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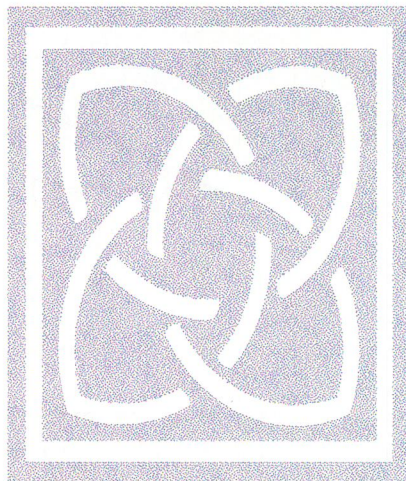
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***'A Personal Response to the Murals in Derry'***

National College of Art & Design  
Dublin  
Dept: Craft (Ceramics)



Submitted to:  
Faculty of History of Art & Design  
and Complimentary Studies for Candidacy of  
'Degree (Bachelor of Design) 1999'

***by Gavin McLaughlin***



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## ***Introduction***

*The belief that art reflects reality is no longer open solely to the area of academic criticism. Murals in not only Derry but the north of Ireland in general are open to criticism within the public domain and especially the community in which they are situated. The murals have also been used by the media to help put across the political situation or climate at a specific time. Examples of this are the anniversaries of Bloody Sunday, the Siege of Derry and so on. Murals are a form of art (but to what extent is often debated), as well as an open expression of feeling or identity. It could be said that they reflect the political climate more freely than media political commentary as they do not have the restrictions of censorship and control.*

*Over the last few years the media have come to realise that the murals which have been produced in the Catholic and Protestant communities reveal much about the conflicts of power and culture that existed, and still do in the six counties. To help understand, this thesis will look at murals that have been produced in Derry since 1968. It will look at the murals' place within their respective communities. The issue of media representation will also be dealt with. What is the role of murals? Are they emblems, political art or markers of territory? The thesis will also look at the development of icons used in murals.*

The first of these is the fact that the  
 world is not a uniform whole, but a  
 collection of many different parts, each  
 with its own characteristics and laws.  
 This is the principle of diversity, and it  
 is the basis of all knowledge and science.  
 The second is the fact that the world  
 is not a static whole, but a dynamic  
 one, constantly changing and evolving.  
 This is the principle of change, and it  
 is the basis of all history and progress.  
 The third is the fact that the world  
 is not a chaotic whole, but a  
 system, with many different parts  
 working together in a harmonious  
 way. This is the principle of order, and  
 it is the basis of all law and justice.

The fourth is the fact that the world  
 is not a simple whole, but a complex  
 one, with many different parts  
 interacting in a variety of ways.  
 This is the principle of complexity, and  
 it is the basis of all art and science.  
 The fifth is the fact that the world  
 is not a perfect whole, but an  
 imperfect one, with many different  
 parts and many different laws.  
 This is the principle of imperfection, and  
 it is the basis of all human experience  
 and all human progress.

*Murals in Derry are more often than not linked to their location, and the cultural and religious majorities of the area. There are four areas in the city which can be examined. Each will be examined in a chapter of its own. These four areas are as follows: Free Derry Corner, the Fountain, the Waterside and the Cityside. The River Foyle separates Derry not only physically but politically. The eastbank, the Waterside is predominantly unionist and on the westbank, the Cityside is predominantly nationalist. However on the Cityside, there is the Fountain. The Fountain is situated just outside the city's walls, and off Bishop Street. It is the last Protestant stronghold on the westbank. Free Derry Corner also gets mentioned because, like the Fountain, it too has historical significance. These historical significances and their relationships to the murals will also be dealt with in this study.*

*As the political climate changes, so too, do murals. Therefore murals from the past will also be considered in the thesis. Another topic of discussion will be murals that deal with more social or "grass roots level" issues such as aids awareness, and women's rights. Totally apolitical murals will also be looked at.*

*To sum it up briefly the intention of the thesis is to look at a cross section of murals in Derry City and assess their relationship to the community, and what role they play. Also what is their standing in the community?*

In the first place, we have to consider the fact that the

present situation is a result of a long process of

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# *Chapter* **One**

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One of the most important  
characteristics of the  
system is its ability to  
adapt to changing conditions.

## ***Emergence of Murals***

*Among other things Derry is an important cultural centre in the Northwest of Ireland. Although it has a Catholic / nationalist majority, it is a focal point in the history and tradition of the Protestants / unionists of Northern Ireland in general. The 1689 siege, the city's walls, the Apprentice Boys, the burning of Lundy's effigy are all things which the Orange Lodge hold in very high esteem, and celebrate annually.*

*The Siege of 1689 was the culmination of the 1641 Catholic uprising and Protestant settler attempts to secure ascendancy. (This was secured when William III became King).*

*The "planting" of settlers made the issue of ownership a major bone of contention, especially when it involved foreign occupation. Obviously this was not just confined to Derry. It was a nationwide problem that would see the emergence of the Defenders and other agrarian groups in the 18th and 19th centuries.*

*Painting and masking would be recognized as a way of asserting land ownership. Examples of this can be seen worldwide: the ghettos of Los Angeles, and New York are two of the more obvious. Communities would assert boundaries that brought together, in one area, people of the same persuasion. An example of this at its most simplistic*

1870

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would be the painting of curbstones. They are almost like boundaries on a map, and anyone with the most basic insight into the "Troubles" would be well aware of the allegiance of the area in which they stood. Even basic graffiti defines an area. By simply daubing a few initials, (generally that of paramilitary groups), depending on your religious and political affiliation, you know whether or not it is safe. In the North of Ireland the tradition of using paint to outline territory or allegiance goes back to the turn of the century. Belinda Loftus in her book 'Mirrors - William III Mother Ireland' points to a gable wall painting of William III being done in Belfast as far back as 1908, (Loftus, 1990, P32). It was felt that this stemmed from friendly rivalries between different areas of the community. An attempt would be made by each to have the best decorations to commemorate the "Twelfth". Therefore it could be said it was a natural extension of what had always been used, and still is, for decoration, i.e. bunting, banners, etc.

Also the painting were more permanent than banners and bunting. In other words the showing of allegiance was all year round, and not just confined to certain dates of celebration.

The emergence of wide spread republican murals was during the Blanket Protest of the late 1970's, obviously in support of the "Blanketmen". It wasn't until the 1981 Hunger Strike that it was "developed into a more direct political tool" as Oona Woods put it in





her book *'Seeing is Believing'* (Woods, 1995, P6). During the Hunger Strike, and the Blanket protest muralists had something more dynamic which they could use in murals to publicise the communities' claims and protests.

One thing about murals is that they are easily accessible. One doesn't have to go into an art gallery and stand quietly trying to decipher some hidden meaning. Although there is no way to prove it, I wouldn't be in the least surprised if the murals in the city received more visitors, annually, than the local art gallery. Personally, I feel murals have a great deal more pride to them. The murals, some over 30 feet high, and 15 foot wide stand proudly among a community that believes in what it portrays, something that your average painting in a gallery cannot do. Over time there has been a shift away from blatant political messages, outbursts or threats, this now being confined mainly to graffiti. During a conversation I had with one local muralist he pointed out that there was alot more effort put into representation and symbolism: "We want people to show more appreciation to our work; More time and effort is spent on coming up with an image, therefore designs, colours and layouts take on greater importance."

