



Loyalty in Dissent:

Loyalist Public Murals in Pre- and Post-Ceasefire Northern Ireland

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Public Art + Dissent Mini-Course
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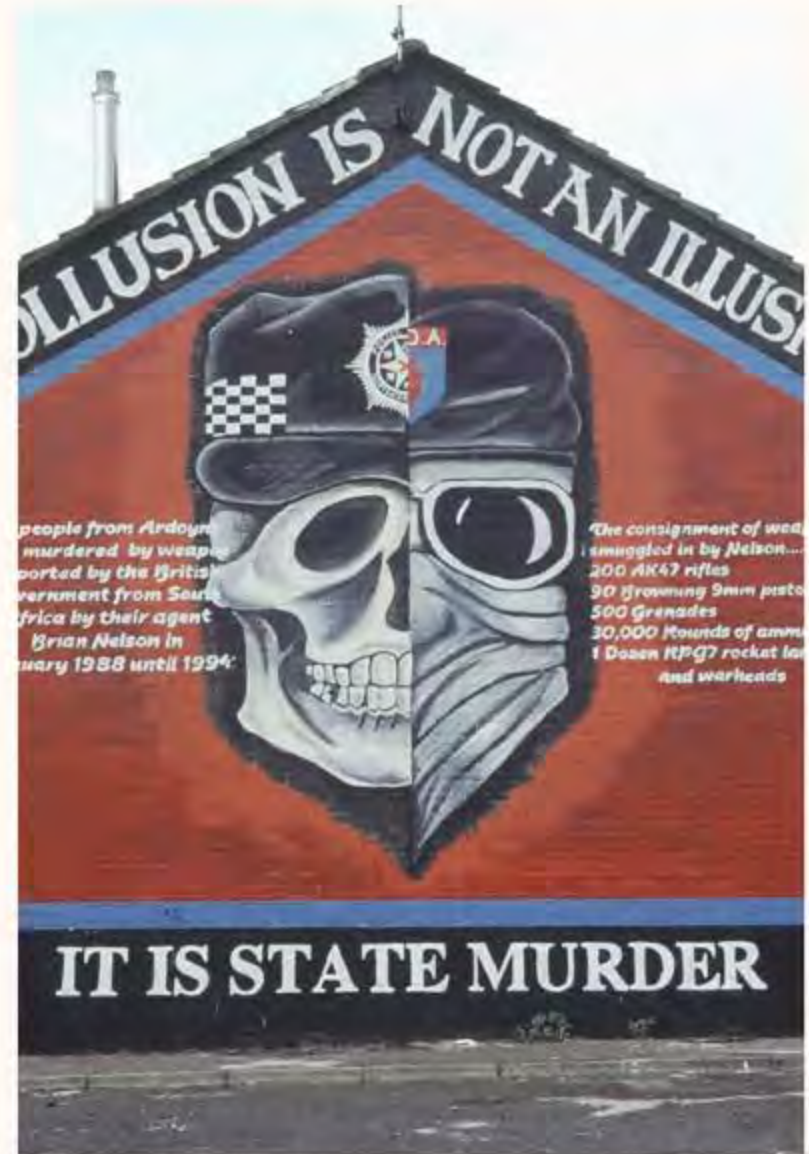
Today's Road Map

- How did Protestants get to Ireland?
- Key themes and historic events in Loyalism.
- Loyalism in the conflict and beyond.
- The history of public murals in Northern Ireland.
- The evolution of murals during the conflict.
- Post-Ceasefire murals and re-imagining Belfast.



