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„Power, Public Space and the Issue of Murals

in Post-Civil War Belfast"

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INTRODUCTION

Even though the Northern Ireland conflict (commonly known as 'The Troubles') is legally over since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, political murals are still omnipresent on the walls of Republican and Loyalist residential districts in Belfast. As they are regularly renewed, overpainted and changed, they still play a significant role in political discourse, are a factor to consider when thinking about local community work and involvement and have become a prominent tourist attraction as well.

Although there is an abundance of different channels of communication in the 21st century, murals stand out, because they mix art (as there are painted by hand) with a – mostly– political message.

Even though many scholars have conducted empirical research – McCormick and Jarman, Liftenegger, Bush, Rolston, just to name a few - dealing with the origins, meanings and creators of murals on both sides of the sectarian spectrum as well as on the non-political scale, most of them have employed rather well-used, well-known methods and theoretical frameworks such as qualitative interviews (Conway), historical classifications (Liftenegger) or autoethnography (Foran). This thesis will be combining a subject that can be attributed to the field of Cultural Studies or, more specifically, Irish Studies, with a mix of semiotic approaches, including the works of C.S. Peirce and Gunter Kress, leading to the assumption that by means of murals, certain myths are created, which in turn are indicators for a power struggle in Belfast's public sphere. Although murals are not the only indicator of power to be found in Belfast's streets, they are among the more outstanding ones, because of their size and of the way communities make use of them both as badges of their own (often very local) identity and as tourist attractions. Providing a possible way to analyse the relationship between the ways certain narratives are established on the murals and their effects on their

audience might offer a different viewpoint on this type of art and its role in post-civil war Belfast.

MURALS AS AN ART FORM

Murals, both political and apolitical ones, can be found in many cultures and countries all over the world; they tend to occur in the urban rather than in in the rural space and, like graffiti, they are only very seldom legitimized by local authorities. On a level of art forms, there are differences between murals and graffiti, even though both are visual art forms.

Liftenegger (28 f.) defines murals as

> "ein Sammelbegriff für thematisch und formal unterschiedlich gestaltete Bemalung von Wänden – sowohl in Innen- als auch in Außenbereichen – beziehungsweise verschiedener plattenförmiger Materialien, die an den Wänden angebracht werden. Die Bemalung der Wände erfolgt durch Einzelpersonen als auch durch Gruppen, die für Außenstehende meist anonym bleiben. Murals können sowohl mit als auch ohne das Einverständnis der HausbewohnerInnen/ HauseigentümerInnen errichtet werden[...]"meaning „a collective term for thematically and formally differently designed painting of walls – both in the indoor and outdoor area – respectively plate-shaped materials which are attached to the walls. The painting of the walls is carried out by individuals as well as groups, who remain anonymous to outsiders. Murals can be put up either with or without the permission of the owners/inhabitants of the respective houses." (my translation)

A NOTE ON NEUTRALITY

In the Northern Ireland conflict, just like in any other (socio)political one, there is no complete neutrality and no objective truth that would make it possible to divide the country in two sides, the 'good' and the 'bad'. This does not mean that everyone in a certain area or city or country is directly involved in the conflict, but the possibilities for individuals to opt out of it and of its consequences in everyday life are few: There are very few parties who choose to stand above the sectarian divide and the vast majority of war crimes have not yet been trailed and several disappeared people's remains have not yet been discovered. These and many more factors serve as daily reminders

of a deeply divided society, almost 20 years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement.

This absence of a neutral line of discussion does also make it very difficult for scientists and researchers to examine the conflict, as they, as outsiders, might position themselves without even realizing it or are under pressure from both their peers and their general readership to explain why they seem to argue in favour of one side. On the other hand, it would not be beneficial for science if the researcher would automatically have to have a personal connection with the research topic, quite often the opposite – a healthy distance to the topic - is recommended. This distance can best be provided by an outsider, who is neither in a negative way affected by the conflict, nor has incorporated this discourse so much that there is likeliness for indifference or a lack of attention to detail.

This need for distance is also why working with ethnographic methods, such as interviews, can compromise the researcher's objectivity. The research methods that are used in the present thesis are not ethnographic, yet critical and might help to see artefacts of conflict in a seemingly balanced light. Nevertheless, there is no such thing as complete neutrality or the one right way to approaching conflict studies.

Caution is also required when trying to label the two groups that oppose each other in the conflict: As religion is not a political marker, the terms 'protestant' and 'catholic' cannot single-handedly be used to distinguish between these two groups, also because not everyone follows either one of these confessions or any at all.   The two main political ideologies, unionism and nationalism, even though throughout Northern Ireland they are demographically linked to areas which are inhabited by religiously rather homogenous groups, should not be used to draw conclusions about the religion of individuals and vice-versa. Nevertheless, I consider the two terms that indicate political affinity to be less problematic and will therefor use them in order to refer to concepts or places, as in 'this is a mainly unionist area/idea/concept' etc.

Coming from a political background that makes Irish republicanism more accessible and appealing than loyalism, I am aware that I have a very strong positive bias towards this side and significantly more knowledge about their traditions, motifs and practices than about loyalist culture. Nevertheless, this thesis will take into consideration sources

from a variety of sources and keep the two opposing sides balanced in terms of the space they take up within it.

CORPORA AND POSITIONING

The selection of data for analysis may seem like a form of preparation, but in fact it is the first step of analysis. By including or excluding items into one's analysis, the researcher, regardless of the field, positions him/herself: Researchers may (without necessarily being aware) pick items that fit their research hypothesis at first glance, just to prove it right. This is especially tempting in social sciences, with research questions which aim at a larger construct, for instance if one tries to find proof of a racist bias in newspaper articles dealing with a certain topic. Busse and Teubert (17), who both work in the field of discourse analysis, observe the following:

> "Konkrete (d. h. einer diskurssemantischen Untersuchung zugrundeliegende) Textkorpora sind Teilmengen der jeweiligen Diskurse. Bei der Auswahl stehen praktische Gesichtspunkte wie Verfügbarkeit der Quellen neben inhaltlich begründbaren Relevanzkriterien im Vordergrund; ausschlaggebend bleibt das Gestaltungsinteresse der Wissenschaftler, das das konkrete Textkorpus und damit den Gegenstand der Untersuchung konstituiert." "Concrete (meaning underlying a discourse semantic analysis) text corpora are a subset of the respective discourses. In selecting, practical aspects like the availability of sources, next to content wise justifiable criteria of relevance are foregrounded; what remains crucial is the shaping interest of the researcher, who is constituting the concrete text corpus and thereby the object of analysis." (my translation)

What, according to the authors, is true for discourse semantics, can be applied to any qualitative corpus analysis, regardless of the field; whether one is working with interviews, pictures or newspaper articles, just to name a few possibilities, deciding on a corpus is the first step of analysis as it includes and excludes certain items right from the beginning.

The pictures in the corpus used for the actual analysis in this thesis were taken between July and August 2015, either by myself or a friend during a four-week stay in Belfast. Although the stay could not entirely be dedicated to data collection, I returned to both residential areas multiple times and these trips did obviously result in a greater number of photographs than I could incorporate here. Knowing that there is no complete record of all the murals in Belfast let alone in Northern Ireland, I started to

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work along the sectarian divide of republicanism and loyalism, until I decided to add a third category which I labelled 'apolitical'. I then slowly filtered out murals which I found to be too similar to others in terms of motives (for example the recurring topic of the 1981 IRA hunger strike[1]) and, this ties in with Busse and Teubert's mentioning of availability, I excluded all pictures that were of poor quality (especially regarding the readability of writings) and as I was not able to go back to Belfast to take these pictures anew, I had to exclude the murals in question completely.

Regarding statistical significance, it has to be said that this corpus by no means asserts a claim to completion; there is no finite record of all murals in all of Belfast. This is partly because, like any form of public art, murals are subject to constant changes: They get overpainted, changed, renewed, different individuals and organisations commission at different places without coordinating their actions; simpler murals can be painted and overpainted again in a matter of a few days or even less and there is no formal governmental "registration process" as there is, for example, for the putting up of election posters.

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

In order to understand the significance of murals for present day Northern Ireland, one must consider the history of what today is Northern Ireland; seeking to provide a coherent overview, the following pages will try to condense several decades of Irish history into a very limited space, starting with the year 1169, when the Anglo-Normans (who came from what is England today) invaded the island. Henry II, who had used this invasion to exile local war chiefs who opposed him, interfered in 1171, because he feared that one said war chiefs, an archer called Strongbow, would gain too much local power. After he sent his troops there, the situation turned out in his favour: 'Henry not only successfully asserted lordship over those of his subjects who had gone to Ireland,

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[1] In 1891, 10 IRA volunteers went on hunger strike in Long Kesh prison because they wanted to be treated as political prisoners, not as ordinary criminals. The IRA officer in command, Bobby Sands, was elected MP to Westminster while leading the hunger strike; this brought the case to international attention. The hunger strike failed eventually and Sands and his 9 comrades died. (see p X, 'the history of the hunger strike') Today, they are idolized by many in the republican community and especially Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams likes refer to the time he spent in prison with Sands whenever he feels that it will help his political agenda.

but also received the submission of a significant number of Irish kings. The military interventions of King Henry changed the actions undertaken by the Anglo-Normans present in Ireland: '[f]rom mercenary activities undertaken initially in support of Diarmait Mac Murchada [the exiled king of the Irish province of Leinster, my comment] and subsequently in pursuit of individual personal territorial aggrandizement, what was to become an enduring link was now forged between the English crown and Ireland.' (see "Anglo-Norman invasion", The Oxford Companion to Irish History, 2007). This time marked the beginning of British settlement in Ireland, but at this point, there was no difference between the north and the south of the island, even though Henry's main strategic and economic interest was Dublin, as there were no significantly large cities in the north at the time. Over the next centuries, the whole island was subject to the British crown; the key point which set the north of the island apart from the southern part in terms of demographic aspects was the so-called 'Ulster Plantation', which took place during the reign of king Henry II in the early 17th century and refers to

> the British colonization of Cos. Armagh, Cavan, Donegal, Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Tyrone, escheated to the crown following the Flight of the Earls. Lord Deputy Chichester favoured a cautious settlement with extensive regrants to natives, even after the unexpected revolt of Sir Cahir O'Doherty. James I, advised by Sir Francis Bacon, preferred the more radical approach advocated by Chief Justice Sir James Ley and Sir John Davies. Their 1609 'orders and conditions' provided the framework for the plantation. Land was divided into 'proportions' of 2,000, 1,500, and 1,000 acres, with three categories of grantee. English and Scottish chief planters (undertakers) had the heaviest responsibilities as regards fortification and settlement. Civil and military servants of the crown in Ireland (servitors) were allowed to have Irish tenants, but could have lower rents if they settled the required number of 24 adult English and Lowland Scots per 1,000 acres. Local recipients (natives) were to pay higher rents and abstain from Irish exactions and tillage methods (see "Ulster plantation", The Oxford Companion to Irish History, 2007)

This systematic discrimination against the 'native' catholic population did not only drive many Irish famers from their land and left them in poverty, but it also established a protestant majority in the parts of Ulster that are now Northern Ireland, which still exists today.

Despite the demographic consequences of the Ulster plantation and the ongoing discrimination of Catholics, the split between an independent Irish state and Northern Ireland only becomes official with the Government of Ireland Act of 1920. This act was a result of the 1916 Easter Rising, one of the key uprisings in republican memory and

probably the key to the formation of the Irish republic that exists today. According to Helen Litton (93-120), Home Rule [which refers to a political system where Scotland, Ireland and England would each have a parliament, but a common executive at Westminster in London, (see "Home Rule", The Oxford Companion to Irish History, 2007), my addition] had destabilized the Irish society immensely and had it split into two fractions, one for Home Rule and one against it. Unionists in Ulster were the main group which opposed home rule, as they would be ruled by mostly catholic MPs and the establishing of a separate Irish parliament would also be signalling a split between Ireland and Great Britain, an idea which unionists are deeply opposed to till this very day. Both sides began to arm themselves; this lead to the formation of the Irish Volunteers, a republican militia, which years later became the IRA (Irish Republican Army), while the anti-Home Rule forces armed themselves too. As a small part of the Irish Volunteers, under the leadership of nationalist schoolmaster Patrick Pearse and trade union leader James Connolly, tried to take Dublin and proclaimed an Irish republic, they were overtaken by the British army and sixteen leaders of the Rising were executed. This rather cold-blooded shooting of the leaders changed the sentiment in the majority of the Irish population and lead to a broader pursuit of Irish independence. The Anglo-Irish War, which was fought between the IRA and the British Forces from 1919 to 1921 (see "Anglo-Irish War", The Oxford Companion to Irish History, 2007) lead to the Anglo-Irish treaty: In this document, it was agreed that Ireland would become a Free State, a dominion to the British crown. It let Northern Ireland opt out of the treaty, which it did. In 1920, through the Government of Ireland Act, which sought to re-structure the country, and through the Anglo-Irish War, home rule became impossible. Here, the split into Ireland in the south and Northern Ireland took place:

> Arguing that Britain could not impose unity, Long's committee on 4 November 1919 recommended the creation of two parliaments, one in Belfast for the nine Ulster counties, and the other in Dublin. Such a nine-county partition, combined with a Council of Ireland, would encourage moves towards unity. Unsure of Unionist ability to govern Cavan, Monaghan, and Donegal, James Craig lobbied the cabinet for a six-county partition, and was strongly supported by Arthur Balfour. On 24 February 1920 the cabinet voted that 'the area of Northern Ireland shall consist of the parliamentary counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Tyrone and the parliamentary boroughs of Belfast and Londonderry'. The subsequent bill passed its third reading on 23 December 1920. (see "Government of Ireland Act", A Dictionary of British History, 2007)

What is now referred to as 'The Troubles', or the Northern Ireland conflict, started with a military operation in 1969 which sought to temporarily deploy British troops to Northern Ireland in order to protect the (protestant) population, who felt threatened by the catholic population, who, inspired by the movement in the USA, demanded more civil rights; issues such as unemployment, housing shortage and the feeling that prestigious positions in society were reserved for protestants were addressed and basic human respect for them as member of the society were lacking. The IRA (after their rather unsuccessful border campaign of the 1950s and 1960s) gained popularity and support during that time and in turn, loyalists started to form their own paramilitary groups, such as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) or the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) a year later. In the following decades, the conflict claimed 3532 victims (http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/tables/Status_Summary.html), the vast majority of them being civilians; after years of failed negotiations, the conflict was legally ended by the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and reaching it was a joint effort of representatives of politicians and paramilitaries from both the loyalist and the republican side, the then US-American president Bill Clinton and the former British prime minister Tony Blair. The main points were the formation of a power-sharing assembly (with the hard-line protestant and loyalist Ian Paisley, leader of the DUP party as first minister, and the ex-IRA commander Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein as deputy first minister). This ended the direct rule from London, which was executed by the Secretary to Northern Ireland until then. *The Dictionary of Contemporary World History* specifies further:

> The agreement was possible because Tony Blair's clear majority in parliament, and the fewer historic ties between Labour and the Protestant Ulster Unionist Party made Blair appear less biased to the Catholic minority. At the same time, Bill Clinton's acceptance of Gerry Adams strengthened the latter's hand against the IRA, and allowed him to declare a cease-fire while keeping the majority of the IRA behind him. Unfortunately, some of the most controversial questions were left in the Agreement, notably the question of the decommissioning of arms (largely a Protestant concern) and the reform of the police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (a Catholic concern). Failure to agree on these issues led to a suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2000 and from 2001. Genuine progress on the decommissioning of arms was only made following the September 11 attacks. As part of the War on Terrorism, the US was in no mood to tolerate the continuation of illicit arms depots by the IRA. Under threat from the withdrawal of US funds, and in order to encourage the resumption of self-rule, Sinn Féin agreed to the destruction of its weapons in 2001, which an

independent commission declared to be complete in 2005. The Democratic Unionist Party demanded a dissolution of the IRA, however, thus blocking the resumption of parliamentary self-rule. The Agreement was revived in 2006 by the St Andrews Agreement (see 'Good Friday Agreement', A Dictionary of Contemporary World History).

The St. Andrews Agreement, the second important document in the process of forming is

> A peace agreement negotiated between the British and Irish governments as well as the major political representatives, including Martin McGuinness from Sinn Féin, and Ian Paisley from the Democratic Unionist Party. The agreement aimed to resume the Northern Ireland peace process which had been stalled until 2005, when the IRA completed the destruction of its weapons. It provided for a resumption of Stormont and the construction of a government in which Paisley would, as First Minister, share power with Sinn Féin by 26 March 2007, following a referendum in Northern Ireland. (see 'St Andrews Agreement', A Dictionary of Contemporary World History).