Who exactly does the murals? Most murals are completed by "freelance" muralists, i.e. people who have gained a reputation for being a "dab hand" with the brush. On the cityside there are two groups in particular, both community arts projects. These are Frontline, Culture and Education, and Inside Out. However, as both groups paint



*overtly republican murals, their title as community art projects must be called into question. Because obviously murals do not represent the entire community. However having said that, they have been involved in several cross-cultural murals. Other murals are completed by the Sinn Fein Youth. This possibly tells its own story about who decides what about murals. The same could also be said of the loyalist / unionist murals of the Waterside and Fountain.*

*As the illustrations of this study will show, loyalist murals tend to concentrate on the same subject matter, i.e. William III, on his white horse, union jacks, the Red Hand of Ulster and so forth. Then we have the republican murals which seem to have developed further, with more diversity not only in imagery but subject matter. The murals, restricted by the availability of walls, are being repainted or updated, highlighting issues of the day.*

*So why is it that murals are situated where they are in working class areas? Why are they not situated in middle class areas? It is widely believed to be linked to the ownership of property. Since the vast majority of houses in working class areas are owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the inhabitants generally have no problems in offering their gable walls as a canvas for the muralist. There is very little the N.I.H.E. can do about it, although they would prefer consultation before clearance; they can't just move in and paint over a mural that has been consented to by the*

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community. If they did it is quite possible that they would face the wrath of that community. This is an example of the community being in control. There have been cases in the city when residents have objected to the sometimes too blatantly militaristic nature of murals, and have been accommodated with less offensive murals being painted instead. Does the community have any say "what" and "where", as far as the murals are concerned? The community would have a say to some extent. They are notified of the intentions of muralists and a meeting with the community is set up for example in the Bogside, residents will attend a meeting in the Pilots Row Centre. However if a political party is involved in some way, I'm sure the community would be easily persuaded. To be quite honest, it is possible that in areas such as the Bogside, or the Fountain, residents would have a certain amount of fear, as far as protesting is concerned. Possibly because of fear of victimization.

What about the media? How do they make use of murals? First of all it can't be denied that when the media wish to discuss issues related to both loyalist and republican paramilitaries there is a clear dependence on the use of murals. In my own opinion, it helps the media to portray the threat of paramilitaries better. It helps underline the feeling of a faceless, masked, unseen evil. The murals chosen for broadcast often don't leave much to the imagination, as far as intimidation goes. Such murals would consist of masked men in camouflage with rifles or pistols, along with appropriate colours or symbols. Is this intimidating presence the intention of the muralist? If it were, it would





*be more of a warning to outsiders, or what they perceive to be the allegiance of their community.*

*It has been argued that murals are purely propaganda. But are they? It could be argued both ways. It could be said they are for the reason that it will imprint a point of view, or possibly force a point of view on visitors to the areas. Their message can be carried half way around the world in the photographs and camcorders of tourists. The more extreme of the murals could be an attempt to sway the more moderate of residents in the area. However on the other hand, it could be said that it is propaganda because they have had their meaning blown out of proportion by the media to suit their own needs. An example being the use of murals containing balaclava clad volunteers brandishing guns, for the purpose of containing the little support paramilitaries have, or portraying them as criminals. Is it propaganda on the communities, in which they are situated, behalf? Personally I doubt it. In my own opinion the murals are done solely by the community for the community. Why would the community want to brainwash itself? Maybe some murals highlight issues that they wish to gain support for, past examples being the hunger strikes or the Hume / Adams initiative. It's an issue on which everyone has their own opinion.*

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# *Chapter* **Two**

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Chapter Two

## ***Free Derry Corner***

*It could be said that Free Derry Corner is a symbol of a people's resistance to state injustice; it could also be said to be a symbol of freedom, freedom of speech or freedom from the state. It could be seen as a symbol of free speech because of its use for murals. As a symbol of freedom, that would refer back to the days of the "No-Go" areas.*

*The man responsible for the original painting of "You Are Now Entering Free Derry", is John "Caker" Casey. It was done on the gable end of a row of terraced houses in the Bogside's Lecky Road, on the first day of rioting after a Civil Rights March was attacked at Burntollet, near Claudy in County Derry in January 1969. The phrase, it is believed, was taken from "You are now entering Free Berkeley", a campus in California, at a time when Civil Rights was a major social issue in the United States. Over the past, almost, three decades Free Derry Corner has become one of Derry's most famous landmarks. It has been described as a monument and tourist attraction. This I find quite remarkable when one considers the overall history of Derry as a whole.*

*In the early eighties a local councillor, Liam Bradley, claimed that the Free Derry Corner Wall had been subject to British Army attacks, such as paint bombing. He went on to describe it as a monument to the city's nationalist dead. Before this he warned of possible retaliation by nationalist youths. However in 1973 a certain British monument*





situated on the Walls was blown up. The Walker Monument was erected in 1826 in honour of the City's Governor during the Siege of 1689. Many Bogside residents were somewhat satisfied at the monuments "removal", as it had looked down on the area for almost 150 years.

The wall had been painted over in 1993 in preparation for a renewed painting when a local paper, the Londonderry Sentinel carried a story remarking that locals blanked it out as civil rights demands had been delivered and the corner had merely become a symbol of hard times. In other words what the "Sentinel" believed was that Free Derry Corner had become somewhat of a dated mindset, it was the end of an era. However they couldn't have been further from the truth as any resident of the Bogside will tell you. Although the Wall is historic, it is also a contemporary "bill board" so to speak, communicating upcoming events and social issues. At one stage plans were afoot by local authorities to have the wall knocked down, but these plans were quickly put to rest after strong public resistance. Muralists feel that Free Derry Corner wasn't just a Civil Rights issue, they feel it has as much relevance today as it did in 1969. It acts as a public notice board for which it is ideally situated, as it is in the widest open space in the Bogside with the main road running alongside it. In 1991 when Derryman Johnny Walker (one of the Birmingham Six) was released the wall read "Johnny Walker, You Are Now Entering Free Derry". Then, similarly in 1993 when the Gaelic football team won the Sam Maguire Cup it read, "Sam, You are Now Entering Free Derry".



*However the wall hasn't exactly met with tolerance from members of the security forces. In fact one incident is quite startling. In 1982 the British Army took it upon themselves to try and demolish the wall, by driving an Armoured Personnel Carrier into it. However they only succeeded in taking one side off it. Then, as I have already mentioned, paint bomb attacks were carried out with regularity over the years. It would seem that members of the security forces see the wall as a threatening symbol of republicanism or the enemy. It could possibly be equated with vandalising youths, who would destroy something in another area and try and get away safely - "behind enemy lines" - so to speak. It is also worth noting that loyalist murals haven't been subjected to the destructive talents of the security forces, unlike another republican mural close to the Sinn Fein offices in Cable Street. Another interesting point is that, as Bogside residents will testify, when regiments complete their tour of duty in the city, they will pose for photographs beside the wall. Whether they know it or not, I believe with others, that this conveys a degree of status upon the wall.*

*Obviously when entering the Bogside you are not entering a "Free" Derry. But, in the early years of "Free Derry Corner", there was a stronger sense of entering a different area. This is because the wall was behind barricades erected to keep out the security forces. Behind these barricades it was the IRA who were policing the community. However this culminated in "The Battle of the Bogside" and "Operation Motorman" –*

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when the army stormed the “No-Go” area. Today, however the “Corner” suggests not reality but more hope.

Through Free Derry Corner’s situation in the area, it makes an ideal bulletin board for the community, (Plates 2-4). Various awareness groups have been supported, forthcoming events are announced or encouraged. As any muralist will admit, that is muralist who have work on the wall, it is no longer solely used by Sinn Fein. It is there also to make people aware of the struggles involved with other minorities, such as gays. It raised issues such as Aids and Drugs. This is an example of how muralists have moved with times, realising there are other problems and not just the “Troubles”, and have not stuck to the usual rhetoric. However, having said that, the “Gay Pride Week” painting was possibly the most controversial in the area, since republican and nationalist areas are predominantly Catholic, homosexuality isn’t highly tolerated - (prohibited in Catholicism). It turns out that the Gay Pride painting was one of only two to be vandalised on the back of Free Derry Corner. The muralists knew that the gay pride mural would cause a stir, but the main aim was to create discussion in the community. It was an attempt to show that republicans had a wider agenda than just a United Ireland. It could be said that they wanted republicans to realise that since they wanted equality, it would have to exist right across the board. It would have to exist for all minorities. The other image that was vandalised as the “Beyond a Joke” mural, which was completed to promote intolerance of violence against women. The reasoning

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2. The second part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the case.

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17. The seventeenth part is devoted to a discussion of the list of bibliographies.

