (McDowell, 2008). Companies require having a credible reputation to gain the tourist's trust to win their support.

In 2007, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, who receives investments by the Northern Irish government, launched its 'Reimagining Communities' program. Authorities considered some murals to promote sectarianism, thus they launched the replacement program for alternative works that would positively represent the communities (Cuny, 2022). Communities received fifty thousand pounds after allowing a controversial mural to be replaced with a non-sectarian artwork. The Council pre-approves the artists, which means 'native' artists are excluded from the program due to their paramilitary pasts. Artists paint 'sanitized' murals, often depicting "local heroes, children, anti-drug messages, clichéd depictions of a 'perfect world'" (Rolston, 2012, p. 460). Initially, muralism was an act of political advocating, but recently commissioned murals lack ties to native communities and neutralize Belfast's visual landscape.

To summarize, murals sustain sectarian divisions within post-ceasefire Belfast.

Murals are commodified for tourism, allowing their meanings to be mediated by direct witnesses of The Troubles, who use tours to advocate their community's narrative. Additionally, state agencies remove 'controversial' murals to depoliticize the spatial environment. This thesis thus argues that murals are controlled by external forces, and the utilization of the murals' ideological narratives has significant socio-political implications.

This thesis is divided into four distinct sections in which I aim to answer the research question: what strategic identity narratives are used to adapt the murals' meanings to current socio-political environments? The first section includes a historical overview of the foundation of social divisions in Northern Ireland. The second section considers existing literature on the strategic framing of conflict and the semiotic construction of identity by incorporating historical events as identity symbols. The third section describes the methods of visual analysis and critical discourse analysis. The next chapter consists of two sections that separately study a selection of Nationalist and Unionist murals, framing their spatial and historical contexts, and analysing the language and visuals used. The findings were embedded within the semi-structured interviews. The final section concludes this thesis by answering the research question and reflecting on the research's implications.

# 1: Historical Background

To comprehend the identities participating in the Northern Irish conflict, their construction and historical progression must be understood. This will be achieved through a concise overview of Northern Irish history focusing on the relationship between government and society. Northern Irish society remains divided between opposing groups whose histories are complex, thus this overview is limited to the main events shaping the identities' narratives.

## *The Trauma of Colonization: Psycho-historical Identity Construction*

The Northern Irish social divide stems from a colonial past and subsequent traumatic impacts. Colonial expansion in Ireland started in 1169 through the Norman Landing but became politicized under Henry VIII as he became 'lord' instead of 'king' of his territories. The Old Irish language was banned, and the Catholic church dissolved in favour of Protestantism. 1609 marks the start of the Plantation of Ulster, a British colonization effort which confiscated land and imported of English-speaking Protestants to Ireland. This colonization enacted the structural separation of society on cultural, linguistic, and theological levels (Robertson, 1994). The Battle of the Boyne in 1690 proved a defining moment for the Protestant community, as Protestant King William III of Orange's victory over Catholic King James III symbolized Protestant eminence over Catholicism. Following the Battle, Anglican Protestantism was fortified and access to higher society was reserved for Protestants, isolating Catholics from full sociative participation. For example, the native Catholic elite were dispossessed under the Penal Laws, which reduced their economic and political power (Ranelagh, 2012). Catholics were treated as second-class citizens whilst Anglo-Irish became the ruling class. This hierarchical ordering is the foundation of the Nationalist and Unionist communities.

## *Organizing and Independence: The Roots of the Conflict*

The following centuries were marked by continuing institutional discrimination, which increased sectarianism and coincided with the findings of military organizations. Notable movements include the United Irishmen, a Nationalist movement whose 1789 Rebellion aimed to restore religious equality and protested British attempts at abolishing the Irish Parliament. The Rebellion failed, and Parliament was abolished in 1801 through the establishment of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Debate on how Ireland should be governed continued into the next centuries. Nationalists advocated for 'Home Rule' in the early twentieth century, under which Ireland would be a self-governing body within the United Kingdom. At this time, there was an island-wide Catholic majority, save for the Northern province of Ulster. To prevent Home Rule's implementation, Unionists founded armed movements including the UVF (Boydell, 1998). Amongst intensifying sectarianism and self-idealization, Unionist



communities emphasized their past to justify their superiority. For example, in 1908 the first Unionist mural was painted to commemorate the Battle of the Boyne to reassert the community's dominance over Catholics (Purdue, 2014). In response to the growing threat to the Irish Catholic identity, Nationalists formed the Irish Volunteers, a predecessor of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The British government proposed excluding Ulster from the Home Rule Bill, but the process was halted by the Great War.

The Great War features across commemorative murals in Belfast, as this event solidified the dichotomy between Irishmen. To protest serving the British Army whilst the independence movement was frozen, the Republican movement organized the 1916 Easter Rising. Republicans seized key buildings in Dublin to announce the Irish Free State, for which its leadership was reprimanded through public execution. Simultaneously, the British Army's Ulster Division suffered major losses during the Battle of the Somme. Irishmen were divided between those loyal to Britain, and those who rebelled against Britain during wartime (Hennessey, 1997). The Rising's leaders became Nationalist heroic symbols, whilst the fallen Ulster Division soldiers functioned similarly for Unionists. These events are commemorated through the peace lily for Nationalists, and the poppy for Unionists (Ginty & Darby, 2002). In 1921 the British government enacted the Partition process as reconciliation between communities seemed beyond reach. Out of thirty-two counties, twenty-six formed the Irish Free State and the remaining six counties formed a separate administrative unit known as Northern Ireland. Within the new borders, the Catholic population in the North was concerned about their minority status, which caused the IRA to relocate their troops to the Northern border in case of hostility (Mulholland, 2002).

### ***The City as a Battlefield: The Troubles***

By the twentieth century, Belfast's Catholic population increased due to the city's flourishing industrial sector, resulting in only a quarter of the population identifying as Protestant. The Catholic 'encroachment' increased tension in Belfast, with violence routinely escalating during the Orange Marches commemorating the Battle of the Boyne on July 12<sup>th</sup>. Unionists used muralism to preserve their cultural heritage, thus the practice became popular to reaffirm and legitimize intra-state Protestant identities. Following World War II's bombings, a quarter of the city's population became homeless, leading to competition between communities over insufficient resources and housing. Police forces often sided with the Unionists, reinforcing beliefs that institutional powers continued to discriminate against Catholics. This justified sentiments among Nationalists to use violence to combat the unequal system (Bryan et al, 2019). As the post-war struggle over resources worsened, the antagonism between communities intensified.

Violence escalated in The Troubles, a period between the sixties and eighties marked by the Provisional IRA (PIRA)'s armed campaign against the British security forces. In this period, discrimination against Catholics included gerrymandering in the favour of Unionist parties, and housing and job discrimination. Catholics were forced from neighbourhoods by intimidation and raids by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), the predominantly Protestant police force of Northern Ireland. Such missions routinely received support from the British Army. The IRA's failure to protect the Catholic minority led to the Official IRA's establishment, which used a political approach, and the PIRA, who opted for violence to achieve their objectives (Shirlow & Murtagh, 2006). The British Army conducted mass arrests and imprisonment without trial of Catholics without little evidence of their PIRA affiliations. Nationalist leaders including John Hume and Austin Currie were inspired by American civil rights movements as they saw parallels in the treatment of Northern Irish Catholics and Black Americans. Irish civil rights movements organized marches, such as the 1972 Derry March, to protest the police's use of discriminatory techniques. The March is remembered as Bloody Sunday, as the RUC and British Army violent disruption killed fourteen and injured more. Political attempts at installing peace coincided with escalating violence, such as the 1974 Sunningdale Agreement which introduced power sharing. Following elections, Northern Irish political leadership consisted of a mix of Unionists and Nationalists, including John Hume and other key figures of the future peace process. Both communities were dissatisfied with the leadership, as the IRA rejected the election outcome, and Unionists feared the initiation of the reunification process through the inclusion of Nationalist politicians. Unionist organizations, including Ian Paisley's DUP, organized a strike during which essential service workers blocked access to Parliament, whilst paramilitaries initiated riots and bombings. The government collapsed after fourteen days due to the British government refusing to use force against the strikers (McCann & McGrattan, 2017).

Persisting failure to secure peace further escalated PIRA's violent counterattacks, which contributed to the British government revoking prisoners of their special status of 'political prisoner.' Republican prisoners detained in the Maze Prison/H-block initiated hunger strikes to appeal the decision. Ten prisoners died, amongst them Bobby Sands, to whom the first Nationalist mural was dedicated in 1981 (Bryan et al, 2019). The Strikes mythologized PIRA, and British leadership recognized PIRA held the 'minds and hearts' of increasing numbers of people, and eradicating the organization could inspire new movements. Simultaneously, PIRA was infiltrated by British intelligence and lacked the financial resources to further escalate its activities. Nationalist leaders such as Sinn Fein's (SF) Gerry Adams convinced Republicans to take a political route, or it would collapse. Behind-the-scenes talks launched secret negotiations

of a peace process, organized by Nationalist and Unionist leaders including Gerry Adams, and British government representatives including John Hume. This agreement included pressure on the PIRA, as every attack damaged SF's legitimacy. Following several failed ceasefires and continuous paramilitary attacks, the 1994 ceasefire allowed for the GFA in 1998. The PIRA agreed to disarmament and decommissioning in exchange for SF entering government and the release of PIRA prisoners. During the peace process, many ex-paramilitaries became disillusioned following their group's dissolution, and particularly Loyalists used drugs as a coping mechanism. Since the GFA, paramilitary groups rarely use violence, though drug gangs aligned with the Nationalist and Unionist ideologies continually engage in violent conflict. Between 1969 and 1994, approximately fifteen hundred citizens of Belfast lost their lives to the conflict (Cunningham & Gregory, 2014).

To summarize, Northern Irish society is divided by the consequences of the Ulster Plantations. The distribution of social rights according to religious affiliation created grievances and superiority complexes and inspired armed resistance. The Great War fortified the opposing identities which evolved into the Unionist and Nationalist armed movements. Increased segregation during the sixties increased the conflict's militarization, accompanied by several failed political solutions. The conflict finally escalated into a ceasefire once a mutually hurting stalemate was established. Paramilitary groups were disarmed, requiring new political ventures through which the communities could guarantee their survival. Though some ex-paramilitaries reintegrated into society, many struggled to cope with their past and turned to drugs, which remains a proxy of the ideological conflict.

To achieve ideological objectives, communities reframe historical experiences into strategic narratives that antagonize the opposing community. The next chapter will study theories of community formation, thematic objectives the narratives through which communities propagate their objectives, and how the murals advocate for socio-political identity issues in Belfast.

## 2: Literature Review

Following the historical overview of the Northern Irish conflict, the theoretical concepts shaping its communities and identity politics can be better understood. As this thesis is concerned with the utilization of the murals' narratives to influence public opinion and the political process, several concepts must be elaborated on to study this relationship. This chapter will study the interplay of identity, conflict, narrative, and memory.

Identity is the core of the Northern Irish conflict, thus its definition provides the foundation from which the concepts of conflict, narrative, and memory are utilized. Constructivist identity theory defines identity through its normative value. This theory argues sociocultural norms shape actors' actions, resulting in the deepening of group identity through comparing the 'Self' to the 'Other' (Barthes & Lavers, 1972). Additionally, norms establish power relationships and are expressed through political actions including hierarchy, emancipation, and state-society struggle. This definition considers identity the result of political actions creating power imbalances. Western thought often focuses on the individual, evident in another definition that considers identity formation the result of external powers persuading individuals to choose from a predetermined set of characteristics (Peterson, 1993). The identity is then attached to a group through the manipulation of symbols and events to politicize the movement. Conversely, African social thought considers identity something that someone 'becomes' through familial ties and participating in local life (Mhikze, 2006). Here, identity is inextricable from community and realized through traditional rites and communal roles. Despite their differences, a red thread can be found in these studies: identity consists of a bottom-up self-validation process and is imposed through top-down community interactions, thus identity-formation is dynamically interconnected. This thesis follows Brubaker & Cooper's (2004) interpretation of identity as a sense-making practice allowing actors to explore how they relate and differ from others in their environment. The following sections will expand on the previously mentioned concepts.

### ***Ideology and Victimhood: Emoting the Past to Garner Support***

Identity expressions can be persuaded by political entities through 'Othering' to escalate conflict. For example, built-up momentum from previous grievances can justify the outbreak of conflict and increase the likelihood of participation (Jacoby, 2015). Next, the self-glorification and self-esteem of a community can be strengthened through 'conflict heritage'. Current membership of the identity is connected to the groups previous members, creating sense of duty to propagate the efforts (Avrami et al, 2019). Finally, the process of 'Othering' stimulates collective victimhood as it supposedly caused by another group. This increases the

chances of conflict, as grievances allow individuals to judge others on their affiliated identity instead of their individuality (Cook-Huffman, 2008). The common feature found in these debates is that identity is the generative source and the product of conflict.

The Northern Irish conflict involves citizens, political parties, paramilitary groups, police forces, and security forces, and is therefore not a 'state versus societal group' case. Victimhood is essential in generating support, which is relevant in civil conflicts where the state does not express allegiance to either group (Bouris, 2007). Without state support, scholars note a competition between parties for supreme victimhood, requiring political platforms to advocate for public support (McDowell & Braniff, 2014). Applying this to the Northern Irish case, violent acts against Unionist or Nationalist communities are considered opportunities to highlight the 'Self's' victimhood and the 'Other's' wickedness (Nagle, 2008). To investigate a conflict's cause and the warranted response, identity groups use collective memory frames. Commemorative symbols frame the conflict's trajectory by reshaping past threats to fit current events (Crowley, 2011). Those practicing muralism in Northern Ireland readapt traumatic historical events, for example, symbols used to commemorate the Great War feature in murals dedicated to paramilitaries killed during The Troubles. Thus, I add that memory symbols are incorporated into murals by identity groups to function as narrative platforms to readapt conflicts.