MYTH: A WORKING DEFINITION

While murals have been assessed extensively regarding markers of territory and their use in conveying messages to a more or less broad public, their role as myth-establishing devices has not yet been in the scientific focus. Roland Barthes (88) defines the myth as something that belongs to the discipline of semiology, a term coined by Ferdinand de Saussure; its meaning goes beyond linguistics, beyond just a statement: De Saussure's two levels of *signifier* and *signified*, which together form the *sign* are used by Barthes, who sees this 'three-dimensional structure' in the myth, which he calls a secondary semiological system that builds on the three beforementioned termini. He adds another level of meaning to this, as he reduces the de Saussurean *sign,* comprised of *signifier* and *signified*, as a whole to a *signifier* and adds another level of *signified* to it to 'create' the *myth*. He reminds the reader (92) that 'the materials of the mythic statement (language, photography, paintings, posters, rites, objects etc.), as diverse as they may seem at first, are reducing themselves to the sole function of signifier, as soon as the myth captures them.'[2] He refers to the

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[2] All quotes from this book are taken from the German translation, ‚Mythen des Alltags‘(‚myths of everyday life‘) as there seems to be no English translation of the book, and if so, it was not available to me. All translations into English are my own.

signifier- signified components as object language, as they are rooted in linguistics and describe actual objects and the myth as meta-language, as it is the way one speaks about the first language.
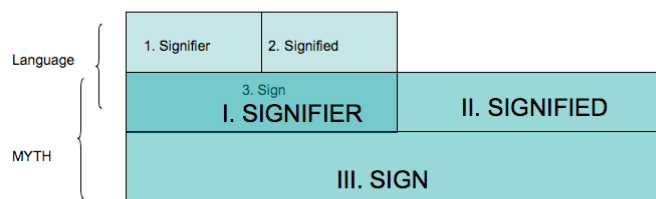
The British semiotician Daniel Chandler, author of the 2001 book *Semiotics: The Basics* (and the complementary online course 'Semiotics for Beginners') writes that:

> Meaning includes both denotation and connotation. In communication and representation, denotative meaning is primarily associated with an informational function and connotative meaning with an aesthetic function. […] 'Denotation tends to be described as the definitional, literal, obviously, elementary, or common-sense meaning of a sign. In the case of linguistic signs, the denotative meaning is what a dictionary attempts to provide. Beyond its literal meaning, a particular word or image may of course have connotations: for instance, sexual connotations. […] There is no denotation without connotation: secondary overtones may be read into any signs regardless of intention. In literary and everyday discourse, 'connotation' often refers to personal associations for individuals, but semiotics focuses on those that are widely recognized within a culture or subculture. Signs are more 'polysemic' – more open to interpretation – in the connotations than in their denotations, though context usually acts as a constraint. Roland Barthes declares (1967a, 89ff.) that Saussure's model of the sign focuses on denotation at the expense of connotation, though one might reasonably object that this may be more true (sic!) of structuralist models than of Saussure's, since *langue* as a system of differential values includes implicit relations, and his notion of associative relations is broader than the notion of paradigmatic relations. […] Connotation and denotation are often described in terms of levels of representation, meaning, or semiosis. Roland Barthes adopted signification' (Barthes 1957, 124; 1961; 1967a, 89–94; 1967b, 27ff) from Louis Hjelmslev the notion that there are different 'orders of signification' (Barthes 1957, 124; 1961; 1967a, 89–94; 1967b, 27ff; Hjelmslev 1961, 114ff.). In Barthes' stratified model of connotation, denotation is the first order of signification; connotation is the second (Figure 4.5 [not copied to this thesis, my comment]). The denotative sign becomes the signifier of a connotative sign. (Chandler 163)

Signifier and signified (or, on a secondary level, denotation and connotation) are the basis for the myth, according to Barthes, and Chandler made this idea very easily accessible on his website (http://visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/) where he presents the following graphic to the reader:
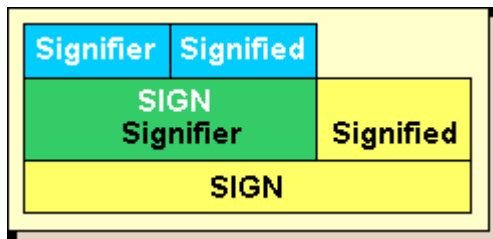
This graphic can also be found in Barthes 'Mythologies', where it looks like this:

Roland Barthes, *Myhologies* (1957, trans. Annette Lavers, Vintage: London, 1993), 115.

(http://vwordpress.stmarys-ca.edu/elijahsarinana/2013/05/16/analytical-reading-response-2-barthes-at-the-bar-the-myth-of-the-standard-drink/)

The signifier and signified form an entity (the signifier in the middle row or the first sign in Chandler's graphic) and this entity, though a new signified, a new layer of meaning, becomes a new sign. Adding this new layer exceeds the meaning that can be conveyed by the actual word itself, as the following example (which is taken from Bathes 78) shows:

On the level of meaning, the words 'rose' and 'romance' have nothing in common, one is a flower and the other is a feeling, something that is not tangible. They only become a unit by the connotation that many people share, which is that of 'romance'. The denotation and connotation merge to form the new signifier and get a new signified, 'Love/Romance'. The new signifier with the new signified then produces the myth that one can prove one's love by giving roses to another person. This then goes further to the ideological level for which the rose might not be the most fitting example, and Chandler uses the example of terror:

> "First, it comes from the sign "terror," which is a signification of an extreme form of fear. Not being startled from a loud bang, or afraid of what someone might say if they see the overt pimple on your forehead, but an abject, gripping sort of fear that cripples you inside, a fear of pain and death. That's a very specific signification. Then we add the "ism," giving "terror" an active property, making it a method or even institution, something that can affect all of us. Then we attach it to specific images and identities—explosions in public spaces, mass death, the Two Towers falling in Manhattan, Arab and Islamic extremists—validating and extenuating existing fears of the Other. Suddenly "terrorism" takes on a new form in it signification, becomes used in new conventions, is given new contexts, and works to shape our realities in its usage." (https://sites.chapman.edu/thescribesarena/2016/02/26/structuralism-and-myth-a-quick-introduction/)

Something that is never touched upon in Barthes's work, is that myths do not always emerge uncontrolled, out of collective connotations, but they can be influenced, created and discarded again. Like many forms of collective knowledge, each period of time has their own myths (Barthes 102). De Saussure (cited in Chandler) however points out that for him, there is no fixed relation between words and the world we live in, language doers not mimic physical objects:

Saussure rejects the common-sense (naïve realist) assumption that there is a natural relationship between words and things. Language is not based on the mimetic representation of independently identifiable 'things'. There is nothing tree-like about the word 'tree'. Even onomatopoeic words (such as words for the sounds made by familiar animals) are more conventional than is often supposed, as is demonstrated by the variability between different languages in their words for the same sounds (CLG 101–2; 69). The principle applies as much to writing as it does to speech: there is no inherent connection between any letter and the sound that it denotes (ibid. 165; 119). Counter-intuitively, words do not 'refer to', 'correspond to', or 'stand for' things. Saussure's reconceptualization of the traditional notion of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign is non-referential. His signified is not to be identified with a referent (a common misinterpretation). He rejects the whole notion of linguistic 'reference'." (Chandler 23f.)

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The whole model of de Saussure revolves around signification, not reference. The relation between the *signifier* and the *signified* are arbitrary to him, the linguistic sign is unmotivated. What helps individuals to communicate with each other is that they share the same set of signs, which have been agreed on by society, in a process that has happened over time; this is called *convention.* Language, which is what this model is trying to describe, therefor is the key element to help us make sense of the world around us, if there is no word to signify a certain concept, it cannot be part of our world.

The notion of influencing the process of myth-making for one's own gain, for the interests of a certain group, will be dealt with at a later stage in this paper, by utilizing the theoretical concepts of Michel Foucault and Gunther Kress.

An additional approach to the topic of the myth is provided by the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996), who wrote an extensive book on the myth in different kinds of contexts [3]. This book included in it a chapter on myth and politics, which he took out before publishing, but the chapter was eventually released as a separate book called 'Präfigurationen' (prefigurations). It deals mostly with Adolf Hitler's Russia campaign: Hitler equated his campaign to Napoleon's, who tried to invade Russia in 1812. By doing so, Blumenberg argues, he uses a prefiguration – something that has become a myth already – to justify his actions (11). By equating his actions and plans to those of an emperor that is surrounded by myths and has been mythicized by historians and laypeople alike – in the 1940s as well as today – he could rely on the beliefs that 'history repeats itself' as well as that 'history can be repeated'. Nevertheless, Blumenberg emphasizes that

> [a]uch in der Betrachtung von einem späteren Wirklichkeitsbegriff her ist nicht jedes Datum, jedes Ereignis, jede Handlung durch Wiederholung, durch Nachspielen zur Präfiguration zu erheben. […] Präfiguration ist also die Figur einer sprachindifferenten Rhetorik. Sie beruhigt über Motivation, schirmt gegen Unterstellungen ab, indem sie als gar nicht mehr dispositionsfähig hinstellt, was zu entscheiden war. Sie schirmt den fremden Blick bei der Suche auf immer weitere >Hintergründe< der Motivation ab. Die historische oder sich historisch dünkende oder historisch ambitionierte Handlung rückt in die Zone der Fraglosigkeit: wer sie in Frage stellt, missachtet, worauf sie sich beruft. [a]lso looked at from a later reality term (term of reality), not every date, every event, every action is elevated to a prefiguration. […] The prefiguration is a figure of

[3] Blumenberg, Hans: Arbeit am Mythos (1979, Surkamp: Frankfurt am Main)

language-indifferent rhetoric. She calms via motivation, shields against imputations, by portraying what was to decide as being no longer operational. She shields the alien gaze on the lookout for more >backgrounds< (punctuation in the original) of the motivation. The historical or historic-seeming or historically ambitioned action moves to the zone of indubitability: Whoever doubts it, disregards what it invokes (p.14 f.) (my translation)

This means that drawing on a commonly shared prefiguration is a safe tool to use, because it comes with a pattern to follow already and if someone would express doubt, this person has – maybe unwillingly – not only criticized the current action but also something that has already been accepted in the mythical canon of his or her time, which seems to automatically compromise the doubt that is being expressed. The person who acts according to a prefiguration will become the 'executor of a historical justice, which shall consist of the reversal of arbitrariness and violence and the reduction to a primal state. But also the extent of the action is no longer held for disposal: rituals have to be depleted until exhaustion.'[4] (p. 15)

(PUBLIC) COMMUNICATION: KRESS' MULTIMODALITY & SEMIOTICS

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, murals are a means of communication. By using the beforementioned approaches, it is possible to examine the underlying myths behind a mural, but not its status as a device for making said myths accessible to a wider audience. In order to examine this aspect and also how communication (in this case, the transportation of myths) is linked to power and the influence of public opinion, even if just on a microlevel (compared to the general population of Belfast, Northern Ireland or Europe), I will employ the view of communication Gunter Kress advocates for in his 2010 book *Multimodality.* Whilst the notion of multimodality as such (every communicative sign consists of several modes, which each have their own functions, for example colt, shape, font, location and so on) is not of primary concern for this thesis, his ideas on how meaning is constructed and received in a social setting is indeed. This starts with what he calls *the motivated sign,* (62-65) for which compares and contrasts the works of both Charles Sanders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure: In Pierce's view, recipients interpret the sign they perceive for themselves, their own

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[4] 'Der Handelnde wird zum Vollstrecker eines geschichtlichen Rechts, das in der Umkehrung von Willkür und Gewalt und der Reduktion auf den ursprünglichen Zustand bestehen soll. Aber auch der Umfang der Handlung steht dann nicht mehr zu Disposition: Rituale müssen bis zur Erschöpfung ausgeschöpft werden.'

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interpretation (which is linked to their own reality and knowledge) is called the *interpretant*, which is the starting point of a new chain of interpretations. This process goes on indefinitely, but obviously, without communicational context, which ensures that two communicating parties have at least similar interpretations or can at least communicate how theirs differ from the respective other person, communication would be impossible. The referent (which is what the recipients interpret) therefor needs to have a sort of commonly accepted meaning in the first place (similar to a de Saussurean convention), which could be interpreted ad infinitum but after too much interpretation, it would be hard to find someone who would be able to follow one's final interpretation, thereby making communication harder or even impossible. Pierce distinguishes *iconic* signs (who look like the thing they want to represent), *indexical* signs (who 'point at' what they represent, such as the relationship between smoke and fire) and *symbolic* signs (who rely on a 'conventionally agreed relation', like the Red Cross symbol which stands for a certain humanitarian organisation and is recognized as exactly that).

In contrast, de Saussure put emphasis on how a reference is established between items in the 'inner mental world' (signifier) and their 'outer' mental representations (signified, for which sensations need to be taken from the physical world); their relation is arbitrary (there is no logical explanation why the mental concept of a large plant with leaves is called 'tree' in English but 'Baum' in German for example) and bound by convention, the force of social power, which keeps these signs stable over time. This notion of *arbitrariness* however goes against the notion that the maker of a respective sign has as *interest* in its making and meaning, which is something that Kress sees as a crucial point of contemporary communication.

Kress' concept of Multimodal Social Semiotics differs from these two models of semiotics by putting emphasis on the creator of the sign, who, according to him, is the driving force between what the sign looks like, as the creator's primary interest is in getting his message across to this audience, which is why there can be no room for de Saussure's *arbitrariness*, as the creator has planned out the sign he/she is going to put in front of an audience very carefully. The creator is, nevertheless, just as much a party of the 'outer world' as his potential audience:

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> "If the 'shape' of the signifier aptly suggests the 'shape' of the signified (i.e. the circle as a wheel), it allows an analyst – whether in everyday interaction or in research – to hypothesise about the features which the maker of the sign regarded as critical about the object which she or he represented. Posting that relation between 'sign' and 'world' is crucial; it opens the possibility of a path to understanding what in the phenomenon or object to be represented was treated as critical by the maker of the sign at the moment of representation. That can lead to an understanding of the sign maker's position in their world at the moment of the making of the sign. Such a hypothesis is of fundamental importance in all communication – whether framed rhetorically as critique or as design." (Kress 65)

Kress' *motivated sign* operates on a different level of meaning than de Saussure's theory, as shown above, and it provides an additional layer to Barthes' *myth*-level. Although it cannot be denied that some myths cannot be traced down to their *creators,* like the example of the roses which are symbol of romance if gifted to another person[5], but with murals, newspapers, advertising, children's drawings and so on, there can be either an individual creator named or a group with a certain agenda.

WHY EVEN MURALS?

With the tools that were discussed above, it is possible to investigate all kinds of political and apolitical displays, both in the public and private space, in a Belfast context or otherwise, so why focus on murals? Why give more room to a medium that has been the key part of Belfast's 'conflict tourism' or 'dark tourism' for years? Spurgeon Thompson argues in his 1999 article *The Commodification of Murals and Decolonisation in Northern Ireland* that the Northern Irish Tourist Board (NITB) took over murals as a medium and sold them as remnants of a troubled past, through which tourists could experience the times of conflict and thereby have a seemingly unique experience, which is of course heavily commodified and driven by consumerism. This then, he argues, reduces the whole legacy of the conflict to political kitsch, including Irish-language home décor and mugs with Gerry Adams and Nelson Mandela on them, sold by Sinn Fein themselves (Thompson 56). He then writes about the mural tour he took while he was there, which was superficial and more focused on humorous anecdotes and less on engaging with the topics at hand, such as internment or the ever-looming presence of paramilitaries:

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[5] Although it has to be mentioned that there is a 'Rose novel' (originally 'Roman de la Rose'), a French verse novel from the 14th century that deals with love and courtship, it might, at least very locally, have established a connection between this certain flower and romance.

The usual tourist sites, such as the Town Hall, the Albert Clock, or other pieces of architecture in Belfast, did not merit the same energy of interest nor the same number of shutter clicking and film winding as the murals. Yet the narration that accompanied the mural 'drive-bys' was kept to a minimum – a somehow considerate silence would come from the normally talkative driver. Occasionally, he would say, for example, 'And this is one showing the banned paramilitary group, the UDA.' But no details would be included, nor any engagement with the individual murals. I suspect that this silence was the bus driver's way of being 'excellently impartial', as Ian Hill as said of the tours in *Fortnight* [18]. Whatever you say, say nothing – yet again. (Thompson 58)

Thompson's article was published almost 20 years ago, when the Good Friday Agreement was only a year old and it could be argued that the political climate has changed since then and that in the beginning of the 21st century, other forms of public communication have taken over the public space. One might think of large billboards in streets and on public transport, as well as TV ads and of course the every-growing field of social media marketing. All of these are also part of today's Northern Ireland, but the murals are something that is rather unique to Northern Ireland, as a means of political communication and, sometimes, public discussion. Nevertheless, the (non-)communicative behaviour described by Thompson above is not gone completely: Neither the fact that these murals exist in the first place nor their political message seems to be challenged by a larger number of people. Just like the existence of paramilitary dissident groups on both sides, them (and other groups) using murals as a medium to convey their message and mark their territory is not seen as a primary concern for city development politics or the effort to build a shared Northern Ireland or, in the case of Belfast, an urban space for everyone, regardless of political or religious beliefs. It is understandable that in early 2018, where there is no legislative assembly in place, bigger issues need to be tackled and more pressing problems need to be resolved, but that does not mean that there is no use for more analyses of murals and the way the narrate their version of the truth. Thompson's autoethnographic approach gives a different insight than this thesis will, and a plurality of methods is the most sustainable approach to a topic as deeply rooted in the cityscape and public perception – locally and abroad – of Belfast. The fact that murals did not vanish from Northern Irish streets ever since they were first recorded in the 1990s stands for a certain significance of this art form, which cannot be replaced by other ones, but of course has its individual *reach* and *affordance,* as Kress (8 and 27) called it – it makes a certain

way of communication possible and is not useable for certain other ways and therefor it reaches (or does not reach) a certain audience: Murals for example have no connection to the world of online communication, unless for example, someone posts a picture of them or writes about them, thereby changing their modalities (converting a painted wall into a picture on a camera or a piece of writing with no visuals at all). They are, however, seen daily by residents of the area and because they are marketed as a tourist sight, people take photos of them and while this changes the modality of the mural, it still spreads the image as such (with a different meaning though, eventually stripping it from its complex political message and reducing it to a touristic piece of art.

