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# The Value of Representation in Transition:

A Case Study of Political Murals in East Belfast

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## **Abstract**

Despite the undeniable progress achieved in the seventeen years since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland remains a significantly divided society. Tensions surrounding socio-political representation and expression in public spaces have continued to contribute to political instability and underline the fact that there are yet unresolved issues from the peace process; the extent to which the future will be socially inclusive remains to be worked out. This present research examines political wall murals along the lower Newtownards Road as a way of looking at the dynamics of social and political relationships within the current peace process, of their re-definition, as well as the effects of various strategies in working towards a 'shared future'. This line of inquiry questions how, in the context of transition, shifting frames of representation and communal belonging are being negotiated, and with what consequence. Photographs of the murals, and interviews with practitioners in community development, and academics in the field constituted the primary data. An interpretive analysis of the data was conducted through qualitative methods grounded in contemporary peace research. This analysis is conducted in three parts: the murals as cultural artefacts and coded texts; the murals in terms of both the processes involved in their production and the relationships that develop through them; and the mural as a site of political encounter, involving political strategies. The findings indicate that the social and governmental organizations included in this case study produced the murals as a means of establishing and legitimizing their public position in the changing context of transition, where, as the mode of conflict shifts from one of violence to one of persuasion, social groups work to adapt to it. The analysis of these displays, and of the processes behind them, demonstrates how relationships of power are being negotiated and re-structured, and identifies how the people they claim to represent are thus being imagined and 'positioned'. These imaginings are significant in that they are potentially constitutive, and may inform the basis on which the organization relates to the local population, as well as the ways in which they connect those who constitute their local to the current political order. Considering that the question of political representation is inseparable from questions of political participation, the observations that emerged through the analysis pointed to the need for further research on the fragmentation of civic culture in Northern Ireland, and suggest that excavating differing notions of 'the public' would serve this purpose well.

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## List of Abbreviations

ACNI	Arts Council of Northern Ireland
B/GFA	Belfast/Good Friday Agreement
CLMC	Combined Loyalist Military Command
CRC	Community Relations Council
CVS	Community and Volunteer Sector
DCAL	Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
DSD	Department for Social Development
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
EBHCS	East Belfast Historical and Cultural Society
EBP	East Belfast Partnership
IFI	International Fund for Ireland
INEBP	Inner East Neighbourhood Partnership
IRA	Irish Republican Army (also known as PIRA)
NIHE	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NP	Neighbourhood Partnership, sub-partnerships within EBP
NUPRG	New Ulster Political Research Group, advisory group to the UDA
PEACE	The EU's Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland, established in 2001
PUL	Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist
PUP	Progressive Unionist Party
UDA	Ulster Defence Association, a loyalist paramilitary
UDP	Ulster Democratic Party, dissolved in 2001
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment, a part time army regiment disbanded in 1992.
ULDP	Ulster Loyalist Democratic Party, synonym for UDP
UFF	Ulster Freedom Fighters, associated with the UDA
USC	Ulster Special Constabulary
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force, a loyalist paramilitary

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# Chapter 1. Introduction and Research Objectives

## 1.1 Introduction

The study at hand focuses on a situation of continuing tension, where, despite the undeniable progress achieved in the seventeen years since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland remains a significantly divided society. Its social divisions, largely framed around notions of ethno-political identity, have continued to contribute to political instability and civil unrest, with many contentious issues revolving around the mitigation of socio-political representation and expression in public spaces<sup>1</sup>. As the question of tradition and culture have come to be seen as synonymous with the identity of either social group, being the ‘Catholic community’ or the ‘Protestant community’, changes to either mode of expression can be perceived as threatening the ontological survival of that social group<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, addressing such issues has proven to be a sticking point throughout the peace process, and continues to be a roadblock to achieving political and social agreement on a number of other issues.

I intend to approach this problem, concerning the negotiation of expressions of imagined community, and its divisions, by looking at the murals along the lower Newtownards Road in inner East Belfast. The area has fairly recently opened up to re-imaging programmes designed to mitigate threatening or potentially antagonistic displays, and the resulting mixture of representations provide an interesting base from which to consider the political projects and interests behind them, and the ways in which their significance has been acknowledged, framed and used by both state and societal bodies. To do this is it first necessary that I first provide a bit of background to the situation, which follows. From there I will proceed to outline my research objectives and the structure of this text.

## 1.2 Background and context

### Political organization

After decades of violent sectarian conflict, most of Northern Ireland’s political parties entered into a series of negotiations<sup>3</sup>, beginning in 1994, which culminated in the Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement (B/GFA) in 1998. This Agreement provided an institutional framework for devolving powers back

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1 Louise Mallinder, "Dealing with Northern Ireland's Past: A Guide to the Haass-O'Sullivan Talks," *OpenDemocracy*, Last modified May 8, 2014.

2 Dominic Bryan, "The Politics of Community" in *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*. Vol.9 No.4 (2006): 605.

3 This process also involved the participation of the British and Irish Governments.

to government in Northern Ireland<sup>4</sup>, and, following a consociational model of democracy, established a power-sharing government in Northern Ireland which would operate on ‘cross-community consent’; this government was structured around the state’s two prominent political blocks, British unionists and Irish nationalists. It continues to form the basis of Northern Ireland’s constitutional structure<sup>5</sup>.

The power-sharing Assembly is organized through a system of designation where elected members have to self-designate as ‘nationalist’ or ‘unionist’ or ‘other’ when registering as an MLA. Designation serves to facilitate ‘cross-community voting’<sup>6</sup>, where, as a feature of the political agreement, there is a provision for “the Assembly to be run using a system of weighted voting, effectively requiring consent from”<sup>7</sup> exclusively unionist and nationalist parties on important or controversial matters. In such circumstances, “parties self-designated as ‘other’ are therefore effectively irrelevant for any [of these] key votes unless they have redesignated themselves as ‘nationalist’ or ‘unionist’”<sup>8</sup>.

Although powers were devolved to the Assembly and other government institutions in 1999, this political process encountered numerous obstacles that impeded the transitional progress for a number of years. These challenges contributed to instances of political stagnation as well as the suspension of government on a number of occasions. Proving difficult to implement, the B/GFA was therefore amended several times, with the 2006 St Andrews Agreement finally restoring the devolved government, establishing the institutional framework as it is today<sup>9</sup>. In effect, the “Assembly term which ended in 2011 was the first since devolution in 1998 to run its full course without any suspension or collapse”<sup>10</sup>, a point which indicates a situation of increasing political stability. That said, it is important to note that while sharing power, the major political groupings continue to hold differing visions of Northern Ireland’s future as well as differing views of how to deal with its past. While there has been an increase in political stability, it is not without continuing

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4 The government in Westminster had suspended powers “with the prorogation of the old Northern Ireland Parliament in 1972” (Source: Cabinet Office and Northern Ireland Office, “Devolution settlement: Northern Ireland”).

5 Cabinet Office and Northern Ireland Office, “Devolution settlement: Northern Ireland,” *GOV.UK*, 20 February 2013, accessed March 14 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/devolution-settlement-northern-ireland>.

6 “Belfast/ Good Friday Agreement” *Northern Ireland Assembly*, accessed March 14 2015. [http://education.niassembly.gov.uk/post\\_16/snapshots\\_of\\_devolution/gfa](http://education.niassembly.gov.uk/post_16/snapshots_of_devolution/gfa).

7 Dominic Bryan (2006): 611.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Cabinet Office and Northern Ireland Office, “Devolution settlement: Northern Ireland”.

10 Cabinet Office and Northern Ireland Office, “Devolution settlement: Northern Ireland”.

tensions and political stalemates, where politics continues to be played out along the problematic fault lines of communal identity.

### **Societal organization**

Various state and societal mechanisms have been developed to promote conflict transformation on the societal level alongside of this broader institutional approach. Considerable progress has been made, however, continuing work is needed to not only deal with the legacy of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, but to also address its underlying root causes. In very simplistic terms, this conflict has been about division, of a society “divided ... by conflicting [political] aspirations”<sup>11</sup> that were understood to be mutually exclusive and which came to parallel other existing lines of ethnic/cultural demarcation<sup>12</sup>. This separation continues to organize society and structure everyday life for many people, and while lessening its potency is essential for broader social transformation, it has proved to be a difficult task.

Belfast, in particular, continues to be an extremely divided city, and recent studies have actually indicated that its residential areas have experienced “increased division and a growing number of interface areas since the signing of the Agreement”<sup>13,14</sup> in 1998. Although residential segregation between Catholics/nationalists and Protestants/unionists had informally existed before the outbreak of violence in the late 1960s, it rose with the instability of the early 1970s and proceeded to cement itself over the length of the conflict. Bearing the brunt of the violence, this process predominantly occurred in working class areas, with the formation of Protestant or Catholic enclaves. These were residential enclosures that were controlled by the local paramilitary groups, which policed the population and, for a time, barred the entrance of state forces. These enclaves now gone, their imprints remain, with territorial demarcations made explicit through ‘peacelines’, or interface walls, and other markings<sup>15</sup>. On this note, it should be mentioned that the site of my case study, the lower Newtownards Road, is located within a Protestant area.

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11 John Hume, *A New Ireland: Politics, Peace, and Reconciliation* (Boulder, Colorado: Robert Rinehart Publishers, 1997), p. 58

12 Lee A. Smithey, *Unionists, Loyalists, and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 11.

13 Dominic Bryan, “Parades, Flags, Carnivals and Riots: Public Space, Contestation and Transformation in Northern Ireland.” *Managing Diversity in Divided Societies: Research & Practice*, a conference hosted by the Georgetown University Conflict Resolution Program 30-31 January 2014.

14 Interface areas are spaces where Protestant areas and Catholic areas border each other.

15 Peter Shirlow and Brendan Murtagh, *Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 57-58.

It is also necessary to acknowledge that although social division is primarily understood as occurring along sectarian lines, the reality and lived experiences of poverty, or, class divisions, have and continue to be, a major element of social and spatial organization in the city, as well as in the state, and compounds upon political insecurities in important ways. For instance, the conditions of working class communities have in part contributed to issues of social alienation and disengagement from both the political process, with many people not necessarily feeling represented in the current state; and the peace process, where there is a general sense of being excluded from the positive transitions that are occurring elsewhere. When speaking about ongoing processes of conflict transformation, it is important to recognize this division for the ways in which it has differentially shaped experiences of not only the conflict, but also the current peace; it is an important layer for understanding the current complexities of transitioning towards a durable peace.

### **Processes of conflict transformation**

Conflict transformation in Northern Ireland is an enormously complex process with many sectors, many strategies underway, and many actors involved. In the present study, I've chosen to look at processes of social transformation, focusing on the strategies and effects of peacebuilding efforts as they work to address problematic social relationships. This approach is informed by JOHN PAUL LEDERACH'S work on conflict transformation, which promotes the understanding that social conflict is a natural part of human relationships, and "is a phenomenon that transforms events [and] the relationships in which conflict occurs"<sup>16</sup>. From this viewpoint, conflict is a long-term and multidimensional "agent of change in relationships"<sup>17</sup>, and their patterns of communication, expression and perception. Importantly, being transformative, conflict is dynamic and has the potential to "move in destructive or constructive directions"<sup>18</sup>, contributing to unpeaceful or to peaceful relationships. If the objective is to transition a society from war to a durable peace, to transition from unpeaceful to peaceful relationships, then "the relational context that generates the fighting"<sup>19</sup> needs to be addressed as well as the content of the fighting. As explained by LEDERACH, the relational context "includes both face-to-face interactions and the ways in which we structure

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16 John Paul Lederach, "Framework for Building Peace," in *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 17.

17 Ibid., 18

18 Ibid.,19

19 Michelle Maiese, "Summary of *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building*," [Summary of the book *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, by John Paul Lederach (2005)] *Beyond Intractability*, Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder. <http://www.beyondintractability.org/bks/lederach-imagination> .

our social, political, economic, and cultural relationships”<sup>20</sup>, and is fundamentally grounded in societal power structures.

### **1.3 Research objectives**

Much is uncertain regarding Northern Ireland’s future. Although continuing tensions indicate that there are yet unresolved issues from the peace process<sup>21</sup>, particularly in regards to dealing with the past and the continuing threat of violence from dissident elements, many do not believe that the situation will return to the previous levels of violence or social disorder experienced in the recent conflict; however, the extent to which the future will be socially inclusive, and therefore politically stable, remains to be worked out.

In the contemporary context of conflict transformation, I am fundamentally interested in the relational dynamics between the state and society, of what the state wants to do in transitioning society towards a durable peace, of how much impact it is having on the ground, and how issues relating to representation and inclusion are, or are not, being addressed in this process. Looking at the political wall murals along the lower Newtownards Road is one way of looking at the dynamics of social and political relationships within the current peace process, of their re-definition, as well as the effects of certain strategies of social transformation. This is based on the understanding that these murals are an outcome of a set of power relationships involving a set of social groups, which use the murals as a way of defining a public position and representing themselves in a public space. This line of exploration will allow me to reflect on how, in the context of transition, shifting frames of representation and communal belonging are being negotiated and with what consequence.

### **1.4 Structure of this thesis**

Having already introduced the subject and outlined my research objectives, Chapter 2 serves to problematise the notion of ‘community’ as currently used in Northern Ireland. Reflecting on the implications of ‘community’ as politically practised, I will then engage in a theoretical discussion on the notions of ‘group identity’, as it relates to ‘community’, as well as the problems which arise when those terms are used analytically. Establishing that the concept of ‘identification’ is a term better suited for the project, I will end the chapter with a lens through which to conceptualize how

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20 John Paul Lederach, "Conflict Transformation," *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess, Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder.

Posted: October 2003, <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/transformation>.

21 Louise Mallinder (2014).

processes of identification may change following social conflict. Chapter 3 then serves to introduce the case study and outline my fieldwork methods and my general research approach. Having identified photographs and interviews as my primary data, I then present my hypothesis and outline how the subsequent analyses is thematically divided, and spread out across Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Highlighting the social significance of murals in Northern Ireland, Chapter 4 serves to analyse the murals as cultural artefacts and coded texts, primarily exploring how, as political statements, various organizations use them to situate themselves within the local environment, and publicly define their role within the public sphere. Working with the understanding that a mural is the outcome of a range of activities and processes involving sets of power relationships, Chapter 5 moves the analysis forward, and studies the murals in terms of the processes involved in their production, as well as the relationships that develop through them. Working from observations and information gleaned from the interview material, this analysis plots various processes of social mapping as occurring around the murals and establishes the production of the mural as a site of encounter.

In Chapter 6, I elaborate on both Chapters 4 and 5, focusing on the mural as a site of political encounter and applying a simple model through which to interpret the political strategies involved in their production, I then demonstrates how organizations and governmental programmes both use the murals as an asset in the pursuit of broader political strategies. From there, I go on to reflect on what all of this activity means in terms shifting frames of representation and imagined local communities, as it relates to the current stage of transition in Northern Ireland. Finally, chapter 7 concludes the study with a summary of the central findings.

## Chapter 2. Conceptualizing Community

### 2.1 Representing community

Focusing on issues of political and ethnically-framed representation within the context of Northern Ireland, where processes of conflict transformation are working to address the many legacies of violent conflict as well as its underlying and continuing social divisions, words like ‘community’, ‘tradition’ and ‘identity’ require further attention. As explained by social-anthropologist DOMINIC BRYAN, the notion of ‘community’, in particular, is hugely present in both popular and political discourse, as well as in government policy and legislation, and as such, is intricately bound up in shaping the peace process itself<sup>22</sup>. Yet, despite all of this attention, despite being an organizing feature of Northern Ireland’s social and political landscapes, the complexity of the concept itself has made defining it and importantly “who represents it [difficult, and] [t]his difficulty goes to the heart of politics in Northern Ireland”<sup>23</sup>.

Exploring the complexities that underpin these seemingly simple words, this section is intended to serve a number of purposes. First of all, there is a practical need to problematise the language most often used in making sense of the situation on the ground, and to question how useful it actually is for exploring the mechanics behind issues of cultural and political representation. It is important to recognize that terms like ‘community’, ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ are highly political and carry with them varied subtexts. There is a need to get beyond their associated scripts, and to consider their role in underlying processes of social and political (re)organization in Northern Ireland. To do this, I will begin by briefly introducing the concept of the ‘two traditions model’ and then go on to consider the practical implications for its use. This leads into the second purpose, which is that I seek to provide a degree of conceptual clarity as to how I’ve approached these elements within my own research, which is key to situating my work within a broader theoretical framework. The manner in which I have engaged with these concepts has been a fundamental part of the research process itself, establishing the foundations on which I have directed my focus, as well as the methodology through which I carried out my work. The third and final section aims to clarify this connection, between theory and its application, by briefly outlining some theoretical approaches concerning ‘identity change’ in relation to processes of social and political transformation in the aftermath of violent conflict.

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<sup>22</sup> Dominic Bryan (2006): 604.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 610.

## 2.2 Discussion of the ‘two-communities’ model

Obviously, there is much more to the situation than ‘identity’, its divisive politics or polarizing ideologies- there are many layers to this conflict as well as the continuing social divisions, and it would be reductive not to acknowledge that. However, in discussing issues of representation within this context of transformation, the cultural and political dimensions of the conflict are brought to the forefront, as they have come to frame a relationship of difference between the island’s ‘two traditions’ or ‘two communities’. As sociologist, LEE A. SMITHEY, further explains: that “despite the complexity of the field of ethnic and political identities, it is hard to deny the reality of two readily discernable blocs [...] [where,] due largely to historical realities, [...] fundamental political and ethnic categories have aligned”<sup>24</sup>. Broadly speaking, these two social groupings are recognized as being the Protestant/unionist/loyalist community and the Catholic/nationalist/republican community. Here the terms ‘Protestants’ and ‘Catholics’ have come to signify ethnic identification as well as denominational affiliation as each ‘community’ has come to be defined in terms of both religious and cultural traditions.

This commonly understood framework of distinction has contributed to what SMITHEY has described as the now “chastened ‘two traditions’ logic, [an approach] which recognizes considerable religious, political, and economic diversity across Northern Ireland but also acknowledges an unavoidable [...] divide”<sup>25</sup> between the ‘two communities’. Chastened, in that it more or less reduces the recent conflict and continuing divisions down to ‘ethnicity’ and ‘communal differences’, potentially contributing to the reification of both social groups and their relationships, the ‘two traditions’ framework nonetheless maintains a relevancy in current discourse and ongoing political conflict and its transformation, and continues to be a ‘model “ held across the political spectrum”<sup>26</sup>, from politicians and government agencies, to local activists and other organizations. Importantly, this understanding has also “effectively been embedded in the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (B/GFA)”<sup>27</sup> which, reflecting a consociational approach to conflict management, was “designed to regulate the two political blocks, unionism and nationalism- which represent the Protestant and Catholic communities [...] [and in effect, essentially] replicates and reconstitutes

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24 Lee A. Smithey (2011), 57.

25 Ibid., 17.

26 Dominic Bryan (2006): 605.

27 Ibid.

communal politics in Northern Ireland”<sup>28</sup>. While this framework effectively presents both unionism and nationalism as distinct political blocs, it is important to acknowledge that there are important ideological distinctions that run through either political grouping. As it concerns my case study, it is necessary that I briefly touch upon the variation that exist within the broader unionist political culture, namely, the set of ideological distinctions between unionism and loyalism, as it will be relevant to later discussions. To do this, I will concisely outline JENNIFER TODD’S typology describing the terrain of unionist politics<sup>29</sup> as I have found it to be useful for understanding this variation on a basic level<sup>30</sup>.

Basically, TODD categorized these two variations as being either Ulster loyalist or Ulster British, characterizing Ulster loyalists as “those prioritiz[ing] identification with fellow Ulster Protestants over British identity”<sup>31, 32</sup> and tending to be generally working class, while then characterizing the Ulster British as unionists who “subsume a regional Ulster identity of identification with Great Britain”<sup>33</sup> and are more likely to be of the middle or upper classes<sup>34</sup>. There is then variation within each of these categories. Within unionism, it is generally understood that there are two strands of political thought, with one being traditional/conventional unionism, where the focus is on “the constitutional relationship linking Northern Ireland to Great Britain” and the belief that Northern Ireland serves to promote core British values; and the other being new unionism, which “refers to attempts to shake conventional unionism from its fixation [...] on status, and provide rationales that allow for greater political manoeuvrability”<sup>35</sup>. Within loyalism, it is also understood that there are two forms: Ulster loyalism and new loyalism. Ulster loyalism, or rather, traditional loyalism, is described as “simply being physical force unionism”, the gunmen, while new loyalism “refers to the emergence of politicians and political organizations connected to loyalist paramilitaries”. New loyalism broadly describes “the development of working-class loyalist agendas that distinguish them from traditional unionism by advocating community politics”<sup>36</sup>.

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28 Dominic Bryan (2006): 611.

29 As presented by Lee A. Smithey (2011), 56-60.

30 It is important to note this is an ideal type, with various strands overlapping in reality.

31 Lee A. Smithey (2011), 56.

32 “... for whom evangelical Protestantism and anti-Catholicism often frame political struggle and conflict as spiritual zero-sum battle” (Ibid.).

33 Ibid.

34 ... and is generally understood to “refer to the political fundamentals of unionism” (Ibid.).

35 All quotes from Lee A. Smithey (2011), 57.

36 All quotes from Lee A. Smithey (2011), 58.

With this now established, it is worth considering how the ‘two-traditions’ logic continues to be upheld within a context of conflict transformation that would also work to problematise it, as well as understand why it needs to be constructively engaged with, if not ascribed to. Sociologist RICHARD JENKINS offers some insight on the matter, explaining that “this is a matter of perceived similarities and differences that structure a great deal of everyday life, which are meaningful collectively and individually, which are historically specific, which have not always been the same as they are today, and are thus in important aspects open to change”<sup>37</sup>. Emphasising the weight of perceptions in processes of socialization, JENKINS points to their capacity for transformation. This underlines the importance of understanding how such perceptions become meaningful, collectively and individually, and indicates the utility in engaging with the processes that foster them, rather than dismissing them outright. This necessarily opens up a discussion on not only “relationships of power and the role of the state, but also the parts played in the process by individual actors and political groups”<sup>38</sup>, a topic that I will further explore in later chapters.

### **A question of language**

With the intention of mapping out the social relations in ongoing processes of transformation, I want to aim for some level of consistency and clarity in the way that I speak about Northern Ireland’s ‘communities’, engaging with these discourses while not necessarily replicating them. There are a number of reasons for why I am focusing on this issue of terminology, a central one being that I have come across a lot of overlap and ambiguity in how the terms are practically used in the everyday sense, when talking about these social groups, their representation, and their internal and external relations, which don’t always account for the nuances, variation and exceptions within, between and across them. While for pragmatic reasons, it makes sense to keep my language grounded in the everyday social realities which inform these social relations, it can become a quagmire, where the meaning of the term, but not the term itself, implicitly changes depending on the temporal, and relational circumstances surrounding it. And while this may reflect part of the situation on the ground, where the salient factors of identification are somewhat contingent on contextual setting, it only offers a partial view.

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37 Richard Jenkins, “When Politics and Social Theory Converge: Group Identification and Group Rights in Northern Ireland,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 12, no. 3-4 (2006): 395.

38 Dominic Bryan (2006): 613.

Another relevant factor in exploring this issue is that words pertaining to ‘identity’ and ‘community’, especially in situations of insecurity, are deeply political in that they can “become coterminous with notions of uniformity and conformity”<sup>39</sup>, which is instrumental for cultural and political entrepreneurs who seek to “organize and justify collective action along certain lines”<sup>40</sup>. Commenting on notions of ‘community’ in Northern Ireland, social anthropologist JENNIFER CURTIS remarked how “in its crudest sense [...] community is shorthand for communalism, and maps onto competing nations and visions of state, nationalist or unionist. As such, it imputes boundedness and homogeneity to ‘two sides’ [and] it is also used to establish alternative legitimacies”<sup>41</sup>.

Essentially, the problem I face concerns how I should interpret and write about these ‘identities’ and these ‘communities’ in a way that not only avoids reification, but also accurately reflects what peacebuilding practitioner JOHN PAUL LEDERACH described as ‘the presenting situation’. The presenting situation is multilayered in that it is both “the content of the dispute and the patterns of relationship in the context in which the dispute is expressed”<sup>42</sup>; to address this complexity requires an approach that simultaneously acknowledges that group identities and social realities are performed and discursively produced, yet also experienced and consequential.

Not only can it be difficult to maintain a critical distance from ideologically constructed notions of community and community relations, while also employing language that is active in their reproduction, the language itself can also prove to be problematic in that it lacks the nuance required to properly consider the presenting situation in all of its ambiguity. It can become difficult to sort through, and understand the relational dynamics on the ground, not to mention that there is also a need to look beyond the partial reality that such everyday language describes<sup>43</sup>. And while it is crucial to not accept such worldviews or logic as given, at the same time, they need to be acknowledged and to an extent worked with, because, as argued by JENKINS, it is important to “understand the intersubjective realities in terms of which people act and the human world is constituted. How people define the situation(s) in which they find themselves”<sup>44</sup> matters because “people act in terms of their shared imaginings and they therefore have extensive consequences”<sup>45</sup>.

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39 Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 4th ed. (Routledge, 2014), 23.

40 Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’” In *Ethnicity without Groups* (Harvard University Press, 2004), 32.

41 Jennifer Curtis, “‘Community’ and the Re-Making of 1970s Belfast,” *Ethnos* 73, no. 3 (2008): 402.

42 John Paul Lederach and Michelle Maisse, “Conflict Transformation: A Circular Journey with a Purpose,” *New Routes* 14, no. 2 (2009): 8, accessed February 1, 2015. life-peace.org.

43 Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2004), 54.

44 Richard Jenkins (2014), 108.

45 Richard Jenkins (2006): 394.

### 2.3 A theoretical discussion of identification

At this point, it would be useful to step out of context and consider these notions more abstractly so as to establish conceptual clarity for the following developments of my study. There is an extensive body of literature that explores these issues, and from this work I have selected a few authors whose contributions I have found to be influential. My general research questions are themselves grounded in particular understandings of ‘identity’, as are my concerns revolving around issues of terminology; if I aim to delineate an approach in dealing with concepts of group identification, and community in particular, it would be worthwhile to more closely consider the foundations on which I base my questions, as well as the terms themselves.

My conceptualization of group identification is grounded on the premise that “we generate meaning and knowledge through the interplay between the ideas we encounter and experiences we have”<sup>46</sup>. Our knowledge of who’s who, what’s what<sup>47</sup>, and why it matters, is contingent on ongoing processes of inter-subjective meaning-making, involving discourse, language and convention; reality is constituted through social interactions and particularly through the production and reproduction of relations and identities<sup>48</sup>. Focusing on the interconnection between status and behaviour<sup>49</sup> in his influential introductory chapter, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, FREDRIK BARTH highlighted the role of social boundaries, and the interactional processes which maintain them (both at them and across them), in structuring these relations and classifying these identities and in effect, organizing a particular kind of social system. Understood as processual and active, the noun ‘identity’ is more accurately understood as the verb ‘to identify’; it’s not just a thing, but must be continually established, it’s a reflexive and fluid practise, and it is something that people do to meaningfully locate themselves in relation to others<sup>50</sup>. ‘To identify’ also denotes the presence of what BARTH called ‘agents of change’<sup>51</sup>: individuals who are active participants in managing processes of boundary maintenance, and fostering ‘in-group’ solidarity.

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46 Douglas AJ. Elshaw, “What is ‘digital literacy’? A Pragmatic investigation” (Doctoral thesis, Durham University. 2012), p125, <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3446/> .

47 Richard Jenkins (2014), 27.

48 Susanne Buckley-Zistel, “In-Between War and Peace: Identities, Boundaries and Change after Violent Conflict,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 35, no. 1 (2006):4 -5.

49 Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries The Social Organization of Culture Difference. [Results of a Symposium Held at the University of Bergen, 23rd to 26th February 1967]* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), 29. [http://sites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic446176.files/Week\\_4/Barth\\_Introduction\\_Ethnic\\_Groups\\_and\\_Boundaries\\_.pdf](http://sites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic446176.files/Week_4/Barth_Introduction_Ethnic_Groups_and_Boundaries_.pdf)

50 Richard Jenkins (2014), 18.

51 Fredrik Barth (1969), 25.

Social categories of identification are symbolic constructs; they are a means of making sense, shedding light on some aspect of a complex world and the diversity of human experience. Constructs of ‘identity’ and ‘community’ evoke some other ideas beyond themselves, and alter visions of the world by drawing attention to some patterns while at the same time hiding, or omitting, others<sup>52</sup>. Through the codification of attributes or circumstances of similarity and difference<sup>53</sup>, they classify patterns of behaviour and are a form of social organization<sup>54</sup> in that they effectively structure relations and contribute to what BENEDICT ANDERSON has described as ‘imagined communities’. Concepts of collective identity, of ‘nationality’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘race’, and so on, are cultural artefacts, categories whose significance in part developed out of a “distillation of complex crossing of discrete historical forces”<sup>55</sup>.

This conceptualization is based on the basic understanding that a self-identified collectivity is “a plurality of individuals who either see themselves as similar, or who have in common similar behaviour and circumstances”<sup>56</sup>, and that processes of collective identification “involve processes of classification and signification that necessarily invoke criteria of similarity and difference”<sup>57</sup>. Simply put, this means that identification ‘with’ involves identification ‘from’, and that to “define the criteria for membership of any set of objects is, at the same time, also to create a boundary, everything beyond which does not belong”<sup>58</sup>. With that being said, ANDERSON rightly pointed out that “communities can be distinguished by the style in which they are imagined- [by] the ties that bind the people together”<sup>59</sup>; it is important to bear in mind that classificatory boundary-making is only one pattern of many possible patterns of ‘relational connectedness’<sup>60</sup>.

While BARTH’s focus was on ethnic groups in particular, in many ways, his approach is generally applicable to all of the domains of identification<sup>61</sup>. His emphasis on boundary-making through “self-ascription and ascription by others”<sup>62</sup> as being the critical feature of social organization, points to

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52 Anthony D. Buckley “Introduction: daring us to laugh: creativity and power in Northern Irish Symbols” in *Symbols in Northern Ireland*, ed. by Anthony Buckley, Belfast: Queen’s University, Institute of Irish Studies, 1998, 4-5.

53 Richard Jenkins (2014), 105.

54 Fredrik Barth (1969), 13.

55 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. and ext. 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2006), 4.

56 Richard Jenkins (2014), 105.

57 *Ibid.*, 24.

58 *Ibid.*, 104.

59 Benedict Anderson (2006), 6.

60 Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2004), 50.

61 Richard Jenkins (2014), 133.

62 Fredrik Barth (1969), 13.

the two facets of collective identification alluded to in the paragraph above, namely that “the members of a collectivity can identify themselves as such – they know who (and what) they are [...] [or,] members may be ignorant of their membership or even of the collectivity’s existence”<sup>63</sup>. JENKINS described this criterion of recognition as being the “basis for the fundamental [analytical] conceptual distinction between groups and categories”<sup>64</sup>, as well as a means of understanding “the internal-external dialectic of identification”<sup>65</sup>.

Warning against the “reification of interaction [...] and misplaced precision”, JENKINS defined the two concepts in sociological terms, where: a category is “a class whose nature and composition is decided by the person who defines the category”, which “in principle at least may be defined arbitrarily, according to any criteria”; and a group is “defined by the nature of the relations between the members”, “requiring mutual recognition on the part of its members”<sup>66</sup>. With this basic methodological distinction established, the simultaneous interplay between the two processes of categorization and group identification comes into focus, where members of a category may come to be understood as members of a group “once relationships between members of a category involve mutual recognition of their categorization, [because] this is the first step to group identification”<sup>67</sup>. To sum up JENKINS’ discussion on these inter-related dynamics of identification of the self and ascription made by others, it follows that: group identity is a process of *collective internal definition*, as well as interactional processes of *collective external definition*, or categorization, where “our self-conscious group memberships identify others and create relationships with them [...] [I]dentification of others — their definition according to criteria of our adoption, which they may neither accept nor recognize — is often part of the process of identifying ourselves”<sup>68</sup>.

Referencing Foucault’s theory of governmentality, which connects political practise to processes of subject formation and identification, JENKINS went on to further discuss the role of categorization and of categorizer in “the production of disciplinary power”<sup>69</sup>, which is an extremely important aspect in considering the broader realm of identity politics, and the issue of cultural and political representation. However, in this regard, I found BRUBAKER AND COOPER’s approach in their

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63 Richard Jenkins (2014), 106.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid., 105.

66 All quotes from Richard Jenkins (2014), 106.

67 Ibid., 110.

68 Richard Jenkins (2014), 107.

69 Ibid., 109.

chapter, *Beyond Identity*, more straightforward in seeking to not only understand, but to analytically describe such practices on their multiple levels of interaction. BRUBAKER AND COOPER are essentially making the same point as JENKINS, that “identification-of oneself and of others- is intrinsic to social life”<sup>70</sup>, and that “self-identification takes place in dialectic interplay with external identification”<sup>71</sup>- however, I found their writing to be more nuanced when considering the broader situational, and contextual, external influences.

