Modulating mythology in a post-traumatic era: Murals and re-imagining in Northern Ireland

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Arguably the most ancient of the social media, wall paintings have been a persistent vehicle of cultural meaning management. The dynamics of myth markets are reflected in the sectarian murals of Northern Ireland. In this paper, we draw from consumer research literature on mythology and street art to explore the continuous revision of these wallscapes that seeks to address the enduring contradictions of civic ideology in contested political space. In particular, we focus on the use of classical, historical and pop-cultural mythologies to transform private space into public place. We examine the decommissioning of murals occurring in the wake of the Peace Accords, and speculate on the implications of the creation of a shared mythology for the future of mural painting and the state.

Keywords: Mythology, street art, public place, political contestation

Introduction

In this paper, we draw principally from the consumer research literature on mythology (Brown et al. 2013a; Levy 1981; Stern 1995; Thompson 2010, 2008; Arsel and Thompson 2011; Venkataraman et al. 2001), retroscapes (Brown and Sherry 2003), and street art (Visconti et al. 2010; Borghini et al. 2010) to explore the ways in which two brand/fan communities have altered their respective mythic iconographies both to accommodate and resist the supra-local process of reconciliation aimed at creating a common or shared sense of civic community. We employ the images themselves and an analysis of their agency to illustrate the complexity of re-imaging.

This paper is excerpted from a larger ethnographic/netnographic study of the redaction of sectarian murals in Northern Ireland. While the long-term project is focused primarily on the changes in painting that followed in the wake of the Good Friday Peace Accords of 1998, our paper offers more of a historical perspective on the murals, and we draw principally from archival sources and our own photographs for our analysis. We concentrate on the use of mythic motifs in the creation and maintenance of brand or fan community, and the conversion of public space first to private place, and thence to public place, as the forces of sectarian integrity are shaped toward common civic ends.

We describe how public space can be contested as sectarian, or returned to a prospective community as a collective good, promoting a feeling of belonging and encouraging dialogue in the service of restorative meaning. We trace the evolution of the murals, from once hidden visual narratives of identity to the spectacle of the public domain, illustrating how the dialectical and dialogical interaction of stakeholders drives a type of layered agency. Distinct communities are given the opportunity to learn from the 'Other' in terms of ability to comprehend images in the language of the 'Other' (Penaloza and Venkatesh 2006, 307). Public space is co-created out of private place, for example, compare cave paintings to murals, where mythic iconography builds mythic identity. Intimate space is opened out to public exposure and con-

flictual narratives and ideologies of identity consumption are reconfigured. Murals comprise a kind of insurgent public space (Hou 2010), an alternative repurposing of the urban landscape for common cause.

While our study unfolds in a Northern Irish setting, it is important to recognize that murals have contributed to the process of nation building in a number of cultures around the world. Murals are monumental works of public art (Greeley 2012). "Muralisms" and "muraling" imply both an image of aesthetic value and a coherent vision of the world – an art object and a cultural practice (Campbell 2012, 263). The complex is enmeshed in a politics and poetics of national identity. Muraling has flourished throughout Latin America (Chaffee 1993) and, in particular, Mexico (Anreus et al. 2012; Coffey 2012). It has figured prominently in such places as South Africa (Marschall 2002), Palestine (Huda et al. 2014), Sardinia (Rolston 2014), and on the former Berlin Wall. Muraling has thrived in the urban enclaves (Cockcroft et al. 1998), revitalizing central business districts (Fleming 2007) and small towns (Marling 1982) of the United States.

Street art and brand community contexts

While it may seem ironic, if not wholly inappropriate, to speak of civil-religious factions in the language of the marketplace, as publics counterpublics (Warner 2002) or as brand and fan communities (Schau et al. 2009), we find many of the same processes and features at work among these groups that the scholars of the sacralization of the secular (from Belk et al. 1989 through Muniz and Schau 2005, for example), the materiality of association (from Muniz and O'Guinn 2001 through Schouten and McAlexander 1995, for example), and the tribalization of consumption (from Maffesoli 1996 through Cova et al. 2007, for example) have found in theirs. To treat ideology or religion as a consumption experience is to return much of this earlier scholarship to its roots (Kozinets 2002; Sherry and Kozinets 2007).

Cultural branding (Holt 2004; Holt and Cameron 2010) posits the existence of myth markets that arise in response to and attempt to resolve contradictions in civic ideology. Civic ideology (in competition and concert most strikingly with religion and ethnicity) bridges the gap between the moral consensus a nation requires to function and the everyday identity projects of its citizens. This ideology is embodied in myths, which draw upon populist worlds for sustenance. Myth markets are "implicit public conversations" about civic ideology that are enacted through cultural production by a host of stakeholders (Holt 2004, 56-59).

The riven nature of our field site provides a fertile field of inquiry into myth markets. Moral consensus is a turbulent, fragile, negotiated, emergent enterprise with the civic ideology being contested by republican and loyalist communities (each of which has internal rifts on matters of means and goals. Civic, religious and ethnic discourses are thoroughly interpenetrating. For example, one commentator (Tanner 2001, 2, 8) juxtaposes the absence of art in Protestant churches with the profusion of florid iconography on the gable walls of the North, and the realist nature of republican painting with the implied mystical and allegorical art in catholic churches. Each is a way of sacralizing and appropriating public space. Individual identity projects are further complicated by the globalization of consumer culture. The mural, as both material artifact and social process, is a powerful example of vernacular culture shaping civic ideology. Murals are embodiments and emplacements of myth markets.