### ***Expressing Social Identity through Narrative***

To construct a collective identity's worldview, a system of symbols and narratives must be constructed. This can be achieved through myths, fairytales, or commentaries. Despite the unique definitions of these terms, the key is a distance between the experience of reality and its facts, which are ordered to produce a strategic narrative promoting social change (Barthes & Lavers, 1972). This thesis uses 'narrative' to describe the process of sensemaking through strategic storytelling. Narrative can be defined by several interpretations, but I follow its definition as a strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change through storytelling (Herman, 2007). This definition encapsulates a distinction between the internal narrative as strategically dictated by its maker and the external social-relational circumstances and ideological values that produce the narrative. Another definition considers narratives to have a consistent core whose meaning alters according to speech events (Ryan, 2009). This definition agrees narratives conform to situational circumstances, however, claiming narratives are a stagnant textual property ignores their contextual nature. Narrative can also be defined as a semiotic expression event, making meaning by organizing information in a casual way (Onega & Landa, 1996). As the narratives in this thesis are concerned with murals, which strategically appeal to emotions to gain support, thus the 'casual way' of this definition clashes with the aim

of the narratives studied. Using this definition, the following sections will study the employment of narratives in murals, and how current social circumstances influence their interpretation.

### ***Trauma, Memory, and Creating Opposing Identity Using Symbols***

To understand the Northern Irish conflict, the identity-formation process must be considered. As mentioned, identities use collective remembering to understand the present, expanding on the historical interpretation shaped by preceding communities. This phenomenon refers to “post-memory”, which states historical events have transferable capacities allowing people without direct experience to attach a personal memory to it (Hirsch, 2008). Collective memories platform identity expressions and emphasize other groups which do not share this history. This ‘Othering’ legitimizes socio-political demands as requisites for ‘living’ an identity (Heersmink, 2023). Romanticized post-memories are common in Northern Ireland due to the commodification of transgenerational trauma, allowing it to continue influencing societal structures.

The group identities in Northern Ireland persist because constructing a new identity in post-colonial Ireland is complicated, as it must cater to historical social divides between Catholics and Protestants, Anglo-Irish and ‘native’ Irish. In this sense, Irish refers to the culture that has faced erasure since the 10th century, whilst Anglo-Irish refers to the assimilation of English, Scottish, and Irish culture in the geographical area of Ireland (Scanlon & Satish Kumar, 2019). Irish communities suffered psychological impacts caused by systemic erasure of their religion, language, and culture through systemic dispossession and geographical displacement. Similarly, the Anglo-Irish suffered during the Irish independence movement and the ongoing advocacy for reunification (Abrams et al, 2005). For both identities, exclusion from a geographical space of historical and cultural significance serves as the foundation of group identity. Thus, Northern Irish group identities are formed by remembering exclusive histories to fortify in-group relations and out-group ‘Othering’ (Conway, 2010).

Scholars have considered many explanations of the Northern Irish conflict. One theory argues the conflict is structured through unequal social relationships, including ethnicity, religion, colonialism, progressiveness/backwardness, and national identity (Ruane & Todd, 1996). British dominance and Protestant dependency are complicit in creating power structures perpetuated through insecurity: community belonging is a prerequisite to survival and is strengthened through polarization. Members live in a fantasized reality where they consistently face political, social, and economic obstacles imposed by the ‘Other’. Another study found the combined suppression of culture and subsequent trauma experienced by communities bolster self-idealization (Millar, 2013). Thus, ethnonational aspirations and self-idealization amongst

Nationalists and Unionists produce socio-ideological illusions that reinforce antagonistic identities. Another study argues that self-determination resulting from religious spatial confinements within Northern Ireland serves as the conflict's cause (McGarry & O'Leary, 1995). Thus, Northern Ireland's history of settlement and organized religion increases the need for 'community belonging.' A final study notes representations of religious communities and alternative expressions of reality inspire fear and dehumanize the 'Other'. These increased feelings of subordination are then used to justify violence towards the 'Other'.

Following the literature, the historical and geographical context of Northern Ireland has allowed communities to base their identities on self-idealization and structured fantasies. Nationalist and Unionist group identities are fundamentally based on oppositional interpretations of their community's history and use collective commemoration of traumatic events to continue their movements.

### ***Ideology and Victimhood: Emoting the Past to Mobilize the Current***

To realize the identity's political objectives, ideological movements must mobilize support. In the Northern Irish context, ideology refers to the moral values which express a desired reality towards which the movement is working (Cash, 1996). These expressions require emotionally driven narratives emphasizing morality to evoke empathy. The Nationalist ideological objectives include a United Ireland, which should protect civil rights, increase social equity, legitimize Gaeilge, and establish peace (McGlinchey, 2019). For Unionists, the ideological objectives retain the status quo; remaining within the United Kingdom, prevent reunification with the Republic of Ireland, and freely practice the Protestant tradition (Todd, 2021). Considering these ideologies are mutually exclusive, their competition becomes a social problem, whose solution lies in collective actions.

The current debate on collective action challenges newer forms of political participation, expanding theoretical models to study recent conflicts beyond the Marxist model. Della Porta and Diani's (2006) framework on social mobilizations active beyond the 1960s employs a metapolitical critique of the social order to challenge a repressive political environment, which is achieved through radical collective acts. By using conflict narratives, these murals engage in meaning-making and articulating the negotiation of the social conflict in Northern Ireland, thus functioning as a medium for metapolitical critique.

Many frameworks on narrative formation that mobilize communities in times of conflict exist. One study noted 'martyrdom' narratives of the Arab Spring in countries governed by an oppressive regime (Buckner & Khatib, 2014). Though victimhood and martyrdom are prevalent in the Northern Irish case, this study focuses on attempts of regime change, instead of violence between societal groups. Another analysis tracked an organized social media campaign, in

which local stories were spread to induce mass anxiety and sway public opinion during the 2013 Pakistani national elections (Cheema et al, 2019). Though mass anxiety was also prevalent during the Northern Irish conflict, here narratives were not spread using social media. Instead, I will look at the analytical framework of strategic narratives of armed conflict to garner public support (de Graaf et al, 2015).

This framework consists of two components, the first concerning continued temporality. Narratives draw temporal connections, comparing historical traumatic events to existing frames to reinforce new threats for which movements need support. In the Northern Irish case memory is commodified by readapting history to revitalize the ideological struggle. Readaptations mainly incorporate declining sovereignty or systematic suppression through inequity (Sears et al, 2003). Following the GFA, armed struggle occurred less frequently, thus non-violent events threatening identities were sought out, for example, where Home Rule served as a past issue of sovereignty for Unionists, this theme was readapted by the Brexit referendum (Rolston, 2020). Scholars also note this adaptative process in personification, for example, connecting Bobby Sands' activism to the SF's campaign for a 'United Ireland' (Outram & Laybourn, 2018). As mentioned, the Nationalist objective is a United Ireland with a peaceful and equal society, and Loyalist goal is continued unity with the United Kingdom. These goals must then merge with contemporary events to motivate mobilization. Thus, according to the literature on Northern Irish conflict narratives, the memory legacy of is stretched to apply to current events to demand present action in the ongoing ideological struggle.

To summarize, the literature qualifies murals as platforms of influencing public opinion and political processes. Identity values are shaped by sociocultural norms and political actions and are both a generative source of and a product of conflict. Group identity in Northern Ireland is formed through collective commemoration of traumatic events, induced by historical cases of unequal social relationships, exclusion from a geographical space, and identity-based discrimination. Narratives are employed strategically to mobilize support. As the murals can be freely interpreted, symbols guide the sensemaking process to make the viewer conclude one identity is the supreme victim. The next chapter will discuss the methodological frameworks in which the salience of the identity narratives in the murals will be analysed.



### 3: Methodology

Following an overview of the academic debate concerning conflict and Northern Irish ideological facets, this chapter turns to how the murals' messages can be understood. This research is primarily a conflict-analysis, in which the murals' locative and temporal contexts are data vehicles for the Northern Irish conflict (Mesev et al, 2009). To achieve this, I treat murals as social institutions with unique visual and speech events, participants, and settings in pursuit of achieving objectives. Social institutions provide a set of symbols and a frame through which the image is presented to the viewer. By viewing and relating to these visual images, murals can enact an identification process. Thus, murals function as an ideology in and of itself (Rolston, 2012). To understand the core of the Northern Irish conflict, it is important to note the conflict typology in which these institutions function.

I previously categorized the Northern Irish conflict as an identity conflict, as conflicts characterized by a combination of psycho-emotional and structural forces exceed the term ethno-nationalist (Kuzmanic & Truger, 1992). The core issue of identity conflicts is a structural governmental failure to secure participation in decision-making, equal rights, and basic needs. Consequentially, resource insecurity positions community belonging as a survival prerequisite. Once group identification has expedited communities to a significant number, collective action to claim political recognition to recover basic needs can be instigated (Lederach, 1997).

Despite the Northern Irish conflict consisting of competing identities, previous literature and my database find that Nationalist and Loyalist muralists use unique community symbols and events to express similar themes. Therefore, I ordered the murals according to their dominant theme in the analytical chapter. The themes include leadership, commemoration, solidarity, and deradicalization (London, 2016). Leadership murals feature important community figures, ranging from paramilitary leaders to activists and politicians to confirm the legitimacy of the community. Commemoration murals emphasize people and events displaying heroic sacrifice in service of the community. These murals remind viewers of the native dead to inspire support. Solidarity murals highlight allegiances by featuring symbols that signify a network of organizations or causes that the community supports. Deradicalization murals do not contain symbols related to paramilitary violence. They express hope for the future and community values. Murals may contain references to multiple themes, but their dominant message dictates which main theme they are chosen to represent.

The murals in Belfast are composed of a visual image and texts, either externally providing contextual information or expressions within the image. Therefore, the methodology is twofold, consisting of semiotics and iconography, methods of visual analysis, and critical

discourse analysis (CDA) to study the texts and semi-structured interviews. These approaches are employed to unpack the murals' totality by dissecting the visuals and language to provide an answer to: what are the strategic identity narratives adapting the murals' meanings to their current socio-political environments?

### ***Seeing and Understanding: Visual Images and Political Ideologies***

To examine the content of the murals' visual narratives and their use, this thesis employs iconography and semiotics, which are visual analysis methods. Visual analysis is used in Art History but is usefully applied when visual media is politically framed and demands political responses (Callahan, 2020). Moreover, it follows the 'aesthetic turn' of International Relations theorizing and highlights the values represented by visual artifacts. The sources used for the visual analysis consist of the database of photographs I took during my visit to Belfast in August 2023. As previously noted, the murals in Northern Ireland are subject to change and substitution, thus those studied in this thesis may have been replaced since their recording.

Iconography identifies and describes the image's visual content, and is primarily interested in what is evident during first-time viewings, to then connect it to deeper meanings. Thus, iconography tends to be inward-looking. This approach is too confined since this thesis aims to unearth the connection between surface observances and the influence of spatial and temporal locations. Therefore, I will follow Panofsky's (1955) method, which prioritizes an outward-looking approach to consider the murals in phases. The first phase notes the facts present in the images without applying cultural and historical context. The second phase applies codes, motifs, and concepts which allows the events depicted in the image to be recognized. Finally, the third phase connects the facts to the symbols to determine the image's meaning.

As these murals are used for ideological purposes, social context lies at the heart of the analysis. Therefore, I will expand on Panofsky's theory of iconography by including semiotics. Semiotics develops the assumption that images have layered signs which make meaning through analysis (van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001). In Rose's *Visual Methodologies* (2016), she argues that images are dependent on ideology to legitimize social inequalities. Images are sites of resistance that aim to 'do something' but cannot articulate this through language. Instead, the instruments used to produce images express this resistance. However, the image's ideology is mediated by the social context of the viewer's social context thus the analysis of 'social murals' must include their technology, composition, and social sites. Rose's framework consists of the following modalities: production (i), visual culture (ii) and embedding (iii). The production describes the tools and materials used, such as the distinction between painted or printed images. Visual culture refers the articulation of social differences, thus who and what is represented and absent. Finally, how the image is embedded into a culture is studied, thus

how it circulates, where it is located, and who has access to it. For tourists, the murals mainly circulate through mural tours. The visual analysis will first note the images' content through Panofsky's phases of iconography and then embed them into the social context through Rose's considerations.

### ***Giving Visuals Vocal Agency: Analysing Subtitles, Captions and Plaques***

CDA, as developed by Fairclough (1995), focusses on the division between linguistic and extra-linguistic. Linguistic refers to representations of language in a textual context, so who says what using which frame. Extra-linguistic representations denote the progression of adapting textual frames into fixed meanings. The study of texts follows two steps: (i) textual analysis and (ii) discourse practice. Textual analysis is conducted by studying the grammar and definitions of language, whilst discourse practice investigates the textual production and what ideologies are encoded. Considering the limitations imposed on this thesis, I will focus on (ii) to understand how ideologies adopt thematic frames and use strategic narratives in the murals. This approach is not meant understate the visual component, rather, CDA serves as a denotative confirmation of the visual's analogical nature. Moreover, it improves the understanding between sequences of narratives, easing the interpretation process and reducing verisimilitude. By using CDA I aim to answer the question; what ideological textual message does the mural promote?

### ***Applying Theory to Practice: Interviewing Current Actors***

Interpretations are subject to personal bias and are thus never concretely fixed. To anchor the interpretations into the analysis, the relationship between theory and practice must be deduced. Thus, this thesis's findings must be embedded into the lived reality of Belfast to strengthen my claims. This requires insights into how the people of Belfast think. This thesis addresses the multifaceted purpose and content of the murals. To address these multiple concerns, I have chosen to follow quantitative research methods (Bryman 2001). During the selection of research sites and subjects, I strove for an equal balance of samples, specifically aiming to interview the same number of Nationalists as Loyalist respondents. I focussed on interviewing tour guides, as they provide informational commentary on the murals. Though tourists individually dissect the images, the tour guides provide contextual information, thus tour guides are important external factors in the interpretation of murals. Some touring companies explicitly state their ideological convictions, such as Coiste, an organization employing Republican ex-convicts. Others may not profile themselves before the tour, which is why I explicitly requested Unionist tour guides at the 'non-affiliated' companies. This request could not be met due to the high demand for tours during the summer. In the end, I interviewed

a muralist, three tour guides, an employee of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, and the director of Coiste.