Keeping the role of identifier at the forefront of their discussion of relational and categorical modes of identification, the authors included a third “key element of external identification”<sup>72</sup>, being that of institutional or authoritative identification. Here, the authors introduce the modern state as being “one of the most important agents of identification and categorization”<sup>73</sup>, in that they “seek to monopolize not only legitimate physical force, but also legitimate symbolic force”<sup>74</sup>, including the power to define what’s what and who’s who. Acknowledging at the same time that “the state does not monopolize the production and diffusion of identifications and categories; and those that it does produce may be contested”<sup>75</sup>, the authors include the ‘social setting’ within this third element of external identification, where a range of non-state actors and institutions, from families to social movements and their leaders, also do ‘organizational work’. The reason for why I prefer BRUBAKER AND COOPER’S approach is that it places the third element at an equal level with the preceding two, while, comparatively, I found there be is a hierarchical ordering in JENKINS’ explanation.

In a basic sense, their approach is similar to that of JENKINS’ in the manner of signalling out a number of comparable modes of identification, however, another key difference is their purposeful avoidance of the potentially reifying nouns, that of group and of identity, when exploring modes of social collectivity, further arguing that the outcome of such interaction should not be assumed. While I found JENKINS’ work to be useful in that it does offer a degree of conceptual and practical clarity in understanding how the terms are themselves used methodologically, as well as the sorts of processes which are involved in their overlap, I appreciate BRUBAKER AND COOPER’S stepping

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70 Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2004), 41.

71 Ibid., 42.

72 Ibid., 42.

73 Ibid., 42.

74 Ibid., 42.

75 Ibid., 43.

outside of the predominant institutional logic which is itself recognized to inform these processes. While JENKINS did acknowledge the role of the social sciences in the production of knowledge and power, he ultimately subscribed to its practices by prioritizing the relational and categorical levels of interactions, attaching the question of power as a secondary item.

BRUBAKER AND COOPER'S approach stems from an crucial conceptual distinction between identity as a category of social and political practise, and identity as a category of social and political analysis<sup>76</sup>. This distinction between categories of practice and analysis allows for a critical reading of identity as a concept, without dismissing identity as found in everyday experience and felt reality, or as developed and used by social actors. It also provides the basis for their underlying premise which is that while “‘identity’ is a key tem in the vernacular of contemporary politics [...] this does not require us to use ‘identity’ as a category of analysis or to conceptualize as a thing that all people have, seek, construct or negotiate”<sup>77</sup>, and following that, that there are clustered terms better suited to do the work that ‘identity’ is supposed to do: ‘identification and categorization’, ‘self-understanding and social location’, as well as ‘commonality, connectedness and groupness’<sup>78</sup>. In that this last cluster concerns forms of “‘affectively charged self-understanding”<sup>79</sup> as it relates to “‘phenomena conceptualized as involving *collective* identities”<sup>80</sup>, it would be worthwhile to consider it further, for how it may apply to conceptualizing, and writing about ‘community’.

The purpose of this last set of terms, as explained by BRUBAKER AND COOPER, was to “develop an analytical idiom sensitive to the multiple forms and degrees of commonality and connectedness, and to the widely varying ways in which actors [...] and prevailing discourses on which they draw [,] attribute meaning and significance to them”<sup>81</sup>, allowing for analytical differentiation along a continuum of varying forms and strengths of affinity and affiliation. Understanding forms of belonging as occurring along a continuum, while also acknowledging the possibility for ‘fluidity and hybridity’ among them is extremely pertinent to problematizing the use of ‘community’ in the context of Northern Ireland. As it is used in everyday language, the word ‘community’, like

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76 Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2004), 31-32.

77 Ibid., 29.

78 Ibid., 41-44.

79 Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2004), 46.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid., 48.

‘identity’<sup>82</sup>, is made to do a lot of work, it contains a ‘tangle of meanings’ some of it contradictory, and much of it emotionally charged.

While less precisely articulated, ANDERSON similarly tracked such these processes in his book *Imagined Communities*. Questioning how the nation, as an imagined political community, constructed “around cognitive and symbolic processes”<sup>83</sup>, came to affect such strong sentiments of attachment and emotional legitimacy<sup>84</sup> among its members, ANDERSON highlighted a number of relevant factors, the most prominent being a sense of a natural belonging, denoted in a language of kinship/home<sup>85</sup>, closely connected to notions of identity, and generated through biographical narratives which re-framed experience in terms of a particular form of continuity. The attachment that ANDERSON describes broadly correlates to BRUBAKER AND COOPER’s ‘groupness’, and in many ways, to how the ‘two-traditions’ logic understands ‘community’ to work in Northern Ireland.

A strong example of this is the emergence of the term ‘PUL community’ (Protestant/unionist/loyalist). ‘PUL’ is increasingly becoming a preferred label to what had before simply (and also problematically) been referred to as the ‘Protestant community’. Argued by SMITHEY, that while “to lump all three terms together oversimplifies the political and cultural landscape [...] one could also argue that its use is an attempt to at least acknowledge different currents of political thought that are related to one another and held by people who identify themselves as Protestant”<sup>86</sup>. I would agree with SMITHEY to a point, however, I think that it is equally important to consider the implication of lumping three terms together in conjunction to perceived or stated intention, focusing on what it means in terms of membership, and processes of identification and categorization. I would argue, that while in some respects a commendable nod to, an albeit limited, diversity ‘within’, that by effectively condensing a whole diverse network of people into a singular frame of belonging (implicating ‘community as place’ in the process) ‘PUL’ demonstrates a need to express and perform a persisting commonality and connectedness where there is increasingly fragmentation. It shows that even for those who ascribe to it, ‘community’ isn’t working<sup>87</sup>- politically or socially- in the same ways as it had during times of violent conflict.

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82 Ibid., 40-41.

83 Dominic Bryan (2006): 606.

84 Benedict Anderson (2006), 4.

85 Ibid., 143.

86 Lee A. Smithey (2011), 56.

87 I thank Dominic Bryan for his helpful comments on this point during a conversation on November 14 2014.

This is reflected in relatively recent survey results (2008) that have indicated that a common perception among self-identified Protestants is “that they are politically and socially fragmented”<sup>88</sup>, and that they are “at risk of disintegration from within. As external threats diminish, the internal ones remain”<sup>89</sup>. In some respects, ‘PUL’ is a means of projecting ‘groupness’.

With my intention being to interpret and write about social relations, and their representations, within Northern Ireland’s currently dubbed ‘PUL community’ with consistency and clarity, the ability to differentiate among ‘the multiple forms and degrees of commonality and connectedness’ as it relates to ‘collective identities’ is extremely relevant in that the form and the degree “shape personal experience and condition social and political action in sharply differing ways”<sup>90</sup>, at its most basic, politics comes down to how we talk about and conceive of social relations. Aptly put by BRUBAKER AND COOPER: “activists of identity politics deploy the language of bounded groupness not because it reflects social reality [...]. Their groupist rhetoric has a performative, constitutive dimension, contributing, when it is successful, to the making of the group it invokes”<sup>91</sup>. Particularly when analysing ‘identity politics’, and the transformation of destructive relationship patterns, it is important to step out of the projected frameworks of ‘identity’ and ‘community’ to better consider not only “the practices and discourses through which subject positions and boundaries between them have been constituted”<sup>92</sup>, but also beyond them – to allow for the development of varied and alternative logics and processes, which is a necessary part of social transformation. Stepping out from particularist logics, in the case of Northern Ireland, would contribute to the development of what SMITHEY referred to as an “emancipatory approach to the conflict”<sup>93</sup>, making room for the gradual unwinding of mutually reinforcing structures and practices.

### **Transforming frames of identification**

Much of the discussion in this chapter has focused on the boundary setting processes of identification and categorization, as they relate to the construction and maintenance of social groups. While within this discussion, it has been acknowledged that that these boundaries are malleable, and that which constitutes ‘identity’ is processual, relational, and situational, the ways in which to conceptualize processes of ‘identity change’, and the “reconstruction of identity

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88 Lee A. Smithey (2011), 67.

89 Ibid., 68.

90 Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2004), 47.

91 Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2004), 59.

92 Susanne Buckley-Zistel (2006): 6.

93 Lee A. Smithey (2011), 41.

categories”<sup>94</sup> have not really been addressed. This is a complex issue, and will be further explored in later chapters, however, with the intention of setting the theoretical groundwork for the following chapters, it would be useful to expand upon what has been developed so far.

A good place to start is with SMITHEY’S book, *Unionists, Loyalists, and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland*, of which identity change is a central theme. Working from a constructivist understanding which considers ‘ethnic identities’ to be “reflections of boundaries that are performed and shaped through narrative and discourse”<sup>95</sup>, SMITHEY argues that much of the scholarly work on Northern Ireland has predominately focused on the many processes which have contributed to deepening of divisions between ‘communal identities’ in situations of insecurity, while not enough work has focused on considering how they may be unwound in the aftermath of violent conflict.

Drawing from ‘soft constructivist approaches’ which have worked to include change and “the reconstruction of identity categories”<sup>96</sup> into the constructivist model, SMITHEY outlines four key theoretical developments for “examining identity change and the transformation of conflict”<sup>97</sup>, which I will concisely describe here. The first development is the interpretation of ‘identity’ as “shifting and subject to incremental change as individuals and groups experiment with new identification and boundary frames”<sup>98</sup> and that this can be “precipitated by significant social and political change, requiring psychocultural work in reconciling new circumstances and power relations with old identity categories”<sup>99</sup>. The second, influenced by Bourdieu, is that “ethnic boundaries are a product of the multiplex interactions of a range of individuals, organizations, and institutions whose relative positions of power can be in flux”<sup>100</sup>, and who operate within certain “parameters of what is possible [...] for innovation”<sup>101</sup>. Building on the previous two points, the third development contends that the “content, the texts, objects and activities through which ethnic boundaries are constructed”<sup>102</sup> are significant. Contributing to the “construction of worldviews”<sup>103</sup>

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94 Ibid., 27.

95 Ibid., 26.

96 Lee A. Smithey (2011), 27.

97 Ibid.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid., 28.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., 28.

103 Ibid., 28.

and “the constitution of categories”<sup>104</sup> they matter in that they are subject to change, and that it is the accumulation of such changes that “alter the characters of the category”<sup>105</sup>. And finally, the fourth development proposes that “if the cultural stuff matters, those who sponsor, authorize, choreograph, and participate in it also matter”<sup>106</sup>; the work of these cultural entrepreneurs is “important because the symbolic displays they develop both reflect and contribute to the formation of collective identities that in turn influence choices about future actions”<sup>107</sup>. And that while these actors are “constrained by structural circumstances, strategic imperatives [...] and the social psychological needs of their communities [there is] [n]onetheless, room for change as well”<sup>108</sup>.

Complimentary to SMITHEY’S framework, BUCKLEY-ZISTEL’S article *In-Between War and Peace: Identities, Boundaries and Change after Violent Conflict* offers a useful lens through which to conceptualize how exactly these ‘identities’ and boundaries may change in processes of social transformation, especially in the aftermath of violent conflict. Similarly to many of the other authors discussed, these two authors presented social boundaries as a point of focus, however, I found that their combined approaches more wholly appreciated boundaries as not only being practices of demarcation but also points of connection and encounter. While this is generally acknowledged throughout the literature, the idea that boundaries are sites/experiences of interaction, where the meaning of belonging is open to evaluation, is usually not fully engaged with. In many ways BRUBAKER AND COOPER’S terminology allows for this exploration, as it underlines the importance of language to the substance of social analysis<sup>109</sup>, however, it misses the mark in certain respects: striving for precision, the dynamics of the ambiguous encounter—the in-between/engagement with difference<sup>110</sup>— is somewhat overlooked.

Along the same lines as SMITHEY, BUCKLEY-ZISTEL acknowledges that understanding the “practices and discourses through which subject positions and boundaries between them have been established”<sup>111</sup> is important, and that it is necessary to deconstruct, expose, and challenge the relationship patterns which contributed to the manifestation (and persistence) of destructive conflict

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104 Ibid., 28.

105 Ibid., 29.

106 Ibid., 29.

107 Ibid., 29.

108 Ibid., 31.

109 Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2004), 29.

110 Susanne Buckley-Zistel (2006): 17.

111 Ibid., 6.

in the first place- she goes a step further and suggests that this focus does not fully account for moments of transition, where “conflicts are unmade discursively”<sup>112</sup>. Suggesting that an alternative “way of seeing and interpreting the world”<sup>113</sup> is necessary to do this, BUCKLEY-ZISTEL offers the notion of hermeneutics as a way to understand how boundaries, social relationships, and in effect social reality, may “change in the [inter-subjective] process of understanding between self and other”<sup>114</sup>.

Following the work of German philosopher H.G. Gadamer, the author presents the notion of hermeneutics as depicting “how identities are constituted in a circular processes between past, present and future as well as the experience of others”<sup>115</sup>, and explains that in this way, this particular conceptualization of how ‘identities change’ is a useful approach for interpreting if and how social relations change in a context of post-conflict transition, without “introducing new fixed boundaries”<sup>116</sup> in the process. BUCKLEY-ZISTEL goes on to then suggest that the hermeneutic lens is a valuable tool of analysis for peace and conflict studies<sup>117</sup>, where it can provide a means of assessing and critically engaging with “theories and approaches which seek to contribute to social change and the consolidation of a sustainable peace after violent conflict”<sup>118</sup>, as well as identifying “whether there are any obstacles to this process or whether they contribute to peace”<sup>119</sup>.

## **2.4 Concluding remarks**

In writing about concepts of ‘identity’ and ‘community’ within in Northern Ireland, I see myself drawing from a number of these approaches when ‘looking at processes of interaction’ in the context of transition. BRUBAKER AND COOPER’S critical distinction between categories of practice and categories of analysis is extremely useful in providing a conceptual distance from both of the ideologically constructed notions, and I intend to use their descriptive and differentiating language when framing the context and mapping out the relational dynamics on the ground. That being said, following JENKINS’ minimal definition for ‘group’<sup>120</sup>, I feel that skirting around the word with descriptions of affiliation and affinity would be overly cumbersome and not contribute to

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112 Ibid., 3.

113 Ibid., 21.

114 Ibid., 5.

115 Ibid., 3.

116 Susanne Buckley-Zistel (2006): 17.

117 Ibid., 20.

118 Ibid., 20.

119 Ibid., 21.

120 Richard Jenkins (2006): 391.

conceptual clarity. Maintaining a degree of analytical distance from the word's multiple meanings, I will use 'social group' rather than just 'group'. I intend to avoid using the word community descriptively altogether, however that being said, due to the context of the case study, it is difficult to completely forgo the word; for practical reasons, I will employ it in reference to locally specific populations and their various interest groups.

While critical of the 'two-communities' framework, my case study does engage with it; covering the lower Newtownards Road, the case focuses on an area that is widely recognized as being working class and significantly Protestant in composition, and this has been a factor in determining the parameters of research. Three of the organizations included in the study are self-described as having a loyalist ethos, and while the fourth is non-aligned, it too operates within this distinct local landscape, socially defined as 'Protestant'. Referring back to TODD's typology concerning 'the two traditions of unionist political culture'<sup>121</sup>, it is important to note that the terms, unionist and loyalist, not only refer to frames of communal identification, but are also nationalistically defined political projects, both with their own important internal distinctions<sup>122</sup> as well as various overlaps within and between them. While I will avoid the use of the problematic 'P.U.L', I will generally follow SMITHEY'S approach, and try to "move accurately among the terms"<sup>123</sup>, referring to the organization or an individual as being loyalist, or unionist where self-described and contextually relevant; after all, my research topic is political and the content of my interviews revolved around the socio-political activities and positioning of the participants and their organizations.

Finally, the chapter ended with a focus on boundaries as sites of interaction. Set within a context of conflict transformation, this last section served to present some tools with which to conceptualize the reconstruction of categories of identification, and the processes through which social relations change in the aftermath of violent conflict. When combined, both SMITHEY'S and BUCKLEY-ZISTEL'S approaches provided a useful lens through which to be able to identify and engage with such processes in order to then assess their impact, and will be further employed when analysing the murals and the ways in which they are used in current processes of transition.

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121 Lee A. Smithey (2011), 56.

122 Ibid., 57.

123 Ibid.

## Chapter 3. The Case Study

### 3.1 The lower Newtownards Road

I intend to explore the ways in which relationship of power are currently being negotiated and re-structured in ongoing processes of transition through the representation and expressions of imagined community, and its divisions, in public spaces; I will do this by looking at the murals along the lower Newtownards Road in inner East Belfast, at the political projects and interests behind them, and the ways in which their significance has been acknowledged, framed and used by both state and societal bodies. Fundamentally, this approach is grounded in the understanding that the political is embedded in and expressed through the social realm, and that cultural products and social process can be studied to address crucial political questions. Contributing to the construction of worldviews, the constitution of social categories, and ultimately the organization of a social system, ‘the cultural stuff’, as process and as product, is political, in both origin and impact; these processes not only mirror political dynamics but also in part constitute them.

Interacting with each other on multiple levels, social and cultural processes are complex, plural, dynamic and can be full of ambiguity and contradictions. However, despite this, these processes can be accessed through the investigation of their articulations and concretizations, such as anecdotes from an interview, observations, symbols, rituals and images. Although one such study would never be exhaustive, it would allow the researcher to understand a dimension of these processes and their interactions, providing insight into broader dynamics. In other words, focusing on these concretizations provides a solid ground from which to then consider their production, and the driving social and political forces behind them<sup>124</sup>.

Studying the murals along the lower Newtownards Road will provide me with a window through which to interpret broader social forces and processes of change, as well as a solid foundation from which to further explore them, addressing crucial political aspects concerning conflict transformation. The murals are themselves continually changing, in both their images and in their function, mirroring the developments occurring within their various social contexts, and, on a basic level, serving as a proxy for fundamental political activities.

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124 Denis-Constant Martin, “À la quête des OPNI (objets politiques non identifiés). Comment traiter l’invention du politique?” *Revue française de science politique*, 39e année, n6, (1989): 796- 808.

The purpose of this chapter is to lay the groundwork for such an exploration, starting with an introduction to my case study. This will be done in two parts, the first part being a descriptive account of the site's physical and social environment, and the second, a series of profiles introducing the four organizations included in the study. The following section will move on to discuss my experience in developing this approach. This will also include a description of my fieldwork methods, as well as an introduction to the materials and documents used for this study. Finally, I will outline the working hypothesis, while also acknowledging certain limitations inherent to this type of research, and my case study in particular.

### **3.2 The case study: physical and social environment**

As highlighted in the introductory chapter, residential segregation along ethno-political lines is a “prominent feature of urban division within Belfast”<sup>125</sup>, with certain areas that are recognized as being mainly Protestant, and others as being mainly Catholic in composition. With the exception of the Short Strand, a small Catholic neighbourhood on the eastern side of the river Lagan, inner East Belfast is recognized as being a predominantly working class Protestant area. And while its residents should not be understood in homogeneous terms, there are areas within the inner East that are characterized as being strongly loyalist, including the area surrounding the lower Newtownards Road. Being on the interface with the Short Strand, this area not only directly experienced violence and chronic insecurity during the conflict, but has also continued to experience heightened insecurity throughout the peace process, as interface areas tend to be sites where sectarian unrest breaks out at times of tension.

Recognized as being a distinct area within the city of Belfast, the four wards that constitute the inner East are known to be some of the most disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland<sup>126</sup>. Ranking high on the Nobel index's scale for multiple deprivations, residents in the area tend to experience high levels of poverty, unemployment, health issues, and educational underachievement. This has contributed to a growing sense of marginalization and apathy<sup>127</sup>, and has compounded broader issues of political alienation, not only concerning the newly established power-sharing government, but also within

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125 Peter Shirlow and Brendan Murtagh (2006), 8.

126 Neighbourhood Renewal," Neighbourhood Renewal and East Belfast Partnership (accessed March 15 2015) <http://neighbourhoodrenewal.eastbelfastpartnership.org/>.

127 Charter NI. Strategic Plan 2013-2015: Together We Can Make This Work! 2.

the wider unionist political culture itself. Generally speaking, this situation has engendered ambivalence towards the wider peace processes, and “a perceived resistance to change”<sup>128</sup>.

The focus of my case study, the lower Newtownards, is a central road for the inner East, serving as a hub for the surrounding residential area. If you were to walk up the street, coming from the direction of city centre, you would first pass by a section of peace wall, which is part of the interface with the Short Strand, then a church, some houses, a small park, and another two churches, before passing onto a section of road with a mixture of small shops, derelict buildings, offices, another church, community facilities, and pubs, eventually reaching a major intersection, where you would find the Connswater Shopping Centre. While a distinct area in and of itself, the lower Newtownards Road would not necessarily be described as a neighbourhood, in that the area that it runs through is itself broken down into micro-neighbourhoods, some containing a single street. Although this is only a broad overview of the area’s spatial composition, it provides a degree of insight into the area’s social composition as well. In this context, ‘locality’ is not only complex and multilayered but also significant and serves as an identifier: it means something to belong to one street and not to another. Additionally, sandwiched between two major intersections, the road is also one of the city’s main arterial routes, linking East Belfast and beyond to the city centre, and in this way can be seen to serve needs that are both internal and external to the immediate locality.

Although the designation of the area as being Protestant is common knowledge, it is made explicit through a range of visual markings. For example, at the time of my fieldwork, not only did numerous houses have nationalistic flags flying, but having been strung to the top of the lampposts, there was also red, white and blue bunting zigzagging high over the road, as well as promotional bannerettes attached to these lampposts, depicting either Queen Elizabeth II’s face, or the historic Protestant King William on his horse. Amongst all of this, the murals that lined the road stood out as being the most prominent of all the markings, totalling about twenty-five in number, with more to be found down side streets. The sheer quantity of murals is in part due to the fact that the street and surrounding areas had been territorially controlled by loyalist paramilitary groups during the conflict, and since then both the UVF and the UDA/UFF have continued to have some form of presence on the street, made manifest through these murals, in both their images and in their density. Another key factor is due to the status of the road itself; being both a central and arterial

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128 Charter NI. Strategic Plan 2013-2015: Together We Can Make This Work! 8.

route, it has provided paramilitary groups with a highly visible platform from which to communicate. That being said, while the majority of the murals along the road continue to have some association with these loyalist paramilitary groups, in recent years there has been a marked trend of re-imaging in the area. This has contributed to the bulk of these murals being less overtly militaristic than before, with masked gunmen being painted over with themes such as the Titanic or various displays of commemoration.

The shift towards re-imaging contentious murals has also contributed to a slowly developing “mixed economy of mural painting in Northern Ireland”<sup>129</sup>, introducing multiple sources of sponsorship and funding into the arena, and allowing for a limited loosening of control of the walls. Where at one point in time all of the murals would have been directly under the control of paramilitary groups, there are now a number of other locally relevant organizations painting walls as well. Of the approximately twenty-five murals that line the street, eight will be featured in my case study, representing four organizations, which are the East Belfast Partnership (EBP), a broad based social partnership; the UDA, a loyalist paramilitary group; Charter NI a community development organization associated with the UDA; and the UVF, another loyalist paramilitary group. The following section will elaborate on these organizations, broadly mapping their histories and their connection to the murals through organizational profiles. These are by no means meant to be complete overviews of the organizations, but instead serve to introduce them to the reader, and situate them within the context of this case study.

### **3.3 Case study: profiles**

#### **EBP**

The East Belfast Partnership (EBP) is a broad based social partnership whose offices are located on the lower Newtownards Road. Established in 1995 as a company with charitable status, the EBP was formed “with the specific responsibility of getting stakeholder organizations to work together to develop and implement plans for the social, economic, environmental and cultural regeneration of East Belfast”<sup>130</sup>. At its top, the EBP has a voluntary Board of Directors with a number of representatives from the four relevant sectors, including local councils, statutory sector agencies, private sector businesses, and community sector organizations<sup>131</sup>. Below the Board, there are a

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129 Bill Rolston (2012): 462.

130 “About EBP: Our Structure,” East Belfast Partnership (Accessed March 15 2015) <http://www.eastbelfastpartnership.org/about-ebp/structure.html>.

131 “About EBP: Our Background,” East Belfast Partnership (Accessed March 15 2015) <http://www.eastbelfastpartnership.org/about-ebp/background.html>.

number of substructures including an Executive Committee, and a range of working groups set up by the Partnership. These working groups also involve a range of statutory agencies in their operations, whose participation is specific to the group's work, covering themes such as Employability, Physical & Economic Regeneration, Health and Education<sup>132</sup>.

Alongside these working groups are two sub-partnerships, the Inner East and the Tullycarnet Neighbourhood Partnerships (NPs), whose purpose is to fulfil the Department for Social Development's (DSD) task of developing and implementing an action plan for neighbourhood renewal in both of these East Belfast neighbourhoods, both ranking in the top "36 of the most disadvantaged areas in Northern Ireland"<sup>133</sup>. As outlined by the DSD, the four strategic priorities for neighbourhood renewal to be met by each NP's action plan are those of: community, economic, social, and physical renewal<sup>134</sup>. The sum of these objectives is reflected in the Inner East Neighbourhood Partnership's (INEBP) 2005 Vision Statement: "Inner East Belfast will be transformed into a safer, attractive, healthier community in which people choose to live, learn, work and invest"<sup>135</sup>.

The Partnership's approach stems from its strategic vision "to build and sustain East Belfast in its important position within the city as the home of wealth creation and opportunity"<sup>136</sup>. This goal is in part based on the idea that successful places are welcoming places, and that the regeneration of an area is "about achieving a place where people feel comfortable living in, no matter who [they] are, and people feel comfortable coming to, no matter who [they] are"<sup>137</sup>. Developed with this understanding, many of EBP's projects have been described as being about encouraging city-wide interest in the local area, while also encouraging local residents to engage with the broader urban area, potentially opening up what opportunities are available to them that could contribute to a better quality of life. In the selection of their projects, the EBP follows a development model set out in its 2008 Strategic Regeneration Framework, which allows them "to assess and prioritise

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132 "About EBP: Our Structure," East Belfast Partnership.

133 "Neighbourhood Renewal," Neighbourhood Renewal and East Belfast Partnership (accessed March 15 2015) <http://neighbourhoodrenewal.eastbelfastpartnership.org/>.

134 Northern Ireland, Department for Social Development, Inner East Neighbourhood Partnership, *Inner East Belfast Neighbourhood Renewal Area: Action Plan 2014 – 2015*, pdf, (January 2014) <http://neighbourhoodrenewal.eastbelfastpartnership.org/inner-east-neighbourhood-partnership>

135 "Inner East Neighbourhood Partnership," Neighbourhood Renewal and East Belfast Partnership (Accessed March 15 2015) <http://neighbourhoodrenewal.eastbelfastpartnership.org/inner-east-neighbourhood-partnership>.

136 "About EBP: Our Vision, Mission and Values," East Belfast Partnership (Accessed March 15 2015) <http://www.eastbelfastpartnership.org/about-ebp/vision-mission-and-values.html>.

137 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:34:00- 00:38:00].

regeneration programmes based on their potential to offer long term benefits to the community”<sup>138</sup>. This model is based on a number of key principles, two of which include being “open to engagement with East Belfast residents in both the production & implementation of the strategy” while also aligning “with key developments such as new physical investment in the East and development programmes for the whole city”<sup>139</sup>.

In trying to describe not only the broad range of projects in which EBP is involved in, but also the way in which it facilitates their delivery, or the diversity of the organizations it works with to do so, the simplest way to phrase it is that within the Partnership, there are two distinct strands of operation<sup>140</sup>. One strand is high profile, working in areas such as tourism, the arts, and the transformation of physical environment, producing projects like an annual Arts Festival, various heritage trails, a community garden, or the Connswater Community Greenway. The other strand is more invisible. This second strand is more about relationships and “creating space for people to collaborate over things”<sup>141</sup>; it tends to revolve around community development work in the more disadvantaged areas, developing initiatives in partnership with another local organization, usually around issues like employability, health or education. There are, of course, overlaps between the two strands, as the outcomes of one may compliment the objectives of another – the physical, social, and economic regeneration of an area are all bound up together.

As a result of these projects, the Partnership has a visual presence at multiple sites along the lower Newtownards Road, including two murals. Producing both murals on otherwise derelict sites, the EBP was participating in re-imaging the area. However, in that they were placed on blank walls, the Partnership was not involved in re-imaging contentious murals as such. One mural, located at the eastern end of the Newtownards Road in INEBP’s recently developed community pocket park, was produced as part of EBP’s arts festival. The other mural, also installed on a small green space, was intended as a “public art intervention”<sup>142</sup> and involved the collaboration of EBP, an art gallery, and a woman’s cross community group.

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138 “East Belfast Strategic Regeneration Framework,” East Belfast Partnership (Accessed March 15 2015) <http://www.eastbelfastpartnership.org/strategic-regeneration-framework.html>.

139 Ibid.

140 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:00:40- 00:00:45].

141 Ibid.

142 Deirdre Robb, “Urban Meadows,” *Deirdre Robb Conceptual Artist* (Accessed May 2 2015) <http://drobbartist.com/public-programmes/urban-meadows/>.

## UDA

The Ulster Defence Association (UDA) is a pro-state loyalist paramilitary group, formed in 1972 from a network of “loyalist vigilante groups, many of which were called ‘defence associations’”<sup>143</sup>. These vigilante groups had originally formed in almost all of Belfast’s working class areas, as highly localized responses to the growing instability and inter-communal violence in the early years of the conflict. Originating from these associations, the UDA became federally organized, with a devolved structure of leadership where paramilitary commanders remained in control of operations within their own distinct regions. Additionally, since 1973, “members of the UDA have [...] used the cover name of Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) to claim responsibility for the killing of Catholics”<sup>144</sup>, and other shootings and bombings. According to the University of Ulster’s Sutton database, the UDA/UFF are responsible for at least 160 killings, between 1969 and 2001<sup>145</sup>. While the UFF had been declared an illegal organization in 1973 the UDA was only proscribed, listed as a terrorist organization by the British Government, in August 1992<sup>146</sup>.

Peaking in the mid-1970s, the UDA was the largest loyalist paramilitary group in Northern Ireland, with an estimated membership of approximately forty thousand. Besides its violent tactics, including the targeting of Catholic civilians, as well as its policing of Protestant civilians, the UDA also became well known for its shows of strength. At one point in time, the organization was capable of mobilizing thousands of its members to stage protest marches through Belfast city centre, and played a central role in enforcing the 1974 Ulster Workers' Council strike through the use of roadblocks, ultimately contributing to the collapse of the power-sharing executive government of Northern Ireland established in 1973. It should also be noted that while the UDA is unquestionably a militaristic organization, starting in 1978 they also sponsored a political think-tank, NUPRG (later replaced by the ULDP, and then the UDP) that published various documents, including a 1979 proposal for an independent Northern Ireland, and the 1987 discussion paper ‘Common Sense’ which “set out plans for a future political settlement”<sup>147</sup> based on consensus government, and proportional representation.

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143 Martin Melaugh, “Abstracts on Organizations: U”, CAIN Web site.(accessed April 27 2015) <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/uorgan.htm>.

144 Ibid.,

145 Malcolm Sutton, “An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland”, CAIN Web site (accessed April 27 2015) [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/tables/Organisation\\_Responsible.html](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/tables/Organisation_Responsible.html).

146 Martin Melaugh, “Abstracts on Organizations: U”.

147 Martin Melaugh, “Abstracts on Organizations: U”.

Six weeks following the pivotal 1994 IRA ceasefire, the UDA/UFF joined other loyalist paramilitary groups in calling their own official ceasefire, operating under the umbrella organization of Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC). In 2007 the UDA issued a statement officially ending its paramilitary campaign, promising to destroy all military intelligence, and put all weaponry beyond use. Reported to have begun decommissioning its weapons in 2009, this process was completed by January 2010, under the supervision of the Independent International Commission for Decommissioning. As of 2014, it is thought that their membership is in the low hundreds<sup>148</sup>.

Focusing on their activity in Belfast's working class neighbourhoods, throughout its history, the UDA have painted paramilitary murals throughout its areas of operation, the reasons for which will be explored in the following chapter. While often located on the gable ends of public housing and other forms of private property, loyalist paramilitary murals are themselves understood as belonging to the armed groups that painted them, and thus cannot be taken down without their permission. Quite prominently displayed along a length of wall on the road, the UDA/UFF have tableau of murals, commonly referred to as 'Freedom Corner', that will be included in the case study. While many of the UDA's militaristic murals remain throughout these areas, over the past few years, there has been a marked move towards toning down overtly antagonistic images and this shift can be seen along the lower Newtownards Road. In East Belfast, the UDA's involvement in re-imaging its murals has been facilitated by Charter NI, whose profile follows.