Murals have existed in a state of revision since their inception, with pieces being repaired, refreshed, replaced and retired over time (Rolston 1991; Woods 2008). They have commemorated folkloric conceits (Cuchulainn and the wolf hound; the Red Hand of Ulster), specific historic moments (the Battle of the Boyne; the Battle of the Somme) and contemporary flashpoints (the hunger strikers and the blanket men of Long Kesh). Murals have long been vehicles of eternal and empirical truth (May 1991), which have represented sectarian perspectives. Source material itself has been problematized, as in the case of the culture hero Cuchulainn, or of the Red Hand

of Ulster, each of whose images have been incorporated into republican and loyalist murals. Cross-cultural borrowing has also occurred, as mythic images from South Africa, Cuba, Palestine and Native America are interwoven with republican symbolism to dramatize similarity and solidarity with other populist movements. But the current trend of producing larger civic (rather than explicitly sectarian) themes that subordinate ancient enmities to the goal of joint nation building portends an especially interesting era of modulated mythology in the evolution of Northern Irish murals. What joint myth can be called upon or created to forge common cause?

The nature of public commemoration

Alderman (2000, 658) considers 'public commemoration' as a socially directed process. People have to share in the value of such visual memorialization as being 'commemorable' (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991, 382) in order for it to command attention. Memorial spaces do not simply reflect public attitudes; they shape how we interpret and value the past, 'Memorial sites solidify historical heritage in terms of location, architecture, and ritual activities," (Azaryahu 1999, 482).

Even more importantly, such sites mythologize moments and movements, instanciating the people, events, values and ideas memorialized. Like brandscapes, the sites embody the mythic meanings of their co-creators, and provide a mythic charter for the ritual activity they underwrite (Sherry 1998). Mythology is encoded in contemporary urban streetscapes every bit as much as it is in aboriginal landscapes (Chatwin 1998), and remains a potent cosmological lodestar in ostensibly secular settings.

Just as mythology has always been revised (Leach 1973) and tradition (re-)invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger 2012), memorial landscapes are in a constant state of redefinition as the heritage and cultural tourism industry continues to expand, and as marginalized populations seek public recognition. Social actors and groups experience and construct the past in different ways and seek to establish the legitimacy of their different historical visions by maintaining memorial landscapes or by creating new ones. This is much in evidence through the evolution of the once hidden brand(ed) community murals that decorate gable walls in brand community enclaves (housing estates). By contrast to other geographic displays of public 'visual materialized discourses', the Northern Ireland context has offered up private galleries and changing canvases for public gaze where mythic identities can be reworked, regenerated, renewed in the safety of 'intimate intensity'. Commemorative sites as visual "materialized discourses," lend themselves to become "value-charged symbolic space," (Hönnighausen 1999, 80).

Memorial sites do not just provide the narrative backdrop; rather the spaces themselves represent both a physical location and a sight-line of interpretation (Johnson 1995). Maurice Halbwachs (1992) observed in early religious rituals, the most successful ones had a 'double focus'—a physical object of veneration and a shared group symbol superimposed on this object. Murals offer this 'double focus,' elevating the hand painted memorials to sites of worship within defined 'brand' communities. The shared group symbol, takes on a more sinister form of visual narrative (i.e. a flower, symbolic of each community, lily and poppy) can be discretely embedded within this form of co-created visual discourse. The symbolic dimension of memorial sites and their obvious connections with social memory and identity politics have garnered much interest in recent times. The 'unveiling' of these once private galleries to public gaze has initiated intra and inter brand community exploration and discussion. These 'sites of memory' (Nora 1989) are considered, 'the dynamic process by which groups map myths (in an anthropological sense) about themselves and their world onto a specific time and place' (Till 1999, 254).

This mapping process is responsible for creating mythic (whether individual or group) identities, which inevitably become symbolically coded and ritualized in such art memorial landscapes (Johnson 2002, 294). Commemorative practice in Northern Ireland has become a means

for nationalists and unionists to compete in the 'Olympics of suffering', and as the state continues to fund so-called 'single-identity' commemorative work (recent re-imaging of the murals); commemoration is set to retain its divisive characteristics. Commemoration, because it clearly articulates identity, can be the target for defacement, desecration and violent attack from the 'Other' (Nagle 2008, 34). Doss writes that the 'Symbolic Memorial' contains 'no references to why the bombing occurred and who was responsible or to the nation's history of catastrophic violence' (2002, 74). Rather than 'opening a window' on traumatic events, easing the process from mourning through to acceptance, these symbolic art forms – the murals are an, 'anaesthetic because the historical and political context of why these deaths occurred has been effaced,' (2002, 78). We situate the shifting identity politics of the current era in the contesting ideologies of public space identified by Visconti et al. (2010) in Table 1. (Table 1)

A brief history of change

Table 1
Re-IMAGING PUBLIC SPACE

Street Artists	DWELLERS: Individualistic appraisal of public space	DWELLERS: Collectivistic appraisal of public space
Individualistic appraisal of public space	**Private appropriation of Public space** Dialectical confrontation - Contesting hypocrisy - Self-affirmation - Market exploitation - Dwellers' preserving private property	**Dwellers' resistance to the Alienation of public space** Dialectical confrontation - Contesting street art locations, forms and intents - Defending the authentic voice of the place
Collectivistic appraisal of public space	- Enchanting urban space via gift - Enchanting urban space via vitalizing Dialectical confrontation **Artists' claim for street democracy**	- Dialogical recreation of public place - Sense of place and feeling the community Dialogical confrontation **Striving for common place**

After Visconti et al. (2010)

The murals comprise an example of urban space as cultural fields and texts that shape and reflect community (Visconti et al. 2010; Warner 2002). Murals are a form of mass communication that help publics – or counterpublics or split publics – to know themselves and act as political subjects (Cody 2011). Relations among members of these groups are mediated materially by the apparatus of communications (Latour 2005). Murals are not merely the passive outdoor billboards of the myth market. They are agentic in their own right (Rolston 2003). As such, they may be understood to exist in a perpetual state of transition.