In the wake of Brexit and the possibility of a new hard border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, there is also a discussion about paramilitary violence becoming more attractive to a wider public and about the question if it is even possible to uphold the peace-keeping and peace-building strategies that were formulated in the Good Friday Agreement. In a socio-political climate like this, myth-making becomes an even more important tool, both in private and public discourse and murals are a part of this very public, very diverse discourse.

OPERATIONALISATION

Analysing murals is a rather subjective task, no matter what method or framework one may employ: Although there are several theoretical approaches available, there will and can never be 'the one correct' analysis. Here, I am mainly interested in the aspects shown in the graphic below, where of course the individual aspects intertwine: Political power is a myth in itself (Barthes gives the example of how 'conservative forces' keep in power because there is an established myth there in Europe that connects their values to desired concepts like growth, stability and wealth), which needs other, smaller and myths to sustain itself. Some are tailored towards members of the respective movement or party that is in power, in order to reassure these members that they (as a political entity) are doing the right thing, making the right decisions, are in power for the right reasons. Other myths that point 'inwards' are there to demonize the political opponent(s) and of course, there needs to be an effort to establish myths for a more general public, in order to gain their votes in the next election and, on a

more sustainable level, their long-time support in the form of new party members, volunteering and running for offices.
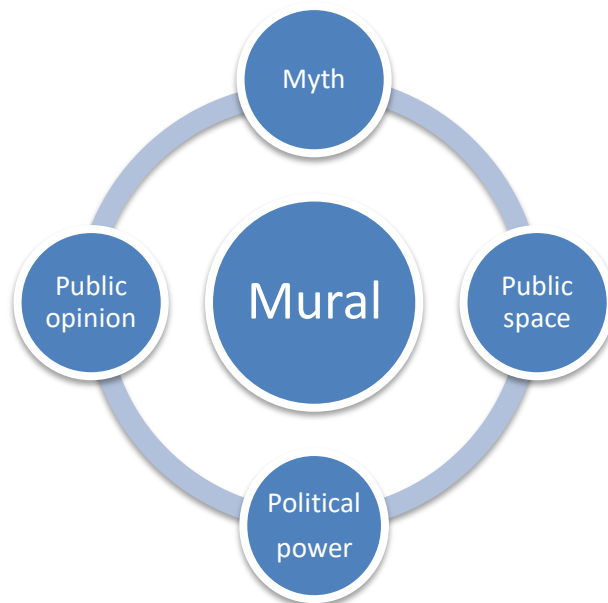
Figure 1: Aspects of analysis

The 'denotation-connotation-myth'-triad from Roland Barthes combined with the notions that Blumenberg put forward both in *Arbeit am Mythos* (which are that every period, every epoch has their own myths which, in order to not become dogmas, need to be rewritten and retold, and that every time depends on their own myths to provide a guideline for everyday life, both on an individual and societal level) and *Präfigurationen* (how already established myths are used as justifications for current actions) will be the basis for the analytical framework of this thesis. As this thesis will not only be looking at the myths that can be found in Belfast's murals, but also on the power relations behind them and their influence of public discourse, there needs to be a step taken that combines myths with power and communication. Although Roland Barthes' work already uses public discourse as examples without explicitly discussing the mechanisms behind them, a more systematic approach to power and public discourse is needed here. For these purposes, I will use both the main work of the applied linguist Gunther Kress (Multimodality) and the basic notions from Michel Foucaults's The Order of Discourse (L'ordre du discours).

By taking both larger identity-building entities (such as different types of sports or myths surrounding whole paramilitary organisations) as well as myths surrounding individuals having an impact on the respective community's self-image and analysing how these are represented on murals, where exactly, what the respective images show on a denotative and connotative level, how that creates the actual myth, if there is a prefiguration behind it, which that would be, and what can be said about the importance of the myth for the community today, all while taking into account the reach of murals as a medium, which has its restrictions.

In order to attempt to answer these questions while roughly splitting the results up in the four surrogating terms found in Figure 1 above, the following questionnaire will be applied to each data set, which in some instances will contain a single mural, in others there will be more than one mural of the same event or person:

- What/who is on the mural? What are the historical facts about the image?
- Are there any presuppositions? Does the mural fit into a larger historical context?
- What myths are established? How exactly?
- Are there any special narratives/legends/media coverage about the mural that would put it into a larger local or even international context?
- Was it overpainted at one point or is it actually there to cover some other motif (erasure/palimpsest)?
- Is there any symbolism (connotation) that, maybe in conjunction with the whole image, maybe separately, is attached to a myth on first glance (like the beforementioned rose)? Is symbolism used that requires a certain level of knowledge to decipher?
- What would be the 'myths of this time' (as put forward by Blumenberg) that are reflected in the mural?
- Who is the creator, if they are even known? Who would want to influence discourse by means of a mural? Is there any record of the reach of murals in the 21st century, where the focus has changed to electronic/online communication?

The political and socio-cultural history of Northern Ireland in the last 19 years – since the good Friday agreement, which officially settled the civil war – has been shaped by a variety of power struggles: the most prominent was the implementation of a shared government in 2000 (see above) which required the strongest unionist and the strongest republican party to form a coalition in the Northern Ireland Assembly, the local parliament. A failure of this constellation will automatically lead back to power being transferred to Westminster in London. Apart from this institutionalised, forced sharing of power, both sides of the political spectrum suffered a credibility problem, Sinn Fein mostly for not distancing themselves from past and present paramilitary violence and both sides for being ideologically caught up in said past without addressing the needs of a post-war society. The Life and Times Survey also shows that there is an increase of people stating they have a 'Northern Irish identity' (http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2001/Political_Attitudes/ID.html; http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2003/Political_Attitudes/ID.html) apart from an Irish/English divide. The public space was obviously not spared by changing displays of power, but the power which upholds the old semiotic landscape is still highly visible.

POWER AND THE SHAPING OF DISCOURSE

In his famous inaugural speech at Collège de France in 1970 (here used in the English translation: Foucault in Young 1981) the French philosopher Michel Foucault identifies a variety of mechanisms, which are used by what he refers to as 'institution' to control discourse: First, the taboo: One is not permitted to speak about just anything at any given time and place (Foucault 52). Second, the topic of madness: He uses the medieval fool as an example, who often made critical and intelligent comments on the king and other figures of power, but was not punished for doing so because he was labelled as 'mad' and therefor he stood outside of discourse and his opinions were not regarded as valid. Also, he was only allowed to speak in a certain set-up, the court during his entertaining performances, which again limited his discursive power (Foucault 53 f.). The last controlling mechanism that is mentioned and elaborated on in greater detail, is the desire for truth and the 'true' discourse: By categorizing statements or even whole discourses into 'true' and 'false', validating this with being

committed to find 'the truth', institutions can easily dismiss discourses or shape them in a way that is beneficial to them.

ALONG THE INTERFACES: FALLS ROAD AND SHANKILL ROAD

Despite several years of attempts from Belfast City council to provide so called 'mixed' housing possibilities and the fixing of more efforts in this directing into their 2020-2035 development strategy[6], the catholic/nationalist and the protestant/unionist communities in Belfast tend to stay among themselves, especially when it comes to housing. The architect David Capener wrote in the *Guardian* on 3rd of October 2017 that

> [i]n an area where housing has been fraught for 40 years, conflict between loyalists and nationalists can arguably be traced back to a civil rights march in 1968, protesting against the allocation of housing to a single Protestant woman ahead of Catholic families. Four decades on, 90% of social housing continues to be segregated into single identity communities. And despite the Good Friday agreement's aims to ensure that one religious group isn't favoured over another in the region, Catholics are still experiencing extensive housing need . There are now more peace walls – which separate communities at contentious religious interfaces – than there were before the Belfast agreement, but it is not the visible walls that are causing most concern.

The 'peace walls' he is referring to are meter-high walls or fences, which can be found at the fringes of the respective communities. Most of them were installed after the Good Friday Agreement, at the request of local residents: They did not feel safe and wanted to be protected from 'the other side' breaking into their houses or throwing stones or Molotov cocktails – this is also why some walls have been visibly made higher after they were initially built (these extensions to the walls were mostly made from material in another colour), because residents still threw devices at each other. There are a few gated interfaces where crossing over between the two main roads is possible (see picture XX in the appendix); these gates are closed at night and re-opened in the morning.

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[6] Avaiblabe from http://search.belfastcity.gov.uk/s/search.html?collection=bcc-website&query=housing%20paper (second search result)

Both Falls Road and Shankill Road are located in West Belfast, and they both start after a respective Westlink (a road which connects the M1, M2 and M3 motorway) junction, then they are separated in Lower Falls/Shankill Road (the areas closer to the Westlink and therefor the city centre), then Mid Shankill and Upper Falls/Shankill Road. The two neighbourhoods are also very similar in terms of structure: From one broad main road with shops and businesses branch a large number of smaller streets, mainly consisting of residential buildings. The farther away the two main streets lead from the city centre, the greener the areas become, and towards the end of each street there is a large park (Falls Park or Woodville Park, respectively).

ANALYSIS

BOBBY SANDS (FALLS ROAD/SEVASTOPOL STREET)

Figure 2: Bobby Sands mural

The mural above is located on the side of Sinn Fein's Lower Falls office, which is the building on the corner of Falls Road Nr. 51 and Sevastopol Street. It is located on the wall facing Sevastopol Street, while the office's entrance is on the Falls Road side (which would be the far left-hand side of the photograph). The fact that this building is not on a residential building but a party office might explain why there is a camera and lights facing the mural, this is by no means standard. What is also very rare is that, even though it is not indicated on the mural itself, it is known who painted it: Danny Devenny, one of the most prominent mural artists of the local republican community. In May 2000, the BBC[7] wrote about Mr. Devenny and his colleague Marty Lyons: "One of their latest works is the new memorial to IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands on the side of Sinn Fein's Falls Road offices."

Robert[8] Gerard Sands, who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s in Newtownabbey, just outside of Belfast, where he moved as a boy (see O'Hearn 2 ff.) and who – like many others. experienced a climate of increasing sectarian violence (Sands was a catholic) towards the end of the 1960s, was first arrested for the possession of handguns in 1972 and was imprisoned from 1972 to 1975; during that time, the picture (appendix) that was later used for the mural was taken. It shows Sands and three of his fellow inmates in Long Kesh prison. Not only is the picture important because it shows the blueprint for the mural, but because it depicts how certain wings of Long Kesh were organized at that time: The four young men do not have to wear prison uniforms, they can take a picture together, nothing indicates that they are indeed in prison. The reason for this is that until 1979, political prisoners were treated differently from 'ordinary criminals': They could wear their own clothes, could organize their own education and entertainment (Danny Devenny only became a painter during his time in Long Kesh, as inmates had the means to produce republican propaganda material, such as leaflets, which were then smuggled out of prison), they were allowed one visit from family members each week and they could keep in contact with friends and republican comrades through letters. They were prisoners of war, protected under international law; this was the so-called called Special Category Status (see Thomas Hennesey: 'Hunger strike: Margaret Thatcher's battle with the IRA, 1980-1981' 12, 15, 459)

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[7] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/771314.stm
[8] Almost exclusively referred to as 'Bobby' Sands, not only by his supporters but also by news outlets and even members of the loyalist community.

The situation changed on March 1, 1979, when, in order to prevent glorification of these inmates and also because more and more criminal offences connected to paramilitary crimes happened, eight 'H'-shaped buildings, the so-called 'H-Blocks', where build on Long Kesh prison grounds and both republican and loyalist paramilitaries were kept in these high-security areas and were treated as ordinary criminals .The inmates protested against this by refusing to wear prison uniforms, just covering themselves with blankets, and refusing to leave their cell to wash themselves or empty their chamber pots, smearing their excrements on the walls of their cells. The prisoners who saw themselves as prisoners of war wanted their Special Status back under every circumstance, and Sands, who was arrested again in 1977 and became the commanding officer (OC) of the IRA inmates of the prison, decided that a hunger strike was the only to make the British government give in to their demands. Sands started his hunger strike on the 1st of March 1981 and died of starvation on the 5th of May 1981 and although many prisoners, both in Long Kesh and in the Armagh Women's prison joined him, the demands of the prisoners were not fulfilled.

What is remarkable about this in a political sense, is that while he was in prison and subsequently on hunger strike, Sands ran for election as an MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone[9] and won the seat. This made the hunger strike interesting for the international media; no one would believe that Margaret Thatcher's government would let one of their elected MPs starve to death. Also, his involvement in a democratic election made Sands more likeable to Northern Irish people who were not hard-line republicans and who condoned the IRA's violence. This lead to an epiphany within the mainstream republican movement and from then onwards, they slowly adapted their strategy and presented themselves as representatives of their party, Sinn Fein, and did not count on their violent resistance to the British to gain them approval and votes from their community. This does not mean that Sinn Fein renounced violence fully at that time; the IRA did not start decommissioning until 2005 and dissident groups remain violent (and armed) till the present day.

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[9] At that time, Northern Irish MPs were sent to Westminster, because of the beforementioned direct rule.

DENOTATION

On the denotative level, the mural consists of a picture of a smiling you man, his name and political position are written under the portrait, along with four other roles that a viewer will accept as given at first sight. To each side of the man, there are two incomplete sentences, which appear to be quotes, but they are nowhere indicated as such. Around the portrait, on a rainbow-colored background, a blue chain goes all around and is busted by two birds, one on the top, one on the bottom. Three smaller portraits of other men, who have their names and 'IRA Volunteer' written underneath it, are also located to the rainbow background. Finally, on what seems to be the backyard wall of the building, there is a black and white picture of a man playing the accordion, in front of a skyline of walls and watchtowers, as well as a flock of white birds and three lines of text, which are surrounded by musical notes.

CONNOTATION

The roles the mural attributes to Sands via the mode of writing (poet, gaeilgeoir [Irish speaker], revolutionary, IRA volunteer and, in the line above that, MP) operate on various levels, both in terms of ideology and semantics.
 Only one of these roles indicates a republican background: The word gaeilgeoir stands out because it is the only non-English word and the Irish language is ascribed to the republican community on the basis that it is the language of the Republic of Ireland which they want to be a part of and also, perhaps more openly, it is *not* English, it creates a divide between people who speak and understand Irish and people who do not. Nevertheless, this word requires either knowledge of Irish or the help of an Irish speaker, as there is no translation provided. This is by no means trying to indicate that in present-day Northern Ireland, no loyalist speaks Irish and all republicans do, but the Falls Road area of West Belfast openly advertises itself as a *Gaeltacht*, a region where Irish is spoken[10]. The word *poet* leaves room for a variety of connotations, but there does not seem to be any that is distinctively negative. Both *revolutionary* and *IRA*

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[10] See for example: https://www.irishtimes.com/news/belfast-gets-a-gaeltacht-quarter-1.1001043

volunteer stand in correlation with violence, but it would depend on the individual to make a distinction between *senseless violence* or, as it is the case with sympathisers of paramilitary groups, *justified violence*.

The individual viewer (who acts as interpreter in a Peircean sense) can give Sands the status of a revolutionary, without having ever read his poetry or knowing that he was fluent in Irish, simply because this information can be found on the mural: On the level of denotation, the mural introduces the viewer to a man named 'Bobby Sands', who is then ascribed various roles of varying objectivity: MP is something that is very easily verifiable, whereas it can be discussed whether anyone who writes poetry can automatically be labelled "poet" in such a prominent and public way, or if someone who was in the IRA is a revolutionary. It leaves a gap for a variety of myths: Sands the (IRA) fighter, Sands the poet and Irish speaker, the artist, Sands the lawfully elected MP or Sands who is all of that in one. Not being able to identify or understand the meaning of the word *gaeilgeoir* takes out one layer of the potential myth, but it does not hinder the viewer to understand the rest of the mural.