## **CHARTER NI**

Charter for Northern Ireland (Charter NI) is a community development organization, whose central office is located on the lower Newtownards Road. Beginning as a UDA ex-prisoner support group during the 1990's peace process, Charter NI was officially founded in 2000, and has since then gone through a number of transitions in its structure, its focus and its scope of activity and is continuing to expand. While it was originally established as a support group to facilitate the reintegration of UDA ex-prisoners, the organization went through a process of development and re-structuring while still in its early years where it transitioned from predominantly working with ex-combatants, ex-prisoners, and their families, to focusing on grassroots community development work<sup>149</sup>. The organization's 2013-2015 Strategic Plan emphasizes this stage of formation, describing Charter NI

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>149</sup> Charter NI, Annual Report 2013-2014: Enable Equip Empower, 5.

as being established as “an independent think tank devoted to studying the causes of conflict at a community level”<sup>150</sup>, whose role includes providing “a forum for creative and challenging discussion, and perhaps more importantly, to offer direction and hope for previously disengaged loyalist communities”<sup>151</sup>. Their engagement with “a wide spectrum of independent, external expertise [...] of issues which have divided communities in Northern Ireland”<sup>152</sup> throughout their development is also highlighted in many of their organizational publications.

To better understand how Charter NI functions as an organization, it is necessary to comment on its structure. Registered as company with a charitable status, it has a board of directors at its head, made up by volunteers “drawn from a community, academic, trade union and business background”<sup>153</sup>. Among others, one of their key responsibilities is providing the strategic direction for the company, whose delivery is then one of the central responsibilities of the Managing Director. This strategic direction is reflected in the company’s mission statement, which is “to enable, equip and empower disconnected communities in East Belfast, Castlereagh, Northern Down and Ards to fully engage, integrate and benefit from the Northern Ireland peace process and the resulting social and economic regeneration”<sup>154</sup>. Throughout the organization’s publications, these communities are described as being “loyalist working class communities and encompassing marginalised groups”<sup>155</sup>, with many areas designated by the government as being ‘hard to reach’. While not included within these documents, it is also relevant to note that these residential localities are themselves located in areas that had formerly been under the military control of the UDA’s East Belfast Brigade<sup>156</sup>.

Focusing on social, economic and political development, Charter NI’s approach is organized around three core objectives: employment and training, youth, and community safety and cohesion. These task areas determine how Charter then selects and delivers their projects. A section manager, who then also coordinates the sub regional areas mentioned above, manages each task area. The majority of people working for Charter are locally based volunteers. At the time of writing, Charter was in the process of developing a system of ‘regional committees’ to include “representatives from local

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150 Charter NI, Strategic Plan 2013-2015: Together We Can Make This Work! 8.

151 Ibid.

152 Ibid.

153 Ibid., 20.

154 Ibid., 6.

155 Ibid., 10.

156 David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:22:00- 00:23:30].

residents' associations and stakeholder organizations such as churches and political parties"<sup>157</sup>. While many of Charter's projects have involved collaboration with a range of organizations on a 'cross-community' basis, the majority of Charter's projects revolves around so-called 'single-identity work', focusing on issues and divisions referred to as being 'intra-community'<sup>158</sup>. As it is in its current form, Charter NI receives funding from a range of organizations, such as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's(NIHE) Community Cohesion Unit, Belfast City Council's Good Relations Partnership, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, and the EU's PEACE III programmes, whose involvement is dependent on the project concerned.

Charter NI has a visible presence on the lower Newtownards Road, not only for its office, but also for its murals, covering themes like: peace and war, youth issues, and the Titanic. Their presence is also to an extent visible in the UDA murals which remain, through the relationship between the two groups. Although Charter NI and the UDA are not the same organizational entity, they are informally connected in many important ways. Whereas the UDA and the UFF are the armed wings of the paramilitary group, now decommissioned, Charter NI is considered to be the community wing<sup>159</sup>, and has functioned to engage UDA ex-combatants with the wider peace process. Self-described as providing leadership and guidance in this process, they are in a position to engage with UDA leadership over de-militarizing the murals.

Charter's involvement with re-imaging has progressed over time, with varied activity throughout the areas in which it works. Originally focused in regions other than the inner East, they started re-imaging in about 2008<sup>160</sup> engaging in the Art Council's Re-imaging Communities programme for funding. At this time, a number of loyalist paramilitaries had begun to go through a decommissioning process, and re-imaging was seen as timely in that it was also a form of de-militarization. Re-imaging the UDA paramilitary murals, considered to be under the ownership of the armed group, involved their consent to the changes, so part of this overall process involved bringing the armed group on board with the projects. Described as being, until recently, 'the most hardline'<sup>161</sup> Charter NI left the inner East until last to bring it through the re-imaging process, in 2013 launching its own initiative, the Communities Moving Forward Re-imaging Programme, to

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157 Charter NI, Strategic Plan 2013-2015: Together We Can Make This Work! 21.

158 Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:01:00- 00:05:00].

159 Bill Rolston, interviewed by Kirima Isler, part one [00:07:00- 00:08:00].

160 David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:43:45- 00:45:00].

161 Ibid., [00:31:35- 00:40:00].

specifically address murals in the area. Painted in 2012 with support from the Arts Council, the ‘Peace/War’ mural on the lower Newtownards Road is one of the earlier ones in the inner East, and is included in this study. Painted in 2013, the ‘The Past the Now the Future’ mural shares the same wall, and is included in this study as well.

## UVF

The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) is a loyalist paramilitary group that was established in 1966, in response to a “perceived threat from a new IRA plot”<sup>162</sup> to destroy Northern Ireland, and in opposition to the moderately reformist unionist government of the time<sup>163</sup>. Adopting the names and symbols of the “previous UVF which was formed in 1912 to oppose, by armed force, the arrangements for Home Rule in Ireland”<sup>164</sup>, the current UVF has seen itself as being “linked directly to its namesake”<sup>165</sup>, where its central objective has been the defence of “Northern Ireland's constitutional position within the United Kingdom”<sup>166</sup>. In 1972, the UVF went through a process of re-organization, where it was re-structured “along British military lines [...] into companies and battalions across Northern Ireland”<sup>167</sup>, with a central leadership located in West Belfast<sup>168</sup>. It is estimated that although proscribed by the government of Northern Ireland since 1966, its membership peaked in the early 1970s, rising to about approximately 1 500 volunteers<sup>169</sup>. According to the University of Ulster’s Sutton database, one estimate calculates that the UVF and its affiliated groups were responsible for at least 483 killings between 1969 and 2001<sup>170</sup>.

Six weeks following the pivotal 1994 IRA ceasefire, the UVF joined other loyalist paramilitary groups in calling their own official ceasefire, operating under the umbrella organization of the CLMC<sup>171</sup>. It should also be noted that while the UVF has unquestionably been a militaristic organization, like the UDA, they also developed a political wing, becoming closely affiliated with the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), established in 1979, which went on to play a prominent role

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162 Tony Novosel, *Northern Ireland's Lost Opportunity* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 15.

163 Ibid., 11.

164 Martin Melaugh, “Abstracts on Organizations: U”, CAIN Web site (accessed April 27 2015) <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/uorgan.htm>.

165 Bill Rolston, *Drawing Support: Murals and Conflict Transformation* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 2013), iii.

166 Martin Melaugh, “Abstracts on Organizations: U”.

167 Tony Novosel (2013), 30.

168 Bill Rolston, interviewed by Kirima Isler, part one [00:14:45- 00:17:00].

169 Martin Melaugh, “Abstracts on Organizations: U”.

170 Malcolm Sutton, “An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland”, CAIN Web site, 2002 (Accessed April 27 2015) [.http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/tables/Organisation\\_Responsible.html](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/tables/Organisation_Responsible.html).

171 Martin Melaugh, “Abstracts on Organizations: U”.

in the peace process<sup>172</sup> following the ceasefire. In 2007 the UVF issued a statement officially ending its paramilitary campaign, promising to “assume a non-military, civilianised, role.”<sup>173</sup> While claiming to have begun decommissioning its weapons at this time, this process was only confirmed in June 2009, after the organization agreed to engage with the Independent International Commission for Decommissioning. As of 2014, it is thought that their membership is in the low hundreds.

Focusing on their activity in Belfast’s working class neighbourhoods, like the UDA, the UVF have painted paramilitary murals throughout its areas of operation. While many of the UVF’s murals remain throughout these areas, over the past few years, there has been a marked move towards toning down overtly antagonistic images. That said, the UVF have not had to go too far in this process, because linking back to their 1912 namesake, whose volunteers also enlisted en masse to fight in the First World War, the UVF have been able to “overwhelmingly [turn] to the events of the Home Rule Crisis and World War I as inspiration as well as a way to confer legitimacy on the actions of the more recent UVF”<sup>174</sup>. One of these murals is located on the lower Newtownards Road and will be included in this case study. Generally, however, there’s a different dynamic within East Belfast, where the local commander, described as a “headstrong independent freelancer”<sup>175</sup> has ceased following the centralized chain of command, and as a result, the East Belfast Brigade has “been off message on many things”<sup>176</sup>, including its murals. As recently as 2013, many of the UVF’s new murals in East Belfast, and its affiliated areas of operation, have gone particularly militaristic, and in a number of cases involved muralists painting gunmen over previously re-imaged images. Two of these murals will be included in this case study.

### **3.4 Fieldwork methods and background**

Having established the basic outline of my case study, introducing its physical and social environment, the following sections will now turn to consider the development of the study itself, revolving around my role as researcher within the process. To begin, during the summer months of 2014, I had the opportunity to live and work in Belfast as an intern at a cross-community organization whose work focuses on finding ways of dealing with the legacy of the recent conflict

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172 BBC NEWS, “Who are the UVF?” (June 22 2011) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-11313364>.

173 Martin Melaugh, “Abstracts on Organizations: U”.

174 Bill Rolston (2013), iii.

175 Bill Rolston, interviewed by Kirima Isler, part one [00:12:45- 00:14:30].

176 Bill Rolston, interviewed by Kirima Isler, part one [00:14:45- 00:17:00].

in and about Northern Ireland. The experience of both the internship, and living in the city, hugely shaped my research strategy, not only by directing my focus, but also through ultimately influencing my choice of case study, as well as informing the methods by which I would later collect data.

Although it was for only a short period of time, this experience was extremely beneficial in that it did expose me to some of the nuances of the current context, complicating my notions of locality, as well as grounding my understandings of conflict transformation as being temporally non-linear and diversely experienced. In particular, the time I spent in the city provided me with a degree of local knowledge and contributed to a better understanding of how the city was physically and socially organized, noticeably along communal and class lines, as well as the varying activities through which this system of organization was being reinterpreted, transformed, or reinforced, from government strategy through to the activities of localized social organizations and individual public figures. Additionally, being a relatively small city, I was able to walk through much of Belfast and experience this organization first hand, which allowed me to get a glimpse into what these divisions meant in an everyday sense. Living in Belfast during the summer months also meant that I was witness to heightened tensions, where disputes and dialogue surrounding commemorations, parades, flags and bonfires dominated public discourse and altered the lived experience of the city itself. It was during this time that I chose East Belfast as the site for the case study. There were a number of reasons involved in this choice, but predominantly, it was because I found the area's dynamics revealing of broader social trends. There was an interesting tension between practices that expressed varying levels of commitment towards the peace process and the new government, while at the same time, there was evidence of the continuation of conflict, with the area hosting a number of riots as well as recently painted paramilitary murals.

Broadly speaking, the initial objective of my research project had been to examine the various ways in which the predominate social groupings within Northern Ireland currently express, perform and mark their narratives in public space, and consider what this meant for the peace process. Limiting the study to mural re-imaging programmes undertaken by residents in a working-class and predominantly Protestant area, I had intended to explore the intra-group dynamics of negotiating representation, and the ways in which it potentially complicated the assumed parameters of communal identity. Ultimately, I wanted to identify whether these agentic processes, and their

material manifestations, challenged a wider system of transition that is primarily based on assumed group alignment, and with what consequence.

My research objective adjusted as I failed to come across documents that would allow me to significantly engage with intra-group discourses surrounding the murals. I found that the difficulty in obtaining material which documented working-class engagement on a grassroots level was itself a relevant find in that it indicated a need to look more closely at the broader power relations in the area, and to reconsider what ‘community representation’ meant in this context. As the centrality of the organizations facilitating these processes became more and more apparent, the thesis adjusted from exploring plurality and modes of agency within social groups, to understanding the channels through which perspectives, interests and narratives continue to be transmitted. The final outcome of these developments was an exploratory study which aimed to consider these issues by looking at the political wall murals along the lower Newtownards Road in East Belfast, for their work on public space and social identity, and importantly, for opening up the political projects and interests behind them, aiming to study the ways in which the significance of the murals is acknowledged, framed and operationalised by both state and societal bodies within the context of wider peace processes.

### **Identifying and collecting data: murals and interviews**

The shift in direction offered me a degree of flexibility in my approach to data selection; concentrating on the use of murals to study the dynamics and mechanics of social and political relationships, the scope of research expanded beyond local residents, to include a range of organizations and other individuals. As the range of potentially relevant organizations broadened, the question of which ones to focus on became less precise, and the option to conduct interviews became feasible. With the intention to use both the murals and interviews as my primary sources of data, I worked to develop a reflexive process between the two materials, where the selection of murals would delineate which social organizations were within the scope of my research, and the interviews from the selected organizations would then contribute to the final sample of murals for textual analysis.

Having decided to use the lower Newtownards Road as the site for my case study, the street itself served as my starting point for data collection, the only criteria for determining which murals would

be included in my sample was that it had to be located on the street, or on an intersecting corner. Before leaving Belfast at the end of August, I was able to photograph the twenty-five or so murals along the length of the street, and from that sample, I was later able to develop a list of the organizations associated with these murals, a number of which stood out as having a noticeable presence on the road. They were: the UDA, and its associated community development organization Charter NI, the UVF, the East Belfast Historical and Cultural Society (EBHCS), described as being a “grassroots organization that operates within its own community [...] to build awareness of shared heritage [...] remember the fallen”<sup>177</sup> and celebrate unionist and loyalist culture, and the EBP. Various departments of the state, the Belfast City Council, and the EU, although less obvious, were also found to be present, noted on plaques indicating which murals were funded through various re-imaging programmes.

Similar to the previous difficulties encountered in searching for documents, there were restrictions as to whom I could interview. Of this smaller sample, the UVF, an active paramilitary group in the area, were not a feasible option. Additionally, while EBHCS had a noticeable presence on the street, and I could find reference to its various activities in a number of sources, they no longer had a working website, or at least, one that was accessible to the public, and I could not find any central contact information for the organization itself. These limitations were in themselves not only informative, further guiding my understanding of the types and levels of involvement that the various organizations had in the area, but played a practical part in delineating the field and establishing a list of relevant candidates to interview.

At the end of my summer internship, I had made plans to return to Belfast to conduct further fieldwork in November. During this second trip, I was able to conduct five semi-structured interviews, three of which were set up through direct correspondence, and two were set up through other contacts. Due to the nature of my research, and the public profile of those interviewed, anonymity was not a necessary condition of participation. These interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. From the above-mentioned list, I met with Maggie A., who is the Regeneration Manager for EBP’s Neighbourhood Renewal Programme in inner East Belfast; David S., CEO of Charter NI; and Sam W., head of Charter NI’s current ‘Communities Moving Forward’ re-imaging programme.

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<sup>177</sup> Lee A. Smithey (2011), 156.

Seeking further insight concerning the use of rituals and symbols in public space, on both the local and state level, where government presence is found in the funding and regulation of these practices, I conducted two additional interviews with influential academics in the field; Dominic Bryan, a professor and the Director of Institute of Irish Studies at Queen's University in Belfast; and Bill Rolston, a professor and the Director of the Transitional Justice Institute at the University of Ulster in Belfast. While not directly related to the murals currently along the road, they were valuable assets to include in my sample, for reasons I will now briefly explain. Bryan has worked extensively on "how identities are constructed within public space through participation in rituals and the displays of symbols"<sup>178</sup>, as well as on "the policy implications of the way public space is utilised and how it influences people's identity"<sup>179</sup>, and his work has contributed to shaping policy in this area. Rolston is well known for his research on Northern Ireland's political murals, which dates back into the 1980s. More generally, "his research interests have been in the areas of popular political culture, in particular, wall murals; [and] community and voluntary politics in Northern Ireland"<sup>180</sup>. He is now part of the steering group for Charter NI's currently in-progress re-imaging programme.

In addition to these five interviews, I had also met with Sean K., the current director of ACNI's Re-Imaging Programme back in August, and at that time conducted an informal interview, noted but not recorded. While he was a new member of the re-imaging team, and hence had not been involved in any of the murals in the area, he was nonetheless able to provide some insight as to how ACNI is present in these processes, and for that reason, his interview has also been included, bringing the total to six.

My strategy concerning the interviews was to allow them to develop through conversation, starting from practical questions concerning the individual and their knowledge of their organization, while also using the street's murals as a talking point to structure the discussions. Additionally, with the objective of maintaining a level of consistency across the six interviews, I had a list of guiding questions and themes that I referred to develop the conversations. Across the board, the interviews were positive experiences, all of the individuals appeared to be fairly open and willing to

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178 "Institute for Collaborative Research in the Humanities," *Queen's University Belfast*. (Accessed November 10, 2014) <http://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/InstituteforCollaborativeResearchintheHumanities/StaffProfiles/DrDominicBryan/>.

179 Ibid.,

180 "Transitional Justice Institute." *University of Ulster*. Accessed November 10, 2014. [http://www.transitionaljustice.ulster.ac.uk/staff\\_profiles/bill\\_rolston.html](http://www.transitionaljustice.ulster.ac.uk/staff_profiles/bill_rolston.html).

participate, and all of them offered me future assistance if needed. I conducted the interviews at the individual's place of work, with the exception of the Dominic and Bill, whom I met with at a university café. Regarding the duration of the interviews, they ranged from approximately an hour to an hour and a half each.

Following qualitative methods found in contemporary peace research<sup>181</sup>, I worked with the materials reflexively: I went through the interviews to identify which of the street's twenty-five murals featured prominently in the conversations, and from that, came up with three sets, three from the UVF, two from EBP and two and a tableau from UDA. The results of this process then informed the selection of supporting documents, such as policy documents or reports. From this data-gathering process, I then developed an interpretive style of analysis through which to engage with the murals and the interviews. Progressively developing the project findings through a flexible interchange between the materials, I sought to acknowledge my presence as a researcher within this process, and account for the ways in which any understandings generated from the interviews or through the murals, was unavoidably influenced by my knowledge of the other. Such intertextuality is, after all, an integral dimension of the murals themselves, how they function, and how they are used; working with this given quality, the flexible methodology and interpretive style of analysis suited both the materials and the subject itself.

### **3.5 Hypothesis and limitations**

Looking at political wall murals along the lower Newtownards Road is one way of looking at the dynamics of social and political relationships within the current peace process, of their re-definition, as well as the effects of certain strategies in working towards a 'shared future'. This approach is based off of the argument that murals contain a stock of symbolic capital, which is a form of political currency, and thus provide social groups with a means of defining a public position, of legitimizing and representing themselves in a public space, and I intend to do this in three steps. First, by studying the murals as visual statements and as cultural artefacts, I will be able to explore how the various organizations situate themselves in the local environment, and publicly (re)define their role within the public sphere. Following that, I will then proceed to study the processes involved in the production of the murals, in effect studying the ways in which the various

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<sup>181</sup> Karen Brounéus, "In-depth Interviewing: the Process, Skill and Ethics of Interviews in Peace Research," in *Understanding Peace Research: Methods and Challenges*, ed. Kristine Höglund and Magnus Öberg (London: Routledge, 2011), 131.

organizations interact with the broader social and political environment. And lastly, I will then combine the above two steps, looking at the murals as both products of representation and as processes of interaction, with the intention of generating insight into the relational dynamics between these organizations, as expressed in public space. This line of exploration will allow me to reflect on how, in the context of transition, shifting frames of representation and communal belonging are being negotiated through a set of power relationships, and with what consequence. These three stages will involve engaging with a variety of sources, ranging from photographs and observational material gathered through fieldwork, through to public documents, organizational publications, social media sites, and news reports.

Before moving on to the next chapter, it is necessary to discuss some of this study's limitations, regarding both the analysis of materials and the transferability of findings. Subjectivity is an unavoidable aspect of this type of qualitative research in that the reading of any cultural or social communication is partial to the position of the reader. It is important to stress that my interpretations of the murals as texts, the interviews, and supporting documents are grounded in the vantage point of my own experiences. For example, my role as a student of peace research has been an influential factor in shaping my objectives and mediating my frames of understandings, as has been my position in relation to the subject itself. An outsider to the situation, I have worked to develop the scope of my local knowledge and of what is contextually significant as it pertains to the material under consideration, however, no amount of fieldwork can equate to the lived experience of an insider. Nevertheless, these issues of subjectivity and externality are neither necessarily problematic nor constraining. If properly acknowledged and reflexively engaged with, they can prove to be assets throughout the research process, useful lenses through which to guide and enhance strategies of investigation. Different perspectives engender different questions, and in a case such as Northern Ireland, where conflict has been generated and perpetuated in part through the naturalization of particularistic worldviews, an external position, with its own set of preconceptions, offers potentially constructive deviation from what may otherwise be taken for granted.

A second limitation concerns the scope of the project itself and the transferability of its findings. The case study is looking at a specific site with particular social dynamics involving a particular set of organizations; the findings will reflect this, and should not be expected to cover the complexity of socio-political relationships for the whole of Northern Ireland. As the claims made regarding this

case study are particular to the site and to my readings, I do not wish to overstate their significance. That being said, a characteristic of the case study is its capacity to develop a depth of understanding that can be difficult to obtain through a wider breadth of investigation. A close study of a handful of murals and the processes behind them, with the examination of a number of in-depth interviews, offers insight into the nuances of complex social processes and the multiplicities of lived experiences. From a limited scope of research, it is possible to highlight important elements and identify particular patterns that in turn can then generate understandings regarding broader social circumstances; in this, their value should not be underestimated.

## Chapter 4. Murals: Social Significance and Changing Functions

### 4.1 Understanding the murals as cultural artefacts

An acknowledged “facet of unofficial custom that is rooted in the cultural landscapes and narratives of local and politicized identit[ification]”<sup>182</sup>, Northern Ireland’s murals have gradually become an established, if at times controversial, media of informal political and cultural expression, and the ways in which they offer insight into their contemporary political and social realities has been well explored. Articulations of political processes, they are social objects: cultural artefacts as well as art, whose visual displays and material presence, when considered collectively, “provide an important record that renders significant insights into the complicated history [...] of Northern Ireland as it has passed from a state of war to the unstable and as yet precarious ‘peace process’”<sup>183</sup>. The purpose of this chapter is to consider what insights can be rendered through an analysis of the murals along the lower Newtownards, primarily exploring how the aforementioned organizations situate themselves within the local environment, and publicly define their role within the public sphere. To do this, I will first provide a general overview of the murals as discussed in the literature, establishing a frame through which to understand them as cultural artefacts and after that, how they can be read as coded texts through a brief discussion on how symbols work. Keeping these insights in mind, the second section will turn to the murals of the case study, serving to analyse their images and interpret their significance. Finally, the chapter will end with a discussion on the findings, establishing some points that I will then carry forward to next chapter, concerning their value to those who produce and use them.

As a subject of study, Belfast’s political wall murals have been extensively covered throughout the years, and what becomes clear when reviewing the literature is that there are numerous vantage points from which to consider them, and varying frames through which to conceptualize their social and political significance. Studied against the changing context of the conflict, as well as its subsequent peace processes, the murals have been and continue to be, interpreted through particular lenses that have progressed along with the social realities of the given time. When considered together, the resulting body of work provides an additional perspective on the changing contextual circumstances of their production and the “complex discourses of power”<sup>184</sup> in which the murals

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182 Peter Shirlow, *The End of Ulster Loyalism?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 160.

183 Tony Crowley, "Hegemonic Shifts: The Latest from the Walls of Northern Ireland," *Estudios Irlandeses: Journal of Irish Studies* [online] no. 10 (2015): 58.

184 Debbie Lisle, "Local Symbols, Global Networks: Rereading the Murals of Belfast," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 31: 1 (January 2006): 29.

participate. Keeping this potential diversity of interpretation in mind, I will now outline the key points that I have drawn from this work, with the intention of developing a working understanding of the murals' contemporary significance and how to understand them as cultural texts within a changing political context<sup>185</sup>. This objective is directed by the understanding that undergoing varying processes of replacement throughout the conflict and peace processes, the murals are a dynamic rather than fixed subject to study, changing in both form and function. Furthermore, as culturally constructed artefacts, they not only reflect broader political processes, but are also interventions, performances that interact with their physical and social environment<sup>186</sup>.

### **The mural as an expression of power**

To begin, I start with the basics: understanding the murals as visual statements. A foundational base to any vantage point when studying the murals is the acknowledgement that they are particular statements produced by particular social groups and organizations. Notably, although the murals “have been painted for over the best part of a century, it has been the predominance of paramilitary images and symbols on the walls in recent years that have come to define the essences of contemporary mural painting”<sup>187</sup>. The murals are thus characterized by their close connection to paramilitary culture; for the ways in which these organizations are “the product and the constituent part of an ongoing political struggle”<sup>188</sup>, the murals are consequently situated within the “wider political culture of both Irish republicanism and Ulster loyalism”<sup>189</sup>. This is of course with exception, as over the past decade their patronage has expanded to allow other localized community groups to produce murals or art pieces on the walls as well. For the most part, these have occurred through a variety of re-imagining, or neighbourhood renewal programmes aimed to address the continuing presence of sectarian imagery in public spaces, and have primarily been funded by governmental departments and/or local councils.

Regardless of the sponsor, the production or even removal of a mural is a conscious act of visual intervention in the public sphere; communicating some message contingent to contextual circumstances, each is political. Furthermore, in that to paint a mural is to “demonstrate control over

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185 Jonathan McCormick, and Neil Jarman, "Death of a Mural," *Journal Of Material Culture* 10, no. 1 (March 2005): 51.

186 Tony Crowley (2015): 64.

187 Jonathan McCormick, and Neil Jarman (2005):49.

188 Ibid., 50.

189 Ibid., 50.

space and place”<sup>190</sup>; “the ability to paint a mural is an expression of power that an organization has within a given geographic location”<sup>191</sup>, as is its’ ability to protect, maintain or replace them. BILL ROLSTON has extensively chronicled the temporal developments in both republican and loyalist murals, and through this work has shown how the murals and their statements can be read as acting as “a sort of barometer of political ideology”<sup>192</sup>, where they not only express certain narratives, but also “reveal the current status of [...] political beliefs”<sup>193</sup>. As such, they are not ‘community art’ and should not be assumed to be representative of, nor supported by, the residents living in their locality, regardless of their political or cultural affiliation. This is not to say that there is not support for them, but that the murals, paramilitary murals in particular, tend to “provoke opposition as much as they generate support, even though such opposition is often muted [...] in contrast to the strident declarations of the painting”<sup>194</sup>.

### **The mural as both image and artefact**

Focusing on the content of the murals as a form of visual communication, what then follows is the question of the medium’s performance. This issue has been widely addressed throughout much of the literature, as a large proportion of attention has concentrated on studying the symbolic content of the murals in relation to their functionality and the ways in which their sponsors have used them at various points in time. Grounded in the ‘two-communities’ logic, researchers have tended to study the murals comparatively. Noting similarities and differences between murals produced on either the loyalist or the republican side of the ideological divide, it has been widely acknowledged that the extent to which the paramilitary groups controlled the murals’ content differed between loyalists and republicans, as did the function and the evolution of the tradition itself<sup>195</sup>. It is important to clarify, due to this variation, that from this point on, the discussion will revolve around murals located within designated Protestant areas.

What is highlighted throughout much of this work is the mural’s value as a vehicle for exhibiting political aspirations, signalling and legitimizing paramilitary power, claiming the territorial ownership of space, and importantly, as a part of “boundary setting processes that produce a sense

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190 Jonathan McCormick, and Neil Jarman (2005): 50.

191 Ibid., 54.

192 Bill Rolston (1992) *Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland*. Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, url: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/bibdb/murals/rolston1.htm>.

193 Ibid.

194 Jonathan McCormick, and Neil Jarman (2005): 50-51.

195 This is particularly well chronicled in Bill Rolston’s series *Drawing Support*, whose four volumes are entitled: *Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland*; *Murals of War and Peace*; *Murals and Transition in the North of Ireland*; *Murals and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland*.

of social cohesion and historical integrity”<sup>196</sup>. Contextualized within the conflict, the murals have mediated the cognitive boundaries of an imagined community which has not only reflected, but bolstered, pre-existing sectarian divisions by simultaneously enacting parameters of “inclusion, belonging and membership”<sup>197</sup> while also projecting antagonistic “messages of exclusion and intimidation”<sup>198</sup>. Functioning as particular statements, each mural has been produced with the intention of addressing an audience. Located in working class residential areas, the murals have predominantly been placed in the heart of paramilitary territory<sup>199</sup>, and “for most of the period of the conflict, the murals were for the local community: they spoke inwards, they didn’t speak outwards”<sup>200</sup>. Intimidating imagery of gunmen and their insignia therefore not only served to warn ‘outsiders’, but have also served to threaten disciplinary action against deviance ‘from within’, while also letting local residents know who ruled the area<sup>201</sup>. In this sense, the murals effectively functioned to enhance a sense of conformity; signalling similarity and difference, they have expressed “what it means to identify with an ethnic category”<sup>202</sup> and not with another, “basically sort of saying: ‘this is the line, are you one of us?’”<sup>203</sup>.

Building upon all of this, a second layer to their significance is the factor of materiality<sup>204</sup>, an important dimension whose now widespread recognition can be largely credited to the work of anthropologist NEIL JARMAN. In so much as the mural exists as a cultural artefact within a physical and relational environment, the matter of its content and how it is produced and interpreted is interconnected with the question of its context. From here it can be argued that the murals are socially significant not only in terms of what is communicated through their visual displays, but also in terms of their material performance where, as sites of articulation they are physical markers that have been and continue to be, an organizing feature of urban landscapes, emplacing social boundaries, categorizing place and signifying localized power structures. In recognizing that “an extension of their significance is generated by a semiotic dynamic which involves the images taking meaning from their location, and their location in turn having a differing significance because of the

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196 Lee A. Smithey, *Unionists, Loyalists, and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 27.

197 Debbie Lisle (2006): 38.

198 Ibid.

199 Bill Rolston, interviewed by Kirima Isler, part two [00:10:50- 00:12:00].

200 Ibid., [00:10:50- 00:12:00].

201 Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter ND), [00:12:50- 00:14:00].

202 Lee A. Smithey (2011), 29.

203 Bill Rolston, interviewed by Kirima Isler, part two [00:14:25].

204 Neil Jarman, “Painting the Landscape: the place of murals in the symbolic construction of urban space,” in *Symbols in Northern Ireland*, edited by Anthony Buckley (Belfast: Queen’s University, Institute of Irish Studies, 1998), 81.

painting”<sup>205</sup>, the murals can then be understood to be symbols in their own right<sup>206</sup>, with the capacity to “redefine mundane public space as politicized place”<sup>207</sup>.

### **Changing context, changing role**

Since the beginning of the peace process in the mid-1990s, there have been numerous developments concerning their production and reception that have further complicated and diversified the investigation and “interpretation of contemporary murals in terms of audience, design and function”<sup>208</sup>. These developments have been well documented, and it is worth mentioning a few here. Firstly, following the 1994 ceasefire, a considerable amount of new murals went up, some in areas already ‘dense’ with imagery, creating “a complex stratigraphy of ideological design”<sup>209</sup>, and some in newly significant, more outward-looking locations as well; this resulted in even greater physical and virtual visibility. At this point in time, the murals were already widely reproduced and circulated by the media, as they had come to be broadly recognized as being signifiers of the conflict as well as indicators of place, and had come to constitute a sort of mediascape for the conflict<sup>210</sup>. Set in this context, the increase in murals and the appropriation of new spaces can be read as reflecting a directional shift in communication, in which murals became a “more self-conscious means by which to propagandise to a wider audience”<sup>211</sup>. This development not only provided their sponsors with an indirect means of maintaining a visible presence within the now wider, changing, socio-political context, but also allowed them to remain anchored to local places.

A second development, already mentioned, has been the gradual introduction of governmental initiatives aimed at promoting good relations through transforming visible signs of sectarianism, covering issues like contentious murals, graffiti, flags and emblems. These efforts have highlighted the need to work in partnership with local community groups and progressed in an ad hoc fashion, largely directed by local realities and expectations of what could be achieved within particular contexts<sup>212</sup>. In 2004, government involvement became more formalized and coordinated with the

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205 Neil Jarman (1998), 81.