Unionist mural painting is a century-old tradition, grounded in historical celebration of empire and ascendancy, commemorating such events as military battles and coronations and embedded in a larger ceremonial complex of pageantry, processional marching, bonfires and symbols of affiliation with Britain. Republican mural painting has a much shorter history, originating in graffiti-type sloganeering and rare depictions of historic Irish revolutionaries, and emerging as memorial portraiture in the wake of the Hunger Strike of 1981 (Rolston 1991,

2003; Vannais 2001; Woods 2008). The former florescent tradition arose out of a position of political dominance and territorial security, the latter clandestine tradition out of political suppression and territorial insecurity.

During the era of the civil rights struggle (aka "The Troubles" or the "Thirty Year War"), unionist murals emphasized paramilitary themes almost exclusively (Rolston 1991, 2003; Vannais 2001). While republican murals also reflected paramilitary themes, it further incorporated content emphasizing the political aspirations of the movement (including solidarity with other revolutionary movements around the globe), as well as ethnic identity motifs rendered in "Celtic Kitsch" (Rolston 2003; Vannais 2001).

Following the ceasefires of 1994, loyalist murals remained bellicose in a defensive key, grew increasingly segmented by paramilitary group, and focused on the release of loyalist prisoners and memorials to slain comrades. Little proactive embrace of the potentialities of peace was evinced. Republican murals increasingly emphasized political over military approaches to the future, as well as historical and traditional cultural themes. Unionist murals mirrored the threat level perceived by the paramilitaries, and the republican murals, the optimism that the promise of a larger share of political voice engendered (Rolston 2003; Vannais 2001).

The decommissioning of murals currently being promoted by government and cultural authorities (Keenan 2007; 2010) has the potential of accelerating the rate of change in mural styles in sectarian communities toward themes of the common good and joint prosperity. Divergence from paramilitary style is occurring among unionist painters, with a return to historic themes being a notable trend. Republican murals have adopted more of a commemorative attitude. This change reflects the shifting identity politics at work among the groups as they negotiate the emerging nation (Rolston 2003; Vannais 2001). While government funded Council murals of the late 70s and early 80s "neither encouraged nor quelled" the local political upsurge (Rolston 1991, 68), the current sociopolitical climate may produce different results.

Many of the motives Chaffee (1993, 10-20) has identified as drivers of street art around the world are at work in Northern Ireland. Street culture promotes popular attention to billboards. The act of painting itself is both a protest and a means of catharsis; it may also "cool out" (Rolston 1991) potential miscreants, which makes government funding an attractive if ultimately ineffective vehicle of social control. Murals promote cultural and ethnic identity, and may serve as an alternative medium for marginal groups deprived of access to official or formal communication channels. Murals are used to define territory and intimidate political rivals. The propaganda value of murals is widely acknowledged (Woods 2008). Painted images are also inspirational, serving to boost morale within the community (Chaffee 1993, 10-20).

Mythic modalities

For brevity's sake, we offer a simple typology of modalities to describe the mythic dimension of the Northern Irish murals. Classical mythology, drawn from the realm of traditional Irish folklore, employs deep cultural symbols to evoke in beholders a sense of belonging to the land in a primordial manner, a mystical participation in the cultural ethos that is grounded in place. The use of deep cultural symbols persists throughout the eras of muraling. Historical mythology is used to exalt an actual human being, promoting that real-life personage into the realm of the hagiographic, and, often, martyrologic. Even when this trend is temporarily displaced, as in the 70s, heraldic and nationalist symbols are still used to evoke reverence (Rolston 1991). A precursor to and embodiment of the inexorable subsumption of culture by marketing, popcultural mythology has been used to infuse murals with a currency and relevance, so that their subject matter may speak to younger generations perhaps less familiar with or committed to the civic conversation, in a way that invites fresh engagement, whether with sectarian or post-sectarian values. This trend began in the late 80s, as young muralists began to break with traditional forms to embrace such pop cultural forms as album covers for inspiration (Rolston 1991). Fi-

nally, we identify an emerging post-traumatic mythology devoted to a transcendent theme of reconciliation, which promotes a tentative, utopian civic ideology of cooperation across factions in pursuit of peaceful prosperity. The sacrificial myth of martyrdom (Kearney 1985, 66) may well be a unifying motif across all of these forms.