18. The eighteenth part is devoted to a discussion of the list of indexes.

19. The nineteenth part is devoted to a discussion of the list of tables of contents.

20. The twentieth part is devoted to a discussion of the list of figures.



*behind the destruction of this mural isn't clear - an must be put down to wanton vandalism, as with the "Gay Pride Week" notice.*

*For me, the most striking change made to Free Derry Corner was in 1994. It was completed by Colin Darke, artist and sculpture. He painted the wall red and the lettering yellow. It was a really striking transformation, and the wall stood out more than it ever did. However despite how "nice" it looked, it wasn't simply done just for a change of scenery. In his press statement Darke said he wanted his work "to raise questions about, and add something to, its history," (Woods, 1995, P.16). Many felt the colours were socialist related, and this generated discussions such as the relationship between the civil Rights movement and Socialism. Such a debate was no doubt instigated by Eamon McCann, a well known Derry Socialist and Journalist. Other discussions were simpler, on whether the colours should have been changed at all. It is quite possible that those against it would been around in the days of Civil Rights and John "Caker" Casey - traditionalists so to speak. On the other side of the wall at this time, there was a mural, of a reworking of a Robert Ballagh painting, depicting British Soldiers walking towards a signpost for London. Above it, it reads "Slan Abhaile" - goodbye in Irish. This is a sentiment that would be strongly echoed by Bogside residents especially since Bloody Sunday.*

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to a general discussion of the problem.

2. The second part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the results.

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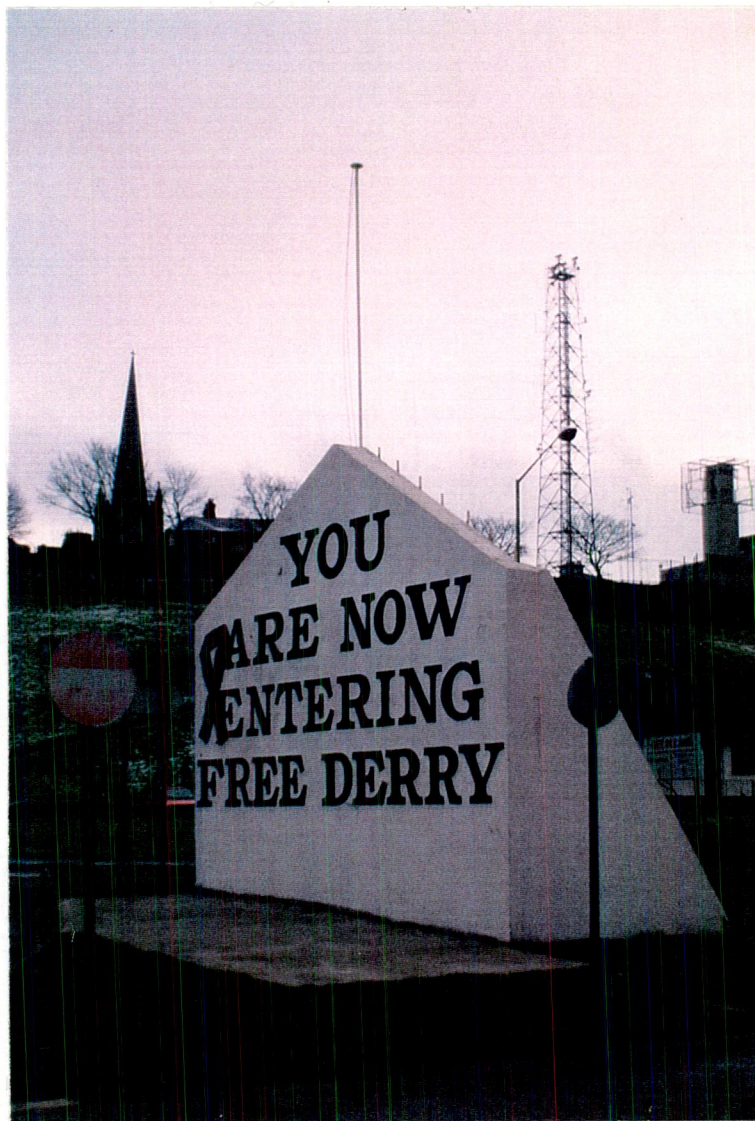
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*Not surprisingly, Sinn Fein make great use of the back of Free Derry Corner, frequently using it for election campaigns, or organising protest rallies and so on. It is also used by "Saoirse", the group that supports the release, or repatriation of political prisoners. It must be said, that not only at Free Derry Corner, but the Cityside in general, Sinn Fein have a great deal of influence on murals.*

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Plate 1



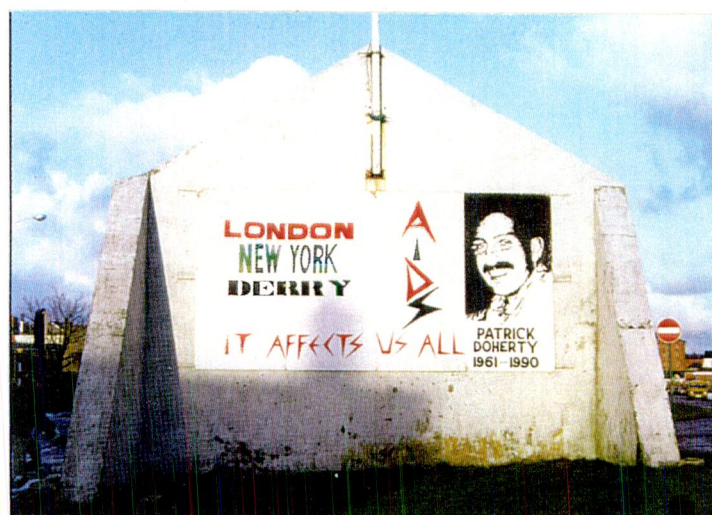








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*Chapter*  
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Chapter  
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## **Fountain**

*The Fountain area of the city is a perfect example of using murals to emphasise an identity through the use of symbols of allegiance. The flying of Union Jacks, the painting of pavements, lamp posts, and walls, are for me, the culmination of being surrounded by the predominantly nationalist cityside. Because of this, the residents in the Fountain believe they are the last bastion of loyalism left on the cityside, and thus feel a stronger urge to assert their identity than say residents in Nelson Drive, in the City's Waterside, which is predominantly Protestant, and under no "threat" so to speak.*

*As with republican murals, there are certain constants the run through loyalist murals - possibly evenmore so. The most obvious of these, and in my opinion used with the monotonous regularity, is the image of King William crossing the Boyne on his whit horse, and the Fountain is no different from any other loyalist area in this respect. But apart from the Battle of the Boyne, are there any other reason for the constant use of King William III? Why not celebrate the setting up of a Protestant parliament? Why are there no images of Craig or Carson? (prominent unionists in the early 1920's). Bill Rolston believes it is because King William's victory, "guaranteed Protestant liberty rather than Catholic authoritarianism in both England and Ireland. As a watershed in Protestant history, particularly Irish Protestant, the significance of 1690 is stamped indelibly on the collective Protestant consciousness in Ireland," (Rolston, 1991, P.16).*

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*In other words events like the 1689 Siege and 1690's Battle of the Boyne, helped create an all Ireland Protestant ascendancy. Unlike the Protestant parliament achieved in the 1920's, which only has jurisdiction of the six counties, it could be argued that both sides look to the past to justify present political stances.*

*One incident which took place in the Fountain is an example of how one could argue that murals portray the sentiments of the majority or residents in the community in which the murals are situated. A problem arose when the Housing Executive wished to demolish a wall on which there were two murals. The demolition was to make way for the building of a new school in the area. It would usually be safe to assume that residents would have no objection to a couple of murals, especially to pave way for an important local amenity such as a school. However the Housing Executive underestimated the level of public support for the murals, one of which depicted King William, and the other, the Relief of Derry, (Plate 7). The mural was held in high esteem because of its age: it was originally located at Clarence Place in the old fountain. However it had been relocated by the Housing Executive though the wishes of the people, when redevelopment was taking place in the area in the 1970's. A petition was circulated and because of the strength of local support the Housing Executive was prepared to relocate the mural again. However, due to the walls crumbling foundations, the chances of a successful relocation were slim. In the end the wall was destroyed but the public were consoled by the fact the Housing Executive was prepared to try the*

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relocation. A new mural was painted with the same subject matter. One mustn't underestimate the level of support the public will give to murals in the immediate area, especially when it comes under threat from outside the area. In the case of the relocation incident in the Fountain estate, it could even be suggested that murals can help bring a community together. It gives the community something to be proud of after all it is their mural, not the muralists.