206 Ibid., 82.

207 Ibid., 86.

208 Tony Crowley (2015): 61.

209 Neil Jarman (1998), 87.

210 Ibid., 88.

211 Ibid., 89.

212 Dominic Bryan and Gordon Gillespie, *Transforming conflict: Flags and emblems* (Belfast: Queen’s University, Institute of Irish Studies, 2005), 34.

NIHE's newly established Community Cohesion Unit<sup>213</sup>, which two years later "joined forces [with Belfast City Council] and established a permanent team to negotiate mural replacement"<sup>214</sup>. Governmental participation in re-imaging was then institutionalized in the ACNI's 2007 Reimaging Communities Programme, whose opening phase "provided £4 million to encourage communities to replace the more offensive murals with more acceptable themes"<sup>215</sup>, primarily targeting the more militaristic loyalist murals.

Overall, these initiatives have tended to side-step potentially provocative subject matter, avoiding direct reference to the recent conflict, as well as any explicitly political representations. Over the past decade, these developments have resulted in "the landscape of murals [...] chang[ing] radically"<sup>216</sup> and importantly, it has also shaped the relational dynamics surrounding their production. This can be seen in the programme's development of collaborative practices and the negotiation of content. These programmes are not obligatory, but instead offer community groups the incentive of financial assistance to re-image contentious murals. In order to qualify for funding, the group has to develop a proposal that meets a set of criteria developed to guide planning and differentiate between what the ACNI has call 'legitimate expressions of culture' and 'redundant' sectarian imagery<sup>217</sup>. Requiring varying levels of consultation with local residents and identified stakeholders, the programme can also be viewed as being a structured attempt to not only bring a range of organizations and interests together to discuss the murals, but also as a means of defining who needs to be included in the process as a stakeholder. Another related development involves the diversification of the artists themselves; the community group may recommend their preferred artist but ultimately the artist is selected through an open and competitive application process. This means that while the artist works to keep the project grounded in the locality<sup>218</sup>, following a brief generated through local consultations, they no longer need to have any local connections themselves.

An additional evolution concerning production and reception has been that as the threat and experience of violence gradually lessened, areas that had previously been closed began to open up. This has allowed for greater access to the murals on site, for those who would seek them out, as

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213 Bill Rolston, "Re-imaging: Mural Painting and the State in Northern Ireland," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 15 (2012): 453.

214 Ibid.

215 Bill Rolston, *Drawing Support: Murals and Conflict Transformation* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 2013), ii.

216 Ibid.

217 Independent Research Solutions, *Evaluation of the Re-Imaging Communities Programme: A Report to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Northern Ireland Arts Council, 2009), 3.

218 Sean K. (Programme Manager for ACNI's Building Peace Through the Arts: Re-Imaging Communities) Interviewed by Kirima Isler, Belfast, UK, August 29 2014.

well as for commuters simply passing by. This has been particularly significant for the development of mural tourism, and the recognition of their potential monetary value. Widely recognized as a “feature of the local culture of war”<sup>219</sup>, murals have become sites of attractions for “a burgeoning heritage industry that brings tourists to very specific parts”<sup>220</sup> of the city through various tours and printed guides.

The extent to which all of this has affected the murals, their designs or performance is hardly straightforward and is decidedly varied. What is clear is that the muralists and their sponsors are aware of these developments and while this can be expected to “have had an effect on the form and content of artwork in particular locations”<sup>221</sup>, “the predominate reason for painting murals is [still] for local consumption”<sup>222</sup>. Their continuing local significance is evident in both the continuing debate and complexities revolving around re-imaging<sup>223</sup>, as well as the mural content itself. That being said, rather than interpret “a consistency of meaning over time”<sup>224</sup>, following a pre-existing narrative of how murals continue to participate in processes of social demarcation, it is important to situate the murals and their symbolic, spatial, and relational significance within the changing socio-political environment, and following MCCORMICK & JARMAN’S argument, put forward in their article, *Death of the Mural*, question how their role in these processes may change<sup>225</sup>. This line of inquiry is reflected in more recent work surrounding the murals, as some commentators have begun to assess the mural’s changing significance through the conceptual frame of conflict transformation, with the intention of identifying and assessing activities that either contribute or impede the transformation of destructive relationship patterns<sup>226</sup>. Considered in this light, the murals offer a window “into a critical process in conflict transformation: changing perceptions of the conflict and softening out-group boundaries”<sup>227</sup>, and can be considered to constitute a mechanism for reshaping attitudes and reframing relationships in modest, but important ways<sup>228</sup>.

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219 Neil Jarman (1998), 90.

220 Tony Crowley (2015): 59.

221 Ibid.

222 Bill Rolston, interviewed by Kirima Isler, part two[ 00:14:25].

223 Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI) Interviewed by Kirima Isler, Belfast, UK, November 21 2014, [00:30:00].

224 Jonathan McCormick, and Neil Jarman (2005): 51.

225 Ibid., 51.

226 Lee A. Smithey (2011), 31.

227 Ibid., 78.

228 Ibid., 110.

Grounded in the understanding that the murals not only articulate, but also “play a role in the construction of larger social trends and patterns”<sup>229</sup>, it has been argued that “while murals are [still] a part of the process of embedding memory within the wider social community, they are not being used as they were, instead they are part of a process of revision of social identity”<sup>230</sup>. Through “incrementally redefining collective identities in ways that maintain continuity and yet, are less polarizing”<sup>231</sup>, the re-imagining of murals offer their sponsors the potential to significantly contribute to restructuring categories of identification. Through experimenting with what it means to belong to a specific social group, they can work to modify the premise on which social groups relate. What’s more, in navigating new structural circumstances, organizations can employ the murals as a vehicle through which to strategize and negotiate new practices of constructive opposition as they develop the capacity to “organize effectively and non-violently around collective interests”<sup>232</sup>. Transitioning from “defensive and coercive modes of operation [...] for more persuasive and diplomatic ones”<sup>233</sup>, these organizations can thus attempt to meaningfully and pragmatically locate themselves within the contemporary political sphere. This work has been documented, to varying degrees, in the changing appearance of murals, and the narratives that they reference. In particular, there has been a noticed trend towards re-historicizing, where there seems to be a growing practice of “represent[ing] not just key foundational moments [...] but perspectives on the more recent past”<sup>234</sup> as well. This practice is fundamentally linked to wider processes of ‘revising social identity’ in that categories of identification are in part “constituted in a circular processes between past, present and future”<sup>235</sup>.

### **A discussion on symbols**

So far, I have established that the murals function through symbolic modes of visual communication and material performance, and that interpreting their meaning necessarily involves an analysis of both content and context. Focusing on the murals as coded texts that can be read, it is worthwhile to discuss basic ways in which symbols work before beginning the analysis. An important place to start is acknowledging that symbols do not have innate meanings, but are given them and in turn they provide people with a vehicle through which to make and communicate meaning<sup>236</sup>. A symbol

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229 Tony Crowley (2015): 65.

230 Jonathan McCormick, and Neil Jarman (2005): 51.

231 Lee A. Smithey (2011), 78.

232 Ibid., 44.

233 Ibid., 51.

234 Ibid., 67.

235 Susanne Buckley-Zistel (2006): 17.

236 Anthony D. Buckley (1998), 14.

is something that is used to “clarify some aspect of the world, [to draw] attention to either the way the world is or the way it should be, or perhaps both”<sup>237</sup>, however, it is important to recognize that every symbol offers only partial views of reality and that “every conjured up world is pregnant with its opposite”<sup>238</sup>; while symbols may be used to define a state of affairs through a particular lens, they can also be used to “provide alternative visions, to subvert such given states of understanding”<sup>239</sup>. Additionally, any given symbol has “layers of meaning [...] Different people will invoke different meanings in the same symbol”<sup>240</sup>, and these meanings are themselves subject to change over time and are “dependant upon the context in which they are used”<sup>241</sup>. In this way, the intended message will not always be the message received, and while variation is not limitless, every interpretation is ultimately grounded in “the vantage-point of [a person’s] own situatedness”<sup>242</sup> and depends on “the different kinds of knowledge that is invested in an image”<sup>243</sup>.

In that a symbol allows for a range of possible interpretations, they can appeal to a broad range of people and in this way can be used by agents of change<sup>244</sup> “to represent, invoke or imagine a diverse community”<sup>245</sup>. Directing means of interpretation, and structuring knowledge, they can thus inform and mediate cognitive frameworks of identification, and provide a focal point through which to express belonging. Such symbols are often associated with narratives, and are often “items taken out of a myth or a history”<sup>246</sup>. “Embedded in time and space, [and] constituted by causal employment”<sup>247</sup>, narratives organize life, and “structures our experiences of practice”<sup>248</sup>. In times of political instability and significant social change, established narratives and their “symbols can be the bridge between the past and the future”<sup>249</sup>, whose use can provide a social group with a sense of continuity and ontological security, while simultaneously providing them with an “imprimatur for change”<sup>250</sup>. On its own, a symbol’s image “does not signify a great deal. Its important lies in the

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237 Ibid., 4.

238 Ibid., 10

239 Ibid., 12

240 Dominic Bryan and Gordon Gillespie (2005), 13.

241 Ibid., 13.

242 Susanne Buckley-Zistel (2006): 12.

243 Tony Schirato and Jen Webb, *Understanding the Visual* (London: SAGE, 2004), 90.

244 Fredrik Barth (1969), 25.

245 Dominic Bryan and Gordon Gillespie (2005), 13.

246 Anthony D. Buckley (1998), 9.

247 Margaret R. Somers, “The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach,” *Theory and Society* 23, no. 5 (1994): 616.

248 Tony Schirato and Jen Webb (2004), 96.

249 Bill Rolston, “‘Trying to reach the future through the past’: Murals and memory in Northern Ireland,” *Crime Media Culture* 6, no. 3 (2010): 285.

250 Bill Rolston (2011): 300.

way [it] draws attention to a narrative [...] which is relevant to present realities”<sup>251</sup>. A social group’s stories, myths and symbols form a repertoire of shared understandings and together, they narrate and translate particular perspectives of the past in ways that grant significance to its present. Contributing to the construction of worldviews, such narratives “help [social] groups make sense out of daily life and provide psychologically meaningful accounts of [social] group’s relationships with other groups, [and institutions], their actions and their motives”<sup>252</sup>. And it is through this capacity to resonate meaning to particular audiences that symbols have the power to evoke emotions and even influence action.

From this, it is clear that symbols form a “fundamental part of people’s emotional attachment, as individuals, to political [and social] groups”<sup>253</sup> and are, as a result, closely linked to politics and power<sup>254</sup>. The ways in which symbolic objects and images are “produced and displayed [...] tell us a great deal about what sort of meanings (or stories) are dominant, and who has the power in the community”<sup>255</sup>. A useful perspective through which to understand symbols for their political dimension is to view them as containing a stock of symbolic capital, where “they are effectively ‘political currency’ [...] [that] can be utilised by a range of people if they are seen as legitimate representatives of the symbols”<sup>256</sup>. When someone uses a symbol in a “way to define (or disrupt a definition of) a state of affairs, it is only because politically [...], [they] can get away with it”<sup>257</sup>. The strategies through which symbols can be manipulated, effecting the distribution of symbolic capital, is a dimension of wider political conflict, and will be explored in the sixth chapter. Ultimately, as it concerns this chapter, the question of power and the ways in which a symbol is used as a political resource is a contextual factor that has to be considered when interpreting the mural’s content: the status of who is to communicating fundamentally affects the message as well as its reception.

To conclude this section, Belfast’s murals can be likened to a form of advertising, tending to be unambiguous, their “content delineate[ing] to a specific audience and demand[ing] only a brief

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251 Anthony D. Buckley (1998), 9.

252 Lee A. Smithey (2011), 12.

253 Dominic Bryan and Gordon Gillespie (2005), 16.

254 Anthony D. Buckley (1998), 13.

255 Tony Schirato and Jen Webb (2004), 59.

256 Dominic Bryan and Gordon Gillespie (2005), 15.

257 Anthony D. Buckley (1998), 16.

cognitive engagement”<sup>258</sup>. The symbols they contain are invested with particular meanings, referencing well-known stories in ways that speak to present day circumstances, hoping to sell the audience on particular social dramas. On this level, it is clear that they do not just work “discursively [...] but at the level of the subconscious [...] [they] are a sensate rather than purely intellectual means of communication”<sup>259</sup>. Taking this into account when reading them as coded texts, their analysis will therefore not only “involve identifying signs and analysing how they come together to make up a text within its contexts”<sup>260</sup> but also account “for the cultural and personal acts of looking and interpreting”<sup>261</sup> that any viewer, including myself as a researcher, bring to the texts.

#### **4.2 Interpreting the murals as emplaced narratives**

Concentrating on the sample of murals included in this case study, this section serves to analyse their images and interpret their significance. The findings are presented in three separate parts, each one focusing on the displays of a particular organization. Photographs of all of the murals can be found towards the back of the document, in the appendix.

#### **UDA and Charter NI: Freedom Corner and Looking Towards a Better Future**

The UDA’s tableau of murals, dubbed Freedom Corner, has become an iconic space on the lower Newtownards Road. Originally painted over thirty years ago<sup>262</sup>, it covers four gable ends and five lower garden walls of a residential housing estate and is the largest display included in this study. While over the years these murals have undergone continual restoration and adaptation, the key elements and symbols contained in the original images have been kept and their core messages retained<sup>263</sup>. The preservation of this tableau indicates that it is of particular value to its sponsors; a major factor in a murals’ success, or its status, is the effectiveness of its location, and Freedom Corner has offered the UDA an “extensive frontage on a major thoroughfare [...] to publicise in visual form [their] ideals and aspirations [...] and to confirm their continued presence in the area”<sup>264</sup>. Its longevity also indicates a continuing relevance for its narratives, whose restoration marks “a recognition of the synchronicity of time, place and message”<sup>265</sup>.

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258 Debbie Lisle (2006): 37.

259 Tony Schirato and Jen Webb (2004), 66.

260 Ibid.

261 Ibid.

262 David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:47:00- 00:48:15].

263 Jonathan McCormick, and Neil Jarman (2005): 67-68.

264 Neil Jarman (1998), 95.

265 Jonathan McCormick, and Neil Jarman (2005): 68.

Explicitly a paramilitary mural, Freedom Corner was included among Charter's list of potential sites for re-imaging, however, after having been discussed during the programmes's consultation process, there has been a renewed commitment on the part of the UDA to maintain the tableau and give it a fresh coat of paint<sup>266</sup>. Although this is in part due to a degree of local acceptance for these murals in particular, ultimately, the question of whether the murals stay or go is up to the organization that controls the walls<sup>267</sup>. When asked, both David S. and Sam W. explained that a central reason for why the tableau will remain is that it is "like a tourist attraction"<sup>268</sup>, and that "they probably will come down at some time, but when the time is right. [For now,] they're going to remain there, strictly for- not for associating with the bad old days, or highlighting the organization- but because of the tourism thing"<sup>269</sup>. Importantly, David also pointed to two other reasons, beyond that of tourism, for why Freedom Corner remains locally relevant and will continue to be repainted. Describing the murals as being a "part of our culture" David explained how, as message boards, they "tell a story, part of our historical background- about the armed forces, you know, about the UDA and stuff". Secondly, justifying that "they won't be going no-where [because] there's twenty-three other murals about inner East Belfast that are going"<sup>270</sup>, David articulated an understanding that not only is re-imaging a mural an act of giving something up, but that some murals are worth more than others and are worth keeping. Although these points complicate Sam's claim that the murals are not currently intended as advertising for the UDA, they at the same time offer insight into how, for certain individuals, the meaning and purpose of such propaganda can shift along with contemporary circumstances. Working from these comments, it is clear that as a tableau of murals, the UDA has set Freedom Corner apart from its others in the inner-East, and it is worth asking what sort of historical narratives do they evoke and contribute to? And, what exactly would be given up if they were to be re-imaged?

Looking over the span of images covering these walls, what is immediately visible is that there is a clear line running through them, threading together a story of 'Ulster's Defenders'. The wall introduces the viewer to the 'Past Defenders' (see Figure 1), showcasing a number of state-sanctioned armed groups, such as the all-Protestant USC, an official paramilitary force, formed in

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266 At the time of writing, the entire tableau had been removed with public reassurance that "these mural WILL be replaced with something similar to what is there already", estimated to be completed by July 1st 2015. [Source: Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre's Facebook page, Post for May 27 2015 (Accessed June 2 2015) <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Andy-Tyrie-Interpretive-Centre/854645301262602>.]

267 Bill Rolston, interviewed by Kirima Isler, part two [00:00:06].

268 David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:46:50].

269 Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:57:50].

270 All quotes from David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:46:50- 00:48:15].

1920 during the Irish War of Independence, as well as its 1970 replacement, the UDR, which was a part-time infantry unit of the British army until 1992. Although the UDA and UFF only formed in 1972 and 1973, through these images, the organizations are visually rooted in British military tradition, representing ‘Ulster’s Present Day Defenders’<sup>271</sup>(see below Figure 2). This storyline constitutes an origin myth, where there is an implicit understanding that the UDA/UFF, the USC and the UDR not only share a common lineage, but also a common mission, operating in concerted defence against a familiar enemy, violent Irish republicans. Echoed in David’s explanation, this elevates the status of the unofficial paramilitary group to one of a professional, state sanctioned security force, continuing a legacy reaching back to the formation of Northern Ireland. Furthermore, while state-approved, it is clear that this is also a local legacy; situated against a backdrop of terraced houses, the men of the UDR and the USC were armed to protect the same local homes and streets that were more recently controlled by the East Belfast UDA/UFF.

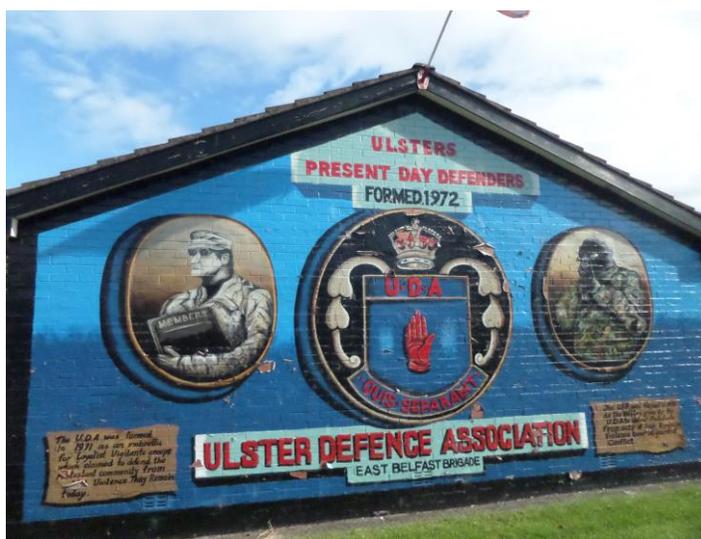


Figure 2: Freedom Corner, Ulster’s Present Day Defenders

Below this top layer, there is a supporting story line that situates these armed groups within a wider frame. Northern Ireland, or Ulster, is a third character in this narrative, and is represented as being historically British and Protestant. This claim is made visible through the use of colours, flags and emblems, but also through the merging together of well-known myths with historical events, such as in Figure 3. Combining the Red Hand of Ulster<sup>272</sup>, landed on a rock, with the readily-identifiable

271 As suggested by Rolston during the interview, ‘present day’ is a bit anachronistic in this setting, having been painted and re-painted over thirty years ago.

272 “A mythical tale wherein two chieftains were racing across a stretch of water in a bid to be the first to reach the land and claim it as his own. Realising his foe would touch the land first, one chieftain cut off his hand and threw it onto the shore, thereby claiming the land before his adversary reached it. The Red Hand is one of the only emblems in Northern Ireland used by both communities in Northern Ireland [...] Catholics see it as representing the nine counties of Ulster while Protestants see it as representing the six counties of Northern Ireland.” (Source: Dara Mulhern, “Symbols Used by Both Traditions” CAIN Web Service, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/images/symbols/crosstrad.htm>)

slogan ‘Rem[ember] 1690’, a widely used reference for a pivotal battle in Northern Ireland’s history<sup>273</sup>, this mural evokes a claim to territory that extends into the realm of mythical tradition. The naturalization of Northern Ireland’s character as inherently British is also identifiable in an interesting twist on the 1320 Declaration of Arbroath<sup>274</sup> (see Figure 4) reading: ‘For as long as one hundred of us remain alive we shall never in anyway submit to the rule of the Irish. For its not for glory honour or riches we fight but for freedom alone which no man loses but with his life. U.D.A./U.F.F.’. Amended to ‘never submit to the rule of the *Irish*’, rather than the original *English*, this version of the declaration simplifies a complicated relationship between Northern Ireland’s Scottish settlers and the English crown, offering instead a picture of historic union between the two.

Lastly, building upon this narrative of military tradition and the defence of British identity, there is one mural that offers an interpretation of the recent conflict and potentially, the ongoing transition. Shown in Figure 5, the mural states: ‘the Ulster conflict is about nationality: this we shall maintain’. Here, the word choice is important as the conflict is written about in the present tense; maintaining the constitutional status of Northern Ireland is an ongoing effort. However, rather than claim the need for defensive action, this is a pledge of conservation. This statement can be read as both an attempt to justify past actions, as well as a limited acknowledgment of the contemporary arrangement, where Ulster’s British-ness has been defended and is now something to be maintained. The UDA’s role in this is further reinforced in the neighbouring mural (see Figure 6) where the UDA and its youth wing, the Young Newtons, are symbolically associated with the Ulster Defence Union, an organized formed during the Home Rule Crisis of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Cumulatively, these murals potentially offer the organization a bridge from the recent past into the transitioning present. This is due to the possibility that for some of its targeted audience, the murals may reinforce a sense of the organization’s credibility as a legitimate and local military force, while also instilling a trust in its continuing, if alternative strategy of ‘defence’. This reading is informed by the presence of two of Charter’s re-imaged murals, located just across the street, whose content sits in stark contrast to the imagery of the tableau. The juxtaposition of the two sets of murals offers an interesting distinction between so-called historic and contemporary imagery. Essentially

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273 1690 is the year that “King William III of Orange (or ‘King Billy’), a Dutchman who was declared sovereign of England, Scotland and Ireland in February 1689, won the Protestant victory over Catholic King James II, a Scotsman who was deposed in December 1688, on 1 July 1690 at the Battle of the Boyne” [Source: Dara Mulhern, “Unionist and Loyalist Symbols” CAIN web service, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/images/symbols/unionloyal.htm>].

274 As explained by Rolston during the interview, the declaration was sent by a group of Scottish Bishops to the Pope in objection to the Vatican’s support for an English ruler in Scotland.

originating from the same organization<sup>275</sup> Charter's two re-imaged murals, which share the same wall, are undeniably an extension of the UDA's older narrative, where they themselves reference this older context, and draw an explicit line between then and the present.

Charter's mural, painted in 2013 and entitled 'The Past the Now the Future' (see below for Figure 8) is literally framing the past and the future through the lenses of a pair of glasses. 'The now' is established in the act of viewing, establishing a standpoint in the present moment by appealing to the individual to look 'towards a better future'. This mural incorporates stories and events that happened in the broader Belfast area, that would have been widely experienced, while also locally significant, and through its imagery, this mural situates Freedom Corner and its 'present day defenders' within a monochromatic past. Framed with the words 'violence, terrorism, conflict, imprisonment', some of the elements found in this past include a UDA show of strength<sup>276</sup>, opposition to the police, and the Ulster Worker's Strike. The East Belfast UDA's presence in these occurrences is underlined by the top mural's quotation (see Figure 7), 'Peace cannot be kept by force, it can only be achieved by understanding'<sup>277</sup> which is replicated on the entrance to the Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre<sup>278</sup>, located just up the road.



Figure 8: *The Past the Now the Future*

275 Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:57:50].

276 Protesting "the imposition of direct rule from Westminster the UDA [...] arranged massive displays of strength on the streets of Belfast during the summer of 1972, when thousands of 'uniformed' members marched through the city centre" (Martin Melaugh).

277 Originally said by Albert Einstein.

278 Associated with Charter NI, the centre's central objective is to display the history and role the UDA played in the conflict, including "the impact the conflict had on loyalist working class communities—in particular East Belfast—how it shaped U.D.A. thinking over the years and how it impacted upon them to turn from Dogs of war into men of peace". (Source: "Andy Tyrrie Interpretive Centre 2012," *Long Kesh: Inside Out* (blog), Accessed June 2 2015. <http://www.longkeshinsideout.co.uk/?p=1181>)

The experiences of the past are then bridged to the colourful and positive imagery of the future with two images, one of Stormont<sup>279</sup> flying a Union Jack in both eras, and the earth, held up by a diversity of individuals. In that ‘the now’ is in this in-between transition, the peaceful future is something to work towards, and its imagery provides clues as to how. Showcasing Belfast City Hall, Queen’s University and the Harland and Wolff cranes<sup>280</sup>, employment, education and politics are highlighted as the means to develop into a multicultural, yet nationally British society. Additionally, this future does not seem to be too distant, and the murals’ figures indicate that it is a generational transition, contrasting the men of the past with the boys of the future. Arguably, Charter NI is also present in this future, in the symbol of a dove guiding the way forwards. A well-known metaphor for peace, the dove is also referential to terminology used leading up to the 1994 ceasefire, and the following peace processes. Referencing the dove, the mural draws on a local narrative regarding “a deep fracturing within loyalism between those who wished to transform and those who wished to maintain violent conflict and criminality”<sup>281</sup>. In this context, ‘the doves’ are automatically situated in contrast to ‘the hawks’, the spoilers and wreckers of the peace process who viewed it as an act of betrayal. Understood in this light, the dove is symbolic of progressive strands of loyalism that seek to maintain their core values and ideologies through cultural and political strategies rather than force. Through re-imagining a previously militant mural, Charter demonstrates its capacity for such transformation, a performance that is documented in the side-plaque noting their cooperation with governmental departments.

Painted a year earlier, the above mural’s binary composition of ‘war’ and ‘peace’ compliments the frames of the past and future. Referencing the locally experienced devastation of the Blitz, this mural points to a discourse of loss but also one of rebuilding and recovery. Additionally, the surrounding poppies are a sign of remembrance, extended to all of the ‘fallen from war’. In this way, although the militancy of paramilitary groups is decidedly left to a dark past, the overall visual effect of these murals, combined, offers those same groups a demonstration of respect in that process of transition.

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279 Northern Ireland’s parliament buildings, located in East Belfast.

280 Located in the east Belfast’s shipyards, the cranes are a local landmark, famously used in the construction of the Titanic.

281 Peter Shirlow (2012), 109.

## **UVF: Carson's Army and the continuing fight**

Similar to the UDA's Freedom Corner, the UVF's mural, 'Our Brave Defenders' (see Figure 9), establishes a historical lineage, tracing its roots back to British military tradition. It is worth noting that painted in 2011<sup>282</sup>, its content has been modified on a number of occasions, notably with the addition of a small memorial plaque in 2012, the re-painting of the bottom-left panel in late 2013, and then the addition of a prayer in late 2014, and it is this most recent version that will be read. 'Our Brave Defenders', as previously mentioned, is representative of a wider trend across Belfast, with the UVF turning to the Home Rule Crisis<sup>283</sup> and the First World War for inspiration when re-imagining many of their older murals. Headed with the title, '36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916' this mural is a pictorial depiction of the Battle of the Somme and the primary story is that of the soldier going into battle, and through tremendous sacrifice, coming through and meeting the angel of victory. In this rendition of events, the angel is backed by the Union Jack; British victory is attributed to the soldiers of the 36<sup>th</sup> Division.

The mural's secondary narrative traces a line of origin further back in time, going from the 36<sup>th</sup> Ulster Division to the contemporary UVF's namesake<sup>284</sup>, nicknamed 'Carson's Army'. This storyline is evoked through the image of Sir Edward Carson, founder of the original 1912 UVF and a locally iconic figure, featured on the bottom-right side of the mural<sup>285</sup>. Having established the UVF "to oppose, by armed force, the arrangements for Home Rule in Ireland"<sup>286</sup>, Carson's figure evokes narratives of loyalty to the crown, but also signifies a complicated and at times oppositional relationship between unionist politicians and the British government. Additionally, Carson's figure is strongly rooted in the Protestant faith, an association the mural reinforces through its rendition of the UVF prayer, placed next to Carson's image. This prayer, handed out to the paramilitary volunteers in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, is a pledge of faith and allegiance to both crown and church, and inscribes onto the bodies and souls of the volunteers the attributes of faith, respectability and

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282 Bill Rolston (2013), 44.

283 "On three occasions in 1886, 1893 and 1912 the British government attempted to introduce legislation providing for a measure of self-government for the whole of Ireland, known as 'Home Rule'. Whilst largely welcomed by Irish Nationalists, the proposals were completely opposed by Unionist opinion. The attempts in 1886 and 1893 were to fail but the third attempt was to meet with some success as a bill granting 'home rule' became law in 1914 [...]suspended because of the outbreak of the First World War [...]the initial concept of 'home rule' was abandoned by the British government in a favour of a settlement based on the partitioning of Ireland". (Source: Martin Melaugh and B. Lynn "A Glossary of Terms Related to the Conflict," CAIN Web Service, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/glossary.htm>).

284 The connection between the two organizations is that with the outbreak of the First World War, a majority of the volunteers went on to enlist as regular soldiers of the 36th Division. (Source: Bill Rolston (2013), vii)

285 Carson's image replaces an earlier painting of the Thiepval memorial, located in France and dedicated to the missing dead of the Somme.

286 Martin Melaugh, "Abstracts on Organizations: U".

bravery, each a ‘good soldier of Jesus Christ’, stoic in the face of adversity, and ‘obedient to [their] leaders’.

On a basic level, this mural serves as a commemoration for the ‘men of Ulster’, for Carson’s Army, the 36<sup>th</sup> Division and the contemporary UVF. Celebrating their ‘glorious deeds’ and marking ‘how nobly they [...] fight and die’, the mural functions to create a moment of remembrance for the fallen and importantly, of recognition of their legacy. This act of remembrance brings the viewer into the frame, connecting them to these events and to these men. The slogan ‘Our Brave Defenders’, set against a cross of red poppies and superimposed over the banner of Northern Ireland, brings the viewer’s position, as having been protected, into detailed focus. Viewed in the current time, this mural goes beyond remembrance for the war dead and the valorisation of their deeds, but is also an acknowledgment of a debt that is owed to them by the viewer, of a responsibility to respect and maintain their legacy. Set to the left of the mural’s central imagery, the contemporary UVF’s insignia, appropriated from the older organizations, mark the paramilitary’s service, legitimating past actions and its continuing presence. This synchronicity of time is also evidenced in the small plaque, located just below the paramilitary emblems. Dedicated to Ernie Laverty who died in 2012, the only other information provided is that he was a comrade of the Belvoir Somme Association, a local club closely affiliated with a number of loyalist flute bands. Without further information, I cannot assume to know the reasons for why he would be memorialised on the wall, whether it was to mark a personal friendship, or possibly some paramilitary service; what insight can be gleaned from this plaque is the fluidity of time as it concerns the memory of the dead, and subsequently, the immediacy of their lived experiences.

Painted in 2011, it could be said that the UVF produced ‘Our Brave Defenders’ to commemorate the upcoming centenary of their namesake’s inception, and is broadly situated within the currently ongoing Decade of Centenaries<sup>287</sup>. However, this understanding is complicated when viewed in the localised context of the lower Newtownards Road. Making headlines that same year, the UVF East Belfast Brigade also produced two other murals (Figures 10 and 11) just a few blocks up the road. Extremely militant, they feature five UVF masked gunmen in modern uniforms, and were put up in conjunction with numerous others in inner and outer East Belfast. Additionally, Figure 10 was

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287 “The period 2012 -2023 marks a number of significant political events which have shaped the sense of British and Irish identity in the 20th century”, whose anniversaries are being acknowledged through numerous societal and state projects. (Source: “Marking Anniversaries,” Community Relations Council, <http://www.community-relations.org.uk/programmes/marking-anniversaries/>).

painted “on top of an existing tribute to local football club Glentoran FC, which itself was commissioned as part of the drive to rid [E]ast Belfast of contentious violent images”<sup>288</sup>; the narratives evoked through ‘Our Brave Defenders’ confer a depth of meaning to these two other murals.