Due to the range of experiences within Northern Irish society with the topic of my thesis, I chose to conduct a semi-structured interview. The prepared questions were divided into thematic concepts including tourism and politics, murals and meaning, and rising tension. To diversify the measurement of responses, I used multiple types of questions to test validity. These include scales of agreement, yes or no questions, descriptions, and examples. As expected for this interview style, interviewees also went on tangents regarding their personal experiences outside the frames of the questions (David & Sutton, 2004). For contextualization purposes, the respondents also provided their names, ages, gender, place of birth, nationality, and employment types. The full details can be found in the appendix.

Several obstacles occurred during my interviewing process. Firstly, tour guides would only conduct the interviews during the tours. As a student, I do not possess the means to pay for multiple tours, as prices range between £60 to £200, thus the corpus is limited in size. Next, the pool of tour guides was homogenous, as I only encountered men of the same age as they usually experienced The Troubles. Only one tour guide gave consent for recording the interview. Finally, due to the mandatory consent sheets provided by Leiden University, my status as interviewer was automatically exposed, rendering me an observer-as-participant. On a critical note, though Bryman touches on the importance of sensitivity to the social setting of the interview, my identity posed challenges in the interviews, despite my sensitivity to its settings. Having Irish heritage, of which my name is indicative, created situations in which I feel limited responses. When interviewing respondents identifying Unionists, I felt restrained in the interaction due to the implications of my Irishness on my opinion of the conflict. This may have been strengthened by my 'probing' tendencies as an overt interviewer. This became evident in the significantly shorter answer length of these interviews. Overall, Nationalist respondents provided more information, thus skewing the neutrality of my data. Therefore, the interviews play a less significant role than I had intended at the start of my writing process, though they do provide context and triangulate my findings.

## 4: Data & Narrative

Having discussed the importance of social contexts in visual communication in the methodology chapter, this chapter delivers an analysis of the murals' samples. The findings are presented in two separate parts dedicated to murals of Nationalist or Unionist origin. Photographs of the murals can be found on the following website: <https://drumferretcx6z.squarespace.com/>. I took pictures of hand-painted murals, plastic canvasses, and information signs. This thesis' limited scope and complex subject matter have enforced the selection of a small sample from the large database according to symbols alluding to narratives occurring most frequently.

As mentioned in the methodology, studying the images revealed both communities draw from events that threaten or idealize community identity to legitimize their presence in Northern Ireland. The murals exhibit cultural symbols that shape the four narrative themes mentioned in the methodology, namely: leadership, commemoration, unity, and deradicalization. The selected images displaying those themes will be studied according to Panofsky and Rose's methods of visual analysis, and Fairclough's framework of discourse analysis. The first analytical section employs Panofsky's three iconographical phases, first noting the basic facts, and then applying contextual knowledge to the signs to finally determine the image's message. The second section covers Rose's three modalities, first stating the instruments used to produce the mural, then considering the representation of the content and what is absent and finally noting the image's embedding through its circulation. The final step of the analysis studies the texts of the murals using Fairclough's theory of CDA. The analysis will then combine the analysis' conclusions to state my interpretation of the community's intended message.

### 4.1 Nationalist Murals: Leadership



Figure 2: United Ireland Advocacy

### *Visual Analysis*

In Panofsky's primary phase, Figure 2 depicts Bobby Sands waving the 'green harp flag' in front of the Irish Tricolor and the Cave Hills in Belfast. To add context for the second phase, Sands was a PIRA member and the Commanding Officer of the prisoners in the Maze Prison. He initiated and died during the Hunger Strikes, demanding incarcerated Republicans be considered political prisoners instead of 'regular' criminals. He symbolizes Republicanism's politicization, exemplified through his grassroots-led election as a Member of Parliament under the label 'anti-H-block/Armagh Political Prisoner' (Aretxaga, 2018). In the Tricolor flag, orange represents the Protestant community, green symbolizes Celtic Catholicism, and white signifies peace between the communities. The 'green harp flag' is the United Irishmen's logo, an organization demanding Irish emancipation from Great Britain (Santino, 2016). Cave Hill inspired Jonathan Swift's writings, who is considered an Irish patriot for his Irish rights advocacy during the Penal Laws (McNulty, 2008). For the third phase, the mural's message expresses SF's contemporary non-violent approach to a United Ireland, strengthening its claim by portraying a communal hero advocating for the same goal in the past.

For Rose's modalities, this mural is a hand-painted replica of a picture of Sands, commissioned for SF's 2021 'Unity in our Time' campaign. Sands is remembered for his political activism and nonviolent strikes, though he was imprisoned for weapons possession and involvement in a bombing campaign. This absence of his violent past represents SF's desire to sever ties with paramilitarism. The campaign circulates the mural on social media and as background for news coverage of the unification movement. It is located on the "International Wall," a prominent stop for mural tours, as the murals are frequently changed to reflect ongoing issues that Nationalists support.

### *Discourse analysis*

The mural's texts include no calls for action, allowing the claims to be read as truths. "Unity in our time" and "#time4unity" suggest that the Nationalist objective is an eternal one, though the use of "our time" claims that it should occur in the lifetime of the viewer. Sta "Aontacht Lenár Linn" and "Am le hAontacht na hÉireann" translate to similar messages expressing the temporal suitedness for the reunification. "Oglach" translates to 'volunteer', a term used for the IRA's active members, reinforcing Sands as a Nationalist symbol.

SF adheres to the Nationalist ideology and its communications are productions of this political thought. Using Gaeilge excludes those who do not speak it from consuming the entire mural, and follows the Nationalist focus on language rights. The use of English expands the mural's viewership, thereby allowing more people to be familiarized with the Nationalist cause.

Through the use of English, a borderless map of Ireland, and Gaelic and community symbols, SF ambiguates the Unification cause to appeal to the Nationalist community and outsiders.



Figure 3: Contemporary leaders

### *Visual analysis*

In Panofsky's primary phase, Figure 3 consists of a single mural consisting of two sections: a Land Rover set on fire and a British hand plucking Northern Ireland from a borderless map of Ireland, which is stopped by an Irish hand wearing a Claddagh ring. The bottom right features a balaclava, which is a symbol of paramilitaries. To add context for the second phase, the RUC used Land Rovers during The Troubles, and the vehicles are still used by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) which replaced the RUC. For the third phase, the mural uses Republicanism's anti-drug stance, self-determination, and Celtic heritage to promote a message of Irish Unification.

For Rose's modalities, the mural is a hand-painted replication of a mural first painted in 1989. This later version removed blood dripping from the British hand and added the Claddagh ring, balaclava, and the Irish hand's inscription. Though the balaclava references the IRA's violence, it is less graphic than blood. This rendition was painted for KNEECAP's 2021 album release, though its painter is unknown. The mural intends to promote KNEECAP and their Republican convictions.

### *Discourse analysis*

KNEECAP refers to kneecapping, an IRA technique during which repeat offenders were shot in the knees for drug dealing or fraternizing with the British Army. "Níl fáilte roimh an RUC" translates to "The RUC is not welcome". The IRA suspected the RUC colluded with the British Army and Loyalist paramilitaries, thus, the text suggests a continued antagonism between Nationalists and the police. 3CAG is the title of KNEECAP's first album and an

abbreviation referring to MDMA. KNEECAP references the ongoing drug problem in Northern Ireland, reiterating the Nationalist belief that drug dealers are often Loyalist ex-paramilitaries. Nationalists sometimes discourage interacting with Unionists due to their supposed alliance with the PSNI and involvement with drug dealing, reframing the conflict as a ‘war on drugs’ (Higgins & McElrath, 2000). “England get out of Ireland” expresses a clear message of Irish unification, but solely blames England for the Partition despite the use of the British flag.

These murals display Nationalist leaders continue advocacy for a United Ireland. Next, the tributes to Republican leaders and their political struggles, and the British absorption of Irish territory are positioned as community sacrifices for sovereignty. To conclude, the objective of a United Ireland is framed as a righteous reward for the struggles of the Nationalist community.

#### 4.2 Nationalist Murals: Solidarity



Figure 4: Solidarity with Palestine

#### *Visual Analysis*

In Panofsky’s primary phase, Figure 4 depicts Fadi Abu Salah, a Palestinian protester who lost his legs in an Israeli airstrike, slinging a tub of Ben & Jerry’s. The background consists of the Palestinian flag and a man carrying a child (Ben-Moshe, 2018). To add context to the second phase, this mural is inspired by a picture in which Fadi’s sling was loaded with a rock, replaced with a ‘Ben & Jerry’s’ ice cream. The company has ended sales in “occupied territory in Palestine” in solidarity with Palestine (Ben & Jerry, n.d.). The rock’s substitution revokes Fadi’s association with violence which can allow for easier sympathising. The relationship between the man carrying the boy is unclear, but the incorporation of a wounded child emphasizes the price paid for resistance and appeals to empathy. For the final phase, the image expresses solidarity with the Palestinian cause using symbols intended to appeal to empathy.



For Rose’s modalities, the mural is a hand-painted replication of a though its painter is unknown. The picture was taken during the Great March of Return of 2018-2019, thus the mural is a recent work. Many Nationalist murals feature Palestine due to the historical solidarity between the cases, as both suffered from British settler colonialism and violence based on identity discrimination (Arar, 2017). The mural is located on the ‘International Wall’, which features in tours. These murals are spread on social media to express online solidarity with the people affected by the depicted struggles.

### *Discourse analysis*

“breeds” describes resistance as a biological output, and therefore needs no justification (Oxford University Press, 2023). The grammatical choices allow the sentence to be read relationally: a cause, oppression, is logically followed by a consequence: resistance. In “They took his land, his legs and finally his life” it is unclear if “they” refers to the Israeli army, state or population, thus blaming the entirety of Israel. The mural intends to express solidarity by highlighting the similar histories of Palestine and Ireland causing identity formation following territorial occupation and cultural suppression. This paralleled martyrdom is designed to evoke dual sympathy for Palestine and Nationalists.



Figure 5: Solidarity with Tamil Eelam

### *Visual Analysis*

In Panofsky’s primary phase, Figure 5 shows an armed Tamil Tiger soldier taking care of a child. Adding context for the second phase, the mural simultaneously expresses solidarity with the armed Tamil resistance movement but highlights its non-violent side. The background features the Northern area of Sri Lanka claimed as Tamil Eelam. The inclusion of proposed territorial sovereignty draws parallels with Northern Irish, though Nationalists aim to reclaim Northern territory into an existing state, whilst the Liberation Tigers of Eelam

Tamil (LTTE) aim to establish a separate territory. For the third phase, the mural's message expresses international solidarity through self-determination from a discriminatory governmental power, which can be achieved by armed movements that serve their community's interests.

For Rose's modalities, the mural is hand-painted, though its artist and date of completion are unknown. Significant context including LTTE's opposition or causes of the conflict are absent and thus remain unknown to those unfamiliar with Sri Lankan history. Instead, the contextless image bluntly declares the Eelam Tamils will gain territorial independence. The political presentation intends to humanize the freedom fighter. The mural declares an indisputable future wherein both ideological movements will gain territorial sovereignty.

### *Discourse Analysis*

Tamil Eelam is the old Tamil name for Sri Lanka and refers to an independent state for the Eelam Tamil, a minority group that faced persecution following Sri Lanka's independence from the United Kingdom. To escape persecution, the Eelam Tamils fortified their claim on the northern territory, leading to LTTE's governance of the area under a de facto state regime during the Sri Lankan Civil War. The techniques used to disarm PIRA were replicated in British aid which aimed to provide a military solution to the Sri Lankan conflict (Weerawardhana, 2018). "Tíocfaidh Ár Lá" is a Republican slogan, translating to "our day will come". As Irish Republicans and the Tamil Tigers strive for independence from an oppressive government, this slogan refers to the "inevitability" of independence for both.

Nationalist murals reference international cases in which the legacies of British colonialism motivated oppressed minorities to use armed force to achieve independence. Next, these murals create a network of armed minorities to legitimize independence claims. To conclude, the Nationalist use of solidarity intends to strengthen the credibility of their demands by representing cases of oppressed groups displaying humanity despite their suffering.

### 4.3 Nationalist Murals: Commemoration



Figure 6: Commemorating the 1916 Rising

#### *Visual Analysis*

In Panofsky's primary phase, Figure 6 displays the crests of Ireland's four provinces Connacht, Leinster, Munster and Ulster. It also features Dublin's Four Courts courthouse which served as a stronghold for the IRA during the Easter Rising. Adding context for the second phase, the fire in the background recreates the National Army's bombing campaign, which destroyed the building and its historical public records. The Easter Lily commemorates IRA soldiers who lost their lives during the Rising (Santino, 2016). For the third phase, the mural's message combines commemorative elements with a building embodying justice, and Ireland's four provinces, thus associating the Rising with communal victimhood.

For Rose's modalities, the mural is hand-painted, though its maker and date of creation are unknown. The painter is likely a local as Gaelige is often transferred in Irish-speaking communities. Its visual culture presents a snapshot of history, lacking contextual information about the event. Without contextual knowledge of the Rising, the viewer requires external information to understand the mural. The mural is accompanied by a community-funded plaque, as the mural is located in the Gaeltacht Quarter, where Irish culture is used to promote tourism and economic opportunities for locals (Department for Communities, n.d.). The mural thus functions to remind its viewer of a significant Republican event to keep its history relevant to continue support for the Nationalist cause.

### *Discourse analysis*

“Éirí Amach Na Cásca” translates to Easter Rising. The definition of ‘rising’ refers to a natural consequence of increased pressure, thus its use suggests the outbreak of violence was a natural consequence of prolonged oppression. Moreover, a ‘rising’ does not necessitate the presence of violence, rather it refers to “hostile action” (Oxford University Press, 2023). Had the event used another term, its commemoration would become associated with armed violence, which could deter audiences from expressing support. Finally, this text highlights the Nationalist cause being intertwined with Gaeilge.