In the short term, we expect this strategy of accommodation to provoke a counter-strategy of resistance and re-membrance in some quarters, fuelling a refreshing and refurbishing of traditional murals. The historical forces giving rise to post-traumatic mythology are situated in the context of a nascent "Brand Belfast" (Brown et al. 2013b) that seeks to pacify and incorporate an "Olympics of suffering" ethos into its emerging image as a cultural (including pop-cultural) center. Commodifying the martyrological moment in a way that supports the local heritage industry without inflaming or devaluing sectarian sympathy will become Belfast's 21st century mythological challenge. The conversion of contested sites to tourist attractions will require an enlightened mythopoeic marketing to prevent a proliferation of Demiurgic Disneylands on the order of LA/NYC gang turf tours. The "dark tourism" option (Brown et al. 2013b, 1262) may not be as officially uncommodifiable as theorists imagine.

The murals

The murals define individual community suffering, fears and trauma. This challenges collective identity and, in doing so, reinforces division through the ownership of restrained colour palates and symbols. Spectators can 'live through' painful episodes clothed in the raiments of 'Others', just as the Pre-Raphaelites 'murals' of the suffering Christ, conjure up a sense of time, place and space. Mythology is embedded into the creation of this form of urban art, played out in ritualized fashion at these sacred sites of commemoration. Murals are examples of 'collective action', especially in their re-imaging. Paramilitaries, community members, artists and government funding bodies' negotiate the aesthetics of the final work to be hung in the private gallery of the housing estate, now open to public gaze.

The consociational model of government in place currently in Northern Ireland has afforded opportunities for exposure of these private 'tribal' galleries not only to the 'Other' but also to the world stage, which in turn has been instrumental in driving forward an evolutionary phase of re-imaging evidenced within the two communities' canvascapes. Murals as living tapestries reflect consumer culture in artistic hangings, where the 'sharing out' of the private to a more public showing helps to bring about the transformation of this place of consumption.

Murals are largely painted by the communities they speak to (Rolston 2003). As such, they sustain a visual rhetoric, which can evoke a diversity of responses in the community. Murals, considered as brand community rhetoric, speak essentially to those already brand-loyal to one ideology. Murals have afforded a blank canvas on which to create myths and legends of the past; evidenced by an evolving kaleidoscope of moving images portraying a mix of, 'myth-symbol complexes and mythomoteurs,' (Forker and McCormick 2009, 425); where legitimacy of identity has its origins in religious and political ideology of the past. The storytelling of myths through constrained colour-palettes helps to reinforce concepts of victimization, sacralization/demonization of the brand legacy.

Murals are the storybook depiction of key events that continue to shape our present understandings of imagined/liminal communities (Turner 1969). The ability for murals to summon-up 'gods' and re-connect disparate tribes (Cova 1997) is reflective of the symbolic strength inherent in these visual brands, understood as, 'significant ideoscapes,' (Askegaard 2006, 84). The conjuring-up of mythical heroes; devotees of good over evil have long captured the imagination of adult and child alike, in such popular film culture as Superman, Spiderman and Batman. Star Wars and Lord of the Rings draw heavily on heroic myth-making to instil moral concerns and it is perhaps not surprising that paramilitary murals routinely depict 'heroes' devoted to a morally legitimate cause; the fight for good over evil. The crusade-like religiosity of

these particular forms of murals serve to authenticate the brand identity and fortify brand community membership (Figures 1 and 2).

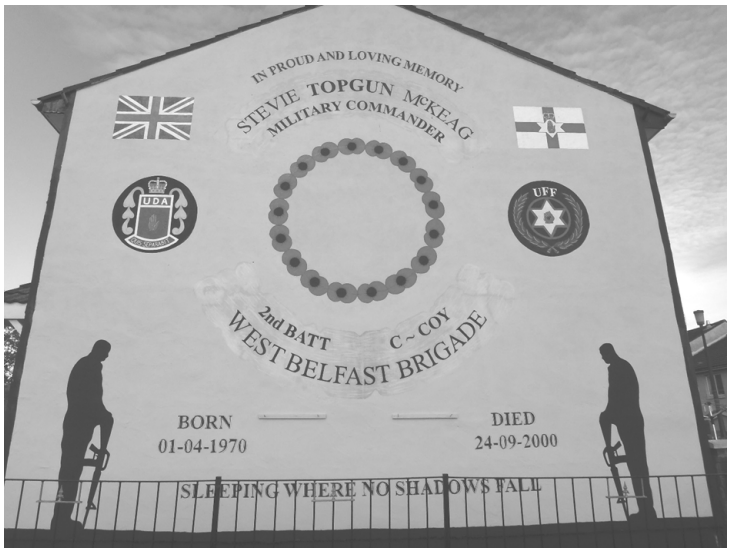


Figure 1. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012) Belfast;
Figure 2. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012) Belfast

Brand legitimacy can be pursued through recalling key events in the brand's life-history (Figures 3 and 4). The capacity to engage global conversations in the storytelling mythologies, serves only to add another layer of authenticity to the brand community identity communicated (Figure 5). These murals serve a different function than the other more openly political ones; instead of being agents of documentation for the change in political brands, they display con-

Figure 3. An Gorta Mor, Ardoyne Avenue, Belfast (1999);
Figure 4. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012 Belfast)

nectedness to the global brand community experiencing similar brand narratives and evolution (Figure 6).