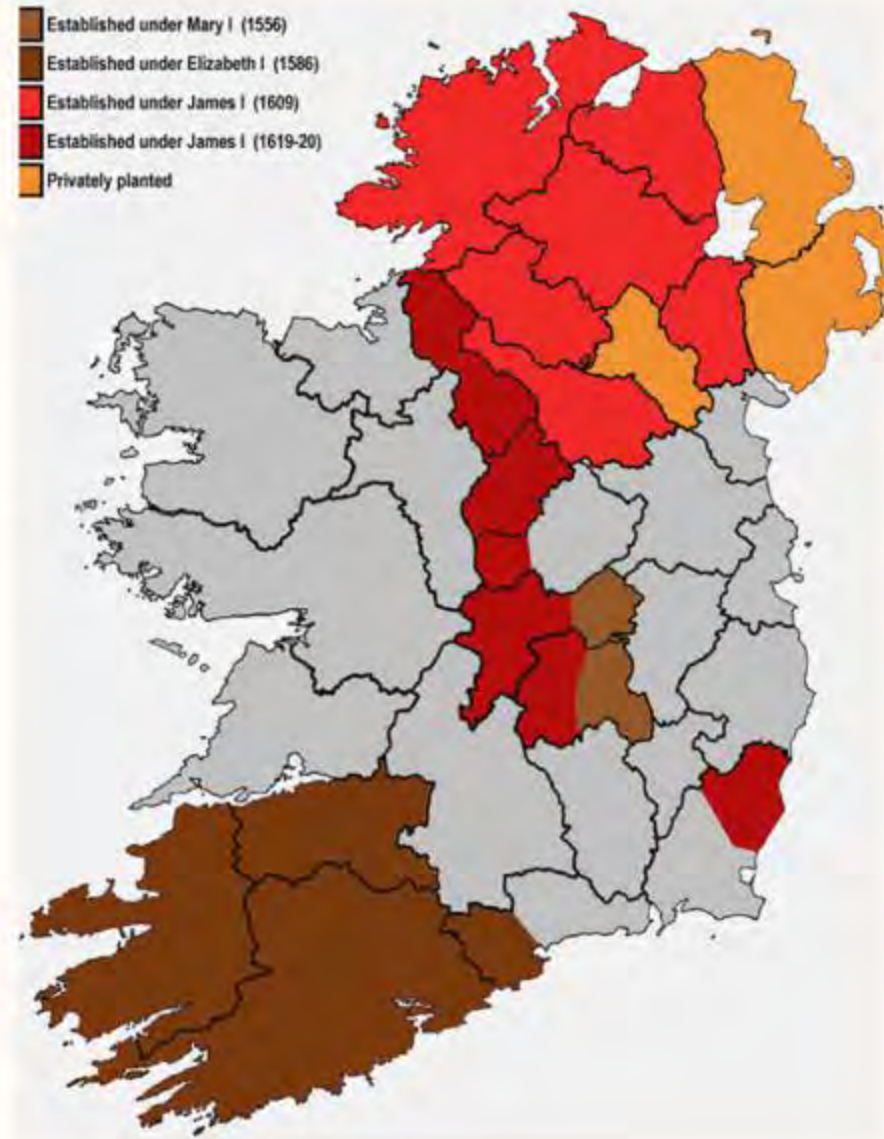
"Murals in their entirety constitute a complex, changing, fascinating body of public art that brings an added element to the understanding of the conflict in Northern Ireland and the 'peace' that has followed."

Tony Crowley "Hegemonic Shifts: The Latest from the Wall of Northern Ireland" (2015; pp. 58)



How did Protestants get to Ireland?

- The Protestant Reformation
- The Plantation of Ulster (1556-1620)
 - Planted Protestants became the landed gentry, landowners, farmers, business owners in key strategic areas.
 - Planting changed the structure of town planning and island wide infrastructure.



Key Themes and Historic Events in Loyalism



IDENTITIES ARE CONSTRUCTED
OUT OF SOCIAL, CULTURAL,
ECONOMIC, AND RELIGIOUS
PERSPECTIVES.

What is Loyalism?