Figure 7: Commemorating Irish Rebellions through Celtic Mythology

### *Visual analysis*

In Panofsky’s primary phase, Figure 7 consists of Cú Chulainn, a woman, an army carrying the ‘green harp flag’, and a map with Ireland’s provincial crests. Adding context for the second phase, Cú Chulainn is a mythological hero who ties himself to a stone to remain standing, allowing him to die an honorable death. The flag identifies the army as the United Irishmen, thereby implying an impending battle against a British armed force. The woman is a personification of Ireland. For the final phase, the mural’s message calls for a unified Ireland through the incorporation of myths produced before the Partition of Ireland.

For Rose’s modalities, the mural is hand-painted by Gael Force Art. The mural was created around 2015. It commemorates Celtic heroes and contemporary Irish military movements, endowing them with mythological prestige. This glorifies the objective of a United Ireland and positions the British as suppressing an ancient Celtic nation. The mural thus mixes

Republican movements with Irish mythology, bolstering its remembrance as a transcendent product of Celtic heritage to damage the status of the British presence in Ireland.

### *Discourse analysis*

“Cú Chulainn Cróga” translates to Brave Cú Chulainn. “Who fears to speak of 1798” refers to a song by the Wolfe Tones, praising those who died during the Irish Rebellion in 1798. The Rebellion saw United Irishmen lose to English troops in a battle for independence, thus the song commemorates sacrifices for Irish independence and considers those “who fear” remembering these sacrifices as cowards. Those brave like Cú Chulainn and the United Irishmen commemorate the past and continue advocating for a United Ireland.

These murals show the Nationalist cause to advocate for all Irishmen, as evident through the inclusion of all provinces. Next, the inclusion of mythological figures endows the Nationalist ideology with a heroic legacy. Finally, it reiterates the personal sacrifices made to secure Irish independence as a justification for support. To conclude, the Nationalist use of commemoration intends to represent its heroic sacrifices for Irish unity in service of all Irishmen.

#### 4.4 Nationalist Murals: Deradicalisation

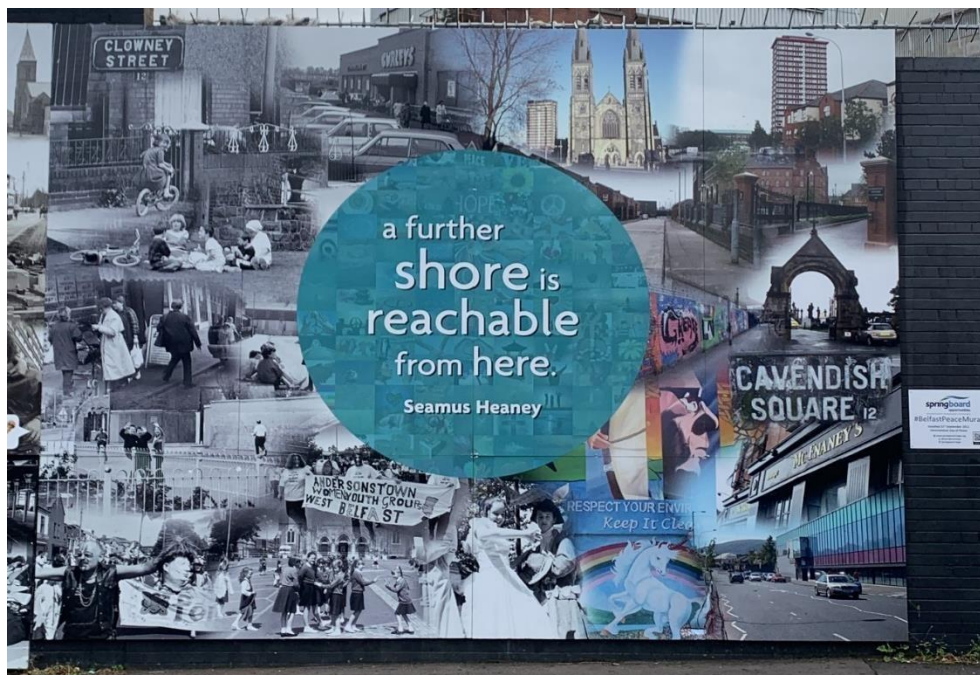


Figure 8: A Peaceful Future for West Belfast

### *Visual analysis*

In Panofsky’s primary phase, Figure 8’s content depicts past and current life in West Belfast. Adding context for the second phase, the mural focuses on elements of Irish Nationalism without clear references to its violent past, such as marches celebrating Celtic heritage and people wearing tricolour face paint. The coloured images feature landmarks such

as St Peter’s Cathedral, Divis Towers, Falls Road Community Centre and Miltown Cemetery. These locations were important PIRA bases during The Troubles and have since become sites of remembrance. For the third phase, the mural’s message uses sites important to the Nationalist community to claim moving on from a violent past is possible, even when covertly commemorating armed history.

For Rose’s modalities, this mural is a ‘plastic mural’. The designer is unknown, though it was commissioned by Springboard, a youth service involved in the 2011 UN Peace Day campaign. Through the collaboration of Shankill and Falls Road’s youth, the mural visualizes a peaceful future for the community (Shared Future News, 2011). The visual culture does not include the community’s violent history, rather it portrays a non-violent past and excludes communal trauma. This mural is located on the ‘border’ of the Peace Wall, essentially in a ‘no man’s land’, thus tours focussing on Nationalist and Unionist murals can include it. Thus, this mural presents a sanitized memory of the past to reinforce a non-violent future for the Nationalist community.

#### *Discourse analysis*

The text quotes from Seamus Heaney’s 1989 play *The Cure at Troy*. 1989 marks SF officially distancing itself from the IRA to reach peaceful self-determination through politics. Written during a transitional period in Northern Ireland, Heaney draws from Greek mythology to scrutinize attempts at Northern Irish society grappling with moving past violence. “a further shore” creates an image of something beyond current reality, thus a Northern Ireland beyond its current state. This alternative “is reachable from here” is meant to instil hope.

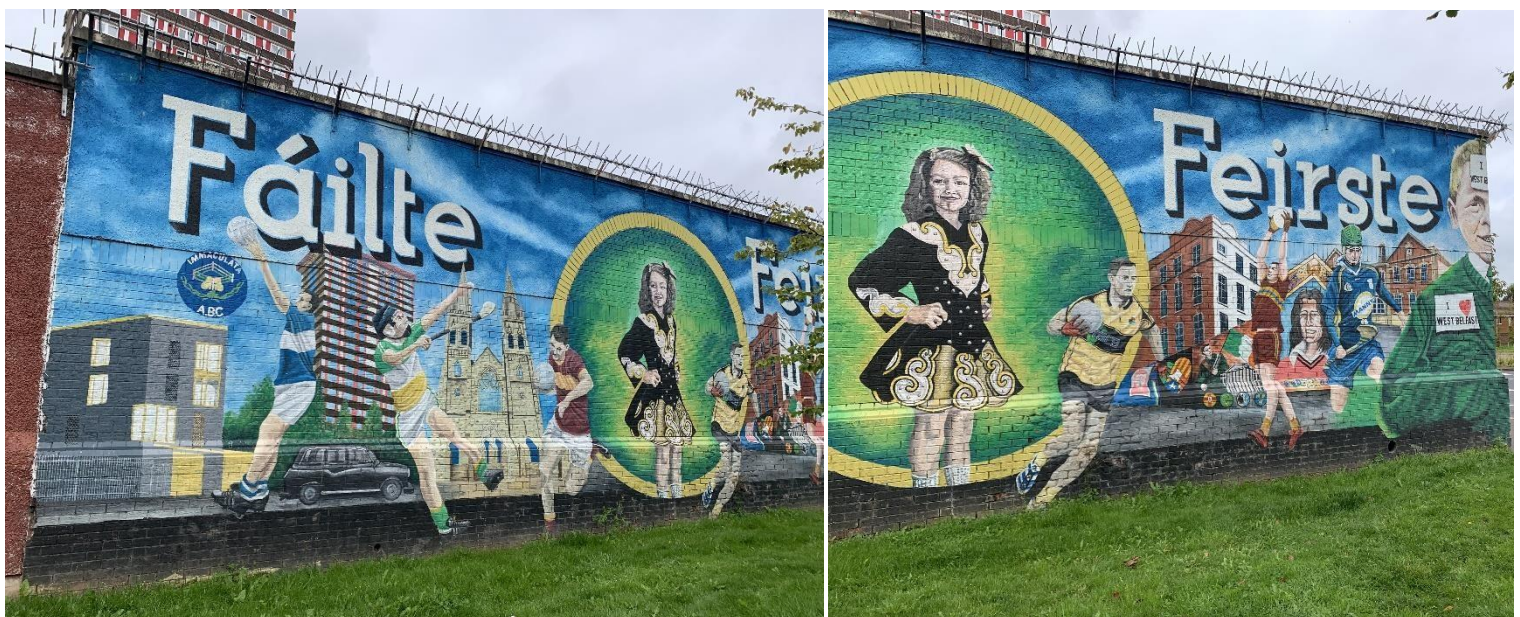


Figure 9: New non-violent West Belfast

### *Visual analysis*

In Panofsky's primary phase, Figure 9 depicts Gaelic sports including Gaelic football, hurling, and Irish dancing. The background features important community buildings including Divis Towers, Raidió Fáilte, St. Peter's Cathedral, the International Wall, the Bobby Sands mural, and the Féile an Phobail office. To add context for the second phase, during The Troubles the black cabs served as public transport for the working class who were often bombing targets. The two children symbolize a future where the community freely practices Celtic traditions. Some locations functioned as PIRA headquarters, but only those aware of the history could recognize the connection. For the third phase, this mural utilizes Celtic traditions visualize the community's future of freely practicing cultural traditions. Moreover, only those who experienced The Troubles know the violent legacies of some symbols. Thus, the mural both acknowledges past violence but sees no future for it in West Belfast.

For Rose's modalities, this mural is hand-painted in commission by Coíste, a Nationalist tourism company that employs Republican ex-convicts to inform tourists about West Belfast. It is unknown when it was painted. The neighborhoods' violent legacy is visually absent, though the tours do include it. Thus, the visual culture of this mural allows it to function as a non-violent visual summary of the current state of West Belfast, though this context is provided in the tours.

### *Discourse analysis*

"Fáilte Feirste Thiar" translates to "Welcome to West Belfast". The use of Gaeilge is notable considering this mural is a touristic product, but only the inhabitants of West Belfast are likely to speak the language.

These Nationalist murals exercise power by informing viewers about prominent figures and traditions of the community. Next, murals feature references to The Troubles, reiterating these events are in the past and the community has moved past violence. Finally, the depictions of children fortify the need for a guaranteed existence of its community. The Nationalist use of deradicalization functions to separate from its violent past to advocate for a future in which younger generations can freely live according to Catholic Irish traditions.

This chapter has studied eight murals that present dominant Nationalist narratives in the four themes. Despite the small sample size, these results are representative and typical of the database found on the website. Figure 2 references indirect violence to modernize the Nationalist cause as a legitimate political movement. The absence of arms allows the movement to part with its violent past and increase support. Figures 8 and 9 support the Nationalist movement as having parted with armed violence by presenting elements of contemporary

Catholic Irish life. Figure 8 presents Belfast as the home of the Nationalist community whilst Figure 9 stresses the community's Celtic heritage, thus both murals claim Northern Ireland as the community's homeland. Celtic heritage also features in Figure 7, though here it functions to antagonize British influence in Ireland by positioning it against the ancient Irish society. Figure 3 supports the notion of Britishness encroaching on Irish territorial sovereignty, and references past systemic oppression through Unionist collaboration with the 'oppressors'. Figures 4 and 5 strengthen the objective of ridding Ireland of British presence by referencing international cases of suffering caused by British colonialism. The following section will apply the same analytical processes to Unionist murals to study their adaptations of the four themes.

#### 4.5 Unionist Murals: Leadership



Figure 10: Royal leadership as Protestant protectors

##### *Visual analysis*

In Panofsky's primary phase, Figure 10 depicts King Charles III and his official symbols. The background features the Union Jack and St. Paul's Cathedral. To add context for the second phase, St. Paul's is the seat of the bishop of London and Anglican church. The mural features Charles' cypher and the Government of Northern Ireland's coat of arms which is composed of British and Irish symbols. The elk represents Ireland and bears the sigil of the House de Burgh, an Anglo-Irish family from which many Royals stem. The red lion represents the Ulster-Scots and carries a flag featuring the Irish harp. The crest in the middle features the Ulster banner (Santino, 2016). For the third phase, the mural's message emphasizes the Royal



lineage with Anglo-Irish history and religion to legitimize King Charles III's importance in Northern Ireland.

For Rose's modalities, the mural was digitally designed and printed on plastic canvas to celebrate Charles' coronation on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Its maker is unknown. The mural's visual culture is simple, featuring a few Royal symbols. The mural is in the Royal Corner in Shankill Road. Nearby murals celebrate Queen Elizabeth II and King Billy, and the streets are decorated with Union Jacks and red phone boxes. The 'King's Corner' sign functions as an unofficial reclamation of space to celebrate the Royal Family as the street is officially named Crimea Street.

#### *Discourse analysis*

The paragraph quotes from an oath reinforcing the monarch's plight to protect Protestantism and the Presbyterian Church in Scotland according to the 1707 Act of Union. It was recited by Charles at a meeting during his accession process (Crowcroft & Cannon, 2019). The quotation is a shortened version of the original Act, as Northern Ireland did not exist at this time. Charles declaring Presbyterianism the "true Protestant Religion" reinforces his connection to Northern Ireland, as most Protestants identify with the Presbyterian tradition. "Defender of the Faith" implies a threat to Presbyterianism, a statement which can easily be related to by a community with a history of conflict. "the Settlement" refers to the Act of Settlement, which ruled that anyone who married into or converted to Catholicism could not ascend the throne (Oxford University Press, 2015). Simultaneously, those who settled in Ireland during the Plantation of Ulster had to be of Protestant faith, reiterating the connection between the Crown, Protestantism, and Northern Ireland.



