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Healing Through Art: An Examination Of  
Northern Ireland's 'Troubles'

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## Healing Through Art: An Examination of Northern Ireland's 'Troubles'

In the span of three decades, Northern Ireland went through a great period of violence referred to as 'The Troubles'. Beginning in 1968 and lasting until the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, this was a time of political unrest, civil discrimination, and a war between paramilitary groups belonging to two denominations of Christianity. Although