Although the murals limit explicit commentary on the severity of the foreign/local problems depicted and avoid direct comparison with brand Northern Ireland, they nevertheless communicate solidarity with other suppressed brands. The diversity of storytelling from the occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel to the more historical connections and lineage are given mythical status through the utilization of artistic license, because they incorporate external thematic elements which makes either/or community seem more secure; using the plight of external 'others' as surrogates/missionaries of the brand, 'avoids reinforcement of ethnocentric competitiveness,' (Forker and McCormick 2009, 436). Hutchinson and Smith (1996, 7) define ethnie as, 'a named human population with a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more el-

Figure 5. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012) Palestinian prisoners' mural on Falls Road.
Figure 6. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012) reference to WW1 Battle of the Somme Sandy Row Belfast.

ements of common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity among at least some of its members.' This common ethnie of 'shared memories, myths, values and symbols woven together and sustained in popular consciousness,' according to (Featherstone 1990) is becoming diffused across the general population and no longer forms a common bond shared uniquely by members of the culture. Craig and Douglas (2006, 322) consider this a form of cultural contamination. This is evidenced in the mythical narratives pedalled in the evolving Muralscapes of N Ireland; especially in the blurring of the stewardship of particular myths.

The use of mythological imagery in murals creates an equivalence between current affairs and the past; the linking value that Cova (1997) alludes to. Mythical characters utilized within murals offer a classical/ historical mythological quality to ailing brands purely on their associative values (Rolston 2004, 42). In particular, Cú Chulainn or St. Patrick are symbolic of high

Figure 7. Loyalist sharing in St Patrick

cultural attainment and as a consequence become desirable, iconic brands, ripe, 'for trans-sectarian poaching,' (Forker and McCormick 2009, 433). Cú Chulainn, traditionally considered as of Irish descent, has been embraced by the UDA as 'a defender of Ulster' within a broader narrative of the Cruthin mythos (Moore and Sanders 2002, 12). The Cruthin narrative overturns the strongly held view that the Irish are the true inhabitants of Ireland; rather the loyalist brand is the indigenous group (Buckley and Kenney 1995, 49). Although this myth is centred on more fact than myth; it is for the most part discarded as inauthentic by both brand communities (Rolston 1991, 36). The 'plagiarizing' of myths from one brand community to the other, harks back to an earlier traditional marketing narrative; where a 'one myth fits all' understanding is at play (Allen 2002). Other examples of this 'sharing in' of historical narratives/figures include St. Patrick (Figure 7), who has been dually-claimed by both communities. Belk's (2010, 730) recognition of 'sharing in' within consumer research also calls for research on 'sharing out', which murals have easily embraced in terms of public space.

The transformation of Cuchulainn into the 'other' brand symbol is heavily reliant on Adamson's notion of a Cruithin pre-Celtic civilisation (Adamson, 1974). As an invented piece of myth-making, Kaufmann (2007, 3) asserts, 'this is a flimsy construct which is easily lampooned by opponents and has failed to take root even amongst its target audience.' Santino (1999) asserts that loyalists have poached Cuchulainn, a nationalist symbol, known in ancient myths as the Hound of Ulster. Beyond the experience economy, consumers are seeking authenticity (Gilmore and Pine 2007), from which to build connections.

If one considers the two murals closely (Figures 8 and 9), it should be noted that the pose offered of Cuchulainn, is fully duplicated in the loyalist mural. The past and present, depicted running left/right in each tri-palette. The heavy, religious undertones, of a Christ-like Cuchulainn, sacrificed at Calvary is potent in both mural offerings; right down to Christ's shrouds, rent and torn about his emaciated body and the phoenix rising atop the right shoulder. The symbols that mark the identity of each community are the canna lily (nationalist) and the poppy (loyalist) emblazoned on each. The heady mix of religious rhetoric entwined in these murals can, 'serve as a catalyst for mobilization and social change,' (Izberk-Bilgin 2012, 680) and this, 'religiosity in consumer research is increasingly understood as a totemic expression of extreme

Figure 8. Source: Sherry, J. (2012) Cuchulainn (republican)
Figure 9. Cuchulainn (loyalist) Belfast

brand loyalty,' (ibid, 665). The murals that adopt such religious patois and myth-making can be understood in terms of community mobilization, as Wald (1987, 29-30) posits, 'human beings will make enormous sacrifices if they believe themselves to be driven by a divine force.' The nature of murals as powerful narrators, exhibit varying degrees of ability to sustain/ oppose marketplace ideologies and brand meanings (Izberk-Bilgin 2012, 665); when heavily laced with nuances of religiosity (Luedicke et al. 2010).

The literature on the symbolic attributes of brands suggest that brand stories increasingly structure the way we understand our identity, relationships, social conflicts, and global events. Symbols are 'the building blocks of myth and the veneration of symbols is a significant aspect of ritual; a ritual observes the procedures with which a symbol is invested–nations are themselves myths,' (Fulbrook 1997, 72). The murals (Figures 10 and 11); are a potent mix of loyalist and nationalist 'mythomoteur[s],' which include Bobby Sands (an iconic brand) Holt (2004). Iconicity of a brand can provide high value to a community, where such murals are seen to address, 'the collective anxieties and desires of a nation,' (Holt 2004, 6). It is in their ability to perform the identity myth, to fire the imagination of individual brand communities. Identity myths have the wherewithal of 'patching' together, otherwise torn life-tapestries; myths can smooth these tensions. The murals are set in the populist world (Holt 2004, 9) where a distinctive ethos can be shared out in that community, which can be the driver for particular collective (Thompson and Tian 2008, 596) actions. The few masterful performances enacted through an iconic brand (i.e. Bobby Sands) are sufficient to carry that brand legacy forward. Such great myths have the potential to augment the brand's reputation and charm its audience.