Figure 11: Armed Unionist Protectors

### *Visual Analysis*

In Panofsky's primary phase, Figure 11 depicts armed men wearing the UVF standard 'uniforms'. Adding context for the second phase, the men's equipment is both a warning to their opposers and a reassurance to their protectorates, indicating they are always ready to act. For the final phase, the symbols imply that the UVF is perpetually active regardless of location. The paramilitary's anonymity acknowledges that their activities are illegal but necessary.

For Rose's modalities, this mural is hand-painted, and its maker and date of creation are unknown. The mural's visual culture is absent of the UVF's motives and opposition. Those unfamiliar with Northern Irish history require external information to comprehend the image. The mural's political presentation is clear: the Unionist community are victims under threat, therefore the UVF has a legitimate reason to protect their community. The mural intends to convince the viewer that Unionists have a right to self-defence and can do so using armed violence.

### *Discourse analysis*

The use of "we" connects the UVF to the Unionist community. "you" strengthens the claim to the right of violence through adapting perspective: when placing yourself in the position of Unionists, you too would look for any way means of self-defence. This commonality is evident in "every man". "elementary" and "implanted" position the right to defence as natural, and thus irrevocable. "seeking nothing but" designs the UVF's claim as basic and uncontroversial. The message is framed as innate and universal, thereby normalising armed violence as a means of defence.

These murals intend to portray leading figures of the Unionist community as protectors. First, the relationship between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom is connected by the Protestant faith, which is defended by King Charles. The Unionist ideology is elevated through his prestigious British lineage. Next, the armed self-defence of Unionist movements is justified by positioning the community as under threat. To conclude, the Unionist claim to be worthy of protection is a confirmation of its legitimacy. Through its leadership acting as a protector, the community's continued existence in the United Kingdom is justified.

#### 4.6 Unionist Murals: Commemoration



Figure 12: Commemorating victims of paramilitary violence

#### *Visual analysis*

In Panofsky's primary phase, Figure 12 depicts the aftermath of five bombings. To add context in the second phase, the bombings include the Balmoral Furniture Company bombing in 1971 in which three Protestants and one Catholic were killed. The ambulance personnel are carrying away the youngest victim of the attack. The bombing's perpetrators remain unidentified, it is believed to have been carried out by the IRA in retaliation for a UVF attack the week prior. The pictures below feature four separate scenes of IRA bombings at the Four Step Inn in 1971, the Mountainview Tavern and Bayardo Bar in 1975, and Frizzell's Fish Shop in 1993. In total, the death toll adds up to twenty-six, though this picture mentions twenty-five,

leaving out an IRA paramilitary's name (Shirlow & Murtagh, 2006). Poppies have become hyper-commemorative symbols, as they militarize all deaths within the Unionist communities, connecting them with fallen soldiers of the Great War. For the final phase, the mural's message reminds the viewer of the unjustified violence against the Unionist community, and how its perpetrators continue to exercise power without repercussions for their actions.

For Rose's modalities, this mural is a 'plastic mural.' The date and creation of this mural are unknown, but the techniques used suggest it is a recent work. Its visual culture commemorates the community's trauma. Notably, this period saw a 'ping-pong' of bomb attacks, though this reciprocity is absent from the mural, presenting this period to only pertain to one-sided violence and suffering. The mural is located on Shankill Road and served as the location for the commemorative march marking the Balmoral bombing's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Besides communal circulation, photographs of the mural have been featured in articles about fears of reemerging sectarian violence.

#### *Discourse analysis*

This mural claims that the victims were killed by the "Provisional Sinn Fein Genocide," reconnecting SF with PIRA's terrorism. The United Nations (1956) defines genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group". Thus, Unionists accuse SF of breaching international human rights to eradicate their community.



Figure 13: Commemorating the Ulster Volunteers

### Visual Analysis

In Panofsky's primary phase, Figure 13 commemorates the Ulster Volunteers 36<sup>th</sup> Division. Adding context in the second phase, the Division's efforts in the Battle of the Somme coincided with the Easter Rising. The soldiers signify communal sacrifice and are commemorated at the Ulster Tower in Thiepval. Sir Edward Carson, who assumed Unionist leadership to block the Home Rule Bill through the Ulster Covenant of 1912, is depicted in the middle. Carson also founded the UVF in preparation of a civil war, but the men were sent to France after the outbreak of war. The background features the SS Clyde Valley, a ship used during a 1914 smuggling campaign to provide arms to the UVF (Brown, 2007). For the final phase, this mural commemorates the founding of the UVF through Unionist sacrifice to protect sovereignty.

For Rose's modalities, this mural is a hand-painted commission by the Cosy Somme Association of East Belfast, though its date of creation is unknown. Its visual culture pays tribute to fallen soldiers and commemorates the Unionist movement through the Ulster Tower and poppies. Though a direct call to action is absent, the context of Brexit and the Northern Irish protocol revived anxiety surrounding territorial sovereignty. The communal duty to continue independence from the Irish state is reasserted by remembering the sacrifices of past heroes and sacrifice. The mural is in a housing estate outside the city centre, suggesting this mural is intended for the Unionist community.



Figure 14: Guiding Information

### Discourse Analysis

The plaque describes the history of the 36<sup>th</sup> Ulster Division through linguistic 'Othering'. The Nationalist effort of Home Rule was a "threat" which was inflicted on Ulster with "force" by those priorly considered "bitter enemies". Conversely, the people of Ulster

“resisted” Home Rule through the Ulster Convention and “disciplined” units of volunteers who “fought nobly and bravely.” The text also reminds the viewer that the life currently lived was provided through the Division’s sacrifice, expressing connectedness and duty.

Though its location renders it a community object, the plaque provides information for viewers outside the community who are unaware of the Unionist role in the Great War. This mural intends to convince its viewers that the Unionist sacrifices must be repaid, and Northern Ireland must keep its sovereignty. These two murals demonstrate the commemoration of victims and heroes in reasserting the need to secure the Unionist identity. First, the sacrifices made by Unionists during the Great War justify Northern Ireland’s place in the United Kingdom. Next, the civilian deaths during The Troubles prove the paramilitary threat to the Unionist identity, which is continued by SF’s Republican links and their objective of a United Ireland. To conclude, by commemorating its past loyalty and current threats, Unionists claim the continuation of their victimhood will last until their objectives are achieved.

#### 4.7 Unionist Murals: Solidarity



Figure 15: Solidarity Against Betrayal

#### *Visual Analysis*

In Panofsky’s primary phase, Figure 15 depicts the flags of the United Kingdom’s members. The crests include Northern Ireland’s Ulster Banner and Scotland’s Saint Andrew’s Cross, indicating the housing estate’s inhabitants identify as Ulster Scots. Adding context for the second phase, paralleling the national flags acknowledges the individual countries but prioritises their union. For the final phase, the mural’s message expresses ‘renewed’ unity following Brexit and the threat posed by the Northern Irish Protocol.

For Rose’s modalities, this mural is a ‘plastic mural’. The artist is unknown. The mural’s content confirms it was created after 2016. Solidarity is expressed through a divisional threat against the United Kingdom which requires renewed solidarity. The visual culture is simple: the mural does not feature any visual references to Brexit, Irish independence, or the European Union. The mural is located within a housing state, invisible from the main road, thus hidden from unguided tourists. This can imply it is not meant for ‘outsiders’, but for Unionists who require reassurance following discussions on the Irish border.

#### *Discourse analysis*

“No Irish Sea Border.” references the post-Brexit Irish border issue. Instead of imposing a hard border with customs checks, Northern Ireland remained in the Single Market. Unionists consider this an attempt to ostracize Northern Ireland from Great Britain, resulting in security threats aimed at Border Control Post staff. “We won’t be divided By An Act of Betrayal.” implies the entire United Kingdom was betrayed by the Irish Sea Border, which could harm the union within the United Kingdom.

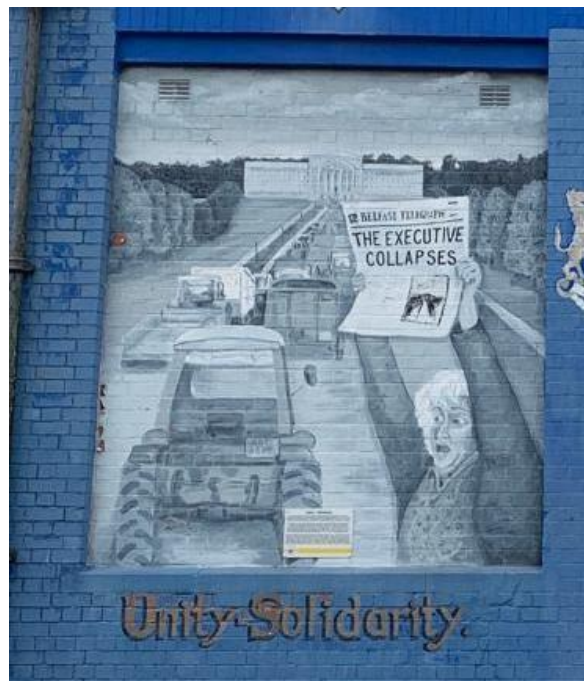


Figure 16: Opposing Power Sharing

#### *Visual analysis*

In Panofsky’s primary phase, Figure 16 depicts the 1974 Ulster Workers Union strike. Adding context in the second phase, the vehicles in front of Stormont represent the large-scale mobilisation of the Unionist working class opposing the Sunningdale Agreement. The woman is celebrating the Prime Minister’s resignation and the collapse of the Agreement. The celebration of the collapse of a cross-community political cooperation suggests this event

further reinforced sectarian divisions. For the final phase, the mural's message conveys a Unionist victory against political treachery through communal solidarity and mobilization.

For Rose's modalities, this mural is a hand-painted commission of the East Belfast Historical and Cultural Society. Its date of creation is unknown. The background is a recreation of a photograph taken during the strikes, with the addition of the woman holding a newspaper. This may be an attempt at Unionist communal representation to deepen identification with the mural. The mural is an instalment of a series of murals depicting the Unionist community's history, though it is in an alleyway and difficult to find unless guided there. The political 'side' of the visual culture is made intelligible due to its situational context and external elaboration.

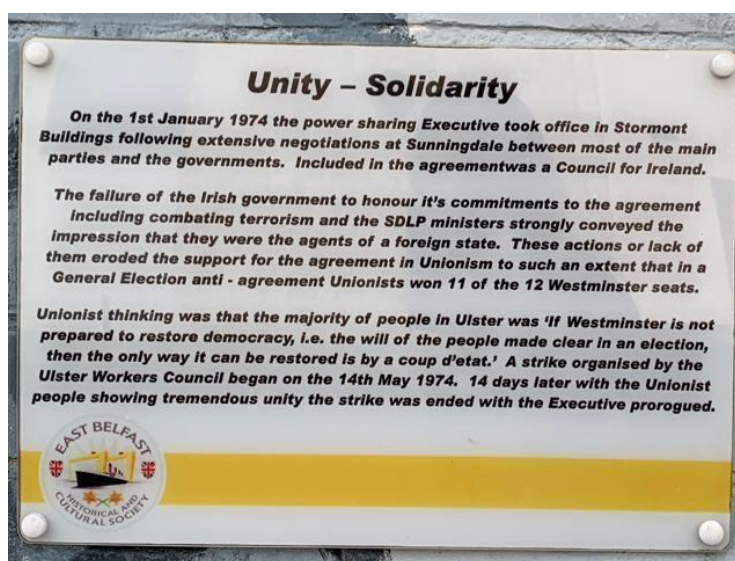


Figure 17: Guiding Information

### *Discourse analysis*

The text describes the strikes as a reaction to “the failure of the Irish government to honour its commitments to the agreement including combating terrorism.” This commitment refers to the compromise of SF entering Parliament if PIRA halted its activities. Accusing the SDLP and the Irish state as “agents of a foreign state” reiterates the paramilitary connection using “agents”, whilst “foreign” categorizes the Nationalists’ as non-native. The hostility towards Westminster responds to Prime Minister Wilson accusing the strikes of eroding British democracy. This mural covertly conveys solidarity within the Unionist community as it is antagonized by British and Irish politics.

These murals reflect on past cases that threatened Northern Irish sovereignty. First, the betrayal of the Unionist community is readapted through the Irish Sea Border as a threat to Northern Irish sovereignty resulting from their loyalty to the United Kingdom. Next, another case in which Irish politics infringed Northern Irish political independence displays the power



of its community. To conclude, the solidarity of the Unionist community through suffering political setbacks justifies the Unionists' place in the United Kingdom.

### 5.8 Unionist Murals: Deradicalization



Figure 18: Deradicalization for gender equality

#### *Visual Analysis*

In Panofsky's primary phase, Figure 18 consists of a quilt composed of homely patterns and coloured artwork. Adding context in the secondary phase, the colours and patterns used convey femininity. For the final phase, this mural expresses family values and female inclusion.

For Rose's modalities, this mural is a digitally designed installation by Lesley Cherry in collaboration with the Housing Committee and the Lower Shankill Community Group. It was funded by the replacement project of 'controversial murals.' The mural functions to deradicalize the visual environment of the community.