Flanking either side of the street, ‘We are the Pilgrims’ (Figure 11) and ‘The Elementary Right’ (see below for Figure 10) lend the impression of a gateway and visually occupy a significant portion of the landscape. Monochromatic, both murals stand out as solemn images of UVF paramilitary activity in the area, their figures anonymous and iconic. Building on the legacies displayed in ‘Our Brave Defenders’, both promote the East Belfast Brigade as being a disciplined standing army, bound to an inherent right and obligation to defend themselves, their



*Figure 10: The Elementary Right*

crowd, and their faith from continuing attack. Quoting Carson, Figure 10 reads: ‘We seek nothing but the elementary right implanted in everyman: the right, if attacked, to defend yourself’. This is an excerpt from a well-known speech that Carson delivered at the opening of a UVF drill hall, where he condemned Westminster’s position on Home Rule. Going on to criticize politicians who ‘barter away’ the rights of inherited citizenship, Carson told the volunteers to ‘go on, be ready, you are our great army’<sup>289</sup>, because if necessary, he and others were prepared to take on “ourselves the whole government of the community in which we live [...] a great deal of that will involve statutory

<sup>288</sup> BBC News, “East Belfast murals show UVF men with machine guns,” May 9 2011 (Accessed June 2 2015) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-13335641>.

<sup>289</sup> Stephen Gwynn, *John Redmond's Last Years* (New York; Longmans, Green & Co, 1919), 80-81, [http://archive.org/stream/johnredmondslast00gwyn/johnredmondslast00gwyn\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/johnredmondslast00gwyn/johnredmondslast00gwyn_djvu.txt).

illegality, but it will also involve much righteousness"<sup>290</sup>. Evoking both the Battle of the Somme and Carson's stand against Westminster, the UVF's murals evokes particular narratives of betrayal, where Ulster men, who went bravely into battle, were essentially used as fodder, led to the slaughter by their distant leaders. Produced during 2011, the murals were painted only a year following the DUP and Sinn Fein collaboration over the Hillsborough Agreement, "hailed as the final piece in the devolution jigsaw"<sup>291</sup>. This narrative of internal betrayal resonated strongly with contemporary discourses concerning the development of a power sharing government and its necessary compromises, particularly those concerning issues pertaining to dealing with the past and the regulation of socio-political symbols of identification.

'We are the Pilgrims', further cements the promise implied by its twin, that the UVF East Belfast Brigade is always willing to go further, prepared to go beyond what is officially approved. Quoting James Elroy Flecker's poem: *'Hassan: The Golden Journey to Samarkand'*<sup>292</sup> the mural reads: 'We are the pilgrims master; we shall go always a little further'. Selecting this particular line, the UVF likens itself to the British Army's elite task force, the SAS<sup>293</sup>, as this same quotation appears in their Hereford headquarters<sup>294</sup>. Read as an extension of 'Our Brave Defenders', these two murals demonstrate 'how they fought' in the more recent past, yet at the same time, when understood in the social context of their production, "the message is not just 'look how we fought', but also 'and we could do it again if we need to'"<sup>295</sup>. To add one more layer to this situation, the UVF were at that time also in the midst of an internal feud, where the commander in the East was deviating from the leadership in the West. These murals were painted as a show of strength, essentially sending a message not only to the wider public, but to the "rest of the UVF: 'I can do this, what're you going to do about it?'"<sup>296</sup>.

### **EBP: Non-affiliation and alternative spaces**

Intended to be life-enhancing pictures that soften a harsh urban environment, EBP's two murals sit in obvious contrast to those of the UVF and the UDA. Situated at the at a busy intersection, the 'Woman in the Field' mural (see page 62 for Figure 13) is a visual interruption in that space; placed

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290 Ibid.

291 "The Hillsborough Agreement," Northern Ireland Assembly (accessed May 28 2015) [http://education.niassembly.gov.uk/post\\_16/snapshots\\_of\\_devolution/hillsborough](http://education.niassembly.gov.uk/post_16/snapshots_of_devolution/hillsborough).

292 Bill Rolston (2013),vi.

293 SAS is the acronym for 'Special Air Service'.

294 Bill Rolston (2013), vi.

295 Bill Rolston, interviewed by Kirima Isler, part two, [00:6:30- 00:07:00].

296 Bill Rolston, interviewed by Kirima Isler, part one [00:14:50- 00:17:00].

behind a patch of green grass where there had previously been a row of derelict buildings, the mural was installed in a small community pocket park<sup>297</sup>, now also the site of a community garden. The processes behind the production of this mural were two-fold: still in its early stages, the park's development coincided with EBP's newly created annual arts festival, which by chance had funds available for the creation of street art<sup>298</sup>. The mural's image was ultimately the result of collaboration between a "London illustrator and graffiti artist Hicks 54"<sup>299</sup> and the EBP staff who selected the artist and wrote his briefing. As a project, the mural not only functioned to serve the festival's purpose of fostering a local arts scene, but was also aligned to the EBP/IENP's broader plans of "improving the quality of the physical environment"<sup>300</sup>, as well as the governmental 'People and Places' strategy<sup>301</sup>, produced by the Department for Social Development (DSD).



*Figure 13: The Woman in the Field*

Painted in 2012, the 'Woman in the Field' is an illustration of a woman walking through the countryside, passing by a lake and some fields. Smiling and relaxed, she sets the tone of the whole

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297 Developed by the Inner East Neighbourhood Partnership, and financially supported by GroundworkNI, the park officially opened in May 2014. Source:(East Belfast Partnership, "Pocket Park to officially open..." (Thursday 26 June 2014) <http://www.eastbelfastpartnership.org/news/3-news/212-pocket-park-to-op88en-.html>).

298 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership) interviewed by Kirima Isler, Belfast, U.K. November 20 2014, transcript; [08:00- 9:00]

299 East Belfast Arts Festival 2012, *East Belfast Arts Programme* (Accessed March 20 2015) [http://gallery.mailchimp.com/85b8c17753c0bafc30d498aa8/files/EBAF\\_Programme.pdf](http://gallery.mailchimp.com/85b8c17753c0bafc30d498aa8/files/EBAF_Programme.pdf), p 15.

300 Northern Ireland, Department for Social Development; p 6.

301 *Ibid.*, p 3.

image. Superimposed along the top-left side is a rectangular black outline framing the mural's text 'Newtownards Road', with 'Hicks54' signed just below it. Being set just alongside of the road, it has the dual effect of situating the image and locating the actual street; a welcoming place sign. Beyond the artist's mark, the mural has no obvious indication of authorship or of ownership, it is linked back to the EBP through the park's information post that is located at the other end of the lot, which advertises some of the EBP's upcoming projects, the nearby developing Connswater Community Greenway, a flagship project. Again, in contrast to the other murals included in this case study, Figure 13 lacks a pre-crafted story. The scene is open to the viewer's own interpretation, containing elements which provide the potential for a loose narrative, in part directed by its location and by cues present in its environment. The 'Woman in the Field' is anecdotal, evocative of a place and of a feeling. The mural's lettering firmly situates that space in site, and through its imagery, establishes a connection between the Newtownards Road and the idea of the Connswater Greenway. This interpretation of place is an expansion of place: it incorporates the greenway into the inner East, a determinedly urban area made up of densely packed terraced houses set on tarmac. Referencing what it beyond tacit territorial demarcations, it re-interprets the Newtownards Road and what is local to the road, and in turn, how the place is itself situated within Belfast. In this connection, the image gains meaning from its environment, and in turn frames the location, interpreting what kind of place it is, or could be.

Underlying this connection is the sense of some sort of continuity, of place through time; the image could be read as being simultaneously past and future oriented. While the figure is in contemporary-day clothing, the surrounding landscape is completely rural, suggesting a previous time, hinting that maybe this is what it had been like and that maybe it could feel that way again. Embodying that experience, and the potential for a vibrant future, it is interesting to note that the figure lacks either overt or tacit signs that would signal where she came from. Her experience of the place, her connection to the land, is personal and uncomplicated by a pre-story of who or what she is and where she came from; questions of affiliation and of origin are irrelevant- for both the figure and the landscape. Describing the mural as an opportunity "to do something different"<sup>302</sup>, Maggie A. explained that the mural was painted with an intention of avoiding any political overtones and any form of particularistic identifications. This said, it is important to understand that containing no elements that are recognizably nationalistic, historic, cultural, or related to the recent conflict, the

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302 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:08:00- 00:09:00].

mural's message and performance are political: set within a social context that continues to be organized through the 'two-communities' logic, this act of omission in an act of non-affiliation. This dimension was readily acknowledged by Maggie, who agreed that the murals which actively avoid reference to either Irish republicanism or Ulster unionism are in actuality political, "because then there's an alternative, and you can say 'look at the alternative' [...]. Everything is politics. You deciding to say something in a particular way [...] or to create some sort of impact in itself, in my view, is playing politics [...] you're either trying to convince people that it's right or it needs to be given consideration"<sup>303</sup>. Additionally, the intention of shunning any political connotations is also referential to the genre of murals that currently exist and the "very political messages"<sup>304</sup> and particularistic statements that they tend to communicate: to communicate an overtly political message through a mural is to risk association with potentially provocative practice. In this context, non-alignment is the alternative to divisive politics, and considered to be "the polar opposite of the images that currently exist"<sup>305</sup>, the mural and its sponsors are therefore non-affiliated with the wider tradition. When looking at murals of this genre, those framed as being neutral, it is clear that their meaning and social significance can be found in their performance, if not directly in their content.

Located just across the street from 'Freedom Corner, 'Urban Meadows' (Figure 12) performs an act of visual interruption similar to that of Figure 13. A painterly image of flax flowers, Figure 12 was also location-inspired, and points to the area's pastoral past, while simultaneously hinting at the East's industrial and working-class heritage. A continuing source of pride, the flowers reference the old linen mills, a history that is "not well represented in the area as much of the focus is on the shipyard industry"<sup>306</sup>. As with the 'The Woman in the Field', 'Urban Meadows' was also the result of two projects coming together; one being a "public art intervention"<sup>307</sup> produced through the collaboration of EBP, an arts studio collective, and a woman's cross community group, and the other being Belfast City Council's Renewing the Routes Programme, a scheme to address degradation along the city's main roads<sup>308</sup>. Although it is not present in the photograph, which was taken while landscaping was still underway<sup>309</sup>, 'Urban Meadows' is situated on a small lawn, a

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303 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [26:10- 27:15].

304 Ibid., [00:06:00 – 00:07:00].

305 Ibid.,

306 Deirdre Robb (2015)

307 Ibid.

308 East Belfast Partnership, "New Community space brings derelict lot to life," East Belfast Partnership: News (Thursday 14 May 2015) <http://www.eastbelfastpartnership.org/news/3-news/237-new-community-space-brings-derelict-site-to-life-.html>

309 It should be noted that the metal fence has been removed upon completion of the park.

“previously derelict plot of land”<sup>310</sup> with signage at its corner edge<sup>311</sup>. Essentially the product of the artist Deirdre Robb’s imagination, the mural’s image is grounded in the historical geography of the area while also purposefully staying clear of any overtly political message.

In this way, both Figure 12 and Figure 13, attached to their respective parks, function to transform the image and the experience of the place; situating the lower Newtownards Road within a context of community development and urban regeneration, they work outside of the habitual framework of the conflict and continuing political and cultural divisions. Both intentionally non-aligned, reaching back to a natural past, the two murals establish a position in which the viewer is not required to locate themselves within any category of identification. The ‘Woman in the Field’ mural, in particular, projects a sense of place as well as its potential. Situated in relation to the Connswater Greenway, it locates and roots the organization, and its objectives, firmly in that physical and social space and frames them through a vocabulary of nature and growth. The pocket park and its adjacent garden are not only sites of emplacement, but they engender the active engagement of local residents as they occupy and use the space provided to them by the EBP, as will the Greenway once completed. The narrative that emerges from this interaction establishes the EBP as an organization that works to revitalize the local environment, and the quality of life for those who live there, and does that effectively by bringing people together in a neutral capacity to literally re-work the ground, and tangibly generate healthy social and physical growth.

When considering the murals all together, EBP’s murals really stand apart on an subject that I have not previously discussed: gender in Northern Ireland’s murals. An issue complex enough to warrant its own dissertation, I will only briefly comment on it here. While not a deliberate move on the part of the EBP<sup>312</sup>, but likely the result of a desire to ‘do something different’ from the majority of murals found in the area, EBP’s murals and their imagery evoke decidedly female-oriented narratives; Figure 13 is literally a woman, a “free spirit”<sup>313</sup> walking through nature, and Figure 12 references an industry whose workforce was predominantly women and children. Neither one exactly subversive to the status quo, what is significant is that through their abnormality they “reveal entrenched power relations other than sectarianism”<sup>314</sup> and highlight the ways in which

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310 East Belfast Partnership, “New Community space brings derelict lot to life”

311 These three small signs that provide a few facts concerning flax as a plant, the local mills, and the resulting linen, and acknowledge the site’s sponsors.

312 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:17:00- 00:22:35].

313 Ibid., [00:21:00- 00:22:00].

314 Debbie Lisle (2006), 41.

many social issues are currently obscured by a preoccupation with narrowly male histories. While woman and girls are represented in other murals, the majority of them are situated in a supporting or traditional role for the men in their lives, waving flags as the men go off to war, kneeling at their graves, or protecting their homes. As argued by author DEBBIE LISLE, this sort of representation does not “threaten or disturb the masculine code of sectarian struggle [...] [nor] the embedded patriarchy of Northern Ireland”<sup>315</sup>, but rather, contribute the naturalization of the “stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity [...] and reaffirm the [conflict] as primarily a masculine experience”<sup>316</sup>. This ties into a broader dynamic found throughout the majority Northern Ireland’s highly public symbolic displays and rituals, and in particular those that are “are widely identified as unique expressions of Protestant ethnopolitical identity”<sup>317</sup>. Here, men “are often considered the keepers of cultural expressions [...]. With the exception of dancing, nearly all other ‘traditional’ [Protestant, unionist, loyalist] activities are [debated, planned and] carried out primarily by men”<sup>318</sup>. While ultimately, this concerns the structuring of society in Northern Ireland and the multiple ways in which social boundaries are reinforced, as it concerns this case study, the significance of this dimension comes back to the question of who controls the walls and what is lost when that control is given up.

### **4.3 Murals as symbolic performances and material practices**

Essentially a means through which to curate the past, it is clear that through the murals, the organizations all reach back to various histories, and in doing so, they are able to narrate the present, positioning themselves within their contemporary context. Staking a particular claim in the East Belfast’s social and political landscape, the murals are a resource through which these groups, each in their own way, can publicly define and perform their role and value to the locality.

Firmly establishing a grassroots connection through its paramilitary past, Charter NI continues to “communicate narratives of distinct Protestant experience”<sup>319</sup> in which nationality and British culture remain referent objects to be defended. However, addressing contemporary social issues, Charter NI’s murals work to redefine the role of the ‘present day defender’ to one of ‘facilitator’ where the organization has transformed itself and now works to empower residents through

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315 Debbie Lisle (2006), 42.

316 Ibid., 41.

317 Smithey (2011), 75.

318 Ibid.

319 Ibid., 11.

education rather than bombs<sup>320</sup>. Guiding the way forward to a peaceful future in which British Ulster is a secure, yet also a multicultural modern society, Charter positions itself as a working-class loyalist entity capable of navigating state structures, and in that process, defines itself as a legitimate stakeholder in current political and social affairs. Developing open green spaces and non-affiliated imagery, the East Belfast Partnership's murals work for an expansion of place, an opening of locality in which there is a collaboration concerning its transformation. Positioning itself as a locally rooted entity that is integrated with broader government strategy, the EBP is capable of serving as an intermediary; the Partnership presents itself as an effective and alternative entity through which local residents can effect change. Developing a conception of place that does not draw on familiar narratives, but rather evokes an experience and way of being that is explicitly natural, the EBP's murals work to revise both territorial and social boundaries, to redefine what it means to belong. The UVF's murals stand apart from those of Charter, EBP and even the UDA. Understood in current circumstances, where the UVF is a proscribed organization, whose activities are criminalized by the government, the UVF's murals evokes particular narratives of betrayal, drawing on a sense of deep dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. Foregrounding the local soldier throughout their murals, and tasking them with the defence of Carson's legacy, the strength of local figures and a trust in their convictions is explicit. Together, these elements articulate an original claim to the state, and its leadership.

Beyond their symbolic content, the murals are also material objects: they are not only expressions of power, but exercises of power through which their sponsors interact with each other and their context, relationally locating themselves in a changing landscape. A means through which social and political organizations can represent themselves in the public realm, and shape particular understandings of the present moment, processes of re-imagining are thusly bound up in the negotiation of power-relationships. Only briefly touched upon on here, the following chapter will now bring this factor into focus.

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320 David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:08:45- 00:11:00].

## Chapter 5. Locality and Processes of Production

### 5.1 Putting paint to the wall

To fully consider the ways in which murals and their social significance have been acknowledged and used by both state and societal bodies, it is necessary to also study the processes involved in their production, as well as the relationships which develop through them. This is based on the premise that a mural is more than an object or a statement, it is also an outcome of a range of activities and processes involving sets of power relationships. A means through which social and political organizations can represent themselves within the public sphere, their significance is also enacted through practice. In that an organization's performance begins before any paint touches a wall, it is important to consider how the production of a mural involves varying degrees of interaction within a broader social and political environment. Throughout the preceding chapters, I have introduced elements of this dimension, and have established a number of ways in which the murals not only articulate but also, in part, constitute the construction of particular social realities. This chapter serves to highlight the ways in which this function, and ultimately the mural's significance, is bound up in these processes of production and the encounters that they create.

To do this, it is necessary to first provide a brief account of the structural context in which these organizations operate. Beginning with a selective overview concerning the relationship between the state and the community and voluntary sector, this section will serve to outline the currently ascendant good relations strategy, and establish some of the ways in which state policy is encountered and engaged with on the local level. With this laid out, the focus will then return to the case study. Broadly following an ethnographic approach to organizational culture<sup>321</sup>, this second part is intended to consider the significance of production as framed by sponsors on the local level. Starting with an overview of the activity surrounding the production of the murals included in the study, this analysis will then work with the interview material, seeking to understand the significance of the mural and its production, as expressed through the participants' stories and the ways in which they position themselves, their affiliated organizations, and others, within this local landscape.

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321 As presented by H.B. Schwartzman in her 1993 book, *Ethnography in Organizations*.

## The good relations industry

As previously discussed, murals and other public displays are specifically targeted through good relations programmes, specific policies that focus on “challenging cultural and social psychological barriers through”<sup>322</sup> a range of activities, usually operating on either a ‘single-identity’ or a ‘cross-community’ basis. These re-imagining programmes work on the premise that by “improving the symbolic landscape [they can] improve community relations”<sup>323</sup>, and contribute to the development of a shared society. The establishment of the Community Relations Council (CRC) in 1990 officially recognized ‘good relations’ as a central practice of governance, and over the years it has, to a large extent, become intertwined with community development work, particularly in the more disadvantaged areas<sup>324</sup>. In that both approaches address some of the root causes and consequences of the conflict, they have “come to be viewed as [...] important strategy in achieving greater social cohesion”<sup>325</sup>, developing both social and cultural capital and significantly contributing to broader peace-building efforts.

This combined approach was further institutionalized in the 2005 document: *‘Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland’*. Essentially this framework has served to provide the government with “a mechanism through which departments [could] more effectively mainstream good relations considerations into policy development”<sup>326</sup>, fulfilling a statutory duty laid out by the 1998 Northern Ireland Act<sup>327</sup> to promote “good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial groups”<sup>328</sup>. Continuing along a similar vein, the 2013 strategy document, *‘Together, Building a United Community’*, was created to facilitate the government’s “move from policy development to implementation and action”<sup>329</sup>. Functioning to change “the way that good relations [...] [is] delivered across government”<sup>330</sup> this document stressed the need for improved coordination amongst governmental departments in order

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322 Lee A Smithey (2011), 192.

323 Ibid., 108.

324 Helen Lewis, “Community Development in Northern Ireland: Past Present & Future,” in *New Trends in Community Development*, a final report for a Think Tank Series hosted by INCORE and Cresco Trust Ltd. (Londonderry, 2006), 7.

325 Ibid., 8.

326 Northern Ireland, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, *Shared Future: Policy And Strategic Framework For Good Relations In Northern Ireland* (Belfast 2005), 4.

327 Found in Section 75 (2) of the Agreement.

328 Northern Ireland, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, *Shared Future: Policy And Strategic Framework For Good Relations In Northern Ireland*, 4.

329 Northern Ireland, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, *Together: Building a United Community* (Belfast: 2013), 1.

330 Ibid., 3.

to ensure that “outcomes are delivered on the ground [...] [and] funding directed in the most appropriate manner through the most appropriate bodies on the basis of themes in this strategy”<sup>331</sup>.

One of the underpinning principles for good relations strategy in Northern Ireland has been the concept of cohesive communities, understood to be places where “people [do] not live ‘parallel lives’, but rather [have] a common vision and a sense of belonging; [...] similar life opportunities; and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds”<sup>332</sup>. ‘Cultural expression’<sup>333</sup> has been earmarked as a key priority in facilitating such cohesion, and includes work around murals as a means of not only addressing social divisions, but also “as one of its long-term goals in political leadership/community engagement”<sup>334</sup>. This emphasis on local-level engagement is explicitly expressed throughout many of the government’s policy documents, underlining the point that “whilst actions to promote good relations will be driven forward by government it is clear that improving relations in the long-run will require leadership at political, civic and community level”<sup>335</sup>. Bridging the gap between state and local levels is one of the central responsibilities of the DSD, which works to do so by “strengthening the relationship between government and voluntary and community organizations”<sup>336</sup>, coordinating the delivery of programmes and the allocation of funds. Notably, monetary support has played a key role in shaping this relationship, and although funding has been made available from a range of sources, the EU’s International Fund for Ireland<sup>337</sup> (IFI) streams have been of special importance. Currently in its fourth and final stage, the EU’s PEACE <sup>338</sup> programme was launched following the 1994 ceasefires, and, with an initial disbursement of over 500 million euros, and then one again in 2000, it “vastly increased the availability of relatively short-term resources to address social exclusion with a community development framework” <sup>339</sup>. This resulted in a “rapid and dramatic expansion”<sup>340</sup> of local-community-based activity, significantly contributing to the development of the community relations industry. Now, just over twenty years later, PEACE funding has been substantially scaled down,

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331 Northern Ireland. Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2013), 3.

332 Helen Lewis (2006); 8.

333 Northern Ireland. Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2013), 86.

334 Peter Shirlow (2012), 170.

335 Northern Ireland. Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2005), 14.

336 Northern Ireland, Department for Social Development, “Voluntary and Community” (Accessed June 8 2015) [http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/voluntary\\_and\\_community.htm](http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/voluntary_and_community.htm).

337 Established following the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement to promote economic and social advancement, as well as foster dialogue and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and its border regions (Smithey 2011, 200).

338 Rolled out in four distinct stages, the programme is widely referred to as either PEACE I, II, III, or IV, however, the programme’s proper title is: the European Union’s Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland (Smithey 2011, 201).

339 Helen Lewis (2006); 9.

340 Ibid., 14.

with organizations currently operating within a fairly competitive funding climate, many working to remain viable, adjusting to changing criteria for funding while also having to address locally-based demands.

It is important to note that organizations originating from either side of the political divide have differentially engaged with these programmes. Without going into too much detail, unionist and loyalist organizations based in Protestant areas have been comparatively more inhibited from using these programmes and have been “more suspicious and less likely than [organizations based in Catholic areas] to take advantage of funding resources”<sup>341</sup>. This has partly stemmed from unionists often “having political qualms with the IFI [...] because of its association with the Anglo-Irish agreement and have considered it a kind of bribe to pacify unionists who opposed the agreement- ‘blood money’”<sup>342</sup>. Consequently, those who have pursued external funding have been vulnerable to criticism and accusations of ‘selling-out’ or of their projects being inauthentic. This atmosphere has recently begun to change, with a growing recognition of the numerous political and social benefits attached to such work. However, while there has been a softening of attitudes towards external funding, particularly when it involves cultural traditions work in so-called single-identity settings, the “prohibitions about funding have not entirely disappeared”<sup>343</sup>.

When speaking about what this means on the ground in urban, disadvantaged Protestant areas, SMITHEY aptly described the landscape as resembling a constellation, where there is “a loose but discernible clustering of interest groups among which there is often little or poor communication, and in some cases, tension”<sup>344</sup>. Although many of these organizations, such as historical associations, loyal institutions, youth clubs, church groups, bands, and ex-combatant groups, “constitute nodes of self-conscious expression of ethno-political identity with the [Protestant, unionist, and/or loyalist] population”<sup>345</sup>, this constellation is complicated and is difficult to further generalize, as it reflects a range of overlapping, but also differing attitudes and orientations.

When looking at how state policy is encountered and engaged with on the local level, it is important to note that there is another crucial element integral to this broader structural context, beyond that of

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341 Lee A Smithey (2011), 202.

342 Ibid., 202.

343 Ibid., 204.

344 Ibid., 73.

345 Ibid., 72.

good relations policy and the involvement of governmental departments, statutory agencies, and district councils. Policing powers, fully devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2010, is another form of state presence that also informs the state-local relationship. Again, while this is a very selective reading of a complex situation, it should nonetheless be noted that the relational dynamics are also expressed in reference to physical power, whether reserved or asserted. As previously discussed, in working to free “the public realm (including public property) from displays of sectarian aggression”<sup>346</sup> and other forms of intolerance and violence, state policy prioritizes the “active promotion of local dialogue involving elected representatives, community leaders, police and other stakeholders”<sup>347</sup>, leaving room for negotiation in the process. As noted by BRYAN, while currently the favoured option of dealing with these issues, this approach is not without its criticism, as engaging in processes of negotiation with paramilitary representatives “may well give them legitimacy over other members of [their social group] and also might lead to solutions that see a reduction, but not complete removal”<sup>348</sup> of offensive displays.

In situations where there is disagreement over the removal or transformation of such displays, *A Shared Future* does highlight the role of police (PSNI) to work “in conjunction with other agencies [...] to remove such displays where no accommodation can be reached”<sup>349</sup>, a role that is reinforced with existing, if somewhat fragmentary, legislation<sup>350</sup>. In practice, however, the ways in which such cases are dealt with is highly dependent on local politics, and necessarily includes a risk assessment for potential ramifications and the safety of officers. Generally, there has been a noted inconsistency in policing such displays and this is also despite existing police protocol explicitly concerning sectarian displays on arterial routes and in town centres<sup>351</sup>, with the clearing of such sites being considered a priority for creating shared spaces. Interestingly, the PSNI did not actually publicize this protocol<sup>352</sup>, and this in itself provides insight concerning not only the types of social and political relationships present in these encounters, but also an understanding of what is actually enforceable. As further explained by BRYAN, this relationship between the police and some of these areas is somewhat extraordinary, where what it comes down to is “that certain things become

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346 Northern Ireland. Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2005), 19.

347 Ibid.,

348 Dominic Bryan and Gordon Gillespie (2005), 59.

349 Northern Ireland. Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2005), 19.

350 Dominic Bryan and Gordon Gillespie (2005), 34.

351 Dominic Bryan, interviewed by Kirima Isler, Belfast, [01:02:00- 01:03:00].

352 Ibid.

untouchable”<sup>353</sup>. On a basic level, underlying all of this is the fact that paramilitaries are proscribed organizations, listed with the likes of Al Qaeda, and “there is a Terrorism Act [...] and one of the clauses is that you can’t show support for terrorism”<sup>354</sup>. A mural, a flag, a banner or a publication that supports a paramilitary group is potentially in contravention of the Act, and yet certain spaces, particular roads for instance, can become almost sacrosanct<sup>355</sup>.

### **Locality and processes of legitimation**

This tension that revolves around public symbolic displays, and their regulation, is central to understanding the relationship between state agencies and local leadership in these areas, and returns the discussion back to the importance of locality, and localized power structures. On a basic level, the government’s emphasis on working with local-level figures stems from the recognition that key stakeholders need to be involved in broader processes of social and political transformation, that in order to develop stability, it is imperative that such processes remain inclusive and foster civic participation. However, when considered in light of Northern Ireland’s current political climate, this tension is also reflective of a wider issue concerning Northern Ireland’s struggling political system, which is that “political authority is not derived from a common civic culture [...] but rather that legitimacy is still founded on the basis of the culture”<sup>356</sup> associated with either British unionism or Irish republicanism, where the state’s political authority, or even that of its elected officials, is not taken for granted but continues to require endorsement on the local level. Importantly, as noted by HAYWARD and KOMAROVA in their article, *The Limits of Local Accommodation*, this emphasis on local-level engagement could arguably be said to actually serve these political representatives in numerous ways, particularly in “reconcil[ing] an ideological tension: aligning their role and actions as central political players in the Agreement macro-politics of compromise with the perceived continuing necessity of [...] engaging in the politics of contestation at the level of [...] locality”<sup>357</sup>.

What it comes down to is that the power-sharing government’s political arrangements remain highly contested among certain segments of the population, and while it has managed to recover some of its public position, there continues to be “lots of local communities feeling insecure and not trusting

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353 Dominic Bryan, interviewed by Kirima Isler, Belfast, [00:13:00- 00:14:00].

354 Ibid., [00:11:15- 00:13:20].

355 Ibid., [1:03:00- 1:04:00].

356 Katy Hayward, and Milena Komarova, “The Limits of Local Accommodation: Why Contentious Events Remain Prone to Conflict in Northern Ireland,” *Studies In Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 9 (September 2014) *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost: 777.

357 Katy Hayward, and Milena Komarova (2014): 788.

in the role of the state”<sup>358</sup>. This is particularly applicable to the more disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where issues of marginalization have compounded issues of political alienation with many individuals not feeling represented by the middle-class politicians who live in the leafy suburbs<sup>359</sup>; a sentiment that Sam W. expressed a number of times throughout his interview, where he described a general need for unionist politicians to connect with the ordinary working class citizens<sup>360</sup>. Furthermore, woven through this situation, there are also still “groups which control those areas, [and who] want to remain broadly hegemonic within those spaces”<sup>361</sup>, many of whom work to do so by grounding their legitimacy in the local community, claiming to be either its representatives or defenders. In some cases there could be “quite a lot of support for the grouping [...] but [...] [it is difficult to tell] how much of that [is] really support and know how much of that [is] people seeming to support something”<sup>362</sup>, not wishing to stick their neck out; this is relevant in that perceptions of legitimacy in part rely on the appearance of consensus<sup>363</sup>. This observation is based on the understanding that legitimacy is a social process, where processes of legitimation occur “through a collective construction of social reality in which elements of a social order are seen as consonant with norms, values and beliefs that individuals presume are widely shared”<sup>364</sup>. Importantly, for any significant change or innovation to be perceived as legitimate, it needs to undergo local validation where it is then “construed as consonant with and linked to the existing broader cultural framework”<sup>365</sup>, justified and managed by local leaders, because they can “do so with a credibility and legitimacy that is often not part of programmatic or state-sponsored community relations initiatives”<sup>366</sup>.

Whether or not an organization engages with the state to deliver some programme is related to its own position and role in the area, and the expectations of the local constituencies to which it plays. For those who have participated with state projects, some of the pragmatic incentives to do so have involved a greater degree of official acknowledgement for their role in their local neighbourhood, as well as the potential to gain both institutional and popular political capital; “the former encompasses access to the mechanisms of government and the leverage that can be applied to shape policy and

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358 Dominic Bryan, interviewed by Kirima Isler, [00:31:26- 00:32:40].

359 Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:43:00- 00:45:00]

360 Ibid., [00:07:00-00:10:00].

361 Dominic Bryan, interviewed by Kirima Isler, [00:31:26- 00:32:40].

362 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:03:24- 00:05:00].

363 Cathryn Johnson, et al. "Legitimacy as a Social Process," *Annual Review Of Sociology* 32 (August 2006) *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost: 57.

364 Ibid., 55.

365 Ibid., 59.

366 Lee A Smithey (2011), 49.

maintain influence, while the latter entails the cultivation of popular support and favourable public opinion through framing their efforts in the public sphere<sup>367</sup>. With the current political situation, and the high tensions that continue to surround issues like emblems, flags and parading, local leadership requires a degree of elasticity to engage in this work and the mitigation that it involves. As explained by SMITHEY “leaders involved in any sort of negotiation must deliver their constituencies, so they must pay careful attention and present themselves as representatives of core beliefs and commitments. However, to be effective negotiators, they must also stretch their constituencies to embrace new ideas and jettison old commitments<sup>368</sup>. Establishing themselves in public spaces, primarily in working class places, the act of production is an opportunity through which to actively frame and legitimate their position within that encounter.

## **5.2 Production as a site of encounter**

Studying the murals as cultural objects that function to legitimize and represent particular organizations within the public sphere, it is important to consider the ways in which their sponsors also “communicate [...] in interaction<sup>369</sup>. Legitimation is not only a social process mediated by perception, but also through behaviour<sup>370</sup>, and looking at the processes surrounding the production of the murals can provide insight as to the ways in which these organizations actively, and relationally, situate themselves within their particular setting. Keeping in mind the idealized narratives expressed through the murals’ images, this section will begin with a descriptive account of how the organizations interact with local residents, other organizations and the structural conditions that they encounter during the production process. Building on these observations, I will engage with the interview material, and develop an understanding of the significance of this activity, as expressed and framed through the participants’ stories. As discussed in Chapter Four, stories are a means of making sense of the world, organizing life and structuring experience, thusly, the stories that individuals tell about their organization “play a role in constituting an organizational reality for<sup>371</sup> its members. Studying the stories that develop surrounding their work, the ways in which they anchor their organization within their locality, and their framing of inter-organizational relationships, can provide insight not only into the perceived significance of the projects they

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367 Ibid 210.

