

Abstract:

Memories and Murals:

Effects of Northern Ireland's Re-Imaging Programs on Peace and Reconciliation

Murals, scattered across Belfast and Derry in Northern Ireland, document the thirty-year history of 'the Troubles'. They paint pictures of solidarity among Loyalists and the opposing Nationalists, while portraying the depth of terror experienced at the hands of paramilitary groups, or the British Army. The murals are a throbbing wound, on the one hand, and a stark reminder of struggle and survival on the other. Due to the conflicting memories of the Troubles, the State has decidedly moved toward re-imaging and removing murals in both cities. Two programs instituted by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the Re-Imaging Communities Programme, and the Building Peace through the Arts Programme have worked with communities and foreign artists to erase the history of the Troubles. All in an effort to create a 'New' Northern Ireland based on peace and reconciliation. These programs have not been met with open arms in all of the communities, with many citizens balking at the invasive, stripping of memory that the State has dictated to their neighborhoods. This research deals with the sects of opposition within Belfast and Derry that struggle with a peace that neglects treating the trauma left from the conflict and a State that avoids according victim status to those who survived the Troubles.

Research was undertaken through the use of contacts within the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, as well as the utilization of documents from independent consulting firms on the programs. Data was gathered on the effectiveness of re-imaging and removing murals, as well as how communities reacted toward the State's attempt to change the murals in their neighborhoods. Newspaper articles from British reporters, during the post-Peace Agreement period, as well as interviews with Northern Irish community leaders were assessed. Bill Rolston, leading Mural expert in Northern Ireland, offered insight and guidance throughout the research process.