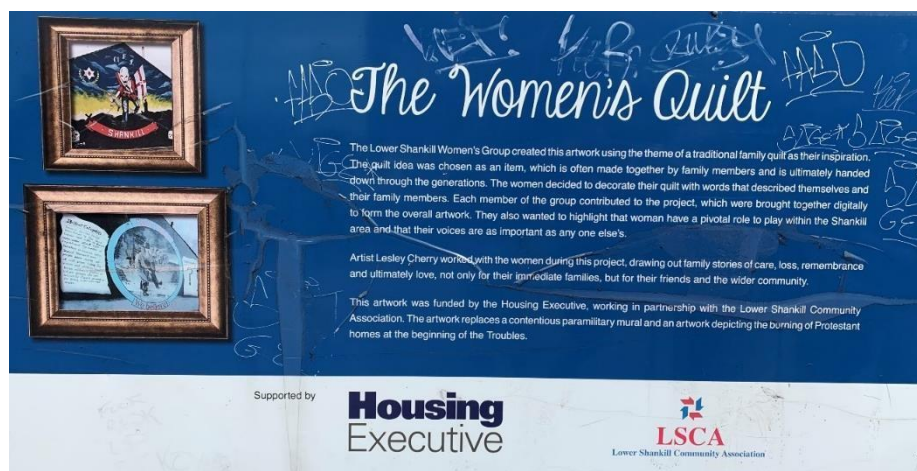


Figure 19: Guiding Information

### *Discourse analysis*

The words in the murals signify trait and roles of women living in Lower Shankill. Much like a quilt, the community's traumas are "handed down through generations." In creating the quilt, the women reminisce on "loss, remembrance" but focus on "love." The implied "wider community" this love is targeted towards is unclear. It can imply those living in Lower Shankill, or even those outside the Unionist community. Overall, the mural's uncontroversial nature intends to heal the impacts of its predecessors to create a message of hope to hand down to future generations.



Figure 20: Equality and Recreation

### *Visual analysis*

In Panofsky's primary phase, Figure 20 depicts the Belfast Giants, the city's ice hockey team. Adding context for the second phase, sectarianism in sports is prevalent in Northern Ireland, but as the Giants were founded in the post-GFA period, its founder intended the team to represent all communities in Belfast (Bairner, 2003). The team is named after Fionn mac Cumhaill, a heroic giant from the Ulster mythical cycle credited with building Giant's Causeway. By including a heritage product of the entire island, the team intends to emphasize the common history between communities. For the final phase, this mural represents a contemporary initiative bridging identities through shared support for a sports team.

For Rose's modalities, the mural was commissioned by the Housing Executive and Charter NI, and completed in 2015 by Blaze FX, a politically unaffiliated graffiti collective. The preceding mural depicted armed UDA soldiers. Its visual culture displays no political affiliation as it depicts a partisan initiative. Its message intends to express reconciliation through sports. It is located on Lord's Street, whose gables have all been subject to the deradicalisation

project, thus no paramilitary mural remains. Due to its apolitical nature, its circulation remains within its community, as tours do not focus on this genre of murals.



Figure 21: Guiding Information

### *Discourse analysis*

“In the Land of GIANTS everyone is EQUAL” references the reconciliatory intent of the team in representing everyone in Belfast. It also expresses equal rights across communities and highlights Celtic mythology as a common heritage product. Remarkably, the content of the informational plaque shifts focus to the Unionist community. “interaction between the artists and community” and the “huge amount of local support and a number of young people from the Lord Street area” emphasize how this mural is significant to the inhabitants of a Loyalist neighbourhood. The Nationalist claim to Belfast Giants is removed which counteracts the team’s symbolic value.

These de-radicalised murals replace paramilitary pieces with reinforcing non-violent elements of Unionism. First, it highlights the role of women in households, expressing the importance of family values and gender equality. Next, the Belfast Giants are intended to represent all communities in Belfast, but the text allows Lord Street’s inhabitants to claim the Giants, thus counteracting its function of bringing people together. These murals suggest the replacement project is limited to removing surface-level references to sectarian violence, but does not solve the community division.

This section studied eight murals to expose dominant Unionist narratives in the four themes. Again, this study only included a small sample, but its findings represent characteristics

of other instalments of the database. Figure 15 is an expression of the Unionist community declaring their ‘home’ as amongst other British nations, and points at the Irish Sea Border as a threat to this sense of belonging. Figure 16 is another example of the implications of Irish meddling in Northern Irish politics. Figure 10 indicates the Protestant minority status on the Catholic island, therefore the community requiring protection from its English religious leader King Charles III. Figure 11 also serves to present the Unionist community as in need of protection, though here it declares being capable of defending itself using armed violence. In both cases, the community being protected expresses victimhood but also the need for it to be legitimized. Despite the inclusion of armed violence in Figure 11, Figures 18 and 20 demonstrate non-violent attributes of the Unionist community, such as sports and family values. Figures 12 and 13 demonstrate the sacrifices the Unionist community suffers for their allegiance to the United Kingdom; thus suffering legitimizes the alliance between Unionists and the British state.

### ***Combining findings***

This section will shortly cover significant findings from the interviews. The scale of agreement questions indicate Nationalist interviewees consider muralism to have little influence on politics, conclude it is not free from state influence, and therefore does not authentically reflect community opinion. Newer commissioned murals are not more apolitical. Nationalist tour guides emphasize educating tourists through personal accounts of the events depicted murals and disagree they partake in dark tourism, as murals allow the community to process its history. They admit their tours’ biased narrative, but claim Nationalist murals prove the legitimacy of Nationalist claims for independence. Nationalist muralists highlight that new young artists have fewer skills and therefore turn to digitally designing plastic boards; thus artistry is lost. Their work with Loyalist artists stress cross-community issues including racism and unemployment to show all communities struggle under current politics.

Unionist response averages on ‘neutral’, thus indicating muralism has some influence on politics, is not free from state intervention, and does not fully reflect community opinion, newer murals are not more apolitical but commissioned murals are not more or less apolitical than non-commissioned ones. The tour guide stated their tours are neutral, despite their content being inspired by their experience during The Troubles. They note a trend of increased numbers of royal murals and humanizing paramilitaries, for example, murals are adapted to remove face coverings.

The non-affiliated tour guide admits some influence of murals on politics, is not free from state intervention and does not fully reflect community opinion, does not consider new murals as more or less apolitical than older ones, but commissioned murals are more apolitical

than non-commissioned ones. They noted the plastic murals replace those with no communal value and are politically constructed to revise history. Loyalist murals are funded by paramilitaries and its content is pre-approved. They claimed tour guides from both sides agree on what history they cover, and what murals are not to be seen by tourists as they disrupt the ideological narratives.

The British Council employee considers murals to influence politics, are free from state intervention, and convey authentic community opinion, but does not consider new or commissioned murals to be apolitical. They note the tours generate stability for the communities through financial gain.

To conclude, the responses indicate the Nationalist community prioritizes muralism as ideological advocacy more than Unionists. This is evident in the existence of a 'purely' Nationalist touring company, and the admittance of bias in narratives. From my experience, there are less Unionist tour guides, and the one I spoke to considers their tour neutral. This suggests Unionists conduct their tours, and thus their influence on opinion, more covertly, which adheres to the ideological goal not requiring a political overhaul, rather stabilizing the status quo.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to understand the role of mural narratives in adapting to the current socio-political environment of Northern Ireland. Throughout this research, I have demonstrated how the Unionist and Nationalist communities utilize their identity to construct visual narratives to gain public support for ideological objectives. These strategic narratives are based on opposing histories, but by analysing a sample of murals demonstrated how the themes of leadership, commemoration, unity, and deradicalization feature in works on both sides of the conflict. These narratives adapt to ongoing issues such as the reunification of Ireland, international resistance movements, and post-Brexit politics to further the construction of group identity and legitimize the community's existence in Northern Ireland. The narratives feature geographical displacement, systemic oppression, and cultural erasure caused by the 'Other'. Though armed escalation is no longer at the heart of the identity conflict, its legacy and victims remain central to the community's claim to victimhood. The literature review has shown that despite paramilitary organizations not actively using violence to influence the political process, the conflict has moved to other frontlines, including murals. Here, communities continue to advocate their cultural, historical, and linguistic supremacy to secure their place in Northern Ireland. Despite the limitations of this study, I can conclude that Nationalist murals adapt to the current socio-political environment of Northern Ireland by reframing United Ireland as a cure to ongoing anxieties of territorial sovereignty. This goal is legitimized by commemorating leaders who sacrificed their lives for their community, emphasizing an international network of independence movements suffering under British influence, committing to a violence-free future and highlighting the legacy of Celtic culture. Unionist murals legitimize remaining in the United Kingdom by positioning Unionists as requiring British protection through their past sacrifices and the continuing Nationalist threat to the community's existence. Murals thus intend to gain popular support by readapting past suffering at the hands of a continuous threat, to mobilize audiences to call for political actions to achieve ideological goals.

This thesis includes multiple contributions to conflict literature on the Northern Irish conflict. The first contribution concerns narratives in political art, expanding on literature through a recent case. As the Unionist goal is continuing the status quo, there is no measurable endpoint, thus the narrative battle between community identities continues to be waged until a United Ireland is achieved. The study of Belfast's murals enhances understanding of visual art as a social institution serving to influence the conflict's expression. The Northern Irish conflict and the murals have been studied extensively, however, as the conflict continues, this thesis provides an update on its progression. The next contribution includes the collection of primary source data including the photographs of the murals as they existed in August 2023. This

enduring database can be referenced for future research, invaluable in a context where the murals are consistently replaced. The murals' strategic narratives can contribute to the construction of Northern Irish history and its identities, as evident in the visual and discourse analyses of this thesis. Moreover, understanding narrative visual art as a vehicle for securing ideological goals aids further studies in similar muralist traditions, as they are also prevalent among non-Western independence movements. To accommodate this, International Relations must recognize alternative sites of conflict such as culture and allow other disciplines' contributions to its methodologies. A lesson can be drawn from the Northern Irish case which allowed communities an outlet for their residual grievances to pre-empt the reemergence of violence. Finally, this thesis has seen the narratives gain visibility due to their touristification, increasing their effectiveness and economic gains for the community. As demonstrated, the tourism industry is important for the re-integration of ex-paramilitaries and improves the Northern Irish economy. Following claims in the literature review, resource scarcity is a source of sectarianism, thus these mural tours are a tool for improving circumstances for communities and strengthening the foundations of a peaceful society. However, as the number of depoliticized artworks continues to grow whilst post-Brexit tensions and the potential reunification of Ireland remain, whether the employment of such narratives in murals is successful in achieving Nationalist or Unionist goals remains to be determined.

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## Appendix I: Nationalist Interviews



Universiteit Leiden


Interview Consent for Thesis Fieldwork project

The research project is on 31/8/23, carried out by Aislinn Hughes, a student on the MA International Relations degree programme at the Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University. The interviewer (the investigator) should have the interviewee read this form carefully and ask any questions the interviewee may have. Before the interview can start, the investigator and the interviewee should sign two copies of this form. The interviewee will be given one copy of the signed form.

**Consent for Participation in Interview Research**

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Aislinn Hughes from Leiden University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the murals of Belfast and their role as both a political artefact and a touristic product.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that most interviewees in will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will notify the interviewer.
4. I understand that I can request that the researcher not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
6. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

D-DEVINE                      AUGUST 31  
 Signature                              Date  
                      31/8/23  
 Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact:  
 aislinnh12@hotmail.com



Universiteit  
Leiden  
Humanities

### Interview questions

Name: Danny DeBruin Country of Residence: NI  
Age: 65 Occupation: Clerical muralist; Rep.  
Gender: M

### Tourism & Politics

What factors have played into the increasing tourism in Northern Ireland? More positive coverage of landscape & scenery as without a violent past

What 'branding' of Northern Ireland do you think the tourism industry promotes?

Do you feel that the mural tours are part of so called 'dark tourism'?

• If yes/no: why? this sounds like we're wrongly using an historical - but we can smuggle some can speak to it.

Do you feel that this 'type' of tourism has led to an increase in the number of tourists?

- How do locals feel about this tourism?

Is the selection process for the murals used in the tours? —

- If so, could you describe it and why you have chosen this selection process?

What is the aim of the tours, is there a certain takeaway you want the visitor to have? —

- If yes: could you describe it?

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: The tourism industry surrounding the murals has influence on politics? not anymore: 2

### Murals & Meaning

How would you describe the function of the murals? Memorials

What are the descriptions of the content of the murals based on? Do you include personal interpretations and the muralists' accounts?

Are the meanings of the mural comprehensible to outsiders, or do they require additional explanation? to come / it's an great news gives his own story & passes it along

What role does the location of a mural have for its meaning?

- Does the location also change the intended audience

Do the muralists identify themselves as being members of an identity group/movement? yes

- If yes, what movements or groups are there?
- Does the identity of a muralist play a role in the content of a mural? If so, can you give an example? yes

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: Muralism is free from state intervention and solely reflects the stories and voices of local communities

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Can you divide the murals according to the time they were painted?

- If yes, do these categories have any significant trends which set them apart from others
- If yes, what are these trends?

On a scale of 1-5, do you agree with the following statement: Newly painted murals are more apolitical than older ones.

2. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: Commissioned murals are more apolitical than those who haven't been commissioned.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

### Rising Tension

Have the recent escalations in Northern Ireland influenced the tourism industry?

- If yes, how? —

What are some recent changes in arts, events or other symbolic expressions you have noticed?

- Do they hint at growing sectarian social undertones? *AI, widespread online movements, decline in young artists & the skill of muralists*
- How have events such as Brexit, the discussion on the Northern Ireland Protocol lead to reinterpretation of murals, or the creation of new ones? *is no, graffiti yes*

Do you think the murals and the tourism that surrounds it help aid the peace process?

- If so, how? *yes, projects committed to promote peace and tolerance, such as his own work with Mark Irvine highlighting "shared" cross community issues such as racism, injustice & unemployment can highlight a sense of commonality.*





Universiteit Leiden

Interview Consent for Thesis Fieldwork project

The research project is on 30 August, carried out by Aislinn Hughes, a student on the MA International Relations degree programme at the Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University. The interviewer (the investigator) should have the interviewee read this form carefully and ask any questions the interviewee may have. Before the interview can start, the investigator and the interviewee should sign two copies of this form. The interviewee will be given one copy of the signed form.