- Unionism:
 - Turn of 20th Century
 - Political ideology intent on maintaining Union with Great Britain (Act of Union, 1801)
 - Protestant, British, Ulster, political, middle class
- Loyalism:
 - 1910s
 - Loyal to the Union, monarchy, Ulster, communities
 - Protestant, British, Ulster, working class, violent at times





Key Themes and Historic Events:

- **Protestantism (Britishness)**
 - The Reformation
 - The Plantation of Ulster
 - Williamite War (1688-1691)
 - Battle of the Boyne (1690)
 - The Orange Order (1795)
- **Dissent and Defence**
 - The Reformation
 - Home Rule Crisis
 - Ulster Volunteer Force
 - First World War
 - 36th Ulster Division
 - Second World War





Key Themes and Historic Events:

- **Siege or Threat**
 - Williamite War (1688-1691)
 - Siege of Derry (1688-1689)
 - Home Rule Crisis (1912-1913)
 - Ulster Volunteer Force
 - Easter Rising (1916)
 - Conflict and Partition (1919-1923)
- **Service and Sacrifice**
 - First World War
 - 36th Ulster Division
 - Battle of the Somme (1916)
 - Second World War
 - Belfast Blitz



CONDITIONAL LOYALTY

"Conditional loyalty is a term that is crucial to understanding the loyalist ethos. The PUL community viewed the 1912 Home Rule crisis as **a threat to their identity and a threat to the union with Britain**. Consequently, even though it meant organizing mass and potentially violent resistance against the British government to which they pledged their loyalty, they felt justified in forming the UVF because **that loyalty was dependent on the maintenance of the union**. The perceived threat to the union was coming from the British state, and therefore, that state would have been seen as a legitimate target. Because of this resistance from 1912-1914, **loyalist paramilitaries were able to justify armed resistance against state forces** (police and army) in Northern Ireland, though they professed loyalty to the union which supported those state forces."

Loyalism in the Conflict and Beyond



SECTARIAN CONFLICT, CIVIL RIGHTS, PARAMILITARY GROUPS AND PROGRESSIVE POLITICS

Troubles Timeline (1968-1998*)

- 1960s: Civil Rights Movement
- 1968-69: violence at marches, Army arrives
- 1970s: violence, Direct Rule, and prisons
- 1980s: hunger strikes, move toward politics, and secret talks
- 1990s: ceasefires (1994) and agreement (1998)
- 2000s: Direct Rule, decommissioning, and agreements
- 2010s: power-sharing and unstable peace



Loyalism Emerges Again:

- 1960s: response to liberal PM O'Neill, perceived threat of violent Republicanism
- 1970s: Defence of communities, 'return the serve' and prison experiences
- 1980s: political development and fear of betrayal
- 1990s: ceasefire, politics, and fracturing

LOYALISM IN THE TROUBLES

Post-Ceasefire Loyalism:

- No identity is a monolith
- Push and pull between progressive and regressive elements
- 2000s: feuds and frustration
- 2010s: loss of identity, culture war and contested symbols, commemoration, commemoration, and more commemoration