Surprisingly enough, what is not on the mural, most likely because it is expected of the viewer to know, is that Sands was the leader of the 1981 hunger strike. Through not explicitly mentioning this, it either builds on the knowledge that is already possessed by the viewer or, to someone from outside the republican community, it paints a much less violent picture of Sands, as 'IRA volunteer' is just one of several identities attributed to him. Nevertheless, the hunger strike is not completely absent: By incorporating three smaller portraits of other hunger strikers (Kieran Doherty, on the left, and Joe McDonnell, on the top right, were among 'the Ten', which refers to Sands and the nine IRA volunteers who died after him in the same hunger strike[11] and Séan McCaughey, who died in 1946 in Port Laoise prison during a hunger strike which revolved around similar demands to that of the 1981 hunger strikers), a relationship with this form of protest is established. This of course requires the audience to know who these three men were, so there is not only additional knowledge needed on the

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[11] There were more hunger strikers in other prisons at the same time and for the same cause, as mentioned before, but these ten men became an ideological fixed point in the more recent republican commemoration canon.

part of the audience, but they need to already have a narrative in mind and ideally even a certain prototype of the republican hunger striker.

The small backyard wall appears to be the part of the mural that needs the most background knowledge to decipher it: The peace walls on the picture are still there today, but not visible from the mural location and the military watchtowers were one by one dismantled in the early 2000s, after the British army did no longer find it necessary to have military bases and checkpoints in Belfast. The lines from the song, the so-called 'H-Block song' only make sense if the viewer knows about the blanket protest and the prisoners' refusal to wear a prison uniform and they needed a certain understanding of what Belfast's skyline looked like when the army was still there and/or when Sands was still alive.

CONSCIOUS COMPOSITION

Looking at the mural from the angle of Kress' 'motivated sign' theory, it is composed of a variety of items that are easily identifiable by most people as well as a number of hints that appeal to the republican community: The white doves are an almost universal sign for peace, according to the de Saussurean convention, but due to their size and placement, they are easily overlooked and stand back behind the portrait of Sands. The portrait itself, being an iconic sign (Sands on the mural looks like Sands on the photograph who obviously looks like the actual person) is not chosen at random: Had Danny Devenny painted Sands in black and white with a gun or a petrol bomb in his hand, had he pictured him starving in Long Kesh or had he used his police mugshot which was taken a few years after the picture from which the mural has been painted, it would have turned out to be a completely different message. By showing a smiling young man and painting him in bright colours, Devenny conveys a picture of Sands to the viewer that is not threatening and not drawing on negative shared knowledge, such as associations with death and conflict.

Neither of the four words ascribed to Sands under his portrait are explained in more detail; even though these words are understood by (English-speaking) viewers because they share the same convention, they then fill it in with their individual

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knowledge of the world, which also incorporates political beliefs, this then can give the words a positive or negative connotation on an individual level. The mural however, acting as an instrument of opinion-forming, tries to link all four to the picture of a smiling young man by the simple means of a caption, just like it would be used in a product advertisement or an election poster. The linking of picture and writing in the perception of the recipient (i.e. whoever sees the mural) takes place on the connotative level, it happens long before any value judgement.

DIFFERENT MYTHS

None of the parts of myths created by the words ascribed to Sands by means of this mural work in isolation; they all intertwine to form a well-rounded, multi-faceted myth, a persona which lives in a larger republican context.

Sands the poet

The word 'poet', as bound by convention, does not invoke a negative connotation but of course for people who have a negative connotation with Sands or the republican movement in general might dismiss this. Also, no examples of Sands' poetry are given on the mural. Nevertheless, labelling someone a poet invokes a positive narrative. The poetic tradition in Ireland has its roots in the bardic and minstrel tradition, which was originally linked to bards in the entourage of the high kings and was widely spread throughout the country until about the 18th century. In his book chapter *Tradition and Modernity: Gaelic Bards in the Twentieth Century* (from: *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature*, 2007) Thomas A. McKean asserts the survival of the bardic tradition in a modern 20th century society to the "*cèilidhean*, the house visits or small social gatherings for which they were created and sung", where they fulfilled a communicative function (McKean 130) but also more broadly on "demotic, social composing tradition that for centuries existed side by side with the formal productions of the professional poets, a tradition ultimately more connected with people's everyday (sic), contemporary lives than the sometimes rarified compositions of the subsidised clan bards." (McKean 130) This need to communicate was as crucial in the 20th century (although McKean writes about Scotland, there is no need to assume that the situation was much different in Ireland) as it was back in the 12th century. In his book The *Last*

Minstrels: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts (2008), Roland Schuchard writes that

> Yeats knew that the fractured harmony between poetry and musical speech had scarcely held together beyond the seventeenth century. Nonetheless, as the poet's relation to his culture and the common man was one of his abiding interests as a young poet, he had become a student of bardic traditions wherever he found them: the Irish File, the English bards, the rhapsodists of ancient Greece, the minstrels of Europe and India. He was no less interested in how the bardic gave way to the ballad tradition in Ireland and England, the Gaelic to the Anglo-Irish, and he began to exercise his knowledge of both traditions in his early critical writings. In 1887 he published "Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland," claiming in his nationalist mode that while England had allowed "the true ballad—the poem of the populace—" to perish, Ireland had preserved what was necessary for a popular ballad literature to arise, "national traditions not hidden in libraries, but living in the minds of the populace" (147).

He thereby describes the bardic tradition as something inherently Gaelic, nationalist and connected with a past collective memory, which, relating to Sands, makes for very good myth-material. Relating back to collective memory in his works – one example the reference to republican Robert Emmett (1778-1803) in the lines "O'Doherty screamed, woken out of a dream/By a vision of bold Robert dying [12] "(although this line shows that he is aware of his own imminent death, it must be Emmett who he is primarily referring to, this is indicated by the adjective 'bold'; this attribution was given to Emmett in the eponymous folk song). As seen from the link in the footnote, the poem was later set to music and recorded by – among others – the Irish singer and songwriter Christy Moore.

Sands the Irish speaker

Inserting a single Irish word into an otherwise English-language mural shows not only an awareness of the demographic living around the mural, i.e. potential Irish speakers, it also serves as a tool for potentially exoticising Sands as a figure for people who do not speak Irish or are unaware of the usage of Irish in Northern Irish prisons as a sort

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[12] https://www.christymoore.com/lyrics/back-home-in-derry/

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of 'secret language' that only republican inmates would understand. This would then connect the republican struggle with Sands as an individual who knew of this linguistic resource, building a narrative of his opposition to the British via language choice. Some viewers might also draw a line to the word 'poet' here, despite the fact that all of Sands' poetry is in written in English. Irish was not only used as a form of 'secret language' in many Irish prisons, but also as a medium of passing on ancient druidic/Celtic knowledge in earlier days.

The republican ex-prisoner Cyril Mac Curtain names Sands as one of the driving forces behind the establishing of Irish classes in Long Kesh and recalls the prisoners' awareness of the language as a means of resistance:

> Daoradh mise i 1974 agus bhí Gaeilge agam ón scoil i gCo Luimnigh óna caogaidí, chuir mé snas air seo fosta nuair a d'fheastal mé ar Chumann Chluain Ard nuair a tháinig mé go Béal Feirste i '71 ... bhí plean agam ranganna a thoiseacht agus cuireadh iad as a riocht nuair a dódh an áit ... ach ansin tógadh cupla huts nua agus bhí a lán lads óga díograiseacha sa hut liomsa..Bobby Sands, Géaróid Ó Ruanaí, Séanna Breathnach, Jim Gibney, Tom Boy Loudan agus a lán eile ... bhí siad ag iarraidh ormsa an teanga a mhúineadh leo, ní raibh aon cháilíocht agam nó cleachtadh sa mhúinteoireacht agam ach bhí fonn millteanach orthu í a fhoghlaim mar gur thuig siad í mar dhóigh eile le taispeáint do na Sasanaigh go raibh an cogadh fós ar siúil ... gléas troda a bhí ann ... bhí ranganna againn achan lá san iarnóin, bheadh daoine ag traenáil agus ag rith ar maidin agus ansin bheadh orainn dul ag mairseáil agus eile so i ndiaidh am dinnéar a bhí forsteanach do na ranganna ... bhí stádas againn agus neart leabhar agus eile ... Progress in Irish is mó a bhí in úsáid againn ... rinne muid an litríocht Ghaeilge leo fosta leabhar ar nós Cith is Dealán , Rotha Mór an tSaoil ... Chuir sé iontas orm cé chomh tapaidh agus a d'fhoglaim cuid do na lads óga an teanga ... daoine ar nós Bobby Sands, bhí a fhios agam láithreach go raibh bua na teanga aige, bhí sé an-díograiseach faoi ... bhain siad ar fad an-phléisiúir ar fad as ... is mar gheall air seo a bhunaigh muid an Ghaeltacht sa deireadh ... bhí ídéalachas ag baint leis an teanga, bhí daoine spreagtha faoi mar gur chuid d'fhís agus aisling pholaitiúil s'acu a bhí ann.

> I was sentenced in 1974 and had Irish from school in County Limerick in the fifties, I improved this when I attended Cumann Chluain Ard when I landed in Belfast in '71 ... I had planned to take classes and these went awry after the fire ... but then a few huts were built and I ended up in a hut with a lot of really diligent young lads. The likes of Bobby Sands, Géaróid Ó Ruanaí, Séanna Breathnach [Seanna Walsh, see *Keeping the myth alive* below, my comment] Jim Gibney, Tom Boy Loudan, and lots more ... they wanted me to teach them Irish; I had no qualifications or experience as a teacher, but they had a real desire to learn it because they understood it as *another way to show the British that the war was still going on ... it was a weapon* (my emphasis) ... there were classes every evening, people would be out training and running and that in the mornings and then we would have to go and march and so on ... therefore after dinner was the

best time for classes ... we had status and plenty of books ... *Progress in Irish* was the most used ... we also did Irish literature with them as well, books like Cith is Dealán , Rotha mór an tSaoil ... It amazed me how quickly they learned the language ... people like Bobby Sands, I knew instantly that he'd a knack for languages, he was very committed ... they all really enjoyed it and because of this we formed a Gaeltacht in the end ... there was an idealism about the language, people were really inspired about it as part of the overall political vision. (original interview and translation: Mac Ionnrachtaigh 2013:121f.)

Mac Curtain's account is especially interesting as it shows that Sands was not a fluent in Irish from birth or through his formal education, but he acquired it as a skill in prison, both as a weapon and a part of the vision of the Ireland that they would want to establish after British rule.

The usage of the Gaelic language as a weapon however dates back to the age of the druids and has been in the focus of a broader (educated) audience at the time of the Gaelic Revival, where both ancient Irish culture as well as the language itself was of interest for authors such as W.B Yeats, Douglas Hyde or James Joyce. Although Sands was born half a decade later and far away from the Dublin elite in which the revival mostly took place, the Irish language had not lost its status as a mythical language or identity-forming device.

Sands the revolutionary

Just like the attributions 'poet' and '*gaeilgeoir'* in their conventional meaning might be linked on the level of pragmatics so could be the attributions 'revolutionary' and 'IRA volunteer'. 'Revolutionary' is way more general and evokes connotations such as *change* or *powershift* but also *violence.* What is not depicted in this specific mural is the link that is often made in republican discourse between Bobby Sands and the Cuban national hero Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, but the word *revolutionary* allows the audience to make a connection, if not between these two historical figures, then between whoever else is a revolutionary in the viewers' context. This is both important for republicans, who thereby can put 'their' hero on the same level as other, maybe internationally more well-known figures and it allows tourists to compare Sands to someone they already know from their own local history. Whether this is a historically accurate way of approaching a snippet of another countries' civil war narrative is of course debatable.

Sands the IRA volunteer

This is the most straightforward of the four terms: Had Sands not been in the IRA, not at least had he not been arrested for paramilitary activities he had never gone on hunger strike and had never become a republican martyr. Despite this obvious historical chain of events, mentioning his membership in the IRA explicitly draws a connection to the republican area the mural is located in, the Sinn Fein office it is located on and the community that surrounds it.

OTHER WRITING: QUOTES

There are two half-sentences on the mural. The one on the left-hand side, 'everyone, republican or otherwise has their own particular role to play,' is taken from Sands' prison diary[13]. The full quote goes: "I have always taken a lesson from something that was told [to] me by a sound man, that is, that everyone, Republican or otherwise, has his own particular part to play. No part is too great or too small, no one is too old or too young to do something." As it is a quote, it does not have a denotative meaning as such, but in the context of the mural, it seems to represent the quintessence of all of Sands' writings. Again, as part of a motivated sign, Devenny must have picked it with an intention, although it might not be as well-recognized as the other quote on the right-hand side, which reads '… our revenge will be the laughter of our children.' As it is often the case with memorable quotes, this one was attributed to Sands but its origins remain unknown. The message, however, seems to be rather easy to decipher: The republican community will prevail and their future generations will be happy; this then will be the revenge on the British. As said before, each feature of the mural works only in conjunction with the others: Everyone playing one's part (in the republican struggle, but this is not explicitly stated) and in the end prevailing, a narrative like this fits in with words like 'revolutionary', while at the same time not interfering with the white doves (as the quotes do not directly reference an armed conflict) and the smiling man in civil clothing.

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[13] http://www.bobbysandstrust.com/writings/prison-diary

On the level of symbolism, the mural works with tools that exceed the very local context, like

- The burst chains on the top and the bottom: These are an almost universal symbol for freedom, for breaking free of either physical prison or societal boundaries or anything in between the physical and the abstract. What is very specific to the context is who breaks these chains: A phoenix on the top and a lark at the bottom. The phoenix, as a mythological creature that rises from its own ashes has been used by Sinn Fein as one of their many symbols, the ashes standing for the destruction brought upon the Irish by British occupation, but like a phoenix from its ashes, the Irish will always rise again. This is not so much a prefiguration as it is a mythological symbol.

- The frequent connections made to the lark and both the 1981 hunger strike and Sands in particular is most likely stemming from a story he wrote while on the blanket protest, called 'The Lark and The Freedom Fighter', which draws parallels between the songbird, which is trapped in a cage but nevertheless does not lose his will to live, and the republican prisoners. This connection between the lark and Sands is not only visible in visual commemorative culture surrounding the hunger strike, but its occurs especially frequently in republican songs that were written about this time, such as Shebeen's 'The Songbird' or Spirit of Freedom's 'The Lark'; it is also the cover picture of Christy Moore's 1986 album 'Spirit of Freedom', which features two of Sands' poems set to music (*McIllhatton* and *Back Home in Derry*). Sands however is not the first artist to make use of the lark as a symbol, it appeared in both Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" (the first of the Canterbury Tales) and Shakespeare's sonnet 29, in both instances it is the bringer of daybreak. In the republican context, both the lark and the phoenix represent the dawning of a new time, either a new day or a new era, and the longing for freedom, in this case of British rule. In Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "To a skylark", these meanings are supplemented by the lark standing for poetic art as such.

- The white doves on the smaller backyard wall are again a universal symbol, this time for peace. Both the broken chains and the dove are (in Kress' terms) *symbolic signs,* they symbolise something that was broadly agreed on, in this

case freedom and peace respectively. Again, this part of the mural might be easily overlooked due to its size and location.

- The rainbow background is ambiguous: In recent decades, rainbow colours have become *symbolic* for the LGBT-community, but there is no thematic connection with this in the rest of the mural. Danny Devenny has painted a mural in honour of hunger striker Kieran Doherty in 2006[14], which is similar in terms of style, so it can be assumed, that the background is simply an artistic choice and has no further connotation to it.

CHANGES TO THE MURAL

The Wikipedia upload tool Wikimedia Commons holds a 2005 version of the mural that differs in some key details from the mural in 2017: Above the phoenix used to be another Irish word, *Saoirse,* which means freedom, and the spaces of the portraits of Doherty and McDonnell used to be filled with two identical emblems that represent the United Irishmen, McCaughey was not portrayed at all. Another picture, found on a stock photo site (http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-ireland-north-belfast-west-falls-road-mural-of-bobby-sands-on-the-25508283.html) shows that the small add-on to the building that now shows lines of the republican 'H-Block Song'[15], was still unpainted in 2009. What can be seen on video footage from almost a decade before Danny Devenny painted his mural (1992)[16], is that where the elaborate mural is today, there used to be a less artistic portrait of Sands, with the same quote that can today be found on the right of Sands' head today, as well as the logo of *An Phoblacht [The Republic]*, Sinn Fein's own newspaper, and a lark similar to the one there is today.