The Relief of Derry has a special place in the hearts of Fountain residents. It is possibly more significant to the Fountain than any other Protestant area in the city. A mural painted in the Fountain's Kennedy Place in 1992 illustrated the significance simply, but perfectly. It was a simple message stating how the "Westbank loyalists" were "still under siege", (Plate 10). This obviously draws parallels between today's residents and the population of Derry in 1689 during the siege. The mural of the Relief of Derry would therefore be justified much easier in the Fountain because of its links to their present day situation, and yet no doubt at the same time instilling pride.

The murals in the Fountain have not been solely confined to the seventeenth century as far as subject matter goes. One mural which has since been demolished stands out in particular, not only for its difference in subject, but the contention surrounding it. The subject of the mural was Michael Stone. Stone is currently serving time for the murder of six Catholics in the 1980's. He is best known for his crazed gun and grenade attack,

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*on a republican funeral in Belfast's Milltown Cemetery in 1988. There was quiet discontent amongst the majority of residents, some citing it as blatant triumphalism over the deaths of other people. However despite their disgust they didn't want it removed, as it may simply have been replaced. However when the Housing Executive had to demolish the mural to make room for renovations, there were no protests or petitions to have it saved.*

*In another case the Fountain's Community Youth Association brought in a non-political artist. The artist painted scenes of the Fountain as it was years ago. However since the young people of the Fountain had no interest in black and white images of the "good old days", they proceeded in making alterations. It wasn't long before the non-political pieces of art were covered with the usual emblems synonymous with loyalism. This isn't the only case of non-political murals being defaced in Derry. Other cases arose in the Bogside and Greggan, and so on. Why? Is it because they feel it has no relevance to them? It is possibly because they wish to see a mural that they can immediately relate to, a mural that says something about them. Then on the other hand, it could be just as easily classed as vandalism or graffiti.*

*In more recent times it has been suggested that there has been a decline in mural activity in the Fountain area. Having been in the area recently, I have seen for myself that, what murals are left are in a shabby condition. The reasons for this are unclear.*

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*But it is quite possible that with the cease-fires, muralists no longer see the point in producing paramilitary style murals, or murals that underpin a conflict that doesn't exist on the scale it once did. It could be a lack of interest in the present political climate. It is worth noting that there is a noted amount of Fountain residents that are moving across the river to the Waterside and this, to an extent it could be said, is breaking up the community. And in my opinion, if an area has not got a closely knit community, it isn't worth while painting murals, especially if the community is fragmented and not giving their full support.*

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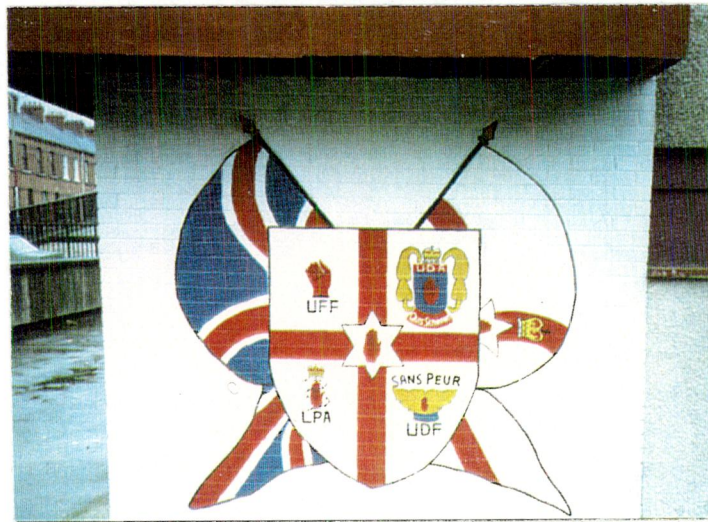
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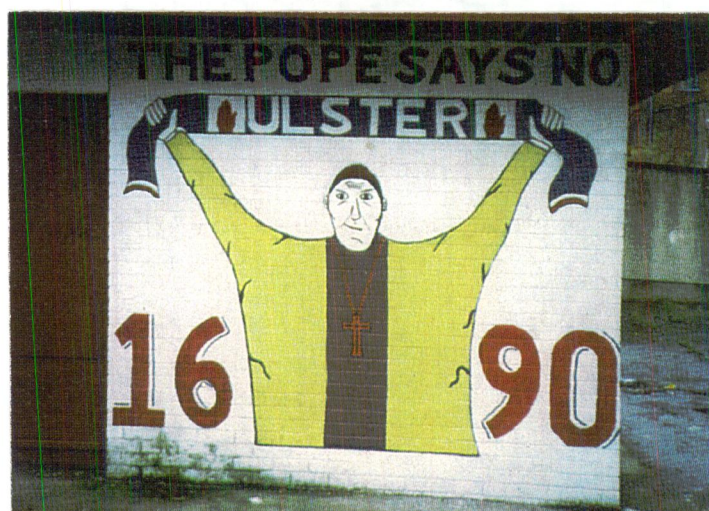
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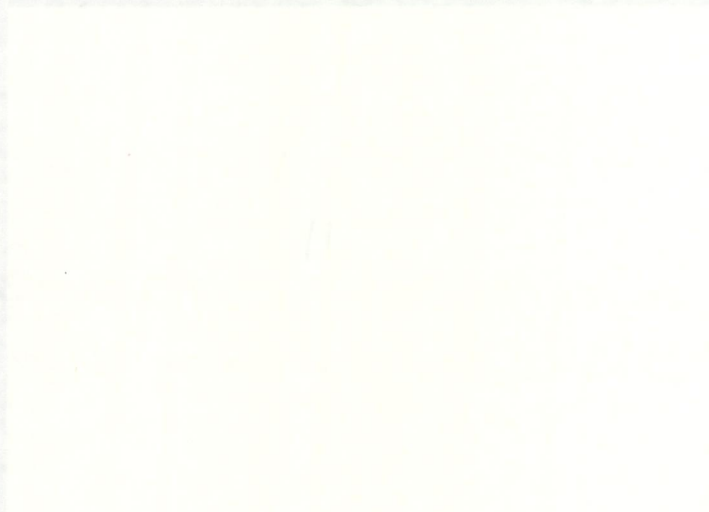
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*Chapter*  
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Chapter  
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## **Waterside**

*In the loyalist areas of the predominantly Protestant Waterside, we see murals that are very similar in content to that of the Fountain estate. That is, the same flags and symbols, William of Orange, and so on. The use of flags, Ulster and Union, clearly indicated an allegiance to the present situation, that it is a six county Ulster linked to the United Kingdom. These are images of flags that fly from government buildings in the North and also Orange Lodges, further emphasising the allegiance.*

*The Red Hand of Ulster is possibly one of the most used symbol in loyalist murals, and this is evident in murals in the Waterside. It is interesting to note that the Red Hand has been the traditional symbol for Ulster as a whole (i.e. nine counties) in Irish history long before loyalists thought of using it for their own means. However the murals in the Waterside that contain the Red Hand have utilized it to portray other meanings. A mural in Bond Street illustrates this point perfectly. It contains a clenched fist, which portrays a feeling of power, strength and to a degree, solidarity. This is the emblem of the Ulster Freedom Fighters. The mural also contains the Red Hand surrounded in barbed wire, which is the symbol of the Loyalist Prisoners Association (Republican murals also use barbed wire to enhance the cause of Saoirse). The Ulster Defence Association also use the Red Hand as part of their emblem; it also portrays another feeling that suits the Unionist / Loyalist ethos. It can be seen to represent the idea of*



*“stop” or “no more”. This ties in well with the well known slogans “not an inch” and “no surrender”. The majority of loyalist murals tend to hark back to an idyllic past, the “Glorious Twelfth” and a time when a Protestant, unionist ascendancy existed.*

*Aside from the Red Hand, Crowns, Flags (Union and Ulster) and so on, another common image reproduced on the loyalist murals in Derry, is the city’s coat of arms. The coat of arms contains a skeleton with the words “Vita, Veritas, Victoria”, “Life, Truth, Victory”. There is debates as to who, or what the skeleton represents. It is believed that the skeleton represents Walter de Burgo who starved himself to death in Greencastle, Co.Donegal in 1332. Or, it has been suggested that the skeleton symbolizes the starvation that the city’s population endured during the 1689 siege.*

*Again, as with the murals in the Fountain, King William of Orange is held aloft with an almost saviour like quality, riding his majestic white horse across the Boyne. Belinda Loftus in her publication, “Wall painting in Northern Ireland: An Occasion for Celebration”, believes that the standard contemporary image of King William originated in painting by Benjamin West, first exhibited in 1780, (Loftus, 1980, P.3). I suppose it is easy to say that this image is very repetitive and unoriginal. However when one stands next to one of these murals, you can’t help but get a feeling of bravery, heroism and that “saviour” quality previously mentioned. Though this is a personal point of view whether other people get the same feeling stands to debate. Obviously a*





great number of murals both republican and loyalist are idealistic. Certain historical facts are totally ignored or distorted. For example in the eighteenth century, Scotch Presbyterians were looked upon by the ascendancy in the same light as Catholics. Another interesting historical fact worth mentioning is that William III's campaign received funding from the pope. Despite this, today's opinion of King William among the Protestant population, will not be easily swayed by such "insignificant" facts.