History of Public Murals in Northern Ireland

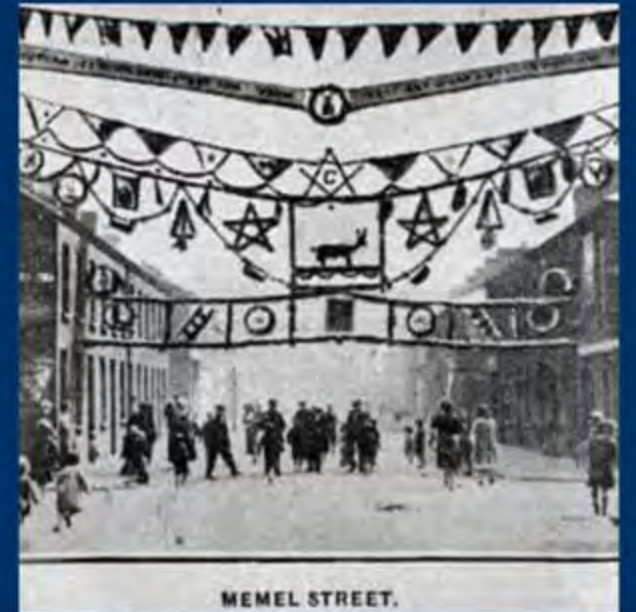


SYMBOLS OF IDENTITY,
CULTURE, AND HISTORY

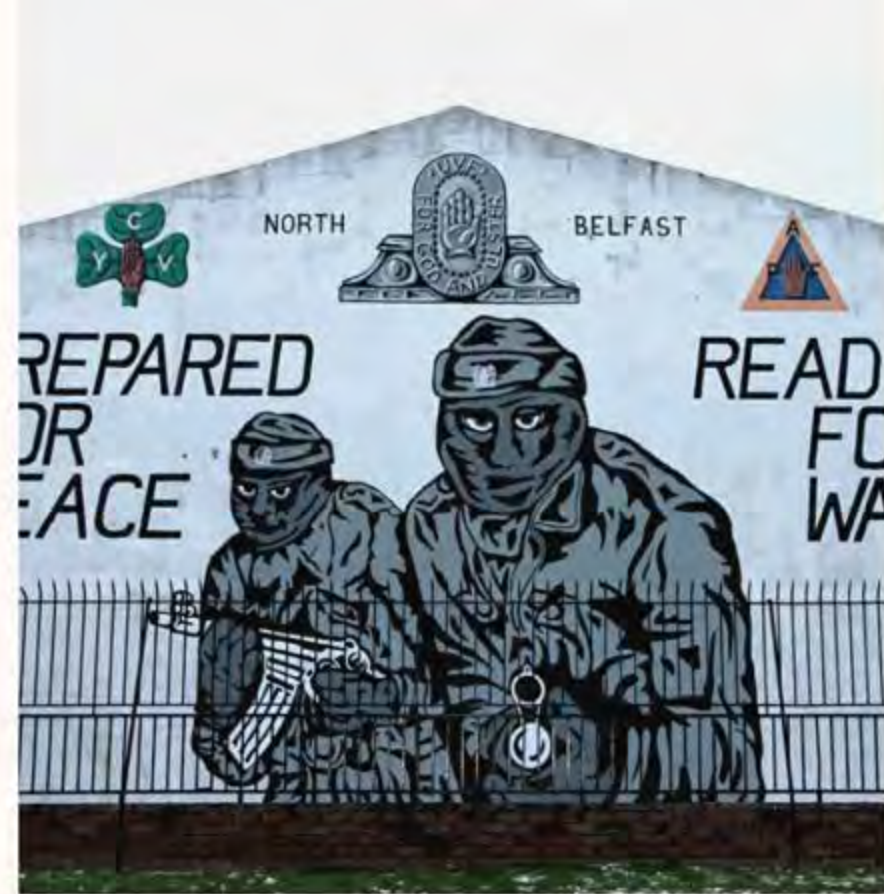


Unionist Traditions:

- Started out of the Orange Order and commemorations of Battle of the Boyne.
- Entirely Unionist tradition until impact of 1981 Hunger Strikes in Republicanism.
- Aside from King Billy images, other early murals include the Titanic, and commemorating the First World War, 36th Ulster Division, etc.



Evolution of Murals During the Conflict



SYMBOLS OF CONFLICT,
IDENTITY, NATIONALISM, AND
PARAMILITARY GROUPS



Evolving Loyalty:

- Early conflict murals depicted flags, crowns, bibles, and badges for paramilitary groups.
- Not real distinction between Unionist and Loyalist imagery till 1985.
- Following the Anglo-Irish Agreement, Loyalist mural themes reflect insecurity, violence, and paramilitary influence.
- Murals evolve to reflect contemporary political and social issues for Loyalist communities.





Republican Murals:

- Used to communicate political ideas after the 1981 Hunger Strikes.
- Draw historical comparisons to 1916, Irish Republicanism, and other key historical moments.
- Make international comparisons to other ethno-national conflicts - South Africa, Basque, Israel/Palestine, etc.
- Draw on rich historical narrative, cultural legacy on the island, not matched in Unionist/Loyalist murals.



Post-Ceasefire Murals & Re-Imaging Belfast



CHANGING THE HISTORY TO
SUIT THE HERITAGE - MURALS,
TOURISM, AND THE FUTURE OF
'SELLING CONFLICT'



Mural Re-Imaging

- Belfast is sold as a city that has moved from 'violently contested' to a 'post-conflict' city that focuses on economic development.
- 2007-2009 & 2013-2016 projects 'Re-Imaging Communities Programme' and 'Tackling the Physical Manifestations of Sectarianism.'
- Work with communities to build collective identity that steered away from sectarian symbolism.
- Competing narratives of 'contested' city, 'new capitalist' city, and 'shared' city.