**Consent for Participation in Interview Research**

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Aislinn Hughes from Leiden University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the murals of Belfast and their role as both a political artefact and a touristic product.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will notify the interviewer.
4. I understand that I can request that the researcher not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
6. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(Handwritten signature)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*30-8-23*

Signature

Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(Handwritten signature)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*30-8-23*

Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact:  
aislinnh12@hotmail.com



**Universiteit  
Leiden**  
Humanities

**Interview questions**

Name: *Peadar Whalen*  
Country of Residence: *NI*  
Age: *67*  
Gender: *M*  
Occupation: *Tourguide (Coast)*

**Tourism & Politics**

What factors have played into the increasing tourism in Northern Ireland? *State funding, heritage, news covering, safety*

What 'branding' of Northern Ireland do you think the tourism industry promotes? *nature, G.O.T, pub culture*

Do you feel that the mural tours are part of so called 'dark tourism'? *dark political, historical, Titanic, Derry*

- If yes/no why? *Rep, no. Loy, yes: but on the same time historical centre: people died there too*

Do you feel that this 'type' of tourism has led to an increase in the number of tourists?

- How do locals feel about this tourism? *as long as it doesn't go deep into "territories": fine. Must not linger & be alone though.*

Is the selection process for the murals used in the tours?

- If so, could you describe it and why you have chosen this selection process?

What is the aim of the tours, is there a certain takeaway you want the visitor to have?

- If yes: could you describe it? *chooses these describing events he was apart of give first hand experience/stories about events on the Rep side. Not partisan, clear "bias"*

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: The tourism industry surrounding the murals has influence on politics? *3*

**Murals & Meaning**

How would you describe the function of the murals? *highlight heroes, make aims of the movement clear: pay tribute to the truth.*

What are the descriptions of the content of the murals based on? Do you include personal interpretations and the muralists' accounts?

Are the meanings of the mural comprehensible to outsiders, or do they require additional explanation? *to those along the wall, but those speak for themselves*

What role does the location of a mural have for its meaning?

- Does the location also change the intended audience? *is often close to the SF HQ, place where events took place or someone lived. those "hidden" will not be observed*

Do the muralists identify themselves as being members of an identity group/movement?

- If yes, what movements or groups are there? *yes Loy/Rep.*
- Does the identity of a muralist play a role in the content of a mural? If so, can you give an example?

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: Muralism is free from state intervention and solely reflects the stories and voices of local communities

In Rep ← ← In Loy

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Can you divide the murals according to the time they were painted? *yes: none of them.*

- If yes, do these categories have any significant trends which set them apart from others
- If yes, what are these trends?

↳ *highlighting the times: people of sign. or int. conf*  
 On a scale of 1-5, do you agree with the following statement: Newly painted murals are more apolitical than older ones.

2. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: Commissioned murals are more apolitical than those who haven't been commissioned.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3, Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

### Rising Tension

Have the recent escalations in Northern Ireland influenced the tourism industry?

- If yes, how? *no*

What are some recent changes in arts, events or other symbolic expressions you have noticed?

- *graffiti on Protocol*  
 Do they hint at growing sectarian social undertones? *yes*

How have events such as Brexit, the discussion on the Northern Ireland Protocol lead to reinterpretation of murals, or the creation of new ones? *blatant resemblance of neo-colonialism*

Do you think the murals and the tourism that surrounds it help aid the peace process? *no, but they will help in reunification*

- If so, how?

• Reps have a clear objective + status quo on what they're for/against. Demographic shifts make either a united Ireland will happen. Murals prove the legitimacy of the struggle & claim for independence



Universiteit Leiden

Interview Consent for Thesis Fieldwork project

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**Consent for Participation in Interview Research**

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Aislinn Hughes from Leiden University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the murals of Belfast and their role as both a political artefact and a touristic product.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that most interviewees in will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will notify the interviewer.
4. I understand that I can request that the researcher not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
6. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Matt Collins      30-08-2023

Signature      Date  
[Signature]      30-8-23

Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact:  
 aislinnh12@hotmail.com



Universiteit  
Leiden  
Humanities

### Interview questions

Name: *Michael* Country of Residence: *Ireland*  
Age: *67* Occupation: *director of Caisle*  
Gender: *M*

### Tourism & Politics

What factors have played into the increasing tourism in Northern Ireland? *EU funds, mouth to mouth, wearing authentic stories*

What 'branding' of Northern Ireland do you think the tourism industry promotes? *academic, in touch with history, united future*

Do you feel that the mural tours are part of so called 'dark tourism'? - *political tourism*  
 • If yes/no: why? *↳ "ours" aren't commercial black ones maybe own/community experiences, reduces the struggle*

Do you feel that this 'type' of tourism has led to an increase in the number of tourists? *yes*

• How do locals feel about this tourism? *normalized, father people be a guided man loosely wandering around. can't really*  
 Is the selection process for the murals used in the tours? *care*

• If so, could you describe it and why you have chosen this selection process? *↳ yes*  
 What is the aim of the tours, is there a certain takeaway you want the visitor to have? *most prominent members: O'Connell, Bobby Sands, etc. those who guides have personal connections to*

*jobs for comm. from british media supported collections*

• If yes: could you describe it? *educating people to enable them to gain historical context*  
 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: The tourism industry surrounding the murals has influence on politics? *engage with primary sources*  
*1*

### Murals & Meaning

How would you describe the function of the murals? *for exp: highlighting solidarity + future hopes / aims of the movements*  
 What are the descriptions of the content of the murals based on? Do you include personal interpretations and the muralists' accounts? *↳ personal stories + muralists' accounts*

Are the meanings of the mural comprehensible to outsiders, or do they require additional explanation? *depends; int. peace wall speaks for itself, others need explaining*

What role does the location of a mural have for its meaning? *↳ comm. / tied to location eg. SFHQ*

• Does the location also change the intended audience? *yes cannot find by themselves*  
 Do the muralists identify themselves as being members of an identity group/movement? *yes*

• If yes, what movements or groups are there? *Rep & boy*  
 • Does the identity of a muralist play a role in the content of a mural? If so, can you give an example? *yes, grew up during B. Some's internment*

*form of opp-political activism*  
 On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: Muralism is free from state intervention and solely reflects the stories and voices of local communities

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Can you divide the murals according to the time they were painted?

- If yes, do these categories have any significant trends which set them apart from others
- If yes, what are these trends?

*the peace wall keeps changing due to current conflicts*

On a scale of 1-5, do you agree with the following statement: Newly painted murals are more apolitical than older ones. *for rep for loy.*

2. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: Commissioned murals are more apolitical than those who haven't been commissioned.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

*in rep*

**Rising Tension**

Have the recent escalations in Northern Ireland influenced the tourism industry?

- If yes, how? *yes. more english/brexit people*

What are some recent changes in arts, events or other symbolic expressions you have noticed?

- Do they hint at growing sectarian social undertones? *boycott of west Belfast undertones due to white tones playing*

How have events such as Brexit, the discussion on the Northern Ireland Protocol lead to reinterpretation of murals, or the creation of new ones? *→ graffiti.*

*NONE*

Do you think the murals and the tourism that surrounds it help aid the peace process?

- If so, how? *no.*



Universiteit Leiden

### Interview Consent for Thesis Fieldwork project

The research project is on 29 August carried out by Aislinn Hughes, a student on the MA International Relations degree programme at the Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University. The interviewer (the investigator) should have the interviewee read this form carefully and ask any questions the interviewee may have. Before the interview can start, the investigator and the interviewee should sign two copies of this form. The interviewee will be given one copy of the signed form.

#### **Consent for Participation in Interview Research**

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Aislinn Hughes from Leiden University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the murals of Belfast and their role as both a political artefact and a touristic product.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that most interviewees in will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will notify the interviewer.
4. I understand that I can request that the researcher not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
6. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

 29 aug 2023

Signature

Date

 29/08/23

Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact:  
aislinnh12@hotmail.com



Universiteit  
Leiden  
Humanities

### Interview questions

Name: Isaac T. Country of Residence: NI  
Age: 62 Occupation: Politician  
Gender: M

#### Tourism & Politics

What factors have played into the increasing tourism in Northern Ireland?

media, documentaries, films, visits, conflict in news

What 'branding' of Northern Ireland do you think the tourism industry promotes?

being in history → hauling back to trad. history + highlighting safety isn't guaranteed

- If yes/no: why? → hadn't heard of the term

Do you feel that this 'type' of tourism has led to an increase in the number of tourists?

• How do locals feel about this tourism? depends on neighborhood, people feel it obstructs daily life but see the economic gains + change

Is the selection process for the murals used in the tours?

based on interest + prior knowledge is absolute. stronger foundations for movements

- If so, could you describe it and why you have chosen this selection process?

What is the aim of the tours, is there a certain takeaway you want the visitor to have?

make information on murals but unbiased, highlight living & dead heroes

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: The tourism industry surrounding the murals has influence on politics? 3 → sponsorship

#### Murals & Meaning

How would you describe the function of the murals? political advocacy + remembrance

What are the descriptions of the content of the murals based on? Do you include personal interpretations and the muralists' accounts? Personal, lived through troubles themselves

Are the meanings of the mural comprehensible to outsiders, or do they require additional explanation? depends if it concerns individuals yes, but some with a lot of text speak for themselves

What role does the location of a mural have for its meaning?

places have historical significance, or eg located at UFF + SF strongholds

- Does the location also change the intended audience, no.

Do the muralists identify themselves as being members of an identity group/movement?

- If yes, what movements or groups are there? loyalist + unionist
- Does the identity of a muralist play a role in the content of a mural? If so, can you give an example? yes, will not paint "impartially"

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: Muralism is free from state intervention and solely reflects the stories and voices of local communities

always  
essentially  
at wall



1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Can you divide the murals according to the time they were painted? *yes*

- If yes, do these categories have any significant trends which set them apart from others
- If yes, what are these trends?

*type of materials used + degree of hostility + jumping on current events*

On a scale of 1-5, do you agree with the following statement: Newly painted murals are more apolitical than older ones.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: Commissioned murals are more apolitical than those who haven't been commissioned.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

**Rising Tension**

Have the recent escalations in Northern Ireland influenced the tourism industry?

- If yes, how? *not really, still a growth*

What are some recent changes in arts, events or other symbolic expressions you have noticed?

- Do they hint at growing sectarian social undertones?

How have events such as Brexit, the discussion on the Northern Ireland Protocol lead to reinterpretation of murals, or the creation of new ones?

*→ mostly increased senses of racial support + a trend*

Do you think the murals and the tourism that surrounds it help aid the peace process?

- If so, how?

*↳ no, thi*

*wherein murals have tended to become more "humanized"*

## Appendix III: Non-affiliated Interviews



Universiteit Leiden

Interview Consent for Thesis Fieldwork project

The research project is on 31 Aug., carried out by Aislinn Hughes, a student on the MA International Relations degree programme at the Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University. The interviewer (the investigator) should have the interviewee read this form carefully and ask any questions the interviewee may have. Before the interview can start, the investigator and the interviewee should sign two copies of this form. The interviewee will be given one copy of the signed form.

**Consent for Participation in Interview Research**

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Aislinn Hughes from Leiden University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the murals of Belfast and their role as both a political artefact and a touristic product.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that most interviewees in will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will notify the interviewer.
4. I understand that I can request that the researcher not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
6. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

      31/08/2023

Signature

Date


31/8/23

Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact:  
aislinnh12@hotmail.com



Universiteit  
Leiden

Humanities

### Interview questions

Name: *Daire McLambrey* Country of Residence: *NI*  
 Age: *42* Occupation: *Senior media/campaigns manager; British Council NI*  
 Gender: *F*

### Tourism & Politics

What factors have played into the increasing tourism in Northern Ireland?

What 'branding' of Northern Ireland do you think the tourism industry promotes? *arts, music, contemporary changes for future*

Do you feel that the mural tours are part of so called 'dark tourism'?

- If yes/no: why? *authentic expressions through art.*

Do you feel that this 'type' of tourism has led to an increase in the number of tourists? *no.*

- How do locals feel about this tourism? *fine if the tourguides are known amongst communities. se*

Is the selection process for the murals used in the tours? *the economic benefits*

- If so, could you describe it and why you have chosen this selection process? *yes.*

What is the aim of the tours, is there a certain takeaway you want the visitor to have? .....

- If yes: could you describe it? *—*

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: The tourism industry surrounding the murals has influence on politics? *4*

### Murals & Meaning

How would you describe the function of the murals? *convey stories with the aid of commemoration + legitimizing a side of the conflict*

What are the descriptions of the content of the murals based on? Do you include personal interpretations and the muralists' accounts? *—*

Are the meanings of the mural comprehensible to outsiders, or do they require additional explanation? *require a basic understanding of NI history*

What role does the location of a mural have for its meaning?

- Does the location also change the intended audience? *yes, Republican murals do not go into loyalist territory and vice versa*

Do the muralists identify themselves as being members of an identity group/movement? *yes*

- If yes, what movements or groups are there? *Rep / Loy*
- Does the identity of a muralist play a role in the content of a mural? If so, can you give an example? *express community goals to which they belong, influenced by funding*

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: Muralism is free from state intervention and solely reflects the stories and voices of local communities

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Can you divide the murals according to the time they were painted? *no, only plastic / painted*

- If yes, do these categories have any significant trends which set them apart from others
- If yes, what are these trends?

On a scale of 1-5, do you agree with the following statement: Newly painted murals are more apolitical than older ones.

2. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: Commissioned murals are more apolitical than those who haven't been commissioned.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

### Rising Tension

Have the recent escalations in Northern Ireland influenced the tourism industry?

- If yes, how? *No, incidents play out on community levels and are not reported on*

What are some recent changes in arts, events or other symbolic expressions you have noticed?

- *Resurgence of new royal support posters on NI Protocol*

How have events such as Brexit, the discussion on the Northern Ireland Protocol lead to reinterpretation of murals, or the creation of new ones?

*Reframing the threat to sovereignty*

Do you think the murals and the tourism that surrounds it help aid the peace process?

- If so, how? *yes, the tourist industry generates income and economic stability*



Universiteit Leiden



### Interview Consent for Thesis Fieldwork project

The research project is on 29/8/23, carried out by Aislinn Hughes, a student on the MA International Relations degree programme at the Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University. The interviewer (the investigator) should have the interviewee read this form carefully and ask any questions the interviewee may have. Before the interview can start, the investigator and the interviewee should sign two copies of this form. The interviewee will be given one copy of the signed form.