ASSEMBLING THE MYTH

Taking all of these pieces of meaning into account, there cannot be one final, definite message that this mural is trying to convey and arguably, this was also not intended

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[14] http://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/26466
[15] „I'll wear no convict's uniform, nor meakly (sic) serve my time, that Britain might make Ireland's fight 800 years of crime", see also: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcglqmrvPxw
[16] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jYbOCI3HOI&feature=youtu.be&t=55

by the artist. It can be assumed that Mr. Devenny, who is a member of Sinn Fein, was asked by his party to paint one of the walls of their party office and it has by now become one of the best-known murals in the city of Belfast. What distinguishes it from other murals is that it is being well maintained (some murals wither because they are not touched up and over time, the paint is chipping) and it is a stop for many mural tours. The friendly, or non-threatening motif of the mural cannot be overestimated, it makes a much better figurehead for the tourist branch of Belfast murals, if one might call it that, than a hooded gunman. It also plays heavily on the notion that despite him being in the IRA, Sands was also a poet, an Irish speaker, a revolutionary- a normal person, like everyone who passes by the mural. This again ties in with the famous picture of Che Guevara with his cigar: Violence is not present, both are perceived as 'good' soldiers, 'good' paramilitaries, who, mainly though the mode of writing, have close ties to the 'civil', peaceful world. Nevertheless, it requires either some amount background knowledge to connect Sands with the 1981 hunger strike or an equally fair amount of critical thinking in order to critically engage with the historical references in this picture, in order look for counter-narratives to the one presented on the mural. Calling the three men in the smaller frames by their paramilitary title (Vol.) shows a legitimisation of the armed struggle of the IRA and painting Sands like this almost Jesus-like figure, smiling, in bright colours, only confirms that. Having the phoenix as a symbol of resurrection after a painful death (the phoenix who burns to death, Sands who slowly and painfully starves). Sands was aware that his death was necessary in order to try and force the British government to give in to his comrades' demands, he sacrificed himself for a greater good, again, like Jesus. And even if at that time, he did it out of political calculation, creating a more 'saintly' narrative in a predominantly roman-catholic community is rather easy. Also, no dates or historical explanations are given, nothing for a stranger to this community to grasp: The young man might still be alive for all the mural shows, he might even be young today, a universally understood mentioning of his birth, - and dying date would explain that he is no longer around, that he still needs to be remembered. Not giving dates or mentioning Long Kesh, which has been shut down in 2000, removes the mural from temporal constraints, making it timeless in a way.

Trying to describe the myth that is produced here, is actually rather vague, it would be something along the lines of: This young man is one of our heroes, he is famous for many different things, but he is a symbol for our struggle for freedom.

KEEPING THE MYTH ALIVE

Even assuming that most inhabitants of Belfast know about Sands and the hunger strike, why would it be important to keep his memory alive in such an almost religious manner? This mural is just one of many dedicated to him and/or his comrades from 1981 and Sinn Fein sells all sorts of merchandise with his face on it[17] and while every political movement has its heroes, for Belfast republicans, there seems to be a special focus on Sands. This can easily be explained by the fact that – even disregarding the way he died and the international attention his death got – most of the republicans who survived Long Kesh prison and continued to be in the public eye because of some sort of (socio)political engagement knew Sands. He would have been 64 years old this year and most of his peers, among them the former Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams, the Irish language activist and Belfast city councillor Séanna[18] Walsh and the notorious, but well-recognized IRA volunteer Brendan 'Bik' McFarlane. Especially Adams, who, since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, has often been accused of 'giving in to the enemy' (i.e. working actively on decommissioning the Provisional IRA), often publicly recalls the time in in prison together with Sands, in order to reinforce his own republican identity. Sands' memory, depicted in this mural and elsewhere, is very convertible: In the 21st century, it is wiser for the Sinn Fein leadership to focus on a mythological representation of Sands that foregrounds his poetry and his suffering in prison, not the reasons he was arrested for and that he was indeed a republican hardliner. The mural is also used as a background for Sinn Féin press briefings or used by newspapers as a background to frame republicans 'in the field', it stands for a whole community.

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[17] http://www.sinnfeinbookshop.com/search.php?search_query=bobby+sands#product-results
[18] https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/ira-veteran-who-called-end-to-armed-campaign-to-become-sf-councillor-31517886.html

Before continuing with the next analysis, it will prove useful to point out the distinctive features in mural motives between the Falls and the Shankill Road. It seems that along the Shankill Road, paramilitaries are mostly remembered in groups, as military units, rather than individual 'heroes'.

According to Neil Jarman (209) murals were "almost totally a unionist preserve" before the 1981 hunger strike; he describes how from then onwards murals exploded in quantity and how "both Catholic and Celtic imagery" was used to accompany slogans on the walls; the mode of the *picture* was added to that of *writing*. After 1984, shortly after the 1981 hunger strike, a new wave of loyalist murals emerged, driven by the emerging murals on the republican side, but the symbolism on the unionist side was different from the republican one:

> Unionist opposition to the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement was a further stimulation to visual displays that placed stress on Ulster's British identity. In the past decade, the emblems, flags and heraldic devices of the paramilitary groups have become more elaborate, and gunmen have appeared on walls with greater frequency. Within this shift of symbolism, the relationship with Great Britain has become more uncertain and ambiguous; increasingly, Ulster has become to be defined in its own terms, independent of external authority, although there is still little visual support for an Independent Ulster. […] Although paramilitary images have come to dominate the murals of loyalist Belfast, the practice [of mural painting, my comment] remains embedded within the commemorative calendar. The anniversaries of the Somme and the Boyne, and more recently Armistice Day in November, remain the events that encourage painters, even if traditional meanings and assumptions are no longer duplicated on the walls. The paramilitary groups have also begun to use murals to extend the commemorative process by painting memorials to their own dead. (Jarman 215)

In this quote, the key difference between republican and loyalist murals is visible: While there are murals commemorating events like the centenary of the Easter Rising (in 2016), republicans stick rather with more general themes, such as internment, Gaelic sports, remembering the victims of individual attacks or single volunteers (independently of their dying days), while loyalist murals revolve mostly around recurring events; this is interlinked with the commemorative practice of parading: The Parades Commission, a body formed in 1998 to approve and monitor parades across Northern Ireland and to act as a neutral advisor to the Secretary of State regarding parading matters, reports on their website that the overwhelming majority of parades

in Belfast last year (2017) were held on the unionist side (278 out of 440, compared to 23 on the republican side[19]) and these numbers can be used as a reference point that reflects the distribution of parades in any other year. Dominic Bryan, former head of the Centre of Irish Studies at Queen's University Belfast and now advisor to the Parades Commission, writes about unionist parades:

> Within Unionism and the Protestant community, the parades play a more complex role [than in the nationalist/republican community, where he sees parades focusing more on a civil rights agenda, driven by local community groups, my comment]. Orange parades, like all large public events, are a collection of individuals and groups, who participate for various reasons, and interpret and reinterpret what is taking place. Local Orange lodges vary in their background. They might be based on church groups, workplaces, geography, or organizations such as ex-servicemen associations. As such, they reflect many of the divisions between Protestant denominations, between rural and urban communities, and most significantly within Unionist party politics, which has fragmented since the 1970s. (Bryan 46)

So, it seems that murals play a rather secondary role in the loyalist/unionist community, because they make themselves visible in the public space through the medium of parades. Still, Shankill Road is full of murals which, just like on Falls Road, branch out into the small side streets and display a variety of motifs and artistic skill.

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[19] http://www.paradescommission.org/Press-Releases/440-parades-were-notified-in-Belfast-in-2017-click.aspx

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ANALYSIS: UVF COMMEMORATION SHANKILL ROAD/CARNAN STREET

Figure 3: UVF mural

The mural under analysis here, found at the conjunction of Shankill Road and Carnan Street, is a rather typical commemoration mural, dedicated to the memory of fallen UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) volunteers from the area. It provides a stark contrast to the mural of Bobby Sands, yet it falls under the same broader category of 'commemorating individuals'. The most unusual feature about it is that none of the young men are shown to wear hoods or balaclavas, as it is usually the case on loyalist murals: They are not anonymous volunteers, who represent their whole unit or organisation, but they are individuals. According to the blog 'Extramural Activity', which chronicles murals all across Belfast, it shows the UVF volunteers Thomas Chapman, James McGregor, Robert McIntyre, William Hannah, and Robert Wadsworth (from left to right), who were killed between 1973 and 1978[20]. The left-most part of the mural can actually stand as a mural on its own, it is not as interwoven with the larger picture as it is the case with the right-most part of the Bobby Sands mural; the two parts differ in style and modality (as the left side has a stone plaque attached right in the mural itself),

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[20] https://extramuralactivity.com/2014/09/11/c-coy-street/

but they are going to be looked at as being painted on the same building and apparently being commissioned by the same organisation, the UVF. The analysis will start with the right-hand side and then move over to the left.

DENOTATION

On the denotative level, this mural is very straight forward: It shows four young men carrying guns but not wearing army uniforms. Their names are not given anywhere, but it is quite clear that the one who stands outside of the frame, carrying an AK-47 assault rifle, is the leader of the group, mainly because he is foregrounded. The group poses in front of a generic residential area background with a sunny sky behind it and the clothes they are wearing do not seem to be the most modern but none of this indicates that this is Belfast, apart from the writing, which reads "C. Coy 1st Belfast Battalion Ulster Volunteers" and the UVF logo, which shows the Red Hand of Ulster and the slogan "For God and Ulster". What is also unusual is the two horizontal flag posts stuck into the mural on the edges of the painted banner. Not visible in this photo, the flag to the right is the flag of the 1st Belfast Battalion of the UVF, to the right is a Union Jack which was modified to serve as a commemoration flag for the Ulstermen who died in the First World War as part of the 36th Ulster Regiment.

CONNOTATION

Although the names of the volunteers are not given (like many murals, it relies on the viewer having some knowledge of the context or having an insider with them), the banner and the emblem identify them as UVF volunteers. There could be a connection made between the generic background and the Shankill area, but that is highly subjective. Given the fact that two of the volunteers are smiling, they do not only represent physical strength and protection, but also youth and recklessness, they make the viewer sympathise with their 'heroes'. Given the fact that they are portrayed with a gun, but still not gloomy or threatening. No further threats are ascribed to the men, but the image works in connection with the left side of the house wall, which, on a black background, adorned by red poppies, shows the poem "Here dead we lie" by A.E. Housman (1919) (http://www.warpoetry.co.uk/housman.html):

"Here dead we lie, because we did not choose,

to live and shame the land, from which we sprung.

Life, to be sure, is nothing much to lose,

but young men think it is, and we were young."

The poem references the First World War, but the men on the murals died in combat in the 1970s. Though this does not make sense at first glance, it is a very clever double-usage of the text: The flags (apart from the unchanged Union Jack on the flagpole over the poem) and the poppies (see below) point to the time of World War I, the picture of the volunteers points to the mid-1970s and the poem can be used for both time periods, as neither the Somme nor Belfast nor any other battleground are explicitly mentioned.

INDIVIDUAL SYMBOLS

- The red poppy: Even beyond Northern Ireland, the red poppy is a symbol of the British to commemorate their losses in the First World War. The BBC (http://www.bbc.co.uk/remembrance/how/poppy.shtml) explains that the following way: "Scarlet corn poppies (popaver rhoeas) grow naturally in conditions of disturbed earth throughout Western Europe. The destruction brought by the Napoleonic wars of the early 19th Century transformed bare land into fields of blood red poppies, growing around the bodies of the fallen soldiers. In late 1914, the fields of Northern France and Flanders were once again ripped open as World War One raged through Europe's heart. Once the conflict was over the poppy was one of the only plants to grow on the otherwise barren battlefields. The significance of the poppy as a lasting memorial symbol to the fallen was realised by the Canadian surgeon John McCrae in his poem "In Flanders Fields." The poppy came to represent the immeasurable sacrifice made by his comrades and quickly became a lasting memorial to those who died in World War One and later conflicts. It was adopted by The Royal British Legion as the symbol for their Poppy Appeal, in aid of those serving in the British Armed Forces, after its formation in 1921."

  On an ideological level, the poppy is for the unionists, what the Easter lily is for republicans: It reminds them of a time of war more than a hundred years ago, which they can still use to build their present-day identity on. The poppy also connects the Ulster unionists to the rest of Britain, reassuring them in the key

part of their identity by using this shared symbol of commemoration. However, what is often left out, is that, as important as this commemorative act is, especially relating to the Battle of the Somme, this narrative does not go unchallenged, as Graham and Shirlow note: The UVF's claim to—"the Somme has not gone unchallenged. Shortly after its first sectarian murder in 1966, the then-Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Terence O'Neill, who, ironically, was forced to return from an official visit to France to deal with this crisis, proscribed the organization:" Let no one imagine [he stated] that there is any connection whatever between the two bodies; between men who were ready to die for their country in the fields of France, and a sordid conspiracy of criminals prepared to take up arms against

unprotected fellow citizens" (Northern Ireland Hansard, 28 June 1966).

O'Neill's outrage at the UVF must have been compounded by his immediate return to France to attend official ceremonies at the Ulster Tower and the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont Hamel marking the 50th anniversary of the opening day of the Battle of the Somme (O'Neill, 1972). There is also contemporary opposition to the UVF's attempt to lay claim to ownership of the Somme epic. One community activist argues that the wall murals are an expression of the organization's present paramilitary culture and that while the UVF may be fighting for the same ideologies, it goes about it in an entirely different way to the 36th Division. The paramilitary trappings give a 'wrong' image in a situation in which the people have to be empowered through knowledge of their own history and made independent of official unionism, the Orange Order and the paramilitaries. Thus, the one utterly unambiguous Somme mural is at the Holywood Arches in East Belfast, where the 36th Division is commemorated and the poppies are in remembrance of it and it alone. (Graham and Shirlow 897)

From their observation, it seems that the poppy might not have been the best symbol to use right next to a mural that openly commemorates paramilitaries, but it shows a coherence in meaning and identity: The UVF is providing an ideological home for those who want to honour the members of the 36th Ulster division.

- The Red Hand: Although it is not actually coloured red in the mural (or on the UVF banner in any context); the upright right hand, visible from the wrist

upwards, is one of the most widespread unionist symbols, it is also part of the flag of the province of Ulster itself. In the earlier 1856 edition of *Notes and Queries,* a British literature journal, the writer (named J.R.R.) notes that he is afraid that this symbol is being used extensively by the superstitious population as a sign of strength and honour and that this needs to stop, as the sign itself is actually honourable and should not be overused by the broader public. As it stems very likely from a folk tale, there is not one correct origin story attached to the Red Hand, but Brighton (155) provides a very concise summary: "The origin of the Red Hand is unclear, and at least four versions of its genesis can be found, although each story recognizes Ulster as the Red Hand's place of origin. Three stories credit King Hugh O'Neill for the symbol, while the fourth gives credit to the Red Branch Knights. Each tale of origin is based in Celtic mythology and folklore. The first story claims that O'Neill adopted the hand as his heraldic symbol after seeing it on a Monasterboice high cross, which still stands in Co. Louth. The hand on the cross symbolizes the powerful hand of God. The two remaining O'Neill stories are similar. In each tale the Red Hand of Ulster represents a raised, severed right hand. However, in each story the ethnicity of the hand's owner is different. In the first story, a band of marauding Vikings were approaching the coast of Northern Ireland when the Viking leader promised possession of the land to the first man to touch it with his hand or foot. O'Neill won possession by severing his right hand and throwing it on shore. O'Neill then employed the image of the bloody hand as his heraldic symbol (MacKillop, 1998, p. 371). In the second story, rival Scottish clans, racing to Ireland, were the central characters. Again, possession was promised to the clan who first reached land. The chieftain of the Clan MacDonnnell, rather than lose the race, cut off his right hand and threw it on shore (MacKillop, 1998, p. 371). The fourth story involves the symbolism of the crest of Co. Tyrone. The crest's shield is composed of three elements, each of which are related to the Red Branch Knights. According to the Ulster Cycle of heroic tales, the Red Knights were a band of warriors of the equestrian order who dedicated themselves to the defense of Ulster (O'Connor, 1996, p. 9). At the battle known as the War of The Trees, they fought their enemy until all weapons were exhausted. The Cycle tells that the last knight, armed with a branch from a red tree, killed the last of the enemy, thus protecting Ulster. In this way they earned

the title of the Red Branch Knights (www.roots.com/~nirtyr3/). The crest of Tyrone, then, is composed of a red hand (for the knights themselves), ocean waves (representing the knights' travels), and a tree (for the weapon they used in the battle)."