368 Ibid., 49.

369 Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman, "Culture in Interaction," *American Journal of Sociology* 108, no. 4 (January 2003): 737.

370 Cathryn Johnson (2006): 57.

371 Helen B. Schwartzman, "Studying Up and Studying Down," in *Ethnography in Organizations* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1993): 22.

undertake, but also the encounters that they experience<sup>372</sup>. This can shed light onto the “groups’ assumptions about what the group’s relationship (imagined and real)[is] to the wider world”<sup>373</sup>.

**Charter NI, the UDA & the facilitation of Communities Moving Forward:** Having previously engaged directly with various state-sponsored re-imaging programmes, in 2013 Charter launched its own initiative, the Communities Moving Forward Re-imaging Programme<sup>374</sup>. They developed the programme to specifically “address issues of [UDA] paramilitary murals and other territorial markings in a number of communities in East Belfast”<sup>375</sup>, and to see these “political murals of the past replaced by more inclusive, permanent and durable artworks [...] that still reflect the community’s identity in line with the theme identified through the [...] consultation process”<sup>376</sup>. Overall, the programme’s objective is to remove and/or transform twenty-five UDA/UFF murals in the area, and at the time of my fieldwork, Charter NI had just completed the first stage of the programme, which involved the facilitation of seventeen consultations and workshops with various local community groups<sup>377</sup>, politicians from the DUP<sup>378</sup>, local churches, and ‘community representatives’<sup>379</sup>, to determine the outcome of the remaining twenty-two murals, having begun with a test run of changing three murals<sup>380</sup>.

Advertised through letters circulated to various local organizations, and by word of mouth, these consultations served the purpose of gaining “public opinion and insight on themes for the re-imaging project”<sup>381</sup> and were funded by the NIHE and the ACNI. Overall, the results indicated a general interest in re-imaging the murals, although the extent to which varied. It ranged from participants asking for the complete removal of the mural with only a planted trellis to replace it, to others requesting that they be replaced by new themes of local significance or even sculptures, to others suggesting that they shouldn’t be changed at all, and that to remove their images was in effect to hide the experience of the conflict<sup>382</sup>. Importantly, the consultation process itself took longer than

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372 Ibid., 43-45.

373 Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman (2003); 785.

374 Its projects are part-financed by range of sponsors, such as the EU’s PEACE III, the Arts Council, the NIHE and the IFI.

375 Charter NI, “Building Peace through the Arts- Our Industrial Heritage, Dee Street/Island Street, Belfast Public Art Commission,” Communities Moving Forward, November 19 2014, Obtained via email from Sam White (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI) December 12 2014, p 3.

376 Ibid., 4.

377 Including two youth groups, a woman’s group, a local educational group, a residents group, and a community group from the Short Strand.

378 An interesting choice in that it is the cross-community Alliance Party that represents East Belfast in the Assembly, not the Democratic Unionist Party.

379 It is important to note that this phrase “is, at times, read as euphemism for paramilitary, or exparamilitary”(Dominic Bryan, 2006, 614).

380 One being ‘The Past the Now the Future’ mural included in this study.

381 Charter NI, “Stage One Artist/Facilitator Report”, 4.

382 Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:14:02- 00:16:00].

originally scheduled, due to difficulties<sup>383</sup> encountered in this work<sup>384</sup>. Drawing from these discussions, Charter's facilitators then wrote up a report to be given to a small steering panel, comprised of a number of academics, the chief inspector at PSNI for east Belfast, and representatives from the NIHE, Belfast City Council, and the ACNI. As of winter 2015, the programme was in its second stage, with Charter staff engaged in the process of selecting the artists who would then create designs based off of the artist briefings<sup>385</sup>. Clearly, these murals have not gone up yet, and most of them will not be going up along the lower Newtownards, however the consultations are relevant for this project in that they indicated an acceptance the UDA/UFF's 'Freedom Corner', as well as the UDA's 'community representatives''<sup>386</sup> renewed commitment to maintain it. It is also important to note that while this is Charter's programme, both the government and the UDA were implicitly present throughout the consultation process, as all participant groups "acknowledged the positivity of the statutory agencies involved in the programme"<sup>387</sup>, with many also inquiring about whether the paramilitaries had agreed to the re-imaging before fully engaging in discussions. Lastly, another important element of this programme has been the explicit clarification of each new mural's ownership, where the "Public Artwork becomes the property of the landowner after installation by the artist/design team [and] [a] contract for the project will provide for the appropriate care and maintenance of the work, artist's copyright and acknowledgment"<sup>388</sup>. While it is unclear the extent to which this shift is simply a symbolic gesture, required for funding, or whether it reflects genuine change with the UDA relinquishing control of certain walls, it is, all the same, a public demonstration of both compromise and the transference of control.

**The EBP & arts-led regeneration:** As already discussed, the EBP works together with organizations from multiple sectors, and the processes behind the production of the 'Woman in the Field' reflected this, having involved a number of actors in the form of financial support. Primarily a product of the Partnership's 2012 East Belfast Arts Festival<sup>389</sup>, the mural was directly funded by one of the festival's many corporate sponsors, the Lloyds TSB Foundation<sup>390</sup>, and was indirectly

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383 An example of such difficulties would be that numerous staff received death threats for their work.

384 Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:30:30- 00:31:20].

385 These designs would then be assessed by the steering panel, potentially adjusted, and approved before going up on the wall.

386 CharterNI, "Stage One Artist/Facilitator Report", 13.

387 Ibid., 6.

388 Charter NI. "Building Peace through the Arts- Our Industrial Heritage, Dee Street/Island Street, Belfast Public Art Commission", 6.

389 Currently re-branded and further developed as 'EastSide Arts' (EastSide Arts "About").

390 An independent grant-making trust, connected to Lloyds's Banking Group (<http://www.lloydstsbfoundationni.org/>); (East Belfast Arts Festival 2012; p 21).

supported by the ACNI and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), in that they were funding the festival as a whole. In contrast to state-sponsored re-imagining programmes, where consultation is a key requirement, there was essentially no significant consultation process with local residents concerning the design of this mural. While working to re-image the local space, this mural did not replace any pre-existing imagery; essentially painted on a bare wall, the production of the mural did not require any form of external approval. That said, when writing the artist brief, the Partnership did work to incorporate local knowledge of what would or wouldn't be acceptable<sup>391</sup> in the area, including local feedback from previous projects. According to various conversations that I had with contacts over the summer months, there has been a mixed reception to the mural, with many individuals expressing appreciation for how fresh it is and for the ways in which it makes the place a bit less depressing, while others disagreed and criticized it for being fluff and a waste of a wall.

An interesting dimension of the 'Woman in the Field's' production was that, promoted as "live street art"<sup>392</sup> which was "community and location inspired"<sup>393</sup> in the Festival's brochure, it was as an event to be visited by festivalgoers who were making their way from one site to another. Occurring over the span of five days, the mural's production was situated alongside of the festival's other events, including performing artists like Van Morrison, numerous art exhibitions, creative workshops, and walking tours. Additionally, it was painted in pair with a second mural on nearby Constance Street (not included in the study), which had young people from the Lower Castlereagh Community Group co-design an image with two visiting artists, also promoted in the brochure; so, although the processes behind Figure 13 did not involve direct engagement with local residents, it was promoted alongside of one that was actually co-produced with local children. Comparatively more low-key, 'Urban Meadows' was also produced as a form of arts-led regeneration, "a creative [solution] to derelict and underused [space]"<sup>394</sup>. Mentioned in Chapter 3, the end product was the result of a collaboration between the EBP, an artist, and the MACARA woman's cross community group, with the EBP's primary role being that of facilitator, delivering the workshops and "securing high levels of participation and engagement"<sup>395</sup> amongst participants. A number of interests and themes emerged from these discussions, as did the plan to green the area, and the artist used this as

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391 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [8:00 - 11:00].

392 East Belfast Arts Festival 2012, p 15.

393 Ibid., p 21.

394 Deirdre Robb (2015)

395 Ibid.,

her inspiration for the flax flowers. In that the woman's group involved individuals from both the inner East and the Short Strand, 'Urban Meadows' was created in pair with a second art project, a ceramic and glass mosaic entitled 'Dove of Peace', which was installed on the grounds of St Matthews Catholic Church, located on the lower Newtownards. Considering these processes altogether, it seems that the practices behind the production of the EBP's two murals shifted their frame of association from being part of a particular muraling tradition to being a part of a wider range of socially-engaged art forms, one mode of cultural expression amongst many.

Concerning details of ownership, and the question of whether permission was required to paint the walls<sup>396</sup>, the EBP was able to keep the production in-house and sidestep any external involvement. As Maggie A. explained, the EBP "didn't have to talk to anybody"<sup>397</sup> before putting the 'Woman in the Field' up on the wall, a tacit acknowledgment of the potential difficulties 'that having to talk to somebody' could involve. Located in the soon-to-be pocket park, the site and building hosting the mural were and are the property of the Department for Regional Development's Roads Service and Landmark East, a subsidiary company of EBP; both landowners supported the project<sup>398</sup> without direct involvement its production. It was a similar situation for both the second festival mural on Constance Street, as well as the 'Urban Meadows' mural down the road.

**UVF:** The three UVF murals that are included in this study were produced in such a way that is difficult to assess them in a similar manner to what was done for either Charter/UDA or the EBP. In so much as it was not feasible to interview an individual associated with the organization, as well as there being an obvious lack of transparency surrounding their activity, this section will rely on observations, and news reports, as well as begin to incorporate descriptive accounts from the interviews. As previously covered, the Belvoir Somme Association, an organization that appears to be informally affiliated with the UVF, may have in part financially sponsored 'Our Brave Defenders'<sup>399</sup>. Definitely not advertised on the wall, there was also no online record of the Association having acquired financial support from any external source, including the ACNI, the

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396 In areas with a continuing loyalist paramilitary presence, it is often necessary to gain permission from the local commander to paint a new mural- often for blank walls as well as for previously marked walls (Bill Rolston, interviewed by Kirima Isler, part two, [00:21:00 – 00:22:00]).

397 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [9:15- 11:00].

398 Belfast City Council, Parks and Leisure Committee, "Newtownards Road 2012: Regeneration of 380-390 Newtownards Road", item 19 on the Agenda, Appendix 1 (pdf), of *Parks and Leisure Committee Agenda and Minutes for Thursday, 9th August, 2012* <http://minutes.belfastcity.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CID=112&MID=11128>; p 2.

399 Here, it is important to note that this connection is not generalizable to all Somme Associations, as well as the additional point that many are uncomfortable with the paramilitary's appropriation of the Somme, or WWI for that matter – information taken from a conversation with a member of such a society, local to the inner East, who approached me as I was photographing the mural.

NIHE, Belfast City Council, or even Northern Ireland's central Somme Association, therefore, it is safe to assume that it was internally funded. While Figure 9 is historic in nature, the other two, Figures 10 and 11, are arguably illegal, clearly supporting the modern UVF. Put up in 2011, their production drew a lot of attention, particularly in online news sources and blogs, and contributed to a general discourse that expressed concern that the murals signalled a return to violence, as well as disappointment<sup>400</sup> for their perceived regression. Locally, "you [could] pretty much guarantee that a whole lot of people didn't think that [they were] a good idea"<sup>401</sup>, however, this opposition would have been muted since there would also have been some level of support, even if only from those associated with the local UVF. From what I could tell, there were three general lines in this camp, where their meaning was read and applauded for being either an act of defiance concerning the intra-UVF feud, being an act of strength vis-à-vis the long-standing UVF-UDA rivalry, or even as being a stand against dissident republican groups which are perceived to be a continuing threat.

Considering their production, it is also useful to look at the performance that surrounded the act painting. With the EBP's offices located just one block up from the two militaristic murals, Maggie experienced their production, and it is her description which I include here. Basically, the muralists "did it very visibly for several days, on scaffolding, with hoods put on, so there was a kind of attempt to create a degree of anonymity about those murals". That said, it can be assumed that the painters were people who lived locally, and "some people would've known who they were and whatever, but it was allowed to happen"<sup>402</sup>. It is informative that nobody troubled the painters about the images they were creating, nothing even as low-level as a police officer or two "wandering over and taking the names and addresses" of the painters, explaining that "the image on [the] mural might be in contravention of the 2000 Terrorism act"<sup>403, 404</sup>. This view, of it being allowed to happen, was also echoed by David S., who stated: "if the police wanted to do something about it, they should have done something about it, but they didn't. They let them- you know, they let hooded men"<sup>405</sup> paint the two gable walls.

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400 BBC News, "East Belfast murals show UVF men with machine guns" (May 9 2011).

401 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:10:56].

402 Both quotations from Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:13:50- 00:16:00].

403 Dominic Bryan, interviewed by Kirima Isler, [00:11:15- 00:13:20].

404 Although rare, this very thing occurred in a similar situation in East Belfast in 2013, resulting in the muralists changing the two UVF gunmen who were in the process of being painted to two WWI soldiers, of their own initiative (Source: Dominic Bryan, [00:11:15- 00:13:20].)

405 David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:48:00- 00:49:00].

The production of these two murals was also associated with a period of heightened UVF activity, and overall increased tension, with their creation being largely linked to two situations; one being a particularly difficult parading season that saw an increase in rioting and sectarian attacks at the nearby interface<sup>406</sup>, and the other being the development of the Belfast flag dispute<sup>407</sup> which would later culminate in a series of loyalist protests and as well as riots in East Belfast. At the time, many in the area regarded them as being “almost like a harbinger of discontent [...] [a] kind of marker that things were, that people weren’t happy with the situation, and that was [...] one of the first things people did, was to put images up on the wall that said that things are not what people think they are”<sup>408</sup>. Unquestionably financed through internal funding, their production also involved the UVF’s direct engagement with government re-imaging initiatives. Not only was it a demonstration of independence, but one of destruction; as already mentioned, ‘Elementary Right’ was painted over a previously re-imaged mural that had been painted to celebrate 125 years of the Glentoran Football Club in East Belfast, painted by the Glentoran Community Trust and funded by the NIHE<sup>409</sup>. In this way, ‘Elementary Right’ can also be read to be an encounter with a segment of the local population, with the individuals who were willing to engage with re-imaging programmes, as the UVF’s new mural in effect overrode the significance of their efforts.

### **Legitimizing Repertoires**

These observations provide a good base from which to further explore the ways in which each organization interacts with its’ setting. Every production a performance, it is clear that the practice of putting up a mural connects each organization to the locality in specific ways; through these processes, the organization is able to not only develop a particular tone for their public image but also structure the terms of their relations, whether with the local population, or with other organizational bodies. Take, for example, the ways in which Charter manages to position itself as a distinct entity between the state and the local UDA, acknowledging both as authorities, while navigating their potentially contradictory expectations. This navigation of diverging principles can particularly be seen around the question of ownership, when, for instance, David was describing Charter’s involvement with re-imaging murals, he explained that it involved Charter taking the armed group through the process, “because those murals were [under] the ownership of the armed

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406 BBC NEWS, “Who are the UVF?” (June 22 2011).

407 The Belfast Flag dispute concerned newly proposed restrictions as to when the Union Jack would be flown at city hall, with councillors eventually voting to only fly it on designated days rather than year-round. It continues to be a point of contention.

408 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:10:56- 00:13:00].

409 “Mural Project,” Glentoran Community Trust, last modified May 16 2007, <http://198.46.82.197/~gctnic5/projects/mural-project/>.

group, the UDA<sup>410</sup>. While this understanding is contradictory to the principles behind good relations strategy, which views this belief as an obstacle to generating shared spaces and in effect, a shared future<sup>411</sup>, Charter NI is able to then partially address it through the contractual transference of ownership for the re-imaged pieces. Additionally, through developing its own initiative, Charter is also able to maintain a degree of control over the whole process, and is therefore not wholly dependant on following the lead of government initiatives, but can be selective in what restrictions it accepts, as it can vary from one programme to another<sup>412</sup>. In this way, the organization is able to work with the established policies concerning the use of public spaces while not being wholly constricted by them, interpreting restrictions in a way that is also acceptable for their constituencies, while not being completely bound to them either. Importantly, this also contributes to the appearance of Charter being in control of the programme, a necessary element for demonstrating legitimacy and maintaining credibility on both the state and local levels. Notably, Charter's ability to navigate these various expectations suggests that, in-so-far-as re-imaging is concerned, good relations policy and the mechanisms through which it is delivered (for instance, the ACNI) have limited reach, and their power should not be exaggerated.

In considering how David S. and Sam W. interpreted these relational dynamics within their interviews, and explained Charter's role in all of it, I found that there were many nuances to the situation that cannot fully be explored here as they would involve further detours. That said, running throughout both conversations, I found that there were two central points that consistently emerged that worked to justify Charter's position of power within this process. The first concerns the framing of Charter's relationship with the local residents and comes back to the organization as being a "totally grassroots community development organization"<sup>413</sup> working to "empower people from the bottom"<sup>414</sup>. Describing the significance of the progress made so far, Sam emphatically pointed out that it is the "local community groups [that] are making the change, and it's not down to the organization [...] people are under the reading that it's a UDA-run programme, it's not. [...] [These groups] need the recognition [...] I've only been facilitating the workshops, it's their programme"<sup>415</sup>. This attribution of project ownership to the various groups involved underscores the

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410 David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:32:50].

411 Sean K. (Programme Manager for ACNI's Building Peace Through the Arts: Re-Imaging Communities).

412 Take, for instance, the recent shift in the ACNI's Re-imaging Programme, where although it will continue to finance the removal of murals, it will no longer pay for the installation of new ones, instead only contributing to the creation of art pieces and other work (Source: Sean K.), whereas the NIHE will continue to provide funding for new paintings.

413 David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:01:00- 00:02:00].

414 Ibid., [00:18:00 – 00:20:00].

415 Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [01:10:00- 1:13:00].

understanding of Charter's role being to serve the locality, and to act on their behalf as a go-between with both the UDA and the government. David's description of how the process developed further illustrates this dynamic, where after explaining that Charter consults 'community representatives'<sup>416</sup> on a quarterly basis, said that they had approached the armed group and had explained to them that " 'the local community that live here, that have [the murals] on their gable walls, don't really want them anymore' [...] [the UDA] understood, [and] they gave us the nod, the ok, to go through the process to take them down". Having secured approval, and being an organization that was "trusted with government money", Charter could then engage "with the Arts Council [...] for the resources, to de-militarize the area, to take the gunmen away from the walls and put something positive up"<sup>417</sup>.

The second role that was threaded throughout both conversations was Charter's purpose and practice of "engag[ing] and divert[ing] people away from the conflict setting that they were originally in"<sup>418</sup>, to help bring them through the transformation process. "Speaking as a UDA volunteer, that works for Charter NI" as a community activist, Sam explained that the murals are significant in that they are a means "of showcasing good practice and good leadership within our communities, [saying]: 'listen the past is the past. Let's put that away, and let's move forward'. And within the UDA, we showcase that to our volunteers, and our ex-combatants, and ex-prisoners and their families"<sup>419</sup>. Both David and Sam described Charter's capacity to "transform people"<sup>420</sup> by speaking about their own experiences with the organization. Both ex-combatants that had been imprisoned, each described how transformative it had been to work with Charter and how empowering it can be to learn "how to affect change in a positive way, [because] when you affect change and make a difference, you're influencing policy and you're delivering change within your community and you're seeing the benefits of it – that's progress. It's showing people a different way to effect change, without violence, that's conflict transformation"<sup>421</sup>. This role was further reiterated when David spoke of the UVF's two militaristic murals, with the UDA sitting in stark contrast, saying that the murals "show you clearly where the two organizations are at. [...] Where they don't want to be involved in conflict transformation". Painted at a time when the UDA were

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416 Read as 'UDA leaders'.

417 All quotes from David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:32:00- 00:35:00].

418 Ibid., [00:02:00- 00:05:00].

419 Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:05:00-00:07:00].

420 David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:13:00- 00:15:00].

421 Ibid., [00:11:00- 00:13:00].

decommissioning their weapons, and “in the militaristic world [...] were becoming less relevant”, David described the murals as being the UVF’s way of “enforcing their power” and propagandising that “[the UDA] sold out for money and they [were] the real defenders”. His reply to this at the time, which he “said it near and far and to every reporter, [...] was that if getting resources into working class areas, to develop [them] [...] [was] perceived to be selling out, well, [he’s] guilty” and that his “opinion of them would be that they’re hiding behind an ideology to continue to do drugs and be involved in crime”<sup>422</sup>; this contrast brings to attention the rivalry between the UDA and the UVF in East Belfast, where re-imaging has become part of the conversation of the efficacy of armed force as a means of achieving goals, and of who has the legitimate and effective means of representing loyalist interests.

Working with the murals provides both a tangible and highly symbolic means through which to demonstrate positive change and effective leadership, however, it is not without its internal controversy and the project also provides a window onto conflicting dynamics within the UDA itself. While Charter works to move people forward together there are those who “still glorify the conflict”<sup>423</sup>, and who strongly dispute any change to the murals. Connecting this to the broader “relationships that [they] have in east Belfast”, Sam described this segment as being associated with the “the far right element” of loyalism, and, positioning Charter more towards the leftwards end of the spectrum, he presented this split as being at the core of loyalism’s current fragmentary state. Furthermore, while speaking of the need to develop “political parity within the intra”, Sam provided an interesting contrast between the two orientations that in effect suggested a disparity rather than equality of worth. Describing those who still glorify “the bad old days” “as bar-stool generals”<sup>424</sup>, essentially figures defunct in contemporary society, Sam referentially framed Charter as being the more relevant and credible of the two. This is in line with Charter’s general portrayal throughout the two interviews as being a part of progressive loyalism, and how it was, as a fundamentally working class organization, working from the bottom up. Importantly, this contrast between differing mindsets and ideologies was extended through to the unionist parties currently in government and the political agendas that they promote. Emphasizing that political backing is required for social change, Sam explained, “We, Charter, are sort of running in parallel with the DUP. We have that as a political force behind us, and we use that political force to showcase good practice [...] for our

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422 All quotes from David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:40:00 – 00:43:00].

423 Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:27:00-00:29:00].

424 All quotes from Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:28:00- 00:34:00]

volunteers, away from the conflict”. Following this up with a tacit comparison to the UVF and its relationship with the PUP, Sam then suggested that there are “some other organizations [who] use other political parties in their own way, in that they don’t want to move forward, and that there’s still a fight - there’s still a war to be won”<sup>425</sup>. While, again, an interesting commentary on the diversity of opinions within loyalism, this description is especially informative for its portrayal of Charter’s relationship with the DUP, where – as articulated by Sam- both Charter and the UDA are in a position from which they can use the DUP in their own way; this not only confirms Charter’s capacity to effect change, but cements its commitment to the locality, refuting any possibility that they are themselves used or directed by higher levels.

Charter’s grassroots image was especially evident in the ways in which both Sam and David spoke about the other organizations in the area and described how Charter fit into this landscape. Describing Charter as ‘pre-GFA’, Sam established that the organization had substantial credentials in the field, whose bottom up approach is only now being recognized as working, after years “of international funds coming in and people being parachuted in and parachuted out, and no real difference being made”. Essentially arguing that a big part of “what’s been going wrong here for years [is that] we’ve had outside organizations coming in here and thinking they knew what we needed” David further explained that although “now we are a competitor in a competitive market, for a long time, the proper [organizations] [were] saying: ‘they’re a UDA exprisoner group, don’t touch them, don’t touch them’[...] and all along [they were] getting the money [...] so they were happy getting the money while putting us down”. Now that Charter is “at the table with them” it is delivering results and “showing them up for what they’re really not doing”<sup>426</sup>. Linking this back to the murals, Sam spoke about how after seeing the impact that ‘silly’ murals can have, where they can prompt people to question re-imagining as a whole, he has to be very careful about their programme and not be as careless as others in putting the wrong things up. Indirectly speaking about the EBP, Sam went on to explain that this has been the case where “some people [...] have these arty-farty [...] artists, but don’t really know. They’re just so far working in their art that they just go in and think – they imagine stuff and just put it on a wall. That doesn’t work”. Explaining that art has a major role to play in social change, and how it can “have a massive effect within working class communities” Sam went on to tacitly comment on the ACNI’s position in the situation, warning that “the right people have to be in place at the top to understand what’s going on

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425 All quotes from Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:57:00- 01:00:00].

426 All quotes from David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:15:00- 00:28:00].

at the bottom,” and what’s been happening is “that we have people from [up top] that’s trying to press down on us: ‘well, this is what you need to do’. Well, that’s not going to work”<sup>427</sup>. Interestingly, Maggie also commented on the use of art for social transformation, and explained how part of the reason for why the EBP began to promote arts-led regeneration was that “because nobody else was doing that, so [...] it was easy for us to take that space because we’re not competing with anybody else”<sup>428</sup>. It is clear, from this standpoint, that although Maggie does not consider the EBP to be a competitor in a competitive market, she does recognize that they may be experienced or perceived to be such on the local level. There is an interesting tension in this, where although practicing partnership and collaboration are central tenants of the organization’s work, they also afford the organization with an advantage in a competitive funding climate, directed by the good relations policy.

When I questioned her about some of the criticism directed towards the EBP for being disconnected or too ‘top-down’ in its approach, Maggie acknowledged that certainly, some of their larger events may not be very meaningful for local residents, however, she also highlighted that the Partnership does have the second strand which is very connected, and works with the local groups. Maggie herself works in this area, and described it as often being the EBP “trying to get people to make changes to some of these spaces, sitting in rooms with the Charter NI, and the community people who are all doing their projects, and trying to get them to work more closely and cleverly together, to get better levels of resources in around employability, improvements to people’s health, education- you name it”. Here, not only does Maggie demonstrate that the EBP is distinct from the other organizations yet still locally oriented, but in turn, questions the overall impact of their approach, suggesting that they are not working strategically but are instead perpetuating counterproductive competition amongst themselves. Such framing was further evident as she went on to explain: “when you’re starting to work in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, you have to be very careful, because you’re trying to coexist with some of the people who think they can do things really really well. Our point would always be: ‘well that’s very true, but you might be able to do it better if you work with these other [...] organizations,[...] and reduce the levels of competition locally”. Characterizing this process as being generally unpopular and convoluted in that it “tends to be done more by stealth”, the EBP resembles a form of guardian, whose role is to facilitate the

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427 All quotes from Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:36:00- 00:39:00].

428 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:40:00 – 00: 43:00].

transformation of the disparate constellation, not through interfering with their work, but through “creating space for people to collaborate over things”<sup>429</sup>.

Returning to the issue of consultation – which featured so prominently in David’s and Sam’s descriptions of their programme - Maggie did not dismiss the need for it, but rather questioned the value that it has, as currently practiced. Criticising it for tending to be a highly selective process with limited outreach, she also problematized the ways in which concepts of representation have become attached to it. Following that, Maggie went on to say: “I think that its very easy for people to say ‘we represent this community’, or ‘there was a representative group of people who did this’, but I find it rare that there’s a representative group of people, because so many people don’t engage, whether you’re putting up a mural or having a meeting about housing, [...] [and] you tend to get people who decide to be spokespeople”<sup>430</sup>. Connecting this to mural re-imaging, she suggested that it is actually for these people that the process of transforming the images is the most significant, and, in what can be read as a tacit reference to Charter, stated that they are “the people who were at the forefront, having maybe put the stuff there in the first place... They still dominate what happens here afterwards”<sup>431</sup>. This contrast, between those who justify their power in terms of representing communities and the EBP which makes no such claims, not only serves to reaffirm the credibility of the Partnership’s projects, but also in effect referentially marks these supposed spokespeople as lacking transparency in their own productions.

In looking at the how the EBP produced its own murals, what becomes clear is that the Partnership did not have to manoeuvre between the state and the localized power structures in the same way that Charter did. While, as a partnership organization it is distinct from other governmental agencies, it can all the same openly follow good relations policies without having to simultaneously navigate contradictory commitments in the same way that Charter or even the UVF may have to. Established in 1995, a year after the ceasefires, the EBP was able to set the terms of its operations according to that changing context, and, seeking to develop a support base through the projects they produce, there is a sense that they have remained exempt from the sorts of expectations directed towards other organizations. This position is especially clear with the ‘Woman in the Field’ and ‘Urban Meadows’. While there was certainly some level of local support for the production of those murals,

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429 All quotes from Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [0040:00- 00:50:00].

430 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:45:00- 00:50:00].

431 Ibid., [00:03:00- 00:05:00].

it did not involve the individuals who are normally consulted. As explained by Rolston, “realistically speaking, you don’t go to the, you know, the wee widows and the teenagers and the school teachers- you don’t go to those in the community- you don’t. You go through the groups that control the murals.[...] [Because] basically, the artist isn’t going to survive if you send them in to paint it, or if the mural gets painted, it’ll last a day”<sup>432</sup>; the Partnership could get away with doing this differently, because it is accepted practice for them. This is also observable in that while neither of the EBP’s murals have since been defaced or paintbombed<sup>433</sup>, the same cannot be said for Charter’s mural, ‘the Past the Now the Future’, which was target by “criminal elements”<sup>434,435</sup> on three occasions.

As previously discussed, the EBP positions itself as a locally rooted, if also externally connected, entity, largely validating its work in terms of how it improves the quality of life for those living in the area. A fair amount of this work has involved making changes to the physical environment, because, as explained by Maggie, although “smartening up the buildings and putting pictures on them [is not] suddenly going to make some people believe their life’s better, it doesn’t- but its a part of it”. Going on to explain that doing transformative things with people is “a much more difficult process [...] but to not do it [...] is the road to nowhere”<sup>436</sup>, it is telling that although neither production involved widespread consultations, Maggie referenced the feedback that the organization has since received, validating both murals as projects that have impacted residents. Underlining that the ‘Woman in the Field’ has not only been accepted, but that “the response to them having been phenomenal, locally, because people consider them to be the polar opposite of the images that currently exist”<sup>437</sup>, Maggie detailed how others have also sought to emulate them, explaining how the EBP has “had contact from people in other council areas, and other parts of Northern Ireland, asking how much it costs, who the artist was, how we did it”, “people just said: can we not do this all over?”<sup>438</sup>.

While much of Maggie’s justification for the murals pointed towards positive feedback, a second theme found throughout the interview was the juxtaposition of the EBP’s ‘new murals’ with ‘old

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432 Bill Rolston, interviewed by Kirima Isler, part one, [00:06:00 – 00:07:00].

433 A paintbomb tends to be a glass bottle that is filled with thinned paint which is then thrown against its target; it is often a form of attack against objectionable murals.

434 Bill Rolston quoting David S. during our interview.

435 Which, as explained by Rolston during the interview, “could mean non-UDA, of the UVF: ‘not one of us’”.

436 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:48:00- 00:55:00].

437 Ibid., [00:05:00- 00:10:00].

438 All quotes from Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:10:00- 00:15:00].

murals’, the “static, strident things that send very particular message[s]”. Acknowledging that many of these old murals have been softened, and continue to be important for many people who are interested in “tell[ing] the history of their area”, she questioned whether they are really the best way to engage people about their area or “of where they’ve been, and where they’re going to go—you’d think that they’d actually want a process rather than a picture”<sup>439</sup>. Speaking directly about Freedom Corner, she described it as having been “protected from challenge”, suggesting that regardless of “that argument about tourism, [...] in communities, they’re not always seen as quite a benevolent addition”<sup>440</sup>- that these old murals do not positively impact the area or its residents. Connecting this back to the linkages between murals and processes of conflict transformation, she believes that in order for society to move forward, there “has to be a widening out of the kind of range of ways in which you express yourself[...] [That] anything that moves the visual images, the art, into a greater, wider, interpretation of people’s worlds, the better”<sup>441</sup>. Additionally, one of her concerns with these murals is that each is “just such a statement, and yet there’s so much behind it” that is not shown, that there are “complexities of why people get to where they are”<sup>442</sup>; these statements need to be drawn into conversations. While not dismissing murals outright, she reasoned that everything does not need to be expressed through a mural, and that many of these ‘old murals’ exist because it has become the thing to do. Marking the gable walls almost instinctively, people “leave their mark to be seen on the same level of anybody else”<sup>443</sup>; a power play. Reflecting on why that is, Maggie ventured to say that these ‘old murals’ shed light onto a key struggle found through Northern Ireland’s society, and found particularly in its politics that “maybe [it]’s something about here- that we find it easier to put things up on walls and make statements – that once its there, its there- than actually hold conversations with people about the statements”<sup>444</sup>. Considering all of this together, what becomes apparent is that belonging to the new generation, the Partnership’s murals are understood to be a break from this practice of fractured communication, with the EBP positioned in such a way as to promote incremental transformation through its practice.