The most recent mural in the Waterside, is probably the most contentious, (Plate 17). The murals depict a demonic type figure in an old soldier's tunic. It is climbing over the city walls with a bloodied sword, after wreaking havoc in the city's Bogside area. The insinuation of the mural is quite stark and shocking. But at this same time, as far as artistic merit goes, it is a brilliantly completed mural.

Despite the fact that the Waterside is predominantly Protestant it includes Gobnascale, a predominantly Catholic estate. Gobnascale's situation is a mirror image of that of the Fountain estate in the cityside. As with the Fountain, residents declare their allegiance without equivocation. It's almost as if residents of areas such as Gobnascale and the Fountain are making a strong statement to those that surround them that "here we are, this is what we are, and we are not moving!" It could be argued that one of the main motivational factors for murals in such areas is pure determinations and defiance.

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*The murals in Gobnascale would not be of the same quality or quantity as those on the cityside. And, as in the case of the Fountain, there has been little mural activity in Gobnascale in recent years. Those that still exist look quite shabby. A possible reason for this could be the fact that Gobnascale lacks a historical location. In other words it hasn't got a Free Derry Corner, and it isn't situated close to the city's walls. No events of historical significance took place in Gobnascale, where as on the cityside there was the Battle of the Bogside, Bloody Sunday, and of course the Siege in the case of the Fountain.*

*Just like the Fountain, Gobnascale has its share of painted lampposts, curbs and so on, and the odd tricolour daubed on the wall. This in itself is a declaration and not just decoration. It clearly states the dominant political belief within the area. The murals in the area use symbols that are fairly well known and commonly used in republican murals throughout the North. Starry Ploughs, tricolours, phoenix, sunburst flags, depictions of paramilitaries can all be found in Gobnascale. Two murals in particular stand out for no other reason than that both are very powerful images. The first is of a volunteer firing a salute, surrounded in flames. Militaristic murals tend to be fairly powerful images anyway, but this one is particularly colourful and simple at the same time. Also the tricolours at either side leave you in no doubt what movement "The Volunteers" belong to. The other mural, situated on the Trench Road, depicts a phoenix*





*rising from the flames with a tricolour to one side and a sunburst flag to the other (the idea of the sunburst originated from Constance Markievicz).*

*However there have been non-political murals painted in the area. The painter was Tom Kelly, the same muralist whose images were interfered with in the Fountain. The difference is the murals he completed in Gobnascale were not destroyed. One of the murals is a reproduction of a scene in the Top of the Hill area of Gobnascale in the 1950's. The mural was an image of an old woman driving a car along the street. Kelly got photographs of the area and let the community decide which would be suitable and this is the one chosen. The interesting thing about it is, unlike the young people of the Fountain, those in Gobnascale showed an interest and asked questions about the area in which they live. They could recognise the street in the mural and would be able to relate someone to the street. As for the older generation, they recognised the street and could remember the woman in the mural. This is one of the nostalgic murals that was accepted by the community even though the mural by no means flattered the area.*

*The other non-political mural produced by Tom Kelly in Gobnascale was again a joint effort between him and the community. The young people were encourage to look into possible subjects for a mural. The idea settled on was to produce a mural that visually represented the name Gobnascale. However on one was quite sure what Gobnascale meant in English. Three possibly interpretations were forwarded and the one settled*



1. The first part of the paper is devoted to a general discussion of the problem.

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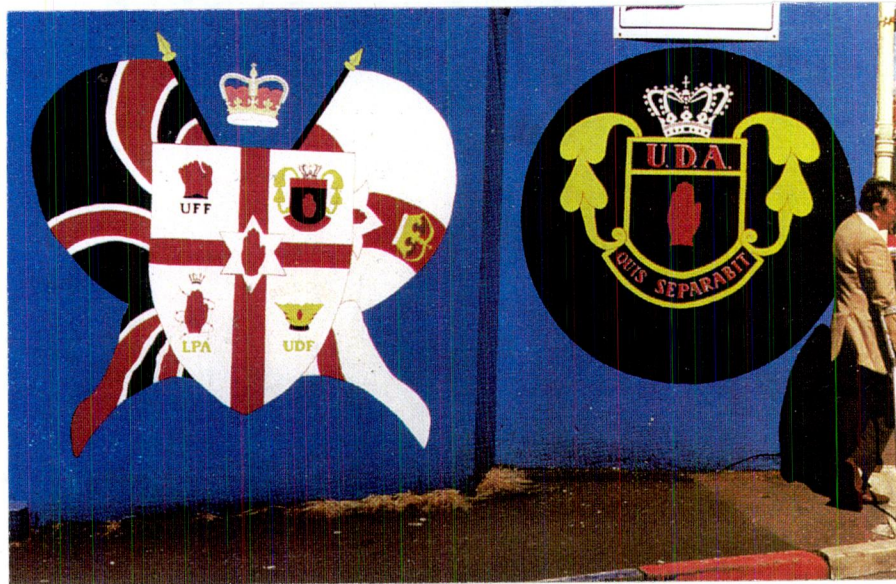
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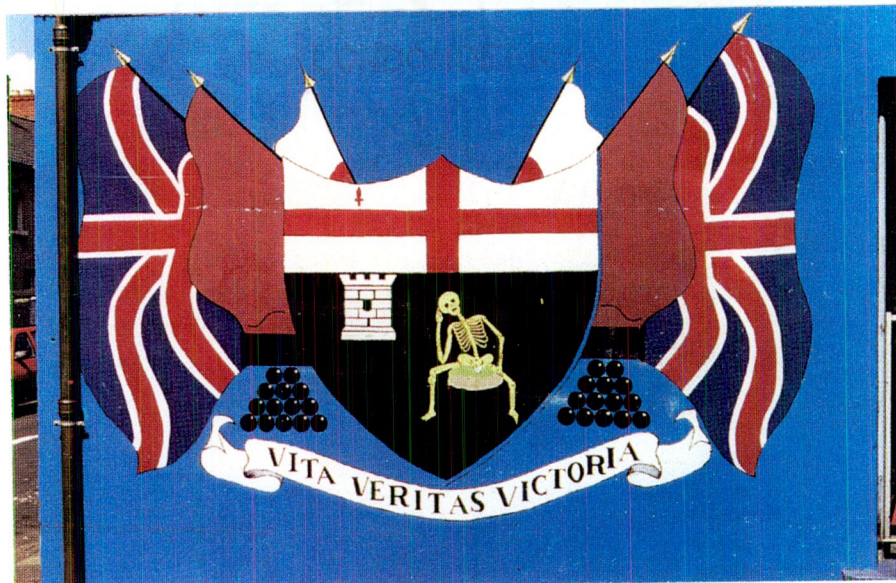
upon was “the field of the stallion”. The mural shows a horse in a field up on its hind legs. The ironic thing about it was that it was white, similar to that of King William’s murals. So to distinguish it from loyalist murals, a dolmen and round tower were added along with a celtic border. These simple additions gave the mural a sense of “Gaelic Culture”. So although the mural was non-political, it was also a mural that you would be unlikely to find in other areas of the Waterside.

For me the key to the survival of Kelly’s murals in Gobnascale, was the close involvement of the community. It involved both young and old. They had a say in the subject matter and the design. In other words if the community actually have a role to play in the production of a mural, it is less likely that it will be destroyed. If what they choose was to go up in the first place, they can’t very well complain about it later. It further underlines the argument that unless murals have the support of the community there is little point in painting them.