Despite being deeply rooted in Celtic mythology, it was adopted by unionists: "Today, the Red Hand of Ulster is associated with the tensions between Loyalists and Nationalists in Northern Ireland. The symbol is commonly associated with the former and is often the focal point of Loyalists murals. The Red Hand itself has signified loyalty to England and Protestant ascendancy since the seventeenth century. The Red Hand became the official symbol of Ulster when James I created the Order of Baronets, following the fall and flight of O'Neill in 1607. This also marked the beginning of a large-scale plantation in six of the nine Ulster counties (Miller, 1985, p. 19). James I intentionally chose this symbol to represent the natural and inalienable right of Protestants to own and control the region (MacKillop, 1998, p. 371). It is usually paired with the symbol of the crown and/or the Star of David. The former symbol represents loyalty to the British monarchy, while the latter is thought to symbolize the six counties of Northern Ireland, each represented by one point of the star. To a lesser extent, the Red Hand of Ulster is and has been used by Nationalists. The Red Hand is part of the O'Neill crest and represents all nine counties of the province. Of all the Gaelic clans, the O'Neills were the most resistant to English invasion." (Brighton 155)

ASSEMBLING THE MYTH

The mural on Carnan Street ticks all the boxes in terms of well-used and well-known unionist and loyalist symbolism and it even works with additional media of commemoration, namely flags and a plaque. The plaque gives the names of the volunteers that are missing on the mural; it requires pedestrians to actively engage with the mural: They need to stop and read if they want to know who these men were or are – it is not indicated anywhere that they are dead: As the UVF is still around (which is also something that is communicated to tourists: Paramilitaries are not gone), these men might as well be too. The myth behind that is the elevation of a paramilitary

group, linking them (by means of the military 'Roll of Honour' on the plaque and the poem next to it) to the dead of World War I. This then provides a connection that can create a *Prefiguration*, which might go like this: The 36th Ulster Regiment fought in the war for England, died for England and the Queen. The goal of the UVF is to fight those who want to rip Northern Ireland away from the Queen and integrate it into a foreign nation, Ireland. As the UVF (including these young men who are from this part of town, these streets, this community) is fighting for the same power balance, to strengthen Great Britain and Northern Ireland's position within it. That would be one possibility, the other is much more negative and is most likely not one that this mural is trying to perpetuate: World War I was the first of its kind, with the usage of chemical weapons and heavy artillery it was more brutal and dangerous than any war before it and, like in any form of conflict, enthusiastic (or indoctrinated) young men go to war, leave their homes and come back either in a casket or severely wounded and traumatized. The poor protestant working class of Belfast did gain nothing in the war, quite the contrary.

A YEAR OF REMEMBERANCE: MURALS AND 2016

As mentioned before, 2016 marked the centenary of both the Easter Rising (on Easter Monday) on the nationalist side and the Battle of the Somme (1st of July) on the unionist side. These two parallel events lead to a broad discussion about whether and which of these occasions should be celebrated by all of Northern Ireland and which representatives of which party will be attending which commemoration event and who was wanted where. This year was also captured on public display in the form of murals; two of them will be the subject of this chapter.

ANALYSIS: EASTER RISING (FALLS ROAD/ GROSVENOR ROAD)

Figure 4: Easter Rising mural, with the artist working on it

Figure 5: Easter Rising mural finished

Figure 6: Easter Rising mural finished II

Figure 7: Easter Rising mural finished III

Figure 8: Easter Rising mural finished IV

Figure 9: Easter Rising mural finished V

This very elaborate mural was put up a year before the centenary. The first (Fig.4) shows the artist, Gerry Kelly (also known by his pseudonym 'Mo chara', which translates to 'my friend') working on the mural in late July 2015. Not on the picture are his two assistants (they sit next to where the photographer stands), who were in charge of handing him pots of paint and brushes. I happened to run into Mr. Kelly working while I was out on the Falls Road with friends, and one of them had her camera with her and took pictures. Only after said friend mentioned my thesis did Mr. Kelly tell me his name, as he did either not deem himself to be special or he thought that we, a group of six obvious 'outsiders', summer school students from all across the world, would not know who he was anyways. His work is repeatedly featured in Bill Rolston's standard works on murals, the illustrated book series *Drawing Support* (1992, 1995, 2003, 2013), which tries to record murals all over Belfast, and he is a founding member of the arts collective Gael Force Art

The finished mural (as photographed in late March 2016) was too large to fit on one picture; it, like many others, it makes use of the onset of the house it is painted on and it is incredibly detailed, not only dealing with the 1916 Rising, but also several other key points/motifs of republican identity. A small detail that sets it apart from any other

mural I have ever seen in Belfast, is that it, like many graffiti, features the artists' name .This might be due to the fact that, as already mentioned, this is the work of artists who belong to an art collective.

THE MURAL

DENOTATION

The background of the mural shows a street with a burning building and a phoenix rising above it; what used to be an advertising board does now hold a sort of document, which is surrounded by eight small portraits. Above these, on the far-right corner, is an emblem or logo of sorts, which is hardly legible because it is so far up. There is another one in the left upper corner, which is also far away from the viewer's eye; under it is a plant with white seeds.

On the smaller onset building, the street scene partly continues, as the lower part of the wall shows armoured cars, the upper part shows a female head without eyeballs, which has the word 'Eira' written underneath. To the left of the head stands a group of men, most likely soldiers, above is a map of Ireland, split in four parts with different coats of arms. Under the soldiers, on what looks like a shop entrance door, it says 'Why fears to speak of 1798?' and next to that, on what looks like a shop window with blinds drawn over it, it says 'Cú Cullainn Croga', next to it stands a man holding a lance and above that is a long-haired man who is held by a knight with wings on his helmet. All of these individual elements are painted with a great care to detail and colour composition, yet nothing on this wall is self-explanatory in any way. This mural does not seem to be of the 'touristy' kind, with slogans and images that evoke feelings or associations in a larger, non-local audience. It is not clear to an uninformed passer-by what happened in 1789, who or what Cú Cullainn Croga is, what sort of battle is fought in the main motif, who the eight people on the portraits are or what the two emblems mean. As it will be shown below, the mural tries to incorporate more than 1000 years of history all at once, which gives it the impression of a patchwork painting, taking different motifs and stitching them together.

Finding a single connotation in this mural is not possible, due to the density of symbolism and the interwoven design of the mural; I will therefore try to address each topical entity on its own, starting with the oldest, in terms of history. Considering Kress' motivated sign once more, this mural is overflowing with intentionally placed cues for an informed viewer, an 'insider', someone who is familiar with republican history and some of the key myths (as in folklore tales) and events that form republican identity today. What sets it apart from the two murals discussed previously, is that the most recent of these events happened 102 years ago (as we are in 2018 now), so there will be much less actual eye witnesses (only a handful of Rising participants are alive today) compared to people who knew Bobby Sands or the five UVF volunteers; this distance in time gives every single event depicted on the mural a greater chance to become a prefiguration: The individual scenes on the mural show different stories of Irish resistance, carried out in different centuries and in different protagonist constellations. There will be at least one to fit any type of present-day republican resistance: The lonely fighter (Cú Cullainn), the inseparable band of conspirators (the men of 1789), or the anonymous fighter who needs to protect the damsel in distress (Eira). These might be seen as general archetypes, but through this mural they are linked to one certain story, one certain historic event or tale from mythology.

DISASSEMBLING THE MURAL

Cú Cullain Croga (Brave Cú Cullain)

The 'oldest' part of the mural is the one on the far left, the man being held by the angel-like figure, a hero from ancient Celtic mythology, Cú Cullainn ('the hound of Cullan'). John Poulter (37) summarizes his story as follows:

Cu Chulainn features in the Ulster Cycle of tales. Named Setanta at birth he later joins his uncle Conchubar's court at Emain Macha in Ulster. While still a young boy he kills a huge guard dog belonging to the smith Cullan and pledges to act as its replacement until a new dog can be raised and trained. He thus receives his new name of Cu Chulainn meaning 'hound of Cullan'. His many adventures include the wooing of the

fair Emer, his training in Alba, alongside Fer Diad, by the warrior-woman Scathach, his killing of his only son by Aoife, and his affair with the fairy Fand. The most epic of the tales in which he features is the Min Bó Cuaiinge — The Cattle Raid of Cooley — in which Queen Medb of Connaught brings an army to Ulster to take the great brown bull of Cooley so that she can match the wealth of her husband Ailill who possesses the great white-homed (sic!) bull. The men of Ulster are struck down with birth pangs by a curse leaving only Cu Chullain to defend the land. After many skirmishes, in which he kills many of Medb's army, he agrees to face her champions in a series of single combats. He vanquishes all of them, eventually killing Fer Diad, his friend and foster-brother. Badly wounded he sleeps but the men of Ulster arc now roused and gather for battle. They prevail after Cu Chulainn rises to join them. The bull has already been taken though and the end of The Min tells of the protracted fight between the two great animals when they meet. Cu Chulainn meets his death in another tale whilst fighting once more against overwhelming odds. When he realises he is mortally wounded he ties himself to a pillar stone in order that he may still face his enemies. They only dare to approach him when a crow lands on his shoulder and he does not stir. The famous statue by Oliver Sheppard captures this moment.

The mentioned Ulster Cycle is one of three important cycles in Irish mythology (the other two being the King Cycle and the Fenian Cycle) and the tales in it take place in Ulster, hence the name. Due to Cú Cullainn's involvement in the Cattle Raid of Cooley, he is also sometimes referred to as 'the defender of Ulster'. In his book chapter, Porter discusses how Cú Cullainn was used throughout Irish history as a reference point and an inspiration to artists and politicians. This is especially relevant for the Gaelic Revival in the beginning of the 20th century and even the loyalist UDA (Ulster Defence Association) makes use of him in a mural, but Porter argues that republicans already made use of the hero in previous times (Poulter 46ff.). What he also points out, and this is also clear from the mural under discussion here, is that Cú Cullainn is the embodiment of a male hero: He is strong (the mural shows his trained upper body), fearless and dies a heroic death in the end (that is also visible on the mural).

The 1789 rebellion

Moving further right on the mural, there is both a single man holding a lance of sorts and a group of men being equipped in the same way. Under them, the mural asks,

'Who fears to speak of 1789?' The rebellion of 1789, which was left out for shortness' sake in the historical overview of this thesis, was

the culmination of the revolutionary activities of the United Irishmen. There were four main outbreaks.

1.   Risings in Co. Dublin, Kildare, and Meath on the night of 23–4 May. Apparently triggered by the interception of mail coaches leaving Dublin, and possibly envisaged as leading to a descent on the capital, the insurrection was undermined by lack of co-ordination and the failure to capture strategic local centres. Government forces killed 350 at Tara (26 May) and 200 at the Curragh (29 May), where troops attacked surrendering rebels. The rising spread to Carlow on 25 May; an attack on Carlow town was bloodily defeated next day.

2.   Risings in eastern Ulster, following a rank and file revolt against provincial United Irish leaders who had failed to respond to events in Leinster. In Co. Antrim 4,000 men under Henry Joy McCracken captured Randalstown and Ballymena, but were defeated at Antrim town (7 June) and dispersed when Gen. George Nugent offered an amnesty to all except ringleaders. In Co. Down Henry Munro (1758–98), a Lisburn linen draper, raised 7,000 men but was defeated at Ballynahinch (13 June).

3.   In Co. Wexford, insurgents massacred militia and yeomanry at Oulart on 27 May, going on to capture Enniscorthy and on 30 May Wexford town, which remained for the next three weeks the headquarters of an improvised revolutionary government. However, the failure of attacks on New Ross (5 June) and Arklow (9 June) left the insurgents confined to this south-eastern corner to await the counter-attack, culminating in the battle of Vinegar Hill (21 June) and the recapture of Wexford town (22 June).The Wexford insurrection, in a region where religious conflict was exacerbated by a comparatively large Protestant population, involved acts of nakedly sectarian violence, most notably the burning to death of 200 Protestant prisoners in a barn at Scullabogue and the mass execution of 93 more in Wexford town. Partly as a result, the county's insurgents have been portrayed as a largely unpoliticized peasantry, driven to rebellion by the indiscriminate violence of local loyalists and turning for leadership to sympathetic Protestant gentlemen like Bagenal Harvey and priests like John Murphy. More recent accounts point to evidence of some prior United

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Irish organization, and argue that the insurrection was more disciplined, and clearer in its political goals, than has been generally recognized

4.   The Connacht rising, sparked off by Humbert's arrival. The insurrection included several lesser episodes: the activities, continuing into 1803, of Michael Dwyer and Joseph Holt in Co. Wicklow; a small outbreak, inspired by Humbert's landing, in Cos. Longford and Westmeath on 2–6 September; and Tandy's brief appearance in Co. Donegal.

Following the insurrection, some 1,500 persons were executed, transported, or flogged, and there were also unofficial reprisals by loyalists, particularly in the south-east. Overall the rebellion, involving an estimated 30,000 deaths, represents the most violent episode in Irish history since the 17th century. Polemical accounts by writers such as Musgrave and Watty Cox perpetuated a legacy of bitterness on both sides. Disillusionment and renewed insecurity following the apparent degeneration of the movement into a priest-led anti-Protestant crusade were central to the collapse both of Protestant patriotism and of the Protestant popular radicalism represented by the United Irishmen. (see: Insurrection of 1789, *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*)

Although this was not the only uprising of its kind, it was so significant for the republican movement not only because of its rather large number casualties (estimations go from 20,000 to 50,000 losses on all sides combined), but also because the rebellion's leaders, Henry Joy McCracken, Daniel O'Connell and, most of all, Theobald Wolfe Tone, were public figures before the rebellion and were skilled in influencing their own myths, especially of their tragic deaths, already in their lifetime. Furthermore, what is indeed unique to this rebellion is that both Wolfe Tone and McCracken came from well-known protestant families and nevertheless fought alongside Catholics.

The United Irishmen themselves, despite mayor differences in members (as seen below, they also had Protestants among their ranks and they were mainly a middle and upper-class movement), they shared one important goal with the 20th century and present-day IRA (splinter groups): The goal of a united Ireland. In this way, the United Irishmen are seen historically as the most influential group in the catholic and republican socio-political tradition before the IRA. The United Irishmen were

established in Belfast (by Neilson, Tone, and Russell) on 18 October 1791 and in Dublin (by Tone, Russell, and Tandy), on 9 November, with smaller clubs in other centres. The membership of the Belfast society was Presbyterian and predominantly middle class; that of the Dublin society, roughly equally divided between Protestant and Catholic, was middle class with a sprinkling of gentry and aristocracy. The society's ideology combined the new radicalism inspired by the American and French Revolutions with the older traditions of British advanced Whig or commonwealth doctrine, and Irish patriotism. Its main aims were parliamentary reform and the removal of English control of Irish affairs. It was not until 1794, however, that the Dublin society defined reform in terms of indirect elections by universal male suffrage, and the early United Irishmen also stopped short of overt separatism or republicanism. The society's most distinctive commitment was to a union of Irishmen of all denominations, though here too some Protestant members were privately uneasy at the prospect of full Catholic emancipation.

The United Irishmen initially operated as a radical club, disseminating propaganda through the Northern Star and other publications, and seeking to act as a radicalizing influence within larger bodies, notably the Volunteers. During 1793 the Gunpowder Act and Convention Act Curtailed Volunteering, while prosecutions silenced leading radicals like Hamilton Rowan. In May 1794, following the arrest of William Jackson, the Dublin society was suppressed. United Irish leaders were later to blame these repressive measures for driving them to revolution. Recent research suggests that the effect was rather to advance a conspiratorial element already present, particularly within the Ulster movement, which now reorganized itself as a secret, oath-bound organization geared for armed insurrection. The new clandestine structures, formalized in a revised constitution adopted on 10 May 1795, were extended to Dublin from the summer of 1796 and from there to surrounding counties. Meanwhile Tone had arrived in France in February 1796 to seek military support, and the Hoche expedition of December dramatically boosted recruitment and morale. By February 1798 the society claimed over 280,000 active members. This expansion, along with the increasingly close alliance with the Defenders, inevitably widened the gulf between the ideas of leaders and followers, as the goal of a democratic republic was reinforced, if not

displaced, by ideas of a radical social transformation, and even of a settling of accounts with 'heretic' Protestants.

During 1797 the campaign of determined counter-insurgency directed by General Lake severely weakened the United Irish organization in its Ulster heartland. In spring 1798 the focus of repression moved to the counties round Dublin. Lord Edward FitzGerald, Arthur O'Connor, and other United Irish leaders advocated immediate insurrection, but were opposed by moderates led by Emmet and W. J. MacNevin. The arrest of most members of the Leinster Directory on 12 March allowed Lord Edward, the Sheares brothers, and Neilson to frame plans for a rising. However, they too were in custody by 23 May, and it remains unclear how far the eventual insurrection of 1798 was centrally co-ordinated.

A new United Irish organization, more tightly knit than its predecessor, appeared quite quickly after 1798, but collapsed following Robert Emmet's insurrection of 1803, although in France United Irish representatives remained active up to the fall of Napoleon. (see United Irishmen, Society of, *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*)

The question why the rebels are all being depicted carrying pikes or lances instead of swords or clubs for example, can be linked to two traditional songs, which are part of the Irish rebel music canon. Rebel music is the term widely used for republican music, often there is a self-composed political text, sung to traditional tunes, which makes singing along rather easy for the audience. The texts range from straight out glorifying the IRA's violence, to commenting on political decisions (these stem mostly from the Thatcher-era) or remembering dead volunteers. The first would be 'Who fears to speak of '98?'; it can be supposed that Gerry Kelly copied the line for his mural straight out of the title this song:

THE MEMORY OF THE DEAD (WHO FEARS TO SPEAK OF '98)
1798 left ten thousands dead. This poem was first published anonymously in the 1840s. Despite the poem's sentiments, John Kells Ingram was never overtly nationalistic; indeed he became a strong unionist in later years. (my emphasis)

Who fears to speak of 'Ninety-eight'?
Who blushes at the name?
When cowards mock the patriot's fate
Who hangs his head for shame?