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439 All quotes from Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:32:00- 00:40:00].

440 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:01:00- 00:05:00].

441 Ibid., [00:34:00- 00:40:00].

442 Ibid., [1:14:00].

443 Ibid., [00:05:00- 00:06:00].

444 Ibid., [00:28:00- 00:30:00].

### 5.3 Anchoring in Interaction

Understanding that a mural's significance is bound up in the processes of production and the relationships that develop through them, the objective of this chapter has been to study these processes, and to study the ways in which the various organizations interact with their broader social and political environment. In order to do this, it was necessary to first provide a brief account of the structural context in which these organizations operate, including the development and institutionalization of good relations policy. From this, it became clear that policy has prioritized public displays and rituals as a means through which to address certain social divisions and foster a cohesive society through the creation of so-called shared spaces. Due to the current emphasis on local-level engagement on these issues, the discussion turned to include a selective overview of the dynamics found in this encounter. While the scope of this project somewhat restricted the extent to which the complexities of these relationships could be examined, there were nonetheless key insights to be found. For instance, although there are numerous incentives for the state to be inclusive in the implementation and delivery of its policies, it also does so out of pragmatic requirement; partly due to the continuing tensions surrounding the current political arrangement, any significant change or social innovation needs to undergo local-level validation to be perceived as legitimate. Such local-level endorsement is one means through which the state can foster trust in its role and recover its position in the public sphere. Furthermore, considering the mural and its production as a site of encounter between the state and the local, it was clear that relations between the two are shaped by some of the state's tools of influence, namely funding, regulation and policing. What also became apparent was that the act of production is an opportunity through which these organizations can similarly frame and legitimate their position within that encounter, distinguishing themselves politically on the local scene. With the state positioned as a reference point, whether or not an organization engages in good relations work, or recognizes state authority on these matters, is related to its own position and role in the area and the constituency to which it plays. This leads to an underlying factor that emerged concerning the impact of state policy and its emphasis on good relations; it is a negotiated process<sup>445</sup>. There are certainly aspects of it that are arguably flawed<sup>446</sup>, however, its effect on the ground is clearly shaped by a range of interests, from community development organizations, to paramilitaries, and the politicians of Northern Ireland's

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445 Dominic Bryan (2006); 610.

446 For example, being grounded in the 'two-traditions' model, it may contribute to the reproduction of communal boundaries, or in the case of murals, its avoidance of mentioning the war or its branding of 'the political' as being too provocative may further alienate those not trusting in the state, and in effect stifle progress.

major political parties<sup>447</sup>. As it relates to this chapter, the central point to keep in mind is the role that it plays in shaping the terms of relations through which these organizations interact.

Directing focus back to the case study, I then considered the significance of production as framed by sponsors on the local level. This was accomplished in two steps, the first being a descriptive account of each organization's practice of putting up a mural, and the ways in which they engaged with their environment during that process. Working from these observations, it became clear that the practice of putting up a mural connects each of them to the locality in specific ways. Through processes of re-imaging, Charter is able to present itself as a credible partner to the state for delivering its policy and effectively using its funds, while at the same time, mediating its implementation in a way that aligned with continuing commitments and expectations on the ground. Additionally, a lengthy consultation process provided Charter with a forum through which to further ground itself locally, an opportunity to perform its role as both facilitator and a representative for the local residents. In turn, by compromising with Charter over the murals, the East Belfast UDA was able to position itself as a relatively progressive group, while also effectively marking the limitations of what they perceive to be acceptable change within the area. Working as a partnership organization, the EBP produced its murals through collaborations while managing to maintain a fair degree of independence in steering the project objectives. Framed as a form of arts-led regeneration, each mural's significance and impact become inseparable from its affiliated project, and the overall effect has served to promote the Partnership as unique in the local landscape, while avoiding stepping on any toes in the process. Furthermore, using each mural as a part of larger projects, the Partnership was able to endorse a strategy of alternative practice, and the widening of expression and of expectations. In striking contrast to both Charter and the EBP, the UVF, through its murals, demonstrated a complete separation from the state and a rejection of its good relations work. Relying on localized networks of support to fund its projects, the production of the murals indicated the continuing existence of support for the organization, and effectively worked to bolster the appearance of having a substantial local backing. Essentially shows of strength, the production of each mural served as a confirmation of continuing commitments to the locality, framing the organization as its defenders. In so much as the murals went up without police interference, their position was reaffirmed in the absence of regulation, or sustained local opposition.

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447 It is important to remember that Northern Ireland's major political parties are "ethnically based parties [...] [who] argue for policies and legislation that underpin their conceptions of a society with two communities" (Dominic Bryan [2006]; 616)

With the intention of adding depth to these observations, the second step involved engaging with the interview material. Through the discussions, various interpretations emerged which shed light onto the participants' viewpoints concerning the experiences of their own organization in this setting. It seems that Charter, for example, is understood to be operating as a competitor in an environment that is somewhat hostile towards them. An established grassroots organization that is not only committed to the peace process, but capable of delivering and effecting change in ways that others cannot, it is an integral link to fostering state-local cooperation, particularly through its relationship with the DUP. The Partnership emerged as an objective guardian, operating on multiple levels, working for the development of the local community as well as the transformation of the constellation of groups that work on their behalf. A difficult setting to work in, the EBP nonetheless continues to follow a long-term vision, effecting change through the strategic coordination of its projects. Although not interviewed, the UVF's conceptualization of the local landscape can be inferred from the murals and the processes behind them. Regardless of the various potential incentives behind their actions, it is clear that they continue to operate as though there is still a war to be won, where any concession is articulated as a loss and a betrayal to its core commitments.

A small window onto wider patterns of interaction, looking at the production of the murals and their significance as narrated by members of these organizations provided some important clues as to how and to what effect social and political relationships are currently adjusting to changing circumstances. In that the production of a mural is both a symbolic expression and exercise of power and identity, the interactions around them are highly political and reflect some of the key tensions that revolve around issues of legitimacy and representation in the public sphere, this will be further explored in the next and final chapter.

## **Chapter 6. Interpretation of the Political Encounter**

### **6.1 Murals as a site of transaction**

The previous two chapters have explored a number of ways in which murals are concretizations of dynamic social processes, whose symbolic performances and material practices both reflect and interact with their physical and social landscapes; an organizing feature of their urban environment, their significance is also bound up in the processes of their production and the encounters that they create. Importantly, these processes constitute an active form of social mapping where the murals not only provide various organizations with a means of representing themselves within the public sphere, but they also serve as a platform from which these organizations can communicate in interaction, relationally locating themselves within a changing landscape. Having already discussed this element of interaction in Chapter 5, the purpose of the present chapter is to take these findings a step further, to more closely consider the significance of these relational dynamics within the current socio-political climate.

To do this, I will first expand on the understanding that these murals contain a stock of symbolic capital, explicating on their function as a political resource. The purpose of this is to be able to then consider how, in a context where tensions persist around political authority and representation in the public sphere, organizations and governmental programmes both use the murals as an asset in the pursuit of broader political strategies. The following section will then broaden this understanding and seek to assess the effect of these practices, as it relates to wider patterns of interactions. Working with the understanding that the murals are sites of political encounter through which behaviour is organized around specific values and entitlements, this final section will serve to explore this encounter as a point of connection. In this way I will be able to then reflect on what all of this activity means in terms shifting frames of representation and conceptualizations of communal belonging.

### **Political symbols as ratios of capital**

Throughout the chapters, I have discussed the murals' significance as symbols, as coded texts used to convey meaning in both their material presence and practice; here, I turn to focus instead on their symbolic value and their significance as specifically *political* symbols. To do this, it is first necessary to acknowledge that for the ways in which the murals are multiply coded, containing sets of symbols nested within each other, (icons within their imagery, imagery within their materiality,

their materiality within their production and so on) it would be more accurate to conceptualize them as each being a complex of symbols containing stocks of symbolic capital, rather than each being a singular symbol; this understanding will allow for a more nuanced reading of how they function as a political resource. With this in mind, it is now possible to discuss what this capital is exactly, as well as what characterizes a symbol as being political, before going on to consider the murals for these qualities. As explained by SIMON HARRISON in his article, *Four Types of Symbolic Conflict*, symbolic capital, a concept credited to Bourdieu<sup>448</sup>, is a form of currency in the political economy of a particular social world, and can be understood as signifying a range of intangible assets such as status, entitlements or rights, influence, legitimacy and so on<sup>449</sup>. The competition for such capital, where political actors “struggle to control or manipulate symbols in some vital way”<sup>450</sup>, is one dimension of political conflict and is referred to as ‘symbolic conflict’.

Integral to this activity, a political symbol is “anything that is used to represent symbolic capital and which is therefore a politically significant or strategic asset”<sup>451</sup>, essentially functioning to “bind a quantity of symbolic value to the political identity of some group or person”<sup>452</sup>. Within situations of symbolic conflict, political actors are concerned with the relative distribution of the symbolic capital between them, as “within any chosen universe of social relations”<sup>453</sup> the worth of this currency is dependant on the weight of others, with the political symbol signifying ratios of capital rather than absolute sums<sup>454</sup>. Finally, political symbols can be identifiable as such when they have the following four characteristics: first, when they are the property of some group or individual; second, when the symbols are status markers, ascribed with distinct and valuable qualities; third, when “their possession is a source of legitimacy and may confer specific rights and prerogatives, such as the ownership of territory or the entitlement to a political office”<sup>455</sup>; and fourth, when “for the individual, the symbols are a focus of emotional attachment, identification and loyalty, invested with the their owner’s own sense of self”<sup>456</sup>. Importantly, these four traits determine the ways in

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448 It is important to note that whilst engaging with Bourdieu’s theory of symbolic capital and his conceptualization of economic activity within the political realm, it is only in a limited way; the descriptive language serves as a tool with which to understand and articulate both the value of the murals for political actors, and their movement in interaction.

449 Simon Harrison, “Four Types of Symbolic Conflict,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 1, no. 2 (1995): 268.

450 *Ibid.*, 255.

451 *Ibid.*, 269.

452 *Ibid.*, 269.

453 *Ibid.*, 268.

454 *Ibid.*, 269.

455 *Ibid.*, 270.

456 Simon Harrison (1995): 270.

which it is then possible to influence the distribution of their capital<sup>457</sup>.

### **Harrison's model of Symbolic Conflict**

Focusing on political symbols that are associated with “persisting groups and signifying enduring group identities”<sup>458</sup>, HARRISON demonstrated how the “manipulation of cultural representations can be analysed as forms of economic action”<sup>459</sup>, and provided a simple model through which to do so. This model outlines four prototypical modes of symbolic conflict, which are as follows: the first mode, described as valuation contests, involves “the re-ordering [of] a set of symbols along some scale of value or prestige”<sup>460</sup>. In these contests, people will use either positive tactics to increase the value of their own symbols, or negative tactics to attack, either verbally or physically, those of others<sup>461</sup>. The second, described as a proprietary contest, is at its most basic a dispute over the rights to a given symbol<sup>462</sup> and involves the “reordering [of] their disposition among groups”<sup>463</sup>. These contests involve the political actor working to influence the balance of symbolic capital in their favour by monopolizing, or appropriating, the symbols of another group. The third conflict, referred to as innovation contests, involves the creation of symbolism and can occur in two ways, where there is either the competitive elaboration of the same symbolic form, or “the competitive creation of new categories of symbolic form”<sup>464</sup>. As explained by HARRISON, innovation contests tend to be a type of status rivalry, and in many ways, they can also be considered as “being contests of competitive emulation”, where “making claims of equality and superiority, groups are engaged in processes of mutual identification with each other”<sup>465</sup>. In this way, although the variation applied to the symbol may be minor, the act of innovation is an assertion in and of itself. And finally, there are expansionary contests. As with innovation contests, this fourth mode also aims to modify “the symbolic repertoires of the groups”<sup>466</sup>, and occurs when one political group tries to suppress and replace “its competitor’s symbols of identity with its own”<sup>467</sup>. This often involves the destruction or banning of these other symbols, and is a strategy associated with the expansion of the acting political group. In expansionary contests, the political groups recognize political allegiance as being

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457 Ibid.

458 Ibid., 255.

459 Ibid., 269.

460 Ibid., 260.

461 Ibid., 258.

462 Ibid.

463 Ibid., 260.

464 Ibid., 261.

465 Ibid., 262.

466 Simon Harrison (1995): 260.

467 Ibid., 263.

the key resource at stake, and the response to this activity tends to be one of preservation, where the so-called competitor works to maintain “its mark on something in order to keep it”<sup>468</sup>. As noted by BRYAN, here, somewhat “ironically, and iconic-ally, the destruction of an opponent’s symbol is in part recognition of its power”<sup>469</sup>. At this point, it is important to clarify that “to speak of symbols being created or destroyed is [...] a shorthand way of referring to certain changes in their political functions”<sup>470</sup>, where to be created is to “become coupled to a particular group in such a way as to signify that group’s identity”<sup>471</sup> while to be destroyed is to be decoupled from it.

Looking at the politics of symbolic capital, this model offers a useful lens through which to then analyse the strategies that political actors undertake to influence its relative distribution. While the four processes of valuation, appropriation, innovation, and destruction are themselves ideal types and are generally used in combination, it is nonetheless useful to separate these strategies for analytical purposes, in that it can serve to distinguish the underlying goals behind them<sup>472</sup>. This is especially the case concerning complexes of symbols, where actors may use “different strategies [...] in relation to different elements”<sup>473</sup> of the complex; making the identification of core incentives all the more valuable when working to interpret the processes themselves. These four strategies and their functions, in no particular order, are as follows: first, valuation strategies “tend to be chosen by actors simply seeking superiority of status”<sup>474</sup> and involve the actors performing rituals or other forms of public dramatizations to give their symbol some value; second, proprietary strategies tend to involve actors working to control or copy the symbols which bestow some kind of special prerogative, and are “usually aimed at legitimizing claims to territory, office or some other entitlement”<sup>475</sup>; third, innovation strategies tend to be used by “those seeking to establish an independent identity”<sup>476</sup> in addition to a superior status; and fourth, expansionary strategies tend to serve actors who seek to gain “human resources of political allegiance and control” and are often deployed through restricting space “in the public sphere for the display of [other] symbols”<sup>477</sup>. Additionally, in that all of “these strategies are structured by relationships of power, feelings of

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468 *Ibid.*, 265.

469 Dominic Bryan and Gordon Gillespie (2005), 15.

470 Simon Harrison (1995): 263.

471 *Ibid.*

472 *Ibid.*, 266.

473 *Ibid.*, 266.

474 *Ibid.*, 266.

475 Simon Harrison (1995): 259.

476 Simon Harrison (1995): 266.

477 Dominic Bryan and Gordon Gillespie (2005), 15.

identity, and senses of (in)security”<sup>478</sup> they are also context specific. For example, in the case of Northern Ireland, the strategy used between the political groupings of loyalists and republicans would differ from the strategies used amongst differing loyalist groups<sup>479</sup>, or between loyalists and mainstream unionists and so on.

As it concerns this chapter, this framework offers an interesting perspective through which to approach the question of interaction and the ways in which, as both product and process, the murals are employed by both state and societal organizations as they navigate issues of representation and legitimacy in the public sphere. Before diving into an analysis of these strategies as played out on the lower Newtownards Road, a brief reminder that as complexes of political symbols, the murals included in this study are multilayered in their significance, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that a range of strategies may accompany their use, in relation to their different parts, and in relation to various sets of relationships<sup>480</sup>. Being that the manipulation involved in the politics of symbols is not only complex, but also “relative to some particular group or set of social relations” these strategies may therefore “appear differently to different social alters”<sup>481</sup>, with the resulting interpretations varying greatly. For these reasons, it necessary to stress that the objective of this section is not to provide a comprehensive account of the ways in which Charter NI, the UDA, the EBP, the UVF or various governmental agencies seek to manipulate the distribution of symbolic capital through each specific mural. Rather, this is a selective reading confined to the parameters of the case study, where the application of the model is intended to expand on existing findings, offering a unique vantage point from which to consider the murals as sites of political encounter and read the activity surrounding them as well as the relationships that develop through this activity. Building upon these findings, I now return to the material, applying HARRISON’S model in the form of the following four questions: *who is trying to value what? Who is trying to appropriate what? Who is trying to ban/destroy what? And, is there a sense of re-invention going on?*

## **6.2 Organizational behaviour: values and entitlements**

### **Strategies of (de)valuation: competition for status on the local scene**

One of the basic changes that a political symbol can undergo is that it can rise or fall in its value. Valuation strategies are therefore one of the four processes through which it is possible for political

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478 Ibid.

479 Ibid.

480 Ibid.

481 Both quotes from Simon Harrison (1995): 266.

actors to manipulate the distribution of this capital in their favour. This could involve the use of positive tactics of self-promotion and/or negative tactics of attack, where the political actor seeks to augment the value of their own symbols by working to diminish the value of others'. Considering the murals and the organizations included in this study, it is clear that processes of valuation were present throughout much of the murals' imagery, their production, as well as the interviews themselves, where through their stories, participants engaged in verbal forms both of valuation, and devaluation. As previously explored, the resource at stake, being status, was specific to the organization's value to the locality however, being relationally determined, the character of this status varied. This is one of the more interesting aspects of this strategy, as understanding the character of a status shines a light onto the character of an organization's relations, which in turn sets the grounds for their encounters, and to an extent, the significance of their other strategies in play.

During the interviews, there were numerous cases of devaluation, where individuals used anecdotes of other murals to illustrate the worth of their own. In some ways, this form of attack could be understood as indicating a position of insecurity where the need to diminish the validity of the other work stemmed from a recognition of its potential weight. The ways in which Maggie categorized other murals as 'old murals' was in effect an act of devaluation, where, re-imaged or not, the murals which send out strident messages in actuality say very little, the ones that seek to inform do not effectively engage, and the ones that seek to inspire do not really widen people's worlds. While not wholly discrediting these works, the generally dismissive tone suggested that while such murals may be popular for their perceived progressiveness, they are instead problematic, a continuation of an old system that provides self-elected spokespeople with a platform from which to control what goes on locally. Importantly, she connected this issue of representation not only to the paramilitaries who paint the murals, but also to the adjacent politicians who "aren't massively supported"<sup>482</sup>. The devaluation of the 'old murals' indicates a sense that the 'new murals', and by extension the political ideology behind them, is threatened by anachronistic power relations which continue to be sustained through static representations of culture. This is an interesting position as it points to a tension that exists between what policies promote and what politicians practice. The EBP's position within this particular universe of social relations, as working for the transformation of social relations, was also reflected in the positive acts of valuation involved in the production of the

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482 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:46:00- 00:48:00].

Woman in the field. By transforming the painting of a wall into an open festival event, the process actively engaged people in the experience of its production, and consequentially involved them in the celebration of a particular kind of (non-affiliated) culture in East Belfast.

Similarly to Maggie's description of 'old murals', David's comments about the two UVF murals that went up in 2011, and of what they represent, were also an act of devaluation. Countering the core argument found within their imagery, as well as the dramatization apparent in their production (which served to boost their status as the superior defenders of the area) David reduced the murals and their ideology to being simply facades, fake fronts behind which the East Belfast UVF hid, cowardly criminals motivated by greed. This point was further emphasised when David described a reversal of positions between the East Belfast UVF and UDA, where ten years ago the UVF had had progressive leadership<sup>483</sup> and had been involved in processes of conflict transformation, while the UDA had been "the group down, involved in drugs, and crime and criminality". Now that "it's the opposite way around"<sup>484</sup>, with UDA earning their continuing local presence, David's description framed the UVF as having returned to an abandoned ideology and outdated practices for material gain. In this context, the status of the organization to the locality is determined by its capacity to reform, while remaining committed to the promotion of core beliefs in a way that is relevant to changing realities.

While speaking out about 'artsy-fartsy' artists, Sam's comments served to diminish the value of the EBP's murals and presence on the local scene, however, it is important to recognize that a larger target lay beyond the two murals and pointed to issues concerning the broader art establishment and the institutions which back it up. Sam went on to explain his perception that many of these artists simply don't understand how art can transform situations of conflict, but that there were many working class people who were unconventionally artistic, and who were actually better equipped to do this<sup>485</sup>. In this way, Sam presented the favouring of conventional expertise over practical grassroots knowledge as an impediment to the meaningful transformation of paramilitary murals and the effective use of art as a vehicle for wider social change. Here, through discussing the importance of art, local initiative, and the need for 'the right people' to be at the top, tensions relating to socio-economic divisions, or class, become manifest. The question of class is inseparable

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483 Notably with the late David Ervine, former leader of the PUP.

484 David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:43:00- 00:45:00].

485 Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:24:00- 00:27:00].

from the state-local dynamic where, within the unionist context, political office has traditionally been the domain of the middle and upper classes, resulting in there being “very few working-class unionists who’ve represented working class communities”<sup>486</sup>. Sam described this situation as being one where the “loyalist working class communities [have] always been led up the garden path [...], they’ve been led like a bull by the horn”<sup>487</sup> by unionist politicians who have never delivered on election promises, but have instead distracted the working class from their poverty through fear tactics. In this universe of social relations, Charter is positioned to help the marginalized classes redress this issue – using current connections with the DUP to promote their interests in Stormont, while also working to motivate the younger generations into the universities and into politics, to eventually change the two major political parties from within<sup>488</sup>.

Charter’s position within this context was also reflected in positive acts of valuation that have since developed around both their re-imaged murals and the maintained Freedom Corner. While not mentioned in the previous chapters, it is nonetheless important to include these activities here as they relate back to the question of relevant expertise and legitimate leadership. Informally affiliated with both Charter NI and the UDA, the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre, a self-described Loyalist Conflict Museum, provides educational walking tours to visiting and local groups, taking them around the murals in East Belfast and talking about them, their history and their significance<sup>489</sup>. By actively including the murals into the centre’s particular historical narrative, these educational tours boost the murals’ value as local records of the recent history and, in effect, solidify Charter’s status within the area and within broader loyalism as well.

### **Strategies of appropriation and monopolization: controlling the walls**

The second of the four basic changes that a political symbol can undergo is that it can “mitigate between groups or, more accurately, the distribution of its rights can change”<sup>490</sup>. Focusing on questions of ownership, propriety contests are a means through which political actors work to manipulate the distribution of these rights, seeking to legitimize their specific claims to territory, political office or so on. Defined by HARRISON as a strategy of appropriation, such processes occur when the acting political group works to monopolize or appropriate “the symbols of other groups,

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486 Ibid., [00:44:00- 00:45:00].

487 Ibid., [1:15:00- 1:20:00].

488 Ibid., [1:18:00 – 1:21:00].

489 As documented on the Andy Tyrie Interpretive Centre’s Facebook page.

490 Simon Harrison (1995): 270.

thereby capturing the symbolic value which they represent”<sup>491</sup>. Considering the murals and the organizations included in this case study, identifying whether any organization’s activities qualify as a form of appropriation is to identify an element that is tied up in its claims of legitimacy.

New to the local muraling scene, the EBP’s use of murals to enhance their projects could be read as a form of appropriation. Understanding that the mural is a complex of symbols, it is important to specify that this strategy of appropriation is in relation to the wall itself being an emblem in its own right, and an element of the mural’s significance. Painting both ‘Woman in the Fields’, and ‘Urban Meadows’ while circumventing conventional channels of approval, the EBP claimed the prerogative to paint the walls and essentially captured some of the value held by the local paramilitaries. As previously discussed, the use and control of the walls in these areas have come to be recognized as symbols of paramilitary control, and forgoing any input from the local paramilitary commanders, the EBP worked to affect the distribution of the right to those walls. Concerning ownership of place and the continuing persistence of territories, this in effect shifted the two walls from falling under assumed paramilitary jurisdiction to their use being determined by the legal ownership of the wall itself; this process not only functioned to legitimize EBP’s claim to serving the neighbourhood, but also that of the authorities which it recognizes. It should be noted that conversely, this possible act of appropriation could also be read as an act of reclamation, where the re-imagining of murals and of spaces is frequently described as taking back what had been taken away from local residents. Understanding that “the murals of Northern Ireland have a longer continuous tradition than anywhere else in the world”<sup>492,493</sup> and were originally associated with broader unionist culture<sup>494</sup>, it could be argued that it was the paramilitaries who had appropriated the walls during the recent conflict. From this vantage point, shifting the control of the walls away from the paramilitaries is, in theory, to reclaim the tradition for the broader population, and to transfer the control of the walls back to state authorized modes of ownership. This leads to the next example, the UVF’s ‘Elementary Right’. Here, the UVF’s act of painting over the re-imagined Glentoran football mural could be read as engaging in a mixture of both proprietary and expansionary conflicts. As an act of monopolization, it served to prevent others from participating in the practice, while also regaining complete control of the walls that it had previously held. As an act of destruction, it was a response to the state’s suppression of paramilitary symbols. Ultimately, it was a rejection of any non-

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491 Ibid., 269.

492 Bill Rolston, “The War of the Walls: political murals in Northern Ireland” (blog) January 2010, <http://billrolston.weebly.com/the-history-of-murals-in-the-north-of-ireland.html>.

493 The first mural painted in Belfast was around 1908.

494 As a part of July festivities and the commemoration of Protestant King William’s 1690 victory over Catholic King James.

paramilitary use of the wall, maintaining that claims to the walls should be determined by territory rather than by legal procedure.

The final acts of appropriation to be included in this section concern both the UDA and the UVF's use of British military emblems and history. Already discussed, it is worth mentioning again as it pertains to the character of relations between each of these current government. Both classified as proscribed organizations, both the UDA and the UVF work to legitimate their past through presenting it as having been a form of military service, therefore contesting their current criminal status. Overall, the appropriation of these symbols signify a claim to some degree of power, where they seek to legitimize their continuing social and political presence as stakeholders in the current system of governance, claiming it to be earned by merit rather than by theft or force.

### **Strategies of expansion and the legitimate use of symbolic force**

Another of the four characteristics of political symbols is that they are invested with their owners' sense of self and are therefore a focus of popular attachment and identification<sup>495</sup>. It follows that the change associated with this characteristic is that the political symbol can cease to exist, or rather, it can be decoupled from the political group or actor which it had formally signified. In situations where one political group is seeking to expand their range of influence, these symbols become a target in the competition for the human resources of political allegiance and control; such strategies of expansion usually involve the acting political group trying to suppress and/or destroy its competitor's symbols, replacing them with their own. Considering the murals and the organizations included in this case study, identifying whether any of their activities qualify as being expansionary will also serve to highlight which of the other organizations they recognize to be their competitors in this arena.

So, who is trying to ban or to destroy what? Looking at the case study, the most obvious example of such activity would be the state's re-imaging programmes, where departments, councils, and agencies work on behalf of the government to implement good relations policy concerning the public display of sectarian imagery; in other words, they work to suppress the continued use of paramilitary imagery on the walls while replacing them with so-called "legitimate expressions of culture"<sup>496</sup>. Expanding their influence to the walls in predominantly working class neighbourhoods,

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495 Simon Harrison (1995): 270.

496 Independent Research Solutions (2009): 3.

these programmes serve to target the continuing presence of paramilitarism in those spaces, while also assuming the legitimate use of both physical and symbolic force in the process. Concerning modes of both socio-political representation as well as popular identification, this expansion could potentially serve as a means through which the state could expand its influence on the local level. However, having to usually work through the paramilitary organizations, who have the power to “insist that others take account of their sensitivities”<sup>497</sup>, the range of this expansion is limited and ad hoc, for the most part secured through compromise. The so-called competitors, here being both the East Belfast UDA and the East Belfast UVF, are both positioned to maintain their mark on the walls and do so to differing degrees. This is significant in that, as previously discussed, the regulation of symbols and the public space that is made available for their display is a dramatization of power that not only “shows that a state of affairs is the case, [but] sometimes [...] provide[s] a focus for the *enforcement* of that state of affairs”<sup>498</sup>. Re-imagining programmes being as popular as they are, it is clear that these strategies of expansion have certainly adjusted the balance of capital in favour of the state, validating the implementation of its policy within local neighbourhoods. However, what has been gained should not be exaggerated; influence is limited as the space made available for the display of re-imagined murals continues to be simultaneously regulated by the paramilitaries.

### **Strategies of innovation: competitive differentiation**

The last of the four basic changes that a political symbol can undergo is that it can “come into existence”<sup>499</sup>, or rather, it can become attached to a political group/actor, binding a quantity of symbolic value to them. Production, or invention, is therefore one of the four processes through which it is possible for political actors to manipulate the distribution of this capital in their favour, working to “establish or enlarge their own share of the total pool of symbolic capital”<sup>500</sup>. Wholly relational, innovation strategies tend to be chosen by those seeking to differentiate themselves from others, with the objective of establishing a distinct identity that is of a superior status, and the tactics can include either the competitive elaboration of some existing symbol, or the generation of new categories of symbolic form. As it concerns this case study, determining whether any of the organizations are engaging in strategies of innovation will serve to identify some of the ways in which these actors are modifying their symbolic repertoires<sup>501</sup> and to what effect.

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497 Anthony D. Buckley (1998), 16.

498 Ibid., 15.

499 Simon Harrison (1995): 270.

500 Ibid., 269.

501 Ibid., 260-262.

To begin: is there a sense of re-invention going on? Taking a broad view of the landscape, again, state-sponsored re-imaging projects<sup>502</sup> stand out as being the clearest examples of this strategy as currently in play. Nested within their other strategies, these programmes have also engaged in strategies of innovation – elaborating on the traditional mural form in numerous ways. Importantly, these programmes have also modified the production of these murals, and the addition of community consultations is a notable example of this. Although the addition of consultation processes serves many other purposes, here, it can be understood as a being a dramatization of inclusion and representation. Whereas the paramilitaries who have been painting murals for the past few decades have claimed to do so from a position of defending and representing their neighbourhoods, here, the re-imaging programmes have taken it one step further, and have added a ritual of inclusion. As already explored, the claim of legitimate representation carries with it symbolic weight, and this modification works to make that claim, and to challenge others. Interestingly, not only has this addition added to the complexity of production, but it has also begun to alter the expectations that accompany the creation of new murals. A requirement for funding, consultation processes have become a growing norm, increasingly expected in the production of contemporary murals and the validation of their content as accepted by the local residents.

The second innovation involves the actual use of funds earmarked for good relations work in the creation of a mural. Not only does this result in a small plaque being located next to the mural, indicating the collaboration involved in its production and effectively bearing an official mark of approval<sup>503</sup>, but it also attaches the symbolic value of shared space to the wall. Integral to the good relations approach, as well as the management of public spaces, the notion of shared space has itself become a political symbol, capitalising “on the implied moral objectives [...] of creating ‘shared space’”<sup>504</sup>. In this way, the plaque of authorship and its attribution of shared space to the mural are referential to how paramilitary murals have worked to divide territory, and this can be read as a signifying a process of competitive differentiation. Additionally, although this elaboration tends to be a somewhat intangible addition it is occasionally made manifest, as was the case in both of the EBP’s murals. By incorporating green space into both of their projects, the EBP not only elaborates

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502 Particularly the ACNI’s programme, which is among the largest.

503 Perhaps matching similar claims of ownership and authorization found throughout paramilitary murals.

504 Mary-Kathryn Rallings, “‘Shared Space’ as Symbolic Capital: Belfast and the ‘right to the City’?” *City* 18, no. 4-5 (2014): 436.

on the wall as being the site of actual regeneration, but also literally adds to the scale of the mural itself; visually merging with the pocket park, the experience of the mural is extended outwards.

A third innovation is the creation of new categories of symbolic form, where re-imaging projects have elaborated on both the medium of expression and the process of production, attaching sculptures and art pieces to walls in a similar manner to painted murals. Charter's own programme, working in partnership with the ACNI on certain projects, will re-image a number of older murals with 'art pieces', which as Sam explained, are the pieces that go "up on aluminium and hoarding, you know, that's going to be bolted onto the wall- so if it ever needs to be changed it can be taken off, [...] changed again to something else"<sup>505</sup>. These comments indicate a form of competitive emulation, where the new pieces are described as being similar to painted murals in their transience, but simultaneously more robust; aluminium and hoarding are unquestionably more durable than paint – which weathers and ages at a faster rate. Furthermore, there are two other consequences to this change in medium that are worth mentioning here, the first being that a change in material will potentially affect the lifespan of who and what is on the wall, and therefore how the wall is used. The other result is that with this elaboration, the art pieces are produced in a studio or a workshop, and then simply assembled on the street. Although only limited in practice, this variation seems to take some of the local out of the walls, lessening the local experience of its production.