It has been theorized that we are symbolic creatures and we inhabit our own symbolic worlds (Cassirer 1944). Myths and symbols are not inert but recurrently re-imagined to sustain currency with popular culture; as such, murals, 'will change, both to those who produce or own it, and to those who view It,' (McCormick and Jarman 2005, 51). Symbolism, therefore has the ability to define community borders and territorialize brand communities (Kuusisto 2001, 62). Ethno-symbolism suggests that nations reach back to the myths and memories of the past to

Figure 10. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012) Belfast
Figure 11. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012) Belfast

(re)construct, (re)invigorate, or transform a brand community (Githens-Mazer 2007, 4). Classical ethno-symbolism, defined by Smith, speaks of 'shared memories of golden ages, ancestors and great heroes and heroines, the communal values that they embody, the myths of ethnic origins, migration and divine election, the symbols of community, territory, history and destiny that distinguish them.' (Smith 2001,119).

It should be noted for the most part, these shared myths associated with Cuchulainn and St Patrick, attend what Holt and Thompson (2004, 425) argue in their study, '[American] mass culture idealizes the man-of-action hero-an idealized model of manhood that resolves the inherent weaknesses in two other prominent models (the breadwinner and the rebel).' These dual roles are identifiable across both communities and why to a greater extent, the 'sharing-in' process translates easily to each brand community (Belk 2010). The murals offer opportunities for heroic masculine consumption, depicted in the strongly militarized or mythical hero-style figure illustrated on gable walls. These forms, offer a vicarious form of agency, as they, 'are imagined to live free of societal authority and can be understood as rebelling against the constraints and conformist pressures of modern life,' (Holt and Thompson 2004, 436). In the context of N Ireland this narrative sits quite neatly within both brand community histories.

Pop-cultural myths

The music culture touched on by both brand communities adopts very different, yet subtle forms. The Harp and Pikesmen mural (republican) draws extensively on the legacy and meaning of the harp as synonymous with the motto of the Society of United Irishmen, 'It is new-strung and shall be heard' adopted as their official insignia (Figure 12). However, in modern culture, this has been updated to, 'It is new strung and shall now be heard.' For the Eddie mural (loyalist), the strong sense of fighting forces of darkness is reflected in the strong association with heavy metal band, Iron Maiden (see Figure 13), which depicts an apparitional figure, Eddie, waging war through an apocalyptic battlefield (Kuper 1990). Such murals reveal evi-

Figure 12. Source: Sherry, J. (2012) Harp and Pikesmen, Carrickfergu 1798– 1998, South Link, Belfast. **Figure 13**. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012) Figure x Eddie

dence of stereotyping (Allport 1954) and the concept of the psychological enemy; in Northern Ireland strong evidence exists to support 'us and them' narratives (of Pink Floyd fame), which fits with what Allport (1954) recognizes as an inherent need to dichotomise conflicts in terms of 'forces of light' versus 'forces of darkness' (Kuper 1990). The more recent additions in the shared space of the Cathedral Quarter, Belfast, draw on local/global brands to reinforce the 'togetherness' of the musical heritage emanating from both ethno-nationalist communities in N Ireland; but whose voices speak across both boundaries. The ability of music to progress a shared cultural identity is captured within the iconic brands, which are Rory Gallaher and Van Morrison (Figures 14 and 15).

Figure 14. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012) Belfast
Figure 15. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012) Belfast

Shared cultural myths

Refurbished

These historical events, Act of Covenant and Titanic (Figures 16 and 17), have celebrated their centenaries in 2012, as part of that legacy they were given a more permanent form of exhibition. Instead of the traditional uni-dimensional mural display, flat on the gable wall; these are now 3D shapes that are fixed to the wall, yet still retain an ability to evolve should the occasion necessitate. This historical murals have certain mythical undertones, but for the most part are factual representations whose narrative is somewhat fixed. For other murals, the re-imaging process has been instrumental through the Peace Programme to initiate narratives of change; in most cases away from the militarized visions (Figure 18) to more palpable images, considered as interchangeable between the two communities (Figure 19). The re-imaging process has continued to effect change, albeit at a slower pace than possibly anticipated.

Re-imaged

Other forms of display/exhibition have been proffered as a means to inject a lighter touch to these messaging forums. In particular the peace wall, offers an opportunity to herald in 'street art' in a recognized global form (Figures 20 and 21).

Figure 16. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012) Belfast Act of Covenant
Figure 17. Belfast Titanic