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He's all a knave or half a slave
Who slights his country thus,
But a true man, like you, man,
Will fill your glass with us.

We drink the memory of the brave,
The faithful and the few,
Some lie far off beyond the wave,
Some sleep in Ireland too;
All, all are gone, but still lives on
The fame of those who died,
All true men, like you, men,
Remember them with pride.

Some on the shores of distant lands
Their weary hearts have laid,
And by the stranger's heedless hands
Their lonely graves were made;
But though their clay be far away,
Beyond the Atlantic foam,
In true men, like you, men,
Their spirit's still at home.

The dust of some is Irish earth,
Among their own they rest;
And that same land that gave them birth
Has caught them to her breast;
And we will pray that from their clay
Full many a race may start
Of true men, like you, men,
To play as brave a part.

They rose in dark and evil days
To free their native land
And kindled then a living blaze
That nothing shall withstand;
Alas, that might should conquer right,
They fell and passed away
But true men, like you, men,
Are plenty here today.

Then here's their memory, let it be
To us a guiding light
To cheer our fight for liberty
And teach us to unite!
Though good and ill be Ireland's still,
Though sad as their your fate,
Yet true men, be you, men,
Like those of 'Ninety-eight.

John   Kells   Ingram   (1823-1907)
()

This song is a textbook example of myth-making in rebel music, which can only be discussed very briefly here, but as it obviously ties in with the mural under discussion, looking closer at the lyrics will help to understand the underlying mindset of this part of the mural:

In the first verse, people who mock or are ashamed of the rebellion are framed as 'knaves' or 'half a slave' and as the opposite of the 'patriots', who took part in the rebellion. This establishes an 'us-versus-them'-narrative, it alienates the proponents of the rebellion from the opponents. This is a widely used political tactic across all ages and political standpoints. The fourth verse starts with 'They rose in dark and evil days/ To free their native land', this of course deals with the belief that only a united Ireland, without British interference, can really be a free country. This has not lost its topicality at all, it is the premise under which not only Sinn Fein, but also the various republican dissident groups (such as the INLA, Óglaigh na hÉireann [not to be confused with the 'actual' IRA] or, most recently, the Irish Republican Movement) operated and still operate today. The last verse of the song fulfils the same functions as the mural: It highlights the practice of remembering the men who fought and died in the rebellion and use them as an example for present-day actions: This is exactly the prefiguration setting that Blumenberg describes: 'If you disagree with what (dissident) republicans do today, you also disagree with the heroes who died for Ireland in 1789, how dare you?' For individuals who grew up with the stories of past rebellions, for sure is not easy to break out of this mindset. On the other hand, for 'outsiders', tourists, non-republicans, this question does not carry meaning, as they do not associate anything with the date and this specific wording.

But why do all the persons depicted carry pikes? It could be assumed that, historically speaking, the rebels would have armed themselves with whatever weapon they had on hand, from shovels to guns to pikes to knives or other things. I do suppose that this is a hint to another famous rebel song, which is even more popular than 'Who fears to speak of '98?'; it is called 'The Rising of the Moon' and it is so popular that is has also been picked up by 'mainstream' Irish artists such as The Dubliners (who used to be more political in the 60s and 70s though than they are now though) or The High Kings:

"O come tell me Sean O'Farrell,
tell me why you hurry so?"
"Hush ma bouchal, hush and listen"
And his cheeks were all aglow
"I bear orders from the Capt'n
Get you ready quick and soon
For the pikes must be together
By the rising of the moon"

"O come tell me Sean O'Farrell
Where the gath'rin is to be?
At the old spot by the river,
Well known to you and me.
One more word for signal token,
Whistle up the marchin' tune,
With your pike upon your shoulder,
By the rising of the moon.
By the rising of the moon,
By the rising of the moon
With your pike upon your shoulder,
By the rising of the moon.

Out from many a mud wall cabin
Eyes were watching through the night,
Many a manly heart was beating,
For the blessed morning light.
Murmurs rang along the valleys,
To the banshee's lonely croon
And a thousand pikes were flashing,
By the rising of the moon.
By the rising of the moon,
By the rising of the moon
And a thousand pikes were flashing,
By the rising of the moon.

All along that singing river
That black mass of men were seen,
High above their shining weapons,
flew their own beloved green.
"Death to every foe and traitor!
Whistle out the marching tune.
And hurrah my boy for freedom;
At the rising of the moon".

By the rising of the moon,
By the rising of the moon,
For the pikes must be together;
By the rising of the moon

By the rising of the moon,

By the rising of the moon,
With your pike upon your shoulder;
By the rising of the moon

By the rising of the moon,
By the rising of the moon,
And a thousand pikes were flashing;
By the rising of the moon

By the rising of the moon,
By the rising of the moon
For the pikes must be together;
By the rising of the moon".

At the rising of the moon,
At the rising of the moon,
And hurrah my boy for freedom;
At the rising of the moon". (http://www.songtexte.com/songtext/the-high-kings/the-rising-of-the-moon-3b55e4c8.html)

This song is much vaguer than the one before, nothing in the lyrics states explicitly which rebellion is meant, and the only person mentioned by name does also not function as a clue, as "[i]t is not known whether Sean O'Farrell refers to anyone in particular or whether it's meant to be just a typical local Name (sic!) used to help set the scene and establish a conversational tone.", according to the Irish Music Daily website. If the context is not already known, it needs to be explained to the audience. The beforementioned High Kings, who are by no means a political band (they are under the same management as the band Celtic Woman, both stand for a light-hearted, family-friendly and a slightly exoticising approach to Irish music, some would even use words such as 'cheesy' or 'generic'.), introduce the song on their album Live in Ireland with the following words: "And this, the next song is about a very, very important time in Irish history, which was of course the rebellion of 1789 down in Wexford. All the boys with their pikes in hand, awaiting (sic!) for the beginning of the rebellion; the signal being The Rising of the Moon." This understanding of history might be the consensus in the Republic of Ireland, but in Northern Ireland, but it is different in Northern Ireland: Deeming the rebellion important is not something that the unionist community does agree with, it therefor putting it on a mural becomes a tool of political positioning.

Being able to understand the 'who fears to speak of 1789?' reference requires the viewer to be either immersed in republican culture (i.e. to have at some knowledge of

Irish history outside of Northern Ireland) or have a guide who can give a short history lesson.

Eira

Moving along further to the left, there is a map of Ireland with the outlines of the four provinces – Leinster, Munster, Connaught and Ulster – which can be seen as a symbol for Irish unity: The four belong together. Much more prominent is the head of the women next to it, which is labelled 'Eira'. This is not an artificial word, made up from Eire and IRA, but it is another name for the Norse goddess Eir, who was, according to H.A. Gierbas' *Myths of the Norsemen From the Eddas and Sagas* (50):

"[Eira], also Frigga's attendant, [was] considered a most skilful physician. She gathered simples (sic!) all over the earth to cure both wounds and diseases, and it was her province to teach the science to women, who were the only ones to practise medicine among the ancient nations of the North."

Who is referred to here, however, is most likely not this Eira, but the goodess Eiru, who, in the blog The New Pagan' (https://thenewpagan.wordpress.com/2014/03/07/eriu/)is described like this:

Ériu was a Queen and patron goddess of Ireland around the time of the Milesian invasion. She was seen as the Goddess of Irish Sovereignty along with her sisters, Banba and Fódla. Ériu's name is thought mean 'earth, soil' or 'plentiful', as well as 'fat land' or 'land of abundance'.

Eriu was the daughter of Fiachna mac Delbaeth and Ernmas of the Tuatha Dé Danann, the mythical race of people who inhabited Ireland before the Celts. Her husband was thought to be Mac Gréine ('Son of the Sun'), who was the son of Oghma and grandson to the Dagda. Ériu's son Bres was also known as Bres Mac Elatha, which could indicate her relationship with Elatha, a prince of the Fomorians. Bres later became High King of Ireland after Nuada, but was quickly found unfit to rule and replaced by Lugh. Ériu was also thought to be the lover of the hero Lugh.

The Book of Invasions, Lebor Gabála Érenn, describes how Ériu, Banba and Fódla each met with the Milesian bard Amergin. Each made a deal with Amergin about the impending invasion asking that their name be given to the new land. This request was

granted, with Ériu or Éire being the most common name, however Banba and Fódla are still sometimes used as poetic names for Ireland.

Today the Gaelige name for Ireland is Éire, and the proper name of the Republic of Ireland is Poblacht na hÉireann. Ériu is thus seen as the modern-day personification of the island of Ireland and a source of pride to the Irish people.

Most of the information on her can be found in non-academic, publicly accessible sources, not only on Wikipedia, but also on many pagan blogs like the one quoted above. The English translation of an important historical source, Lebor Gabála Érenn (The book of the taking of Ireland, which was compiled in the 11th century, verse 65-95), describes her like that:

They came southward from Temair as far as Inber Féile and Inber Scéne, for it is there that their ships were. Then went they out, past nine waves. The druids of Ireland and the poets sang spells behind them, so that they were carried far from Ireland, and were in distress by reason of the sea. A wind of wizards is this! said Éber Donn; look ye whether it—the wind—-be over the mast. And it was not. Patience! said Airech, steersman of the ship of Donn, till Amorgen come (Airech was the fosterling of Amorgen). They all went forward, till they were in one place. Said Donn, the eldest, This is a disgrace for our men of cunning, said he. 'Tis no disgrace! said Amorgen; and he spake—-
I seek the land of Ireland,
Coursed be the fruitful sea,
Fruitful the ranked highland,
Ranked the showery wood,
Showery the river of cataracts,
Of cataracts the lake of poois,
Of pools the hill of a well,
Of a well of a people of assemblies,
Of assemblies of the king of Temair;
Temair, hill of peoples,
Peoples of the Sons of Mll,
Of Mil of ships, of barks;
The high ship Eriu,
Eriu lofty, very green,
An incantation very cunning,
The great cunning of the wives of Bres,
Of Bres, of the wives of Buaigne,
The mighty lady Eriu,
Erimón harried her,
        —and a calming of the wind came to them forthwith.
(http://www.ancienttexts.org/library/celtic/ctexts/lebor5.html)

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The etymological connection between the name of the goddess and the name of Ireland today can also be made by someone who is not proficient in mythology. As for republicans, going back in history to something that has already been mystified (in ancient mythology) and becomes one of the few strong female images (the other personification of Ireland, Kathleen Ni Houlihan, is either depicted as a damsel in distress or an old woman, both personifications are in need of being saved by men) in Irish Republicanism. Although most of the volunteers and idols of the movement are and were men, this does not mean that there were no fighting women in the movement, a very concise account of this is Dieter Reinisch's 2017 book *Die Frauen der IRA* (The women of the IRA).

The burning General Post Office 1916

The last and largest of the motifs is that of the burning building with the rising bird behind it. The bird can be identified as a phoenix, although the mythological role of the phoenix as a symbol of rebirth requires some background knowledge; what cannot be identified on its own, however, is the burning building, which shows the burning GPO at the Easter Rising 1916. This is clear from the context of the small portraits and the Easter Rising Proclamation painted on the repurposed advertising billboard. The small portraits show the eight key figures of the Rising; its historical development can be found on page 6 of this paper; Patrick Pearse (who is pictured in on the top left next to the proclamation, on a red background) read out this document in front of the GPO on Easter Monday 2016 and thereby proclaimed an Irish Republic (not in a legal sense of course, yet this is part of the Republic's founding myth). There is a discrepancy between the proclamation's symbolism and its reach though: When standing on the street, it is impossible to read the entire document and that is also not intended: The viewer is expected to know from the title what it is and what it entails. This, again, requires a certain knowledge of Irish history or help from someone else.

The two emblems and the flowers

There are three items on the mural which do neither have a supertitle nor a very prominent role in the mural, but they are important nevertheless: The two emblems on the left and right of the main wall and the white flowers underneath the left one. The flowers are most likely Easter lilies, which became the symbol of the Easter Rising in

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subsequent years and sort of an opposite to the red poppy, which is worn to remember the fallen of the First World War.

The emblem on the top left says, 'Na Fianna Eireann 1909-2016' and the one on the right says 'Cumann na mBan Protect the Republic 1904-2016'; Na Fianna is a run-up oragnisation of the IRA and Cumann na mBan is the 'women's IRA', two organisations that were also heavily involved in what happened at Easter 1916. Both emblems are visible but the writing is very hard to decipher with the bare eye – when using a camera, the zoom function can help of course – so again, this needs to be known or explained to the viewer. This observation seems tiringly repetitive by now, but it is important to point this out for every single layer of meaning of the mural that adds to it, even if some of the details are not accessible for the individual republican reader, the central message is conveyed via his or her republican background knowledge activated by all the other aspects featured on the mural. Keeping in mind the concept of the motivated sign, it can be said that in this case, each of the individual pieces of the mural carter to the same, namely a republican audience without making much effort to cater to a more general, politically uninterested or uninformed audience.

WRITINGS

The mode of writing has three functions in this mural: On the one hand it describes what is seen, as in the case of Eira, the 1789 rebellion and Cú Cullainn and on the other hand it manifests in two quotes, one on the bottom of the mural ("We want the freedom of our country and your soldiers out.") and above the phoenix ("We bleed that the nation may live. I die that the nation may live. Damn your concessions England, we want our country." Sean Mac Dermada). The third function is giving the name of the artists and the year the mural was painted ('15') in the bottom right corner. The quote on the bottom has no reference given, the other one is ascribed to Sean MacDermott (here refenced to by his Irish name, Mac Dermada), one of the signatories of the proclamation. His portrait is the second from below on the right side with the green background. Like with the Bobby Sands mural, the quotes are pieces of a semiologic puzzle, which have to be assembled by the viewer and they only make sense in conjunction with the other elements of the mural. The first quote reveals an

obvious anti-British stance and the second gives McDermott the status of a martyr, although a self-proclaimed one. The writing fulfils the communicative functions of labelling in some parts of the mural, and this makes it easier for viewers identify some of the details depicted on the wall. Although the quotes establish and comment on a myth, they cannot work on their own. Again, the meaning to be conveyed to the observer depends on the historical background knowledge of the Rising and the actors involved.

ASSEMBLING THE MYTH

The general presupposition of the mural is obviously that all of these figures and events from history and mythology are worth remembering, hence they are painted there, but also that there is a certain continuity, a line in ideology that leads from ancient heroes and goddesses via a rebellion in the late 18th century to the 1916 Rising and, subsequently, to its centenary in 2016. It can be read as one large and long presupposition, justifying the Easter Rising by claiming the need to defend the goddess Eira and act like the men of 1789 (both this rebellion and the Easter Rising were unsuccessful, but had a large iconic value for Irish republicans).

I do not know if this mural has become part of the Falls Road murals tours since it was finished, but if so, it would be a challenge for any guide to give a concise round-up of everything included.

Figure 10: Shankill Protestant Boys mural

Figure 11: Shankill Protestant Boys mural II

Figure 12: Shankill Protestant Boys mural III

Figure 13: Shankill Protestant Boys mural IV

As discussed before, the unionist/loyalist community has different practices and means of commemoration and displaying presence in public space than the nationalist/republican community; this needs to be considered, even when looking at forms of commemoration which are present on both sides, like murals. The final one under analysis here is part of a memorial dedicated to the fallen soldiers of the Battle of the Somme; it is not a standalone mural, but it is part of a complex ensemble that remembers different aspects: The Shankill Protestant Boys Flute Band (in two ways) and the Battle of the Somme. These aspects belong together in many ways and the 'Great War' part of it seems to have been added, like Gerry Kelly's mural above, in 2015, in preparation for the 2016 centenary. What it also shares with the work of Kelly is that it incorporates the centenary into a larger context of cultural memory; the main difference (apart from the obvious ideological one), however, is that the three motifs pictured here are way closer in terms of time: They all play a role in World War I. What also stands out here is the materiality of the mural: The blue and gold background is the actual painted wall of the building (this includes the post of the street light in front of it), the left and centre motifs are printed sheets of metal (this makes touching-up on

faded colours unnecessary and it is also very easy to clean in case of it being vandalised) and the SPB logo and the motif on the left are relief-like pieces, also made from metal. They stand out from the wall which gives the whole artwork a different look than the 'classic' murals, which do not have this added third dimensional depth element. What needs to be further investigated, by talking to the artist would be that a single print on metal must be very expensive, which raises the question of funding. It can be assumed that the picture was commissioned by the SPB, but if the money for it comes from a paramilitary source or not cannot be determined from the motif itself and speculating about it would lead nowhere.