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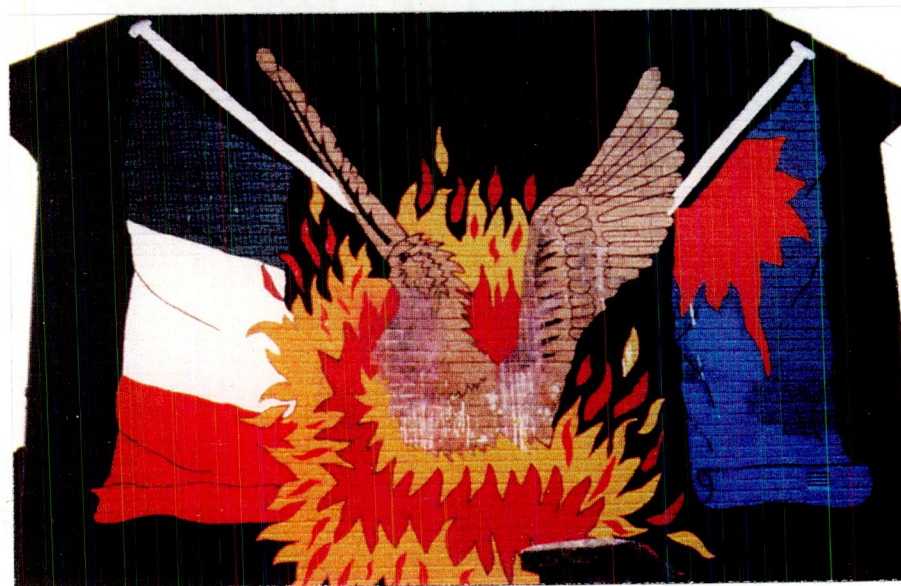
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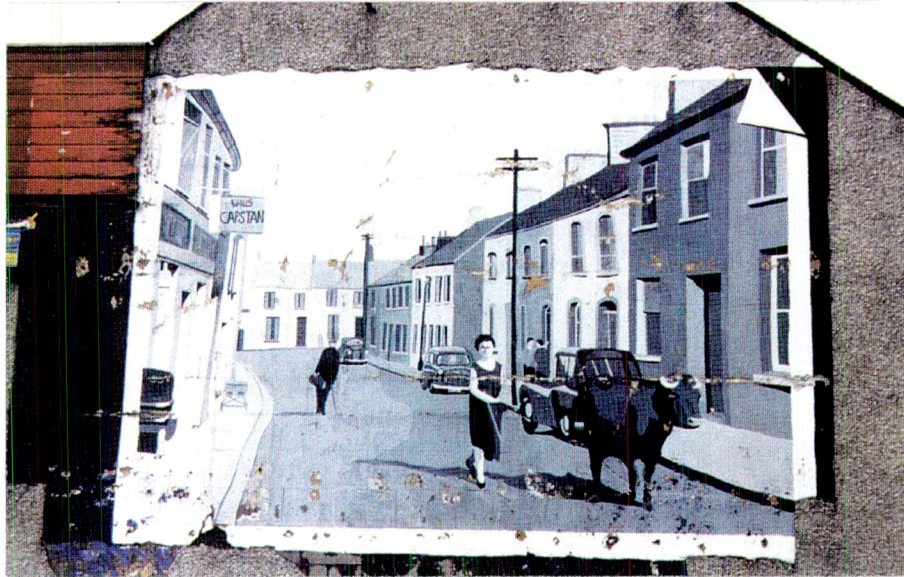


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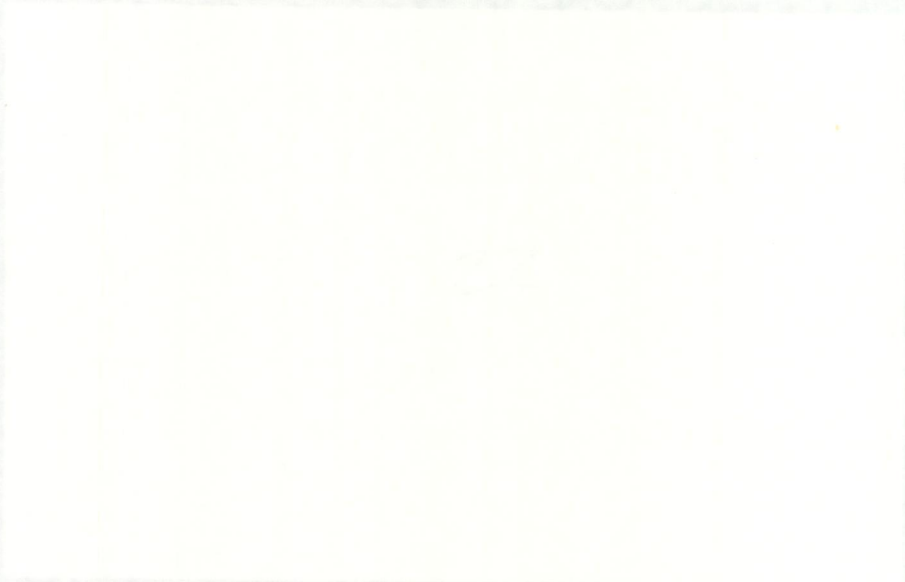
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*Chapter*  
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Chapter  
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## ***Westbank - Cityside***

*It could be said that the events of the early eighties proved to be the springboard from which murals in the cityside took off. The Hunger Strikes deeply affected republicans and others, on the island as a whole. But it was particularly poignant for Derry republicans as four of the ten hunger strikers that died were from the county of Derry. It could be said that in fact the British Government's uncompromising stance was so strong, the need for murals was greater. It was a way the community could make their feeling known. They could show their support for the hunger strikers and literally paint the British in a bad light. This would have been important as the hunger strikes coverage on television and British tabloids would have shown a different opinion to that of the hunger strikers themselves, and the republican population. It could be said that the murals became almost necessary.*

*Throughout the cityside there is a huge amount of imagery used, some of it obvious, some less obvious. Muralists use the tricolour, the sunburst the starry plough, images of the 1916 Rising, religious symbols, celtic symbols. Others include the phoenix, militaristic images and so on, the list is endless. Then to top this off there is frequent use of the Irish language. Examples of Irish used would include, the most obvious, "Tiocfaidh ar La" (Our day will come), "Oglaigh na hEireann" (IRA), "Ta lamh an lia a leigheas anois" (The healers hand is healing her now) and so on. Irish tends to be*



*used in more declarative statements and is a clear statement of the community's support for nationalist culture. The ironic thing about the use of Irish, is that Derry is far from being renowned for its knowledge and use of the language. So why could it be that the muralists use a language so few understand? It could be a possible attempt to generate a public interest in the national language, or it could be an attempt to reinforce the city's cultural roots yet further?*

*In more recent years the "Derryside" has seen a shift away from the use of militaristic images. An example of such a mural and possibly one of my favourites is "The Scream", (Plate 25). This piece as the title suggests, is a reworking of the famous piece of the same title by Edward Munch, the Norwegian expressionist. The piece, which was situated on a board in the Bogside's Rossville Street, was part of a Sinn Fein election campaign. The reasons for this unorthodox approach to a republican mural is not clear. However there could be several reasons. First of all, and possibly most obvious, is that a Sinn Fein election campaign could not be promoted using blatant militaristic images. The use of bright colours in the piece gives off a feeling of positivity or optimism, and even wit. This is it would have to be said, a much more refreshing image than the usual "blood and thunder" images that are normally used - by both republican and loyalist. It could be seen as a challenge to the usual more traditional perceptions of republicanism.*





*The Lecky Road is the site of another example of a less blatant mural. The mural was an attempt to brighten up the areas Dove Gardens. The idea for the mural was formed among the community itself. The children in the area were asked by the muralists to put forward ideas, drawings and designs. The mural that now exists is a montage of the best suggestions. It shows the British Army watchtower that overlooks the Bogside from high upon the walls, as the children would like it to be in the future. It is shown with its windows broken, suggesting a hope that it will be derelict. It has a rainbow coloured slide wrapped around it and coming down the embankment. To the left a crowd of people suggests the days of the Civil Rights Marches and a time of less optimism. Although the piece has slight political undertones they are not overtly obvious. The mural is also a good example of how murals are used to state a community's hopes for the future. There have been quite a few "less political" murals painted on Derry's cityside over the years. Others include a mural, which show two young children playing around the bloody Sunday memorial plinth. There are political implications in this piece, but it sends out a very strong message, in my opinion. The children give the impression of a more joyful future, while the centre piece of the mural begs the question "at what cost?" The fourteen names on the plinth are those of the men who practically gave their lives fighting for the rights of the generations to come after them. The contrast between a very dark past and a bright future is very strong indeed.*