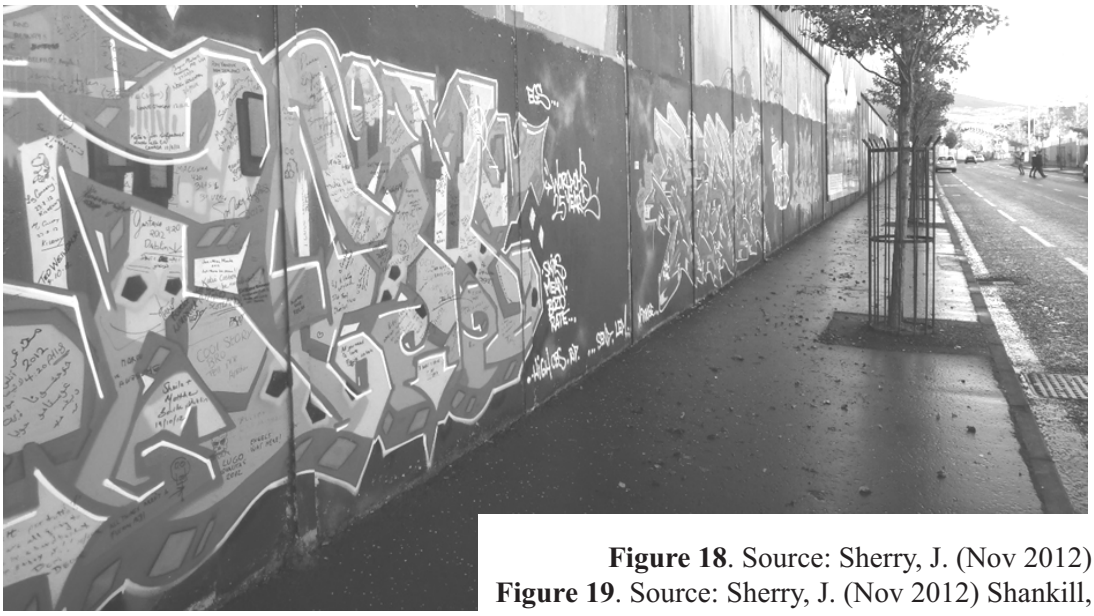


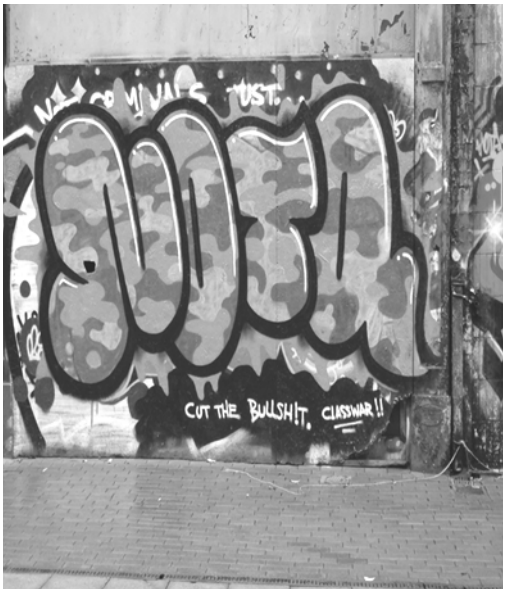
Figure 18. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012)
Figure 19. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012) Shankill, Belfast

Figure 20. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012) Peace Wall Belfast
Figure 21. Peace Wall Belfast

Street art (politicized in terms of public space)

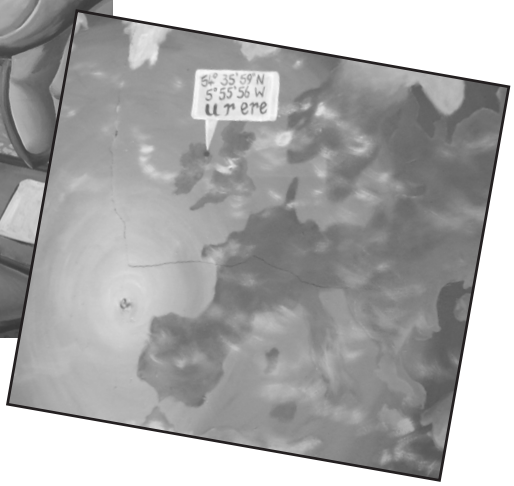
Street art (depoliticized)

These examples of street art (Figures 22, 23 and 24) are indicative of the more common forms of street art composition evidenced in the study by Visconti et al. (2010) across global contexts. These art offerings are situated in areas abandoned in run-down city centre sites. The obvious intention is to reclaim, reinvigorate those public places/spaces that bring urban deterioration.



(Above and Right) **Figures 22, 23 and 24**.
Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012) City centre, Belfast

(Below) **Figures 25 and 26**. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012)Wall Near Kelly's Cellars, City centre Belfast



Community art (Figures 25 and 26)

Rebirth of a politicized mural

The 'Resistance breeds Freedom' mural (Figure 27) removed and reborn to accommodate the latest political event (1 May 2014) in N Ireland (i.e. Arrest of Gerry Adams). This action supports the evolving nature of the ideoscape (Askegaard 2006, 84) in order to mimic the imagination of the people and their current anxieties (Figure 28).

Figure 27. Source: Sherry, J. (Nov 2012) Falls Road, Belfast
Figure 28. Re-imaging of George Best mural (East Belfast). Source: Belfast Telegraph (1 May 2014) http://cdn1.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/incoming/article30240153.ece/eb50e/ALTERNATES/h342/ULSTE