DENOTATION

Just like in the previous analysis, I will start this one on the left-hand side of the photograph (from the viewer's point of view). Here, the left-most part of the picture on the wall shows the emblem of the Shankill Protestant Boys Flute Band. The mural also features the abbreviation 'USSF' and two lions, several flags associated with the commonwealth and the names of places that are not in Northern Ireland, such as Somme, Arras and Langemarck. Also visible are eagle wings, a crown and lots of poppies as an adornment.

The middle part does something very unconventional: Under the plaque that reads 'SPB West Belfast', there is another plaque that gives a complete rundown of the historical context. It reads:

> The officers and members of the Shankill Protestant Boys flute band strive to achieve the same respect that our 1st Battalion West Belfast Ulster Volunteers and Ulster Special Service Force "USSF" forefathers rightfully achieved in 1913, as they marched from Lawnbrook Ave to Fernhill House to enlist in Carson's Army to defend Ulster from the 3rd Home Rule Bill, then again in May 1915 as they enlisted in Kitcheners Army as the 36th (Ulster) Divison marching from Stewards Yard Aberdeen Street as the 9th Battalion Royal Irish Rifles through Belfast and off to fight in the Great War 1914-1918

> The Shankill Protestant Boys were the first flute band to wear the USSF badge and to this day we are proud to have USSF bloodline in our ranks, grandfathers, grandsons and great-grandsons marching as their forefathers had done before them. The Shankill Protestant Boys extensive repertoire consists of many wartime tunes such as Mountjoy (more famously known as the Clydevalley the UVF (sic!) gunrunning ship) and many relating to the modern day (sic) Volunteers.

> The Shankill Protestant Boys flute band or as we are more famously known now "SPB" were formed in the Shankill area in 1980 and many founder members are

still marching today, the reasons for forming the band were much more that (sic) simply establishing another flute band, the Shankill had many at that time, the men behind the formation had other ideas, they wanted to promote and express their Protestant culture and also remember the brave volunteers and servicemen who had fought and died during both World Wars, in particular the Somme offensive during World War 1 and also to remember those in more recent times perished during the conflict in the war against violent republicanism. The SPB were presented with the flags of the 1st Belfast Battalion Ulster Volunteer Force in 1982 and have proudly carried them with honour and dignity on every parade and will continue to do so.

From our humble beginnings wearing homemade uniforms that our wives made, to the   regimental uniforms of more recent times, we now have over 125 members and are very proud to represent the Shankill Road on our many parades throughout Ulster and beyond. To join the SPB now is to take part in much more than learning music and playing in a band, it is as much about learning discipline and educating our youth on our culture and history. There is no better feeling than marching down the Shankill Road with your own community clapping and cheering you on and our aim with the support of fellow bandsmen and Loyalists is to represent our community though our music and decorum.

We are proud Shankill Road men, we are proud of our history; we are proud of who we are; we are the Shankill Protestant Boys.

SPB TILL WE DIE.

The plaque on the right side features the same artwork of the lion, crown and flags that can be found on the far left, just much smaller in format. Below, it reads 'The Great War 1914-1918' and, next to the picture of a cross-shaped headstone in a poppy field, is a longer text:

The Ulster Division has lost more than half the men who attacked and, in doing so, has sacrificed itself for the Empire which has treated them none too well.

The much derided (sic!) Ulster Volunteer Force has won a name which equals any in history. Their devotion, which no doubt has heled (sic!) the advance elsewhere, deserved the gratitude of the British Empire. It is due to the memory of these brave fellows that their beloved Province shall be fairly treated.

Captain Wilfred Spencer

Ulster Division's HQ staff

2nd July 1916

The Shankill Protestant Boys Flute Band was (as it says) was established in 1980, many years after World War I. Flute bands are they key element to any unionist parade and provide a sense of community to the men (according to Kathy Radford (quotation below), these bands are a male domain) of all ages that are a part of one of many local bands. Kathy Radford (2001: 40) summarizes the importance of bands in this context:

> The tradition of parading, accompanied by bands, has been long established in Europe as a marker of solidarity, with origins in church and trade guilds processions, and in the British Isles in particular, with quasi-militaristic overtones.
> Between April and August, a time known locally as "the marching season", approximately 3,500 parades take place in Northern Ireland. Though recent years display a marked increase in the number of nationalist parades, most are still considered to fall within the Protestant domain. According to the RUC Chief Constable's Annual Report in 1995, 2,574 parades were "loyalist", 285, "nationalist", 617, "other" and 24, "illegal" (Jarman and Bryan 1996). Approximately 500 of the loyalist parades take place on 12 July, a public holiday in Northern Ireland, in which members of the Orange and other loyal Orders form parades to commemorate the Battle of the Boyne of 1690. The most prominent feature of these parades is that each is accompanied by a number of marching bands. On this day, Orangemen and women celebrate the defeat of the forces of Catholic King James II by the army of Protestant King William III, which marked the political powerbase of the Protestants in the North of Ireland and ultimately led to the partition of Ireland and the formation of the separate state of Northern Ireland in 1921.

The flags (which will be discussed below) are no explained and go far beyond the usage of the Union Jack, which can be found in many unionist murals, though the two lions and the crown are easily recognizable as royal symbols. What stands out is the adaption of the UVF logo with the Red Hand and the 'for God and Ulster' slogan; it takes up a symbol that is present in the Shankill Road's linguistic landscape already and change one mode, the writing (UVF to SPB), so it is partly recognizable to residents and people who have come across this before, even if they do not know what UVF means. The place names only become contextualized when looking at the middle part of the mural, which has a plaque that explains the history behind it and how it connects to the present day. This rather long piece of text presents the viewer with a coherent tale of heroism and glory that needs to be achieved and it is undoubtedly the most openly presented presupposition found in this corpus: "The officers and members

of the Shankill Protestant Boys flute band strive to achieve the same respect that our 1st Battalion West Belfast Ulster Volunteers and Ulster Special Service Force "USSF" forefathers rightfully achieved in 1913 […]" When looking at it from a non-loyalist perspective, one question comes to: How are they going to achieve that? Despite the military style of the flute bands and this band's obvious connections to present-day paramilitaries, their actions as a group can never compare to those of World War 1 soldiers, mainly because they are a band and not an army. What they can achieve, and that is also visible from the footage of the band's performances that can be found online, is a good reputation within their community.

What the mural achieves in a very unique way, is using an unusual materiality (for a mural) to explain and connect past and present events and even going to the meta-level of identity politics. Unlike Gerry Kelly's 1916 mural, it spells out what would otherwise have been left to the viewer's own guesswork: 'We continue the tradition of the 36th Ulster Regiment through our music. They, like us, are proud people of the Shankill. And this is what they did and this is what we do and here is the link we wish to establish. '

DISASSEMBLING THE WALL
The abundance of explanatory text in the middle part makes the mural extremely accessible for tourists, researchers and non-Shankill people in general. It provides context and clarity, but the many symbols on the wall also give local loyalists enough reference points to work the mural into their own identity and thereby at least tolerate it in their community.

The UVF/SPB badge
The UVF badge with the Red Hand was discussed already on page 38f. of this thesis, what happened with it on this mural was an act of assimilation: The well-known logo was stripped of its original writing, which was replaced with the letters SPB; thereby the symbolic meaning stayed intact, and if the UVF actually had a problem with the SPB using their logo and slogan, there is no doubt there would have been 'punishments ' and the mural would not be intact today. That is actually very cleverly composed, if looked at it from a sort of advertising standpoint: Using a well-known colour scheme and logo and rebranding it, associating one's own brand with something that is already successful. In this case and, more specifically, at this place, this very street, associating oneself with the UVF is the best legitimisation for the band.

The next four items form the motif that occurs twice on this wall:

The lions

This is not the British coat of arms, which would feature both a lion and a unicorn, but as the lion does represent England (the unicorn would represent Scotland), it might just be mirrored and thereby duplicated here, because for this very mural, Scotland is not important. On the other hand, I might be interpreting too much into it, as in heraldics, the animals on the side are only so-called 'shield-holders', who hold the actual coat of arms, which would in this case be the modified UVF logo.

The crown

This is extremely straightforward, the crown represents the Queen, the monarchy and the reason why the men of the 36th Ulster division went to war: Either to prove their loyalty to the crown (if they were unionists) or, if they were nationalists, they thought the Empire would be so grateful to them that they would be granted Home Rule after returning.

The place names

The eleven place names (Somme, Thiepval, Messines, Cambrai, St. Quentin, Arras, Ypres (twice) Langemarck, Passhendaele, Picardy and Courtrai) under the coat of arms lists battles of World War 1, in which the 36th Ulster division fought. This is the only textual part that is not explained at all and requires historical knowledge.

The flags

 Apart from the three physical flags on the flagpoles above the mural that I am unable to identify, due to the very unfortunate angle I took these pictures from, (although the one on the right might be the Ulster flag), there are six painted flags on the mural. The six flags, from front to back, starting with the left column, are:

•   The Royal Irish Rifles Flag: The Royal Irish Rifles were a battalion of riflemen and part of the 36rd Ulster Division.

- An alternate version of the Orange Order flag (according to the CAIN corpus at http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/images/symbols/flags.htm, all CAIN references regarding flags are taken from this page): "This version of the flag is Orange with the English Cross of St. George in the top left-hand corner and a purple star in the bottom right hand corner" The star is not visible though because of the perspective in which it is portrayed here.

- The Crimson Flag: The flag of the Apprentice Boys of Derry, who defended the City of (London)Derry against the troops of the catholic King James in 1689. This is another key myth for unionists/loyalists. This is the same King James that was beaten at the Battle of the Boyne the following year, which, as mentioned before, is the reason for the Twelfth of July celebrations. On CAIN, it says regarding the flag: "The Apprentice Boys of Derry is a loyal order organisation that commemorates the siege of Derry in 1689. During the Williamite Wars, thirteen apprentice boys shut the gates of the city against the armies of the Catholic King James II, who was later defeated by the Protestant King William of Orange. The two dates commemorated by the Apprentice Boys of Derry are 18 December (when they shut the gates), and 12 August (the day the Siege was relieved by King William's forces). The crimson colour of the flag symbolises the bitter and 'bloody' struggle of the defenders."

- UVF Flag: For the flag that has the same background as the first one on the right of the mural, CAIN lists this: "This flag can be seen on many Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) murals. It has the Cross of St. George in the top left-hand corner." The mural in the database as "UVF" in bright yellow letters written across it; here, the UVF is represented by their Red Hand logo and a smaller "UVF" writing. This is the 'original' version of the larger Red Hand SPB emblem that is held by the two lions in the mural.

- The Red Ensign: This combination of the Union Jack and a plain red flag is the civil ensign of Great Britain. Ensigns are used on ships to mark which country they departed from.

- The Union Jack. The flag of the United Kingdom. This needs almost no further explanation, given the nature of the unionist movement.

The quote on the right

The quote by a Captain Wilfred Spencer (he is not introduced further to the viewer) who is speaking through the mural to the audience from the division's headquarters, further feeds into the SPB's glorification of the 36th Ulster division and the presupposition that is very openly set up here. Instead of using a statement from the current band leader or a well-known band member, the artist used a historical quote. This points to a glorious (but also warlike) past, one that the current SPB wants to be associated with, and it is also where it draws its legitimacy from. That the SPB today also includes children and older men, two groups who would have been deemed unfit for war and thereby not even drafted, is a fact that is neglected here. Given close connection to war, there is a strong sense of hypermasculinity in the mural's message, something that is conveyed in the Easter 1916 example though a different mode than writing, namely the picture of the strong and heroic Cú Cullain.

ASSEMBLING THE WALL

As the wall consists of three different parts, a potential viewer is not necessarily obligated to view all three or make a connection between them, he or she can even choose from which side to approach the mural as there is no fixed order and due to the door in the wall, the part on the right even seems to be a bit set off from the rest. It is also questionable whether the audience takes the time to read the large amount of text, this would then be a question of Kress' reach again; this mural takes time and dedication to read and decipher, this time not so much on the level of symbolism, but of writing. Given the location of the mural (in a small side street of a residential area, where no cars are allowed), it can be estimated that potential viewers can rather easily take the time it takes to fully comprehend the text.

FINAL REMARKS

Normally, the final section of this thesis would be titled 'Conclusion', but there are no definite conclusions to be made with absolute certainty. In this thesis, I tried to approach murals from a different, less explored perspective to hopefully create new insights and raise awareness about the multi-facetedness of this sort of street art. What

it all comes to in the end is not much different from many other forms of communication though: Whoever controls public discourse has public power. Those who are responsible for the emerging and the upkeep (I would even go so far as to use the word patronage here) of the murals controls the semiotic landscape and the messages that are conveyed to locals and the world. This is absolutely not a new insight, but what is new is that by dissecting the mural into its different semiotic layers, it can be seen that different parts of it speak to different people; by only changing small details, such as colour schemes or emblems, certain groups of people can be spoken to through the murals in an entirely different way. This, although possibly not with a backing in social semiotics, must also be known to the mural artist and the groups they work for. As it has already been addressed, trying to fit murals into a larger power structure by dissecting its individual layers of meaning and myth-building is only one way of many. Another, which could be employed using the same underlying theoretical framework, would for example be focusing on just one event/person and analyse all murals, which deal with that. The goal of this thesis was to provide a glimpse into the large variety of murals that can be found in West Belfast and to analyse them from a semiotic point of view, and looking at the underlying power structures from a semiotic rather than a sociological point of view. Having a very small corpus (the original one, which quickly proved to be too large, consisted of nine murals in total and also included some which do not have a political message) proved helpful as it made it possible to engage with each mural in sufficient detail. I consider the methodological framework coherent and straight forward in terms of usability, but also not fully developed yet; it will take much more time and way more data to test it out with and fully uncover its potential. Of course, it would also be interesting to look at the linguistic landscape of places that are not that clear-cut in terms of ideological divisions, where there is a more subtle and nuanced usage of signs, symbols and motifs.

Something that could not be addressed here at all, due to the necessary limitations in topic and word count, is the presence of many unpolitical murals, often made by local youths under the supervision of teachers, youth workers or other pedagogues. These convey a different picture of Belfast and as important as they are and as interesting this shift towards this form of community mural is, paramilitary murals are like paramilitaries themselves: They will not go away, it would be naïve to think that, and as long as they are there, there needs to be academic engagement with them, even if

it is just as an evaluative instance, not as a preventing force. This leads to the question if there should not simply be a ban on murals altogether, but it can be assumed that if that would happen, then the same messages would be conveyed in a less public way (as they are already), especially via the Internet and music, I would suppose. Unlike with parades in Northern Ireland, there is no independent body of representatives from all sides, who ratifies murals.

As of today (23/5/2018), Northern Ireland still does not have a functioning legislative assembly (the last assembly elections took place on the 2nd of March 2017, more than a year ago at this point) and there are talks about referring some domestic budget decisions, such as the health and education budget, to Westminster, which would essentially wipe out an independent assembly and re-establish direct rule. Although no certain predictions can be made, it seems that Northern Ireland would be the region of the United Kingdom that would suffer most from a 'hard' Brexit. It may seem very ignorant and out of touch to discuss murals at a time, where the main focus should be border politics, the behaviour of local politicians and preventing a re-emerging of paramilitary terror, but the ultimate goal of the Good Friday agreement and the last twenty years of peace making has been to create a Northern Ireland for all its inhabitants and visitors, regardless of their religious or political views. This can only happen if everyone works on creating a public space that welcomes everyone and does not create an enormous amount of public gatekeeping items in the form of painted walls. Again, this is not to advocate for a banning of murals, but there needs to be an open discussion about them, they need to be taken away from the hands of paramilitaries and to be put to use for the greater good of the public. This can include elements of political and religious commemoration of course, but there must be a better way to use the medium of murals in public space than the way it is currently done. In what way, by whom and with what sort of underlying power relations this will be done, can only be the subject of further research. [28009 words]

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APPENDIX: GERMAN SUMMARY

Diese Meisterarbeit befasst sich mit der Analyse politischer Wandgemälde in Belfast (Nordirland). Mithilfe der Zeichentheorie von Ferdinand de Saussure, dem Mythenbegriff von Roland Barthes und dem Kommunikationsbegriff von Gunther Kress wird der Frage nachgegangen, wie politische Wandgemälde Mythen schaffen und wie das im Zusammenhang mit gesellschaftlicher Macht steht. Ausgewählte Wandgemälde werden in ihre einzelnen kommunikativen Bestandteile zerlegt und ihre Denotationen und Konnotationen bestimmt, aus denen sich letztendlich bewusst ein Mythos formen lässt. Abschließend lässt sich feststellen, dass das für diese Arbeit erstellte Analysemodell, obwohl es sich noch ein seiner Anfangsphase befindet, durchaus dazu eignet, noch genauer auf einzelne Kommunikationsmethoden im öffentlichen Raum einzugehen, da sie bereits bei den Wandgemälden ein sehr detailliertes Bild von ihren kommunikativen und gesellschaftlichen Funktionen zeichnen konnten.