#### **Consent for Participation in Interview Research**

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Aislinn Hughes from Leiden University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the murals of Belfast and their role as both a political artefact and a touristic product.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that most interviewees in will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. The interview will last approximately 45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will notify the interviewer.
4. I understand that I can request that the researcher not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
6. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

	08/28/2023
Signature	Date
	29/08/2023
Signature of the Investigator	

For further information, please contact:  
aislinnh12@hotmail.com



Universiteit  
Leiden  
Humanities

### Interview questions

Name: Francis Higgins Country of Residence: NI  
Age: 63 Occupation: tour guide, writer, college lecturer  
Gender: M former BA soldier

### Tourism & Politics

What factors have played into the increasing tourism in Northern Ireland? Heritage tourism.

What 'branding' of Northern Ireland do you think the tourism industry promotes? clean, safe, family friendly, solved

Do you feel that the mural tours are part of so called 'dark tourism'?

- If yes/no: why? we educate people on terrible history and suffering

Do you feel that this 'type' of tourism has led to an increase in the number of tourists? yes.

- How do locals feel about this tourism? → not good but accept it as Francis is a local

Is the selection process for the murals used in the tours?

- If so, could you describe it and why you have chosen this selection process?

→ covers murals who are commercialised with untrue stories + those "hidden" + more recent

- If yes: could you describe it? that the stories told on popular tours aren't true

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: The tourism industry surrounding the murals has influence on politics? 2

### Murals & Meaning

How would you describe the function of the murals? telling community history

What are the descriptions of the content of the murals based on? Do you include personal interpretations and the muralists' accounts? yes

Are the meanings of the mural comprehensible to outsiders, or do they require additional explanation? depends on where the tourist hails from

What role does the location of a mural have for its meaning? settles the story within the community's location: makes history more real

- Does the location also change the intended audience? yes

Do the muralists identify themselves as being members of an identity group/movement?

- If yes, what movements or groups are there? Rep/loy

- Does the identity of a muralist play a role in the content of a mural? If so, can you give an example? loyalist murals are funded locally, Rep by Sinn Fein, so they're not really by the community

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: Muralism is free from state intervention and solely reflects the stories and voices of local communities

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Can you divide the murals according to the time they were painted?  
*revised but every few years so can't tell* *old murals are*

- If yes, do these categories have any significant trends which set them apart from others
- If yes, what are these trends?

On a scale of 1-5, do you agree with the following statement: Newly painted murals are more apolitical than older ones.

2. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

On a scale of 1 to 5, do you agree with the following statement: Commissioned murals are more apolitical than those who haven't been commissioned.

1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neutral 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

### Rising Tension

Have the recent escalations in Northern Ireland influenced the tourism industry?

- If yes, how? *no*

What are some recent changes in arts, events or other symbolic expressions you have noticed?

*hidden murals feel false stories, other murals*  
 • Do they hint at growing sectarian social undertones? *keep blaming the BA and won't admit the crimes committed by the community*

How have events such as Brexit, the discussion on the Northern Ireland Protocol lead to reinterpretation of murals, or the creation of new ones?

*just another way of dividing society in pro or anti EU*

Do you think the murals and the tourism that surrounds it help aid the peace process?

- If so, how? *no, peace is kept by American and European financial investments, people painting murals seek the stability for their own gain*

## Interview Transcript:

- This is a trap, this is deliberately designed to stop terrorist attacks. So it's a trap, you've driven into a trap. Only local people know how to get in, and how to get out. So have a look and see if you can find a way out of here. Do you see any way out? This is a children school. Protestant. Which looks more like a prison, as you can see. Again, there's no way out. Here, there is no way out. So this is designed to keep terrorists out. So no murals here, you don't need murals here.
- So this is the Peace Wall again. No murals on this side, but a children's playpark, on the Wall. So children play on the Wall on the Protestant side. This was my street, just here. So this is my street. And here, you have the Wall. The first Wall put up here, in 1969. It's still here, supposed to last for 48 hours, its still here after 53 years. So we're gonna drive up my street. So remember this is one street, see how they shoot blocks in, from driving into the street.
- The murals tell the story that on the Republican side, that it was all the fault of the British Army who came to Ireland to oppress the Catholics, and they were freedom fighters. So just here (points at a picture of his family). This is me, my mother and father, and this is the year I went to Holland, and this is the year Holland won Eurovision with 'Ding-a-Dong'. I have big memories. And right here, beside me, was a boy, who was 15 years of age, and he was shot dead right here. Ok? So he was shot dead by the IRA, this was his funeral, and he was shot dead at 15 years of age. So these murals that portray the IRA as freedom fighters, this is what they actually did.
- This photograph right here. So this is Protestants, in my street, my friends, right here 1 2 3, going down to burn down Catholic houses. And facing them was the police. So that's the police stopping the Protestants from burning out the Catholics. So that's not what you're seeing on the murals on the Catholic side. You see only that the Catholic houses were burnt down and the police did nothing, well, this is direct evidence right here.
- Now what you will see here are vast areas where nothing is being built. Because today this are, these Protestant areas are run down because the community here, the terrorists here did not believe in politics, unlike the IRA. So the IRA became Sinn Fein, theyre a political machine. It doesn't happen here.
- Now the bomb I was blown up in in 1971 happened right here, so right at the end of this street. Can you see the black plaque here? So I was 11 in that bomb and 4 people died there. Two babies, ---, an old man --- and a young boy ----. So that's a no warning IRA bomb. There's no murals there, no nothing.
- Now you're going to get a different perspective. Now this guy here (a black cab tourguide) is talking bullshit. This man here. I know because I study these people, just like you study murals. Now you've seen all these photographs, but, these are only Protestants, there's no Catholics up there. Because what you see here is the same propaganda only here, they use only photographs of the victims they want you to see. And my daughter's best friend is up there. She is the girl with the long brown hair and the purple top. And she was killed, and she was 13 years of age. So these murals you see here are politically constructed to revise history.
- Now the best example of that is here. So here you see a plastic sign, theyre not painted, theyre plastic, so cheap. That says King's corner. Now incredibly, just over there, is the Dutch king William (III/King Billy). Now here is the problem with murals. Now here, it looks like theyre the most loyal people in the world, and yet, their loyalty is only conditional. Conditional that they rule over Catholics. That's their loyalty.
- Now for these men, this is fascinating. They were killed here, and they were UVF. Now they used to have their mural with masks, ski masks, on. Today, what theyre doing is to humanize them. So -----. A son, a brother, an uncle, a Loyalist, a joker, a fisherman. Can you see how the trick works? He murdered 7 Catholics. This is -----. It says here devoted husband, father, a



soldier. Now let me be clear, they were not soldiers. They were murdering terrorists. And it happened on both sides. So this is what they want the tourists to see. This is their bar. This is a UVF bar over there called the Rex.

- Now I am gonna show you murals that I hope you haven't seen, because they are hidden from tourists. They don't want tourists to see them, and they're on both sides. Now the bomb attack that almost killed my family, my son and my daughter and my wife and I, it did kill my daughter's best friend. Now it happened right here. Right where this cash machine is, that's where she died, along with 9 other people, that's called the Shankill Bomb.
- Now this mural, you've probably seen this one. Now if you look at this mural, this is new by the way, now these are painted, as you can see the paint is peeling. Now what you don't realise is that 5 people on that side of the wall, 3 of them were shot dead by the British Army. So they try to portray themselves as the British Army, but the British Army killed them, why? Because when I was in the Army, we were under strict orders that a terrorist was a terrorist, we didn't make a distinction. And if we'd see a terrorist, we didn't stop to ask what side they were on, we shot them.
- Now we are going deep into the Loyalist area. So there's no murals, people live here. But there are, if you look closely enough. So we are driving up past the police station. The police stations here are armoured, they don't look like any other police stations. Now here is a blast wall, and a security post, now remember this is a Loyalist area, and here is an armoured area. Now there are lots of flags here, they are territorial markers. They mark out, and they tell Catholics that they are not welcome here.
- You'll see weird things here, like here you'll see the flag of Israel. There is no connection between here and Israel, except that on the IRA side they are pro-Palestinian, so the people on this side take the opposite view. So more plastic murals. These aren't the ones to watch.
- So this Saturday, there is going to be a huge march up here, with 16 bands, 16. And they are coming up to lay wreaths and tributes at a mural for a man called ---. Now this area is UVF, and this is still controlled by the UVF. Now what you're gonna see now is things that they don't want people to see. So you can see how run down this area is. So they say they're loyal and see; this is their reward.
- Now these are the murals that you need to see. Oh this is new. Oh this is brand new. Sorry this has just been painted, here we go, I have to see this myself here. This is brand new yeah. This is to Samuel Rock, yeah, I presume, yes --- Sammy Rocket. Now this is brand new. So it's painted, you can see here it has poetry and it looks as though he was protector of his people. It says "In the name of Ireland's cruel game ---" So I'm not gonna go into the bullshit here. So it says here he was murdered by carroids (?) so who do you think murdered him? He was murdered by his own side over drugs. So here's a mural to Trevor King. Now this is different to the murals you've seen, and this one is the most important and iconic: cause I know the story, here, cause I knew this man. So it should say Brian Robinson, it is painted, and it says "volunteer, killed in action. He took up the gun of Ulster, a volunteer then, a true Ulster son, robbed of his life's blood in September 89'." So on Saturday there will be sixty wreaths laid here. Now how did Brian die? Well Brian used to drink in this club, and the club was an UVF club, and he went and murdered a Catholic grocer half a mile from here. He used a motorcycle, so he was on the back of a motorcycle and the motorcycle reached the end of this street and the SAS got in front of him. The SAS are the British top security forces, so they rammed the motorcycle, Brian came off, and then one of the SAS women came over and shot him three times in the head. So Brian died after murdering a Catholic and was killed by the British Army. So the murals that are on the Catholic side say that the British Army are their enemy and that they killed local people, well here you have the British Army taking out a Loyalist who had just killed a Catholic. So the Army here don't have a mural, and this is a problem. So the terrorists, they have the murals. And they still are in this area. So if you wanna buy drugs here, these are the people who will

get you drugs. The UVF, they're still here. Now you will see other murals here, now remember; these were painted. So you can now see that some murals have value and others don't, they're plastic.

- This will be a peace mural here, these are the way all murals should be: bees and flowers.. Life for all and no death. So these children grow up, and these are what they see. Now this one again: painted, no sorry- plastic. So there you go. So you can see that even the murals here tell their own story; are they painted? Are they plastic? Are they new? Are they old? Are they revitalised? But they are maintained. So these groups, on both sides, still maintain the same story, and the story is: on the Catholic side there were freedom fighters, on this side they were like the British Army, neither of which is true.
- So here, they (the murals on the Loyalist side) are funded by the paramilitaries, they get their money through illegal activities. So these shops you see here, all pay protection money. So you cannot put a mural up here unless it's pre-approved. That is sacred space. That is private, for them the trick of the murals is that you don't ask questions. You look at the mural and you say: "It was the battle of the Falls that put the IRA against the bad British Army". Here it was the Loyalists who were fishermen, played football and fought for the area. The truth is that both sides murdered, and today what they're trying to do is revise history.
- No, no, there won't be an escalation here but this dark tourism. I am going to show you one good example, on this side you have all these people signing the wall, which is bullshit. So I am going to take you to see Goofy, let's go see Goofy. So right here is Goofy and so right here stood a house. So the house, this is when the British Army, they will come in and they couldn't stop these houses from being destroyed. So she was a Protestant who lived here, and there is nothing to mark that. Now you have thousands of signatures here, and have no knowledge of this. And they look at the rest of the murals and go: bad British Army. These were all Protestant houses that were destroyed, now that doesn't fit today's narrative of the good IRA who were defending their area, which is not true. The IRA didn't defend anything. Now as for me, you need to qualify what I am saying. I am ex-military, so I was an Irish Ranger, this was me with the Russian Special Forces, taken in Germany a few years ago, but I served in Ulster.
- But even in this short time, if you're beginning to ask different questions than you would have to the black cab drivers, you're beginning to understand that there is a deeper story here, and that the murals are painted here for the tourists.
- (On Re-imagining Communities Initiative): It was to create a more peaceful environment, the group down there are called the UDA, and although I don't like them, I respect them, and at least they are doing it. But, they will only replace the ones they don't need, so they will never replace some of the other murals. But they are paid a lot of money, so they are paid around 90.000 euros for every mural to be removed. So here is plastics murals over here, Republican.
- So you've seen these (referring to the International Wall). These will have every whack job terrorist organisation in the world are here. All of this trying to portray the Troubles as a fight for freedom. Of the 3800 people who died here, only 900 were directly involved in the Troubles and 2900 were simply innocent bystanders, including two of my family. Here's the black taxi tour, they have an agreed tour, so both the Catholics and the Protestants agree this is the history they want to cover, and this is the bits of history they want to leave out.
- (On mural to Steven McKay): So he murdered up to 22 innocent Catholics. So we have now peace for 25 years, some murals have been replaced but they are plastic signs. So how valuable is a plastic sign? This is one of the things that I am hoping you're picking up. So this man murdered, his mural is still here, why? How do you think he died? Drugs. Exactly. He was shot with a crossbow because he owed the local drug dealer 10.000 euros. Now his mural is still here, this mural has been removed because they didn't care about this mural, and that's the difference. There is murals that you care about, and there's murals that they don't care about.

- No, no, no, there is no state-regulation. So here these murals have been replaced, this one has been replaced, and the one down here hasn't been replaced. So the man down here was the commander called Bucky McCullen. Now this mural you can see is run down, its dilapidated,

but there's fresh flowers. So bits of it are fallen away. So I will think they will sell it, so think of it as selling the mural. Alright? You can still see warnings here, see the graffiti: Royle o'Boyle, Shankill Stalker. So the hatred here is still written on the wall. Now this area, again, a mural was replaced, but by a plastic one. Now I do hope you realize, that if they were real value, they would be painted, but they aren't.