It is interesting to look at Charter's work with re-imaging, as it relates to its relationship with the East Belfast UDA, with which it maintains informal yet significant connections; essentially, it is following the "twin goals of establishing an identity distinct from the [armed group] and establishing a continuity with the past"<sup>506</sup>. Clearly engaging in processes of innovation that include the variations discussed above, as well as the introduction of new motifs within their imagery, Charter is working to establish its position on par with the armed group while also distinguishing itself as a community development organization that is politically minded. What is interesting is that while these changes signal a form of competitive emulation, it cannot really be described as rivalry, in that Charter continues to act referentially to the UDA, requesting permission to change the walls, and asking whether or not their new motifs are acceptable. Here, because of its origins, Charter could be interpreted as a form of descent group that is acting to establish an independent identity by

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505 Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:19:00 – 00:22:00].

506 Simon Harrison (1995): 267.

generating “a distinct set of symbolic *representations* of that identity”<sup>507</sup>, to then be approved by existing authority figures. Importantly, as explained by HARRISON, there are significant political implications involved in this bid for recognition, in that it can be read as a bid for leadership and the control of the walls<sup>508</sup>. The other side of the same coin is that by acknowledging the validity of Charter’s programme, as well as recognizing their right to lead those changes, the UDA manages to not only maintain some of its control, but in modifying it, distinguishes itself from the local UVF at the same time.

This leads to the final example of competitive elaboration, and it concerns the rivalry between the East Belfast UVF and the East Belfast UDA. Briefly, by looking at the paramilitary murals of either organization included in the case study, what is apparent is that while both have elaborated on the traditional mural form, they have also matched each other in the process on two points. First, both the UDA and the UVF have attached nationalistic, paramilitary, or other, flags to their murals, which serve to add to their prestige; and second, each organization has a mural that is located just next to an enclosed memorial, which visually attributes the numerous qualities usually associated with remembrance of the war dead, including the validation of deeds, and earned respect. In that they actually match each other in their elaborations, these innovations of added value could be read as a means of elaborating on a specifically paramilitary tradition, working to secure or maintain paramilitarism’s share of the total pool of symbolic capital available from what is an expanding tradition.

By looking through this window of analysis, and the four processes through which murals and their symbolic capital are politically interacted with, we have seen how, first and foremost, the wall continues to be a pivotal element in the (de)territorialization of local spaces. Following that, it also became apparent that where issues of cultural representation are concerned, there is a perceived dissonance between what good relations policies promote and what certain elected politicians practice. This friction underlines the point that the state cannot be assumed to be pathological in its approach<sup>509</sup>, and that there are various agendas operating through the murals, with vested interests in particular views of social cohesion. As it concerns processes of social transformation, and re-

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507 Ibid., 261.

508 Ibid., 261.

509 Dominic Bryan (2006): 610.

imaging specifically, there are clearly persisting tensions revolving around what is recognized as legitimate expertise, and class divisions are bound up in this. Finally, we also saw how the regulation and management of what public space is available for symbolic displays involves a complicated balancing of sensitivities between local paramilitary groups and those who seek to re-image: a process which not only reflects a continuing paramilitary presence but also a means through which it is maintained, if modified.

### **6.3 The mural as a point of connection**

Expanding on the understanding that the murals are sites of political encounter where behaviour is not only organized around specific values and entitlements, but also operates through a system of resemblances and differences, this final section will serve to explore this encounter as a point of connection. The starting point for this reflection stems from one of the working premises of SMITHEY's theoretical model discussed in Chapter 2<sup>510</sup>, which is that "boundaries are a product of the multiplex interactions of a range of individuals, organizations, and institutions whose relative positions of power can be in flux"<sup>511</sup>; in this way, the mural it is not only a practice of demarcation or boundary maintenance, but can be conceptualized as being a boundary in and of itself. As such, murals can be considered for the ways in which they are points of connection as well as disconnection, both sites and experiences of interaction through which the meaning of belonging is open to evaluation<sup>512</sup>.

As discussed in Chapter 4, researchers have recently begun to explore some of the ways in which Northern Ireland's murals offer a window "into a critical process in conflict transformation: changing perceptions of the conflict and softening out-group boundaries"<sup>513</sup>. This work has focused on how, "precipitated by significant social and political change", organizations and social groups in have worked through the murals to perform the psychocultural work which is "require[ed] in reconciling new circumstances and power relations with old identity categories"<sup>514</sup>. This research has predominantly focused on the symbolic content of such practices, with the intention of understanding how processes of modification can contribute to the revision of widely held categories of identification. With the present study I have sought to build upon this approach.

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510 Where he outlined the four theoretical developments for studying identity change in the context of conflict transformation.

511 Lee A. Smithey (2011), 28.

512 Susanne Buckley-Zistel (2006): 16.

513 Lee A. Smithey (2011), 78.

514 Both quotes from Lee A. Smithey (2011), 27.

Incorporating the element of interaction throughout the stages of analysis, I have worked to widen the habitual frame of interpretation, directing attention beyond the primacy of categories to the relevance of the encounter, and the character of the connections that occur across them; ultimately accounting for the ways in which the substance of social and political relationships may also be open to change. This approach is informed by the understanding that boundaries, social relationships, and in effect social reality, may change in the encounter, or more precisely, “in the [inter-subjective] process of understanding between self and other”<sup>515 516</sup>.

A snapshot onto complex and dynamic processes, the previous section served to explore the mural’s function as a political resource and the ways in which the organizations seek to capitalise on their significance and value as coded texts and sites of interaction. Studying this dimension of political conflict, we saw various ways in which their content and their production are relationally modified to meet strategic needs, offering the organizations with a focus point through which to manage change in the local area. As it concerns the murals, this change has largely been experienced in the form of the state’s good relations policy, specifically encountered through various re-imaging programmes, where the policy has effectively become a reference point around which the organizations interact and relationally position themselves. An attempt, on the part of the state, to recover its public position as well as structure understandings of how to share spaces, what became apparent was that such intervention is not only bound up politics of nationalism but also the politics of class, where different experiences of conflict, government, and peace have ultimately shaped localized perceptions of legitimacy and political authority, as it concerns processes of conflict transformation.

### **Transforming frames of identification**

We have observed a number of ways in which the activities surrounding the murals have contributed to the particular socio-political framing of each organization within the local landscape. Each using the murals as a means of demonstrating their value and legitimizing their activity in the area, they have worked from particular understandings of the needs and expectations found in the local population, behaving in a way that is “consonant with norms, values and beliefs [...] presume[d] [to be] widely shared”<sup>517</sup> in the locality. In this way, these processes and practices in

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515 Susanne Buckley-Zistel (2006): 5.

516 As discussed back in Chapter 2.

517 Cathryn Johnson (2006): 55.

themselves reveal particular understandings of whom the organization assumes to represent, of who constitutes their local. It would be useful to return to the murals, for both their narrative and their production, to touch upon these particular understandings.

Looking at the Partnership's 'Woman in the Field' (see Figure 13), it becomes clear that organization understands the local population to not only be accepting of change and the opening up of places, but also willing to celebrate it. Their sidestepping of external involvement during production indicates the understanding that the will of this majority is potentially obstructed by the will of a minority, whose practices and beliefs remain rooted in the recent conflict. Additionally, offering the local population an alternative use of space and alternative imagery suggests that the EBP perceives a need for alternative frames of public representation, suggesting that, as it stands, the local population haven't had much to work with- an understanding reinforced by positive feedback. Interestingly, when speaking about the mural, re-imagining, and re-creating spaces, Maggie suggested that over the years, heritage themes have become a bit hackneyed, that there "is a tiredness – of only seeing yourself in the same way"<sup>518</sup>. This commentary suggests that the current format of representation does not align with the locality's current experiences and needs, and simply promotes a tired and redundant method for change. And finally, a yet un-discussed dimension to the EBP's lack of consultation concerning the production of 'the Woman in the Field', offset with the invitation to experience its production, is the understanding that fundamentally, while some people may want to express themselves on the walls – there are also some people who do not feel the need to "have a public voice, they are content with [...] their world"<sup>519</sup>; most people just want to get on with their lives, and live comfortably.

Looking at 'The Past the Now the Future'(see Figure 8), at its imagery and its production, what becomes apparent is that Charter recognizes a need to mark out 'the Now' for the local residents; drawing a clear line between the past, the present, and the bright future acknowledges that presently, the benefits of peace have not yet been realized. This reminder indicates that the area continues to be marked by experiences of insecurity that may, in effect, blur the distinction between the now and the past, with the local residents needing some inspiration to move forward. Importantly, this insecurity is not only the threat of sectarian violence, but also, in David's words: "unbelievable poverty, deprivation, housing [issues], drugs. We've had fifteen years of peace, and for us, that's

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518 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:30:00- 00:32:00].

519 Ibid., [00:38:00- 00:40:00].

insane [...] There's been billions spent here, but [...] no real difference has been made in people's lives"<sup>520</sup>. The 'better future' is presented as not only containing employment and other opportunities, but is also represented as being nationally British, and so secure in its identity that is capable of embracing diversity; this image of the future serves to reassure the local population that this is what is being worked for. This indicates an understanding that although there may be a local acceptance of certain changes, it is dampened by the continuing threat of violence, poverty, and a pressing fear regarding the local people's place in the prospective future.

Looking at Freedom Corner, and the way in which the East Belfast UDA pledged to maintain the paintings, while simultaneously letting go of approximately twenty-five other murals, suggests that not only is the tableau significant for them, but that they also understand it to be locally valued. Promoted as potentially supporting local business by increasing tourism to the area, the stronger emphasis points to it being a local landmark, which indicates a notion of local acceptance and appreciation for it as a piece of local history. When describing its value in this way, David explained that they are "telling a historical story for us and they are part of our culture [...] they're messages walls for us"<sup>521</sup>. The need to maintain this record and its messages suggests that there is a need for a local historical record of the conflict, as well as a local interpretation of the loyalist experience; this is also apparent in the Charter's representation of 'the Past' (see Figure 8). What this suggests is that both the UDA and Charter understand that those who constitute the local do not currently see themselves as being represented in the broader narratives about the conflict, nor necessarily within current conceptualizations of loyalism, and that this needs to be addressed. Furthermore, associating the freshening up of Freedom Corner with Charter's Moving Communities Forward programme suggests that the UDA grounds its preservation in the perceived need to ensure the continuing protection of the territory, its inhabitants, and their nationality in the face of the 'Ulster Conflict'<sup>522</sup> - reflecting an understanding that, while change is necessary, a line of defence is still required. As Sam put it, there still people "who see those murals as safety nets. They still see that they are under threat from republicans because of the dissident element. And I can see why they think that"<sup>523</sup>.

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520 David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:15:00- 00:18:00].

521 David S. (CEO of Charter NI), [00:45:00-00:48:00].

522 As described in Figure 5.

523 Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:42:00 – 00:43:00].

And finally, looking at the East Belfast UVF's 'the Elementary Right' (see Figure 10), and its nod to Carson's complicated relationship with the unionist politicians, indicates that the UVF understands that the current situation concerning flags, emblems, and murals is unacceptable and is a source of insecurity to many within the locality. Through the mural's staunch imagery and its association with sectarian violence, the organization positions their constituency as solid in both their convictions and numbers; supportive of the UVF's continuing presence. Articulated in the language of the victim, where they are the party under attack, the mural frames its constituency as continuing to suffer while the powers-that-be restrict their capacity to protect themselves: effectively removing the humble right of defence. This frames those within the locality as living in fear of their potential defeat and subjugation. Being painted over a re-imaged mural, the Elementary Right' suggests that although the UVF view those who engage in acts of re-imagining as representing the minority, they are not insignificant, they are part of the wider problem.

These representations of imagined local communities are significant in that they not only provide clues as to how the organizations imagine the broader social group to which the local belongs, but importantly the ways in which they are connected to society and to the state; it narrates the character of relations that run through them, the things that connect and disconnect them to other places and people.

Although they mirror developments occurring within their social context, such as with the EBP's practice of non-affiliation and its concentration on collaborating for change, Charter's promotion of progressive loyalism in tandem with its growing recognition of the need for formal working class political representation, or the UVF's objection to compromise on issues of communal representation and the ways in which it blurs the line between past and present insecurities, these representations are only partial views of what is occurring. Their performances serve to dramatize what it means to belong to East Belfast, potentially developing an image of consensus of who lives there, and who could live there. They are constructed not only to conform to presumed norms, values and beliefs, but to also project particular interpretations of these shared understandings, adjusting them in a way that supports their public position and their underlying motives within that particular setting. Importantly, they all reach back to various pasts, which then tracks a linear progression to where they are now and why, in order to align expectations with their projects, and to identify the individual with their narrative as well as their future aspirations.

In so much as the EBP's murals lacks any form of affiliation, and is for nobody specifically, it is in a sense for everybody; this understanding can be similarly applied to their vision of an open 'community'. What then is their vision of society? Understanding that one of the obstacles to the transformation of a disadvantaged neighbourhood is its isolation, and that the opening up of local places will allow for an expansion of worldviews, suggests that wider society has progressed to a point where, to use Maggie's words "despite some of the headline stuff, people are much more integrated"<sup>524</sup> than they used to be. So, although societal divisions persist, it is now a growing possibility for people to transgress such demarcations and meaningfully interact with people of other mindsets. This understanding can be extended to the EBP's vision of the state, and the branding of so-called representative politics as hackneyed. Going the route of non-affiliation, the EBP is potentially associating with the ideological underpinning of non-designated political groups, which view the politics of orange and green<sup>525</sup> as non-productive and detrimental. In that Maggie herself described Northern Ireland as being a very insular place<sup>526</sup>, suggests that this idea of expansion extends to the politics of place – and the notion that most people, regardless of their affiliation, are being stunted in their progress by a minority, whose politics of representation remain rooted in the past.

Merging Charter NI and the East Belfast UDA together, as their narratives broadly parallel each other, what could be said about their vision of the 'community' of which the local is a part? While promoting an expanded understanding of their community, where multiculturalism is embraced and differences welcome, the core of this community- the site for this new multiculturalism- is and will continue to be ethnically Protestant, working within the logic of the two-communities framework. How then is this open, Protestant, community imagined? It comes back to the notion of there being a 'PUL'<sup>527</sup> community that is united but fragmented. Acknowledging internal diversity, but glossing over the significance of these differences, 'PUL' points to the current uncertainty of political direction within unionism, and the ambiguity regarding loyalism's place within broader unionist culture. Speaking to these dynamics, Sam described the 'PUL' community as "a community that's divided politically and socially", but explained that "that's good, that's healthy, that's politics"<sup>528</sup>,

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524 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:59:00- 1: 00:00].

525 A common euphemism for Protestant/unionist/loyalist (orange) and Catholic/nationalist/republican (green) that Maggie used when describing how different areas that are separated.

526 Maggie A. (Regeneration Manager at East Belfast Partnership), [00:24:00- 00:25:00]

527 A term that Sam W. used throughout the interview.

528 Both quotes from Sam W. (East Belfast Regional Manager at Charter NI), [00:32:00- 00:35:00].

where internal debate is currently allowing loyalism to find its place within the political sphere. What then is their vision of the society in which ‘PUL’ fits? Simply put, society continues to be ethnically and politically organized around Protestants and Catholics. However, since the violence has subsided, ‘tradition’ is no longer the sole identifier of significance, where, as David put it, “poverty links working class communities together [...] and that’s the big fucking comment; when you cut away the sectarianism, both communities are the same, they’re both deprived”<sup>529</sup>. A bicultural society fundamentally divided by socio-economic disparities, the means to cement the peace and to change the conditions of the working class is understood to be possible only if the current format for power-sharing is upheld. The structure of government is not without its problems, however, the way to affect change is to ignite transformation from within the two main political parties – the DUP and Sinn Fein – and this is viewed to be a generational process.

And most singular in their ideology, the UVF’s murals evoke very simple frames of imagined community, society, and state. The locals are working class Protestants, whose interests need to be promoted by unionists and protected by loyalists. The society in which they currently exist is made up of Protestants and Catholic republicans, who continue to be engaged in a war for social ascendancy. The state is naturally British, but it has been compromised, and needs to be challenged. These representations are potentially constitutive as well as reflective, and contribute to shared understandings of a social reality; as discussed in Chapter 2, “how people define the situation(s) in which they find themselves”<sup>530</sup> matters because “people act in terms of their shared imaginings”<sup>531</sup>. These visions inform the basis on which the organisation act in these spaces. Not only structuring the terms in which each organizations relates to the local population, but also the ways in which they connect those who constitute their local to the current political order; it is a site of political encounter. The type of community that is imagined and the meaning that actors attribute to their commonality matter because they “both shape experience and condition social and political action in different ways”<sup>532</sup>.

We have seen how the type of community imagined and the politics of representation continue to align with the two-communities model, as organizations involved in transformative processes must take this model into account and work with, or around it. As seen in the case study, a critical aspect

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529 David S. (CEO of Charter ND), [00:19:00- 00:20:00].

530 Richard Jenkins (2014), 108.

531 Richard Jenkins (2006): 394.

532 Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper (2004), 46.

of such conflict transformation processes has involved maintaining the legitimacy of the identified local stakeholders, and in doing so, have served to reinforce the so-called “unavoidable divide”.

To properly understand and characterize the full implications and impact of these murals within their socio-political context necessitates acknowledging, if not fully understanding the ways in which they are informed by, and in turn inform, multiple levels and dimensions of this context. In my analysis of the murals, it is clear that there is variance in the meanings and values attributed to the "divide" amongst the different organizations. With certain murals and certain organizational processes, there are indications of organizations ‘playing’ with change through experimentations; however, these do continue to be constrained by not only the larger political framework, but also local sensitivities. Ultimately, all of the examples in my case study contribute to perpetuating the two-communities logic.

The continuing dominance of the two-communities model limits the recognition of non-affiliated organizations such as the EBP and thus their legitimization as stakeholders within these processes; we saw this with the criticism of their murals as being middle-class ‘artsy fartsy’ fantasies. Nevertheless, my analysis of the production of these murals also demonstrates that although constraining, this framework does still allow for changing expressions of what it means to belong, and shifting frames of representation, and encounter. We saw this with Charter NI’s progressive interpretations of loyalism, and of its place in the political sphere. Another dimension of this was reflected in the steering panel for their re-imaging programme, in the fact that its members include the police, church figures, academics and politicians, as well as the design of the programme’s consultation process, which in addition to their core constituency included Catholic residents of the Short Strand and immigrant residents as well.

Political disagreement in and of itself is not really the issue, but rather, the subjective significance of the contested demand. Here, with issues of socio-political representation, the disagreement can become seemingly intractable when the demand is not only a constituting feature of a social groups’ understanding of its legitimate place within the social order, but also a central aspect of the ontological security of that social group. In these circumstances, it is more difficult for parties to recognize the contingency of their perceived truths, and to re-evaluate their perceptions of themselves, and of others.

The demands that motivate political action vary among these organizations, and the problem that arises through the social interaction that such action entails, involves coordinating action where consensus can be reached concerning behaviour. Tension emerges in these processes of coordination where consensus cannot be reached as to the validity, the legitimacy, of a motivating demand<sup>533</sup>. It is through the public sphere that the tensions between differing claims of validity can be discussed, debated, and developed within and between various social groups. Opinions concerning the quality and value of negotiated principles are worked out through such processes, where they are ultimately informed through the encounter and are inter-subjectively tested<sup>534</sup>. Despite the tensions that can arise and even the seemingly intractable points of conflict, such as when the security of the social group seems threatened, these murals represent active points of encounter between social groups that can incrementally alter each one's perceived truths and perceptions. These shifts may not be immediately apparent in the "snapshot in time" that is this analysis, but the processes of production behind the murals have the potential to contribute to an incremental process of changing what means to belong.

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533 Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 17.

534 Serena Parekh, "A meaningful place in the world: Hannah Arendt on the nature of human rights," *Journal of Human Rights* 3 no. 1 (March 2004): 47.

## Conclusions

Concretizations of complex social processes, the murals along the lower Newtownards Road provided a solid ground from which to explore the dynamics of social and political relationships within the current context of the peace process, as well as the impact of certain strategies in working towards a 'shared future'. To do this, I approached the murals from three angles of analysis.

This first stage of analysis served to study the murals as coded texts whose interpretation would allow me to explore how the EBP, Charter NI, the UDA and the UVF position themselves within East Belfast's contemporary social and political landscape. This analysis provided some interesting insights as to how the murals are a resource through which these groups, each in their own way, can publicly define and perform their role and value to the locality. The East Belfast Partnership's murals evoke an experience of place that is explicitly natural, and position the organization as a locally rooted entity that, while integrated with broader government strategy, is distant from Northern Ireland's divisive politics. Working in this capacity, the EBP is represented as an effective and neutral entity through which local residents can collaborate to generate growth and effect tangible change. Similar to the EBP, Charter NI's murals also advocate for a positive future. However, by firmly establishing a grassroots connection through its paramilitary past, Charter's murals differ in that they work to illustrate the organization's function as a loyalist facilitator, a dove of peace, guiding the way towards a peaceful future in a British society. Highlighting contemporary social issues in its re-imaged murals, Charter positions itself as a working-class entity capable of navigating state structures, ultimately defining itself as a legitimate stakeholder in current political and social affairs. Through Freedom Corner, the East Belfast UDA works to present itself as a legitimate security force whose past actions served to defend the locality and support the preservation of the British state. Now working with Charter, and allowing for the transformation of certain murals, the UDA is shown to acknowledge the contemporary political arrangements and the need for an alternative strategy of 'defence', effectively situating itself as the foundations from which such strategy operates. Finally, in reaching back to the Home Rule Crisis and the First World War, the East Belfast UVF grounds its image on that of its namesake. Likened to the common soldier, the current UVF is tasked with the responsibility of protecting victories won by fallen comrades, fundamentally continuing a legacy that is bound to the preservation of a British state.

Evoking particular narratives of betrayal, the murals point to dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, and effectively claim Northern Ireland as its inheritance.

Understanding that a mural's significance is bound up in the processes of production and the relationships that develop through them, the objective of the second stage of analysis was to study these processes, and to study the ways in which the various organizations interact with their broader social and political environment. This began with a discussion of the structural context in which these organizations operate. Focusing on the production as a site of encounter between the state and the local, it became clear that the relations between the two are shaped by some of the state's tools of influence, namely good relations policy/regulation, funding, and policing. Questioning the impact of this policy on working class neighbourhoods, what became apparent was that it requires local-level validation; its implementation is a negotiated process between localized and governmental power structures. Ultimately, whether or not a local organization engages in good relations work, or recognizes state authority on these matters, is related to its own position and role in the area and the constituency to which it plays; the act of production is an opportunity through which the various organizations, departments and agencies can frame and legitimate their position within that encounter.

Directing focus back to the case study, I then considered the significance of production as framed by sponsors on the local level. I did this in two steps, beginning with a descriptive account of production, and the ways in which each organization engaged with their environment during that process. What emerged from these observations were distinct profiles that connected each organization to the locality in specific ways. These profiles underscored the significance of processes of production as a means through which each organization is able to develop a particular tone for their public image while also structuring the terms of their relations within their broader environment. For instance, through processes of re-imaging, Charter is able to present itself as a credible partner to the state for delivering its policy, while at the same time, mediating its implementation in a way that aligns with their ethos as a loyalist organization. Additionally, by grounding itself in a lengthy consultation process Charter was also able to perform its role as both a facilitator and a representative for the local residents. In turn, by compromising with Charter over the murals, the East Belfast UDA was able to position itself as a relatively progressive paramilitary group, while maintaining credibility among its support base by marking the limitations to what

change they would allow. Openly following good relations policies without having to navigate external influences, the Partnership was able to endorse a strategy of alternative practice, and present itself as unique on the local landscape. Framed as a form of arts-led regeneration, each mural's significance and impact has become inseparable from its affiliated project, and the overall effect has served to promote the EBP as capable of effecting change through the strategic coordination of its projects. And finally, through its murals, the UVF demonstrated a complete separation from the state and a rejection of its good relations work; framing any concession as a loss, they present themselves as soldiers in a continuing war. Relying on localized networks of support to fund its projects, the production of the murals indicated the continuing existence of some level of local support for the organization as defenders; in so much as the murals went up without police interference, their claim was strengthened in the absence of regulation.

What then emerged from speaking with Sam and David was that Charter is understood to be operating as a competitor in an environment that is somewhat hostile towards them. An established grassroots organization that is not only committed to the peace process, but also capable of delivering and effecting change in ways that others cannot, it is an integral link to fostering state-local cooperation, particularly through its relationship with the DUP. Discussing the implementation of the programme on the ground, Sam highlighted how 'grassroots' relationships in the East are being shaped by ideological divisions within contemporary loyalism, and that re-imaging murals has become part of internal debate revolving around who has the effective and legitimate means of representing loyalist interests. Importantly, Sam's contrast between regressive loyalism and progressive loyalism was extended up through the unionist parties currently in government, and the political agendas that they promote. From speaking with Maggie, the Partnership emerged as an objective guardian, working for the development of the local community as well as the transformation of the constellation of groups that work on their behalf. Although this can sometimes be a difficult setting for them to work in, the EBP is understood to do what it can to encourage social transformation, and breaking away from Northern Ireland's brand of political statement-making is understood to be a part of that.

Understanding that the processes described above constitute an active form of social mapping, the purpose of the third stage of analysis was to more closely consider the significance of these relational dynamics within the current socio-political climate, and unfolded in two parts. It was

necessary to first expand on the understanding that as specifically political symbols, these murals contain stocks of symbolic capital, representing a range of intangible strategic assets of political significance. The discussion then turned to consider the ways in which, as a form of political currency, various political actors may compete to influence the balance of capital in their favour and consequentially established that this activity constitutes a form ‘symbolic conflict’, a dimension of political conflict.

HARRISON’S model of the Four Types of Symbolic Conflict then provided a useful lens through which to look at the politics of symbolic capital as they concern the murals, and approach the question of interaction and the ways in which the murals are employed by both state and societal organizations as they navigate issues of representation and legitimacy in the public sphere. Following HARRISON’S description of the four processes of valuation, appropriation, innovation, and destruction, I applied the model to the case study in the form of four questions. This model allowed us to explore how the various organizations engaged in: strategies of (de)valuation as they competed for status on the local scene; strategies of appropriation and monopolization as they sought to legitimize their claim to the walls; strategies of expansion as they competed for the human resources of political allegiance; and strategies of innovation, and processes of competitive differentiation, as they each sought to establish a distinct identity of superior status. By studying these four processes we saw how, first and foremost, the wall continues to be a pivotal element in the (de)territorialization of local spaces. Following that, it also became apparent that where issues of cultural representation are concerned, there is a perceived dissonance between what good relations policies promote and what certain elected politicians practice. This friction underlines the point that there are various agendas operating through the murals, with vested interests in particular views of social cohesion. As it concerns processes of social transformation, and re-imaging specifically, there are clearly persisting tensions revolving around what is recognized as legitimate expertise, and class divisions are bound up in this. Finally, we also saw how the regulation and management of what public space is available for symbolic displays involves a complicated balancing of sensitivities between local paramilitary groups and those who seek to re-image: a process which not only reflects a continuing paramilitary presence but also a means through which it is maintained, if modified.

The second part served to expand on this understanding of the murals as sites of political encounter, exploring it as a point of connection through which the substance of social and political

relationships may also be open to change. Understanding that each of the organizations use the murals as a means of demonstrating their value and legitimizing their activity in the area, and that they do so with particular understandings of the needs and expectations found in the local population, the final section returned to the murals, for both their narrative and their production, to identify who is it that each organization assumes to represent, of who constitutes their local.

Discussing the ways in which each organization projects a different vision of the local community, we saw how these imaginings are significant in that they are potentially constitutive, and may inform the basis on which the organisation relates to the local population, as well as the ways in which they connect those who constitute their local to the current political order. All aligning with the two-communities/other model, we saw how processes of re-imagining have generally maintained the legitimacy of the identified local stakeholders and in doing so, have served to reinforce the so-called “unavoidable divide”. However, it was also clear that although constrained by a various factors, there is variance in the meanings and values attributed to the "divide" as well as indications of incremental innovation as it concerns representing imagined communities, and expressions of what it means to belong. Reflecting on what these shifting frames of representation and division means in terms in the broader context of transition, the discussion concluded with the note that despite the tensions that can arise and even the seemingly intractable points of conflict, these murals represent active points of encounter between social groups that can incrementally alter perceptions. These shifts may not be immediately apparent in the "snapshot in time" that is this analysis, but the processes of production behind the murals have the potential to contribute to an incremental process of changing what means to belong.

In as much as this case study has focused on murals along a section of the lower Newtownards Road that has, through various historical and social forces, been marked as being a Protestant area, the observations and findings have been limited to studying work and change within the ‘intra’, where the dynamics in motion and the effects under consideration relate to a particular set of social relations. That being said, it has nevertheless provided insight into the nuances of complex social and political processes currently underway in Northern Ireland, and has not only generated understandings regarding achievements and challenges found in the contemporary stage of transition, but has also presented an interesting line of inquiry for future research.

Studying the murals developed significant insights into the relational context, and the ways in which social relationships are grounded in, and negotiated through, societal power structures. Through the analysis, an underlying point of dissensus emerged within these relations concerning the right to the walls, which points to differing notions of what constitutes ‘the public’ and what constitutes ‘the private’. An excavation of what ‘the public’ means to different parties could have practical implications regarding the development of a less fragmentary civic culture, as well as open up a discussion within the public sphere for debate concerning modalities of political participation and the question of the responsible use of these spaces. This would reach beyond the murals and touch upon other disputes concerning commemoration, parades and other rituals/displays of particularistic design. A focused discussion on ‘the public’ would have the potential to transcend ascribed positions and the language of community; opening up a broader dialogue on the relationship between the state and the people and the ways in which it has changed since 1998, could prompt reflection on how the structures which inform relationship may be re-interpreted for the current context. Ultimately the potential for transformative processes, such as re-imaging, to move past contemporary obstacles is tied up in this relationship- it is not solely determined by local dynamics, state interventions or anything in-between, but rather through their encounters, and the character of their imagined connections.

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## Appendix.

List of Figures: The murals along the lower Newtownards Road



Figure 1: Freedom Corner, Past Defenders



Figure 2: Freedom Corner, Ulster's Present Day Defenders



Figure 3: Freedom Corner, Red Hand of Ulster



Figure 4: Freedom Corner, UFF Gunman



Figure 5: Freedom Corner, The Ulster Conflict



Figure 6: Freedom Corner, Who Shall Separate Us



Figure 7: War and Peace



Figure 8: The Past the Now the Future



Figure 9: Our Brave Defenders

(Photo credit: ©Michael Fisher, Micheal Fisher's News [Blog Post] <sup>1</sup><https://fisherbelfast.wordpress.com/tag/royal-irish-fusiliers/>)



Figure 10: The Elementary Right



Figure 11: We are the Pilgrims

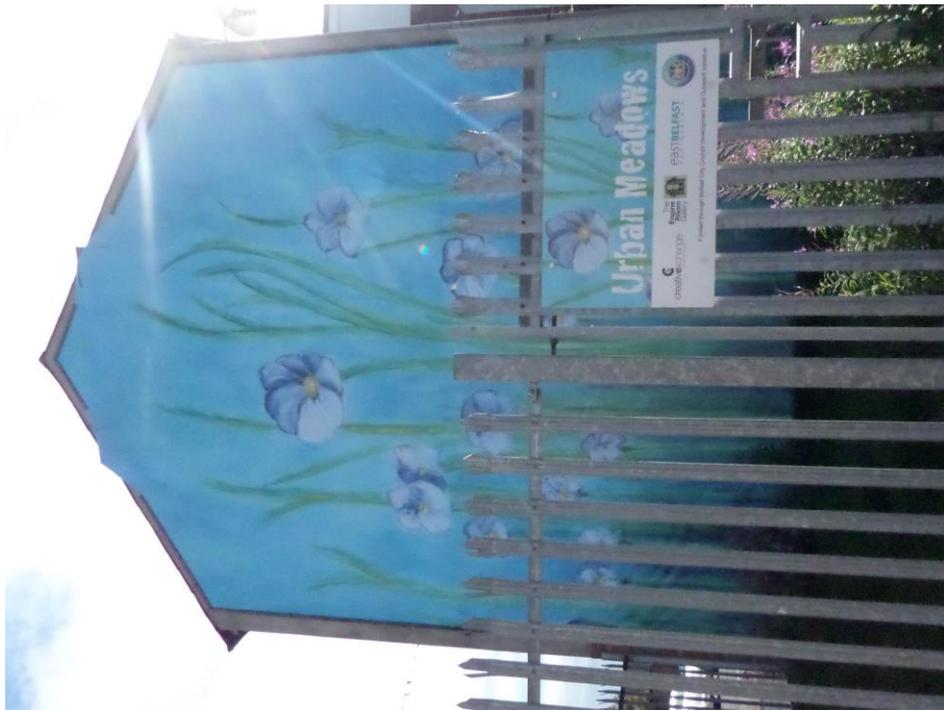


Figure 12: Urban Meadows



Figure 13: The Woman in the Field