Post-Ceasefire Reality

- Communities still deeply segregated on sectarian lines.
- More 'Peace Walls' built since 1998 than before.
- Urban areas marked by inter-communal conflicts and high rates of spatial divisions.
- Murals are 'symbolic repertoire' of communities.
- They become territorial markers for both community insiders and outsiders.
- 2012-2022: Decade of Centenaries and impact on commemorative murals.



'Built by the Irish, sunk by the English':

- East Belfast ties to industrial Belfast and shipyards.
- 2012: centenary of Titanic sinking sees large-scale celebrations in Belfast.
- Titanic Belfast museum is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Europe.
- Museum does not explicitly address sectarianism in the docks.
- Part of the four Quarters branding of Belfast.
- Selling 'industry' as a package of economic success and tourism.





A Fresh Coat of Paint

- Rise in conflict tourism brings more communal 'outsiders' into well-known sectarian areas of Belfast.
- City tours, Black taxi tours, Tour companies from around Europe descend on Belfast for whistle-stop visits to 'famous' murals.
- Attempt to have murals present a more palatable version of history or aspect of a communal identity.
- Local politics, relationship with paramilitary groups, perception of the conflict and peace - all influence how community is represented in murals and what version of history is told.





The Lion, The Witch, and the Mural:

- Communities also move to tell different stories about their history.
- Perception that loyalist communities lack history, culture, heritage outside of conflict.
- East Belfast re-framing narrative in places to draw connections to literary and music history.
- Increase in selection of narratives that do not address the conflict, sectarianism, or the long history of violence between Catholic-Nationalist-Republican and Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist communities.





Who Owns the Streets:

- Impact of legacy investigations and perceptions of who is benefiting from or profiting from the 'peace.'
- Inter-communal conflicts between various factions of Loyalism impact public art.
- Murals again become the place where ideas and narratives are contested.
- Return to overt and violent paramilitary murals in the last 5 years.
- Anti-tourist and anti-economic development narratives emerge in working class Loyalist areas that are not getting the same investment as other parts of the city.





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Tourists are Coming:

- Titanic Studios and filming friendly tax breaks brings Game of Thrones to Northern Ireland.
- Huge tourism boost for filming locations around province.
- Public art throughout Belfast and other locations attempt to draw tourists.
- Focus in tourism and marketing shifts from Titanic to Game of Thrones.
- Reluctance from Tourism Boards, City Council, and government to promote conflict tourism.





'Who Tells Your Story?'

- Lack of shared vision about the past makes a shared vision about the future hard to find.
- Communities and groups vie for legitimacy and power with sometimes high economic stakes.
- Mural tradition in Northern Ireland shows how public art can be influenced by history, memory, identity, politics, tourism, and conflict transformation.



"When war is the basis of collective memories, their multiplicity renders difficult any attempt to educate a public, recall a particular version of the past or create a new narrative of its meaning."

Sarah Crane "The conundrum of ephemerality: time, memory, and museums," (2011; pp. 105)



Further Reading

PUBLICATIONS

Hinson, E. (2020) 'A Virtually Self-Contained Community': Unorthodox Containment and Prisoner Autonomy in the Maze/Long Kesh Compounds', in McCann, F. (eds.) *The Carceral Network in Ireland: History, Agency and Resistance*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 113-132.

Hinson, E. (2019) 'Our Journey, Our Narrative': narratives of para(militarism) and conflict transformation in the ACT exhibition, *Global Discourse*, vol 9 no,3, 507-529.

Hinson, E. (2018) 'Crafting identities: prison artefacts and place-making in pre and post-ceasefire Northern Ireland', in Svašek, M. and Komarova, M (eds.) *Ethnographies of Movement, Sociality and Space: Place-making in the New Northern Ireland*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 60-84.