*One mural which exists, that could most certainly be described as apolitical, is the Doire-Managua mural. This mural, which could be described as cross - cultural, was collaboration between artists from the Bogside and Nicaragua. The project which was co-ordinated by Derry Frontline as what could be described as a montage of the two cultures. It is a mixture of traditional celtic imagery and South American imagery. It is punctuated with more modern images such as a computer game character, syringes (implying drug problems) and so on. The two figures in the centre which represent the two cultures (Red haired Irishman, and a more Aztec looking Nicaraguan) would seem to imply unity or two heads are better than one, by the way they fit together and create symmetry. This underlines the collaboration and co-operation concept.*

*This is not the only example of outside collaboration. In 1991 a mural was produced on the wall of the bookmakers on Westland Street. The piece portrays two women with bin lids (the banging of bin lids on the ground warned of internment swoops by the security forces). I suppose it could be seen as a celebration of female involvement in the conflict. It could be argued that it is a modern day reference to the whole Mother Ireland ideology, which dates back to ancient Irish Folklore. The identity of the collaboration of this piece is quite peculiar. This piece was a joint venture with Native American Indians. Quite where the Native Americans fit in is unclear. The only hint of involvement I can find, is that the mural has a slightly primitive look to it and that the faces of the women look slightly Native American.*





*An earlier mural on the “Bookies Wall” as it is known, depicted Bobby Sands, alongside Lenin and Che Guevara. Moving away from Derry briefly, in Belfast there has been republican murals incorporating the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, and another referring to Nelson Mandela. So why is it that republican murals often draw on other cultures? A possible reason could be that it is an attempt to justify their campaign. It’s as if to say “we’re not alone”. It could be seen as a promotion for a “world struggle” where revolution is the key.*

*The “Bookies Wall” has long been a site of murals over the years, (Plates 29-33). There has been a Hunger Striker mural depicting three paramilitaries firing a salute over a Hunger Striker’s coffin. There has been a mural showing six hands held in the air, each hold something different. The items include are, a paint brush, spanner, pencils, book, Kalashnikov and a placard with “Tiocfaidh Ar La”, on it. The mural contains a writing of Bobby Sands calling for everybody to play their part in the struggle. The mural there at present calls for the release of political prisoners. The mural consists of a fist smashing a chain, underpinning the idea of release. However when looked at more closely the fist takes on the form of another image. The image in question is a lark. Bobby Sands in his prison writings was the lark to describe the spirit of freedom. The mural then, on a lower adjoining wall, goes on to name republican prisoners from Derry. A possible reason for this could be to make the mural more personal. People will be able to see names that they recognise as people they know, and*

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*possibly create discussion of the issue on a, not only general manner, but a personal level.*

*After receiving publicity for a mural done near the Bogside's Pilots Row Community Centre on local radio and television, and basically all round public support, Tom Kelly went on to create yet more apolitical murals on the cityside. The two examples I will use here are situated in Alexandra Place just off the Foyle Road. The key to the success of apolitical, community based murals, is community involvement and murals that have a direct link to that area. If this is not the case then the murals are left open to vandalism. One of the murals was done purely as an attempt to brighten the place up a bit. As was the case in Gobnascale, Kelly went to the local residents and children, to discuss what could be done. The locals wanted reference to be made to the old Derry / Donegal railway line, that had existed many years ago across the street at the Foyle Embankment. They also like the idea of bring a feeling of nature into a built up area. Reference was also made to "Dopey Dick" a "stray" killer whale that came up the Foyle years ago. The final result is what could be described as a colourful landscape, that is, apart from the "ghost train" in the sky. For me this must give the people of Alexandra Place a great sense of pride. After all it was their choice of mural, and they probably love explaining the mural to visitors to the area.*



1. The first part of the paper is devoted to a general discussion of the problem.

2. The second part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the problem.

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*The other mural in Alexandra Place is another Tom Kelly black and white “special” so to speak. The image is of the old Alexandra Place with a woman on a bike at the foreground. Now this mural wouldn’t have much of an impact on an outsider, however this old day image was a fairly controversial mural believe it or not. The lady on the bicycle at the forefront is Mary Bradley, SDLP Councillor and former mayor of the City. The original idea of using Mary Bradley had the best of intentions at heart. It was an attempt to show someone rooted in the area, who was now of some importance. However Mr Kelly underestimated the feelings of people in the area who did not like the SDLP whatsoever. Needless to say the mural was paint bombed.*

*Since Tom Kelly is a cross community “apolitical” muralist it’s obvious why his name crops up so often throughout this study. He has had widespread input into murals all over the city as a whole. However, he has had input into political murals. An example is a mural complete as part of the 25th Anniversary of the battle of the Bogside. The mural depicts a young boy, donning a gas mask, and holding a petrol bomb, while in the background the riot rages on below the old Rossville Flats, which have long since been demolished. The fact that it is situated right beside Free Derry Corner underlines the direct historic link to that period i.e. 1969. This mural in my opinion gives off a very strong sense of defiance, which was in effect what the Battle of the Bogside is all about, defiance of the R.U.C. and the B-Specials. The other mural, which has, since gone was as the plate shows, equally striking. However this piece is obviously more iconographic.*



*The use of strong colours, red, green, black and yellow add to the murals impact on the viewer. The mural is a huge fist in the middle of flames, and a celtic spiral on the palm of the hand adds some culture and stylisation to it. Just like the petrol bomber, it has a strong sense of resistance or defiance attached. The piece is actually more striking than the "photorealistic" piece, based on the petrol bomber. It stood out like a sore thumb when viewed from above on the city's walls. As I have already mentioned the piece has been replaced. The mural in its place is another attempt at "photorealism". The mural is a montage of images include Bernadette McAliskey (nee Devlin) with a loud speaker, two rioters, and a woman with a bin lid in front of Free Derry Corner. Although the mural is very well executed technically, it lacks the impact visually, of the other two.*

*From a personal point of view the more "visually simplistic" murals (i.e. use of flat colour) are the most striking. Other examples of these include a "disband the R.U.C." mural on the Lecky Road, a "No Consent, No March" mural at Glenfada Park, and the "Nothing has Changed 68-96" mural, also at Glenfada Park. These murals make use of orange, white and black. The orange being used to imply the orange order and loyalism. The "Disband the R.U.C." murals implies the republican belief that the R.U.C. are sectarian, by having the officer wearing a sash. This is a mural, which would certainly be a depiction of a commonly held belief amongst the community in the Bogside. The residents here have long felt it was the case, as they allege, they were often subjected to dawn raids by the security forces in previous years in the "Troubles".*





*There is also bitterness shown towards the R.U.C. as before the Parades Commission was formed, they annually set "The Apprentice Boys" to walk along a part of the walls that overlooks the Bogside, residents came to see this as both provocative and triumphalist. Another example of the striking simplistic mural is one that was situated on the Foyle Road. It depicted an RUC riot helmet with union jack pattern around it, and the Ulster Flag as the visor. A green, white and orange screw is smashing through it. This has since been replaced by a less impressive "Saoirse" mural.*

*Moving back to "photorealism" briefly. Another example is the 25th Anniversary mural of Bloody Sunday. This mural shows a group of men carrying the body of Jackie Duddy. Along with them is the then Fr Edward Daly, while at the otherside a British Paratrooper is trampling a bloodied Civil Rights banner. A very emotive piece indeed.*