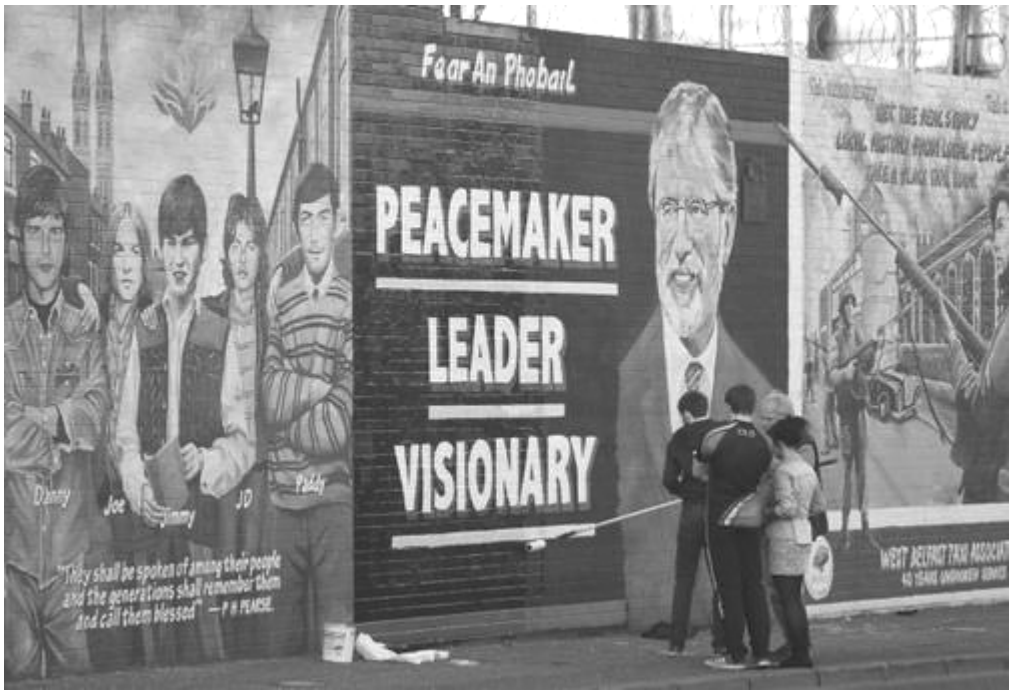


Figure 29. George Best Mural (East Belfast). Source: The Guardian (3 September 2013)

Conclusion

Murals effectively create a storied product that carries distinctive symbolic armoury through which communities imbibe, to identify with that myth (Holt 2004, 36). The concept of iconicity fits with the mural narrative, where the historical entity and ultimately the murals' success emanates from a position where mythical ability and historical demand align. The iconic brand (mural) targets the most appropriate 'community' myth; but remains highly responsive to cultural interruption.

Periods of relative stability in N Ireland have afforded opportunities for some communities to radicalize their ideology and myth-making; identified by the Re-imaging programme. New myths are promulgated in these interrupted life-history spaces; however, not all new myths have the ability to address the anxieties of its community and as such do not capture the imagination of its audience. For some communities this is a welcome change; for others the 'letting go' of an iconic myth can have a profound and disturbing effect (Figures 29 and 30), accompanied by an almost immediate retreat back to the safety of the original myth (i.e. the re-militarization of the George Best mural in East Belfast, 2013).

Here Socrates (via Plato) describes humans as prisoners who have been chained all their life in a cave, able to perceive the world only via shadows cast on the wall in front of them by the light of a fire behind them. In other words, they see shadows rather than reality, indeed, the shadows *are* their reality. The philosopher's role in society is to leave the cave and finally see the world for what it is (Levene 2010, 36).

As Holt (2004) argues, populist worlds breathe life into iconic myths; the linkages, imaginary connections afforded by such contexts, afford an authenticity in its being, 'Myths… are the primary medium through which we participate in the nation's culture,' (Holt 2004, 59-60). Iconic brands are therefore considered as those who draw from existing myth-culture to initiate the process through building on already acknowledged mythical markers. In contradiction

to Holt (2004), the myth market constitutive of the murals, has not succumbed to 'crumble' when charged with cultural upheaval; rather there exists opportunities for symbiosis for both changed/unchanged myths despite cultural constraints and resistance evidenced in some brand communities (i.e. Eddy mural Carrickfergus, unwillingness to change).

Here, too, we have instruction from Plato, who does indeed teach that, at first, we are in darkness concerning the Good; but once led out of this darkness into the light, our perception does not take well to the origin of its source; rather we think our sight is somehow damaged or incapacitated, (Celsus 1987, 104).

Bhattacharjee et al. (forthcoming 2014) draw attention to the storying of brands that have the capability to invoke identity in the community and demonstrate fit (Reed et al. 2012). In this case the mural of George Best, considered a neutral and a shared iconic brand across the two ethno-communities in N Ireland; but considered the 'local boy' from East Belfast; this narrative did not obviously hit the 'connect' button with home community. As such, the mural was not taken-up as expected; the ability for self-agency, as Moller, Ryan, and Deci (2006) argue plays a vital role in whether a 'marketing message' is adopted, coupled with the agency (Visconti et al. 2010) inherent in that choice. The murals highlight the important role that brands play in the expression of the historical and spatial dimensions of ideological consumption (Varman and Belk 2009), where past, present and future narratives mediate their respective community's consumption (i.e. dual representation of Cuchulainn). This aspect of mural disconnect, contributes to an emergent literature that recognizes the social linking value of brands (Cayla and Eckhardt 2008).

In the words of Bauman (2005, 77); public places that, 'recognize the creative and life-enhancing value of diversity, while encouraging the differences to engage in a meaningful dialogue,' are the sites for the future of urban life,' as cited in Visconti et al., (2010, 526). To the extent that a "shared future" agenda of subsidizing the re-imaging of murals (Arts Council of Northern Ireland, n.d.) remains a top-down rather than grassroots initiative, myth markets will reflect an on-going tension between civic ideology and those of the populist worlds in search of reconciliation.

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