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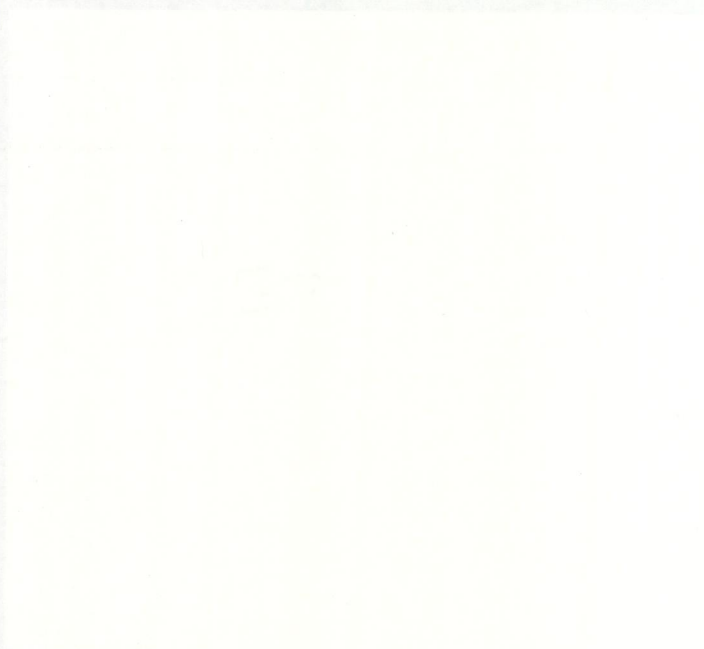


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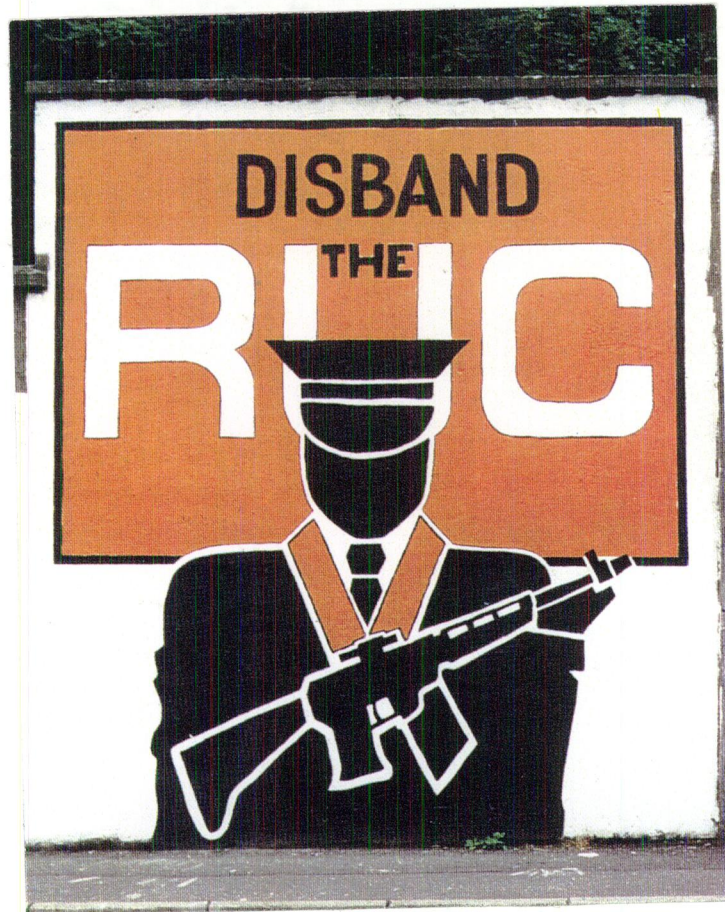
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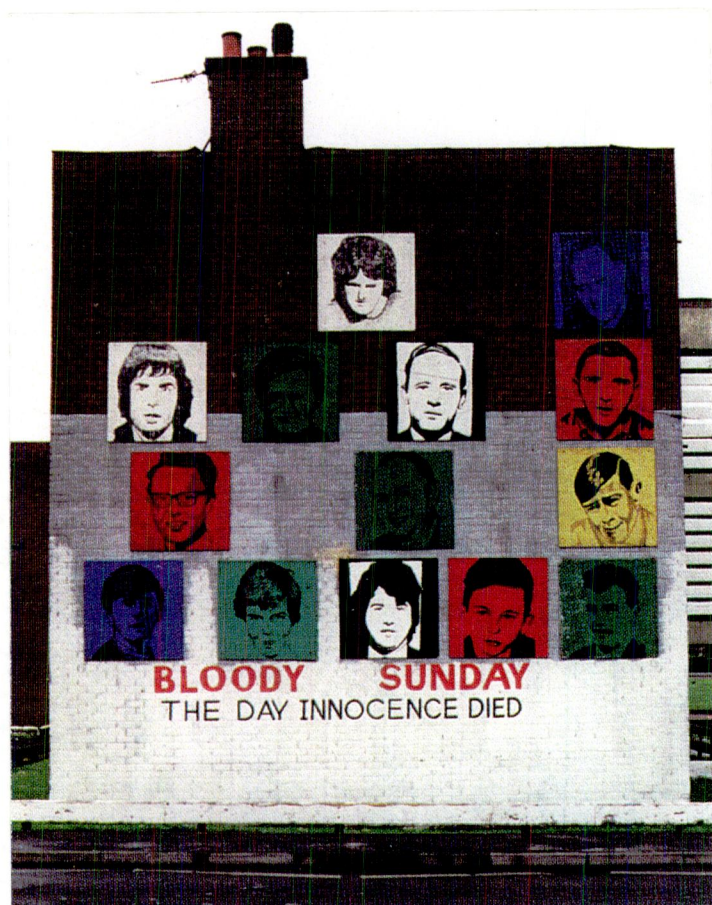
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## **Conclusion**

*Murals, it could be said, are one form of public art in existence within the community. In my own opinion they reflect, what the muralists feel (or other groups), reflect the concerns of the majority of the community in which they exist. Whether they are a celebration, protestation or remembrance.*

*It cannot be denied that the murals in the city have received substantial attention from the media over the years, be it news reports or documentaries. Images of the murals can find there way further afield if one considers that every year tourists can be seen film or photographing them. Indeed suggestions have been forwarded in the past to include the murals in tourist guides about the city. This comes along with suggestions that the Northern Ireland Arts Council and other organisations should fund the production of murals. It is matters like this that reflect the strong interest in murals both here at home and abroad. However, personally, I feel that involvement from the Arts Council would take away from the murals. Obviously if the Arts Council of Northern Ireland are funding murals, the muralists say with regards to design and content, would be significantly diminished. Inevitably some of the murals, especially militaristic ones would be censored. There would be a dilution of the degree to which the muralist puts across what he feels are the communities concerns. For me this takes away the foundations on which murals are based. That is, murals are produced more often than*





*not, with the community in which they are situated in mind. Although it must be said that there is outside pressure brought to bear so far as political murals are concerned, it can not be denied that members of the community will share the political views. Of course there is the issue of free speech. If someone has an opinion, and a wall is willingly given, then who are we to judge? In other words if the Arts Council was involved it would take away that freedom of speech, because obviously the Arts Council are not going to fund blatantly political murals.*

*It is worth pointing that many of the murals that were in existence pre cease-fire 1995 are still in existence today. After that cease-fire people in Derry, as with most places in the North, were unsure of the political state of affairs. This was reflected by a decrease in the amount of mural activity in the city. This could be said to be because muralists were unsure of how to accurately portray the community feelings. In other words since the community was unsure so too were muralists. There were pre cease-fire and anti cease-fire factions developing. Since then there is little concrete political murals done, safe issues such as the calls for the disbandment of the R.U.C., or the Marching issue and so on. Since there has been such a split in the loyalist and republican movements, surely muralists no longer know what to paint or where to paint it. The only thing that can be said is that loyalist muralists can continue painting murals based on King William III, the Siege and so on, as such traditional images have been tried and tested in their respective areas.*

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*So what do the communities perceive of the mural now, in an era of fragile peace?*

*Speaking to several people in the City's Shantallow Estate the more moderate of residents felt they should be removed citing them as "terrible reminders of a terrible past". However it is worth noting that such residents were, and generally tend to be, of the older generation. However the younger generations "representative" believe they should remain as "warnings" almost warnings against a return to violence. Then amidst all that, I suppose there will be people who want them retained in remembrance of loved ones, e.g. Bloody Sunday murals.*

*Despite the relative peace in which we now live, many of the issues that inspired the murals still remain unresolved. With a situation as delicate as the Northern Ireland question, new issues are sure to arise. Therefore, although the mural activity is not as frantic as it once was, it cannot be ruled out that it won't again. The question of murals is as difficult as the Irish question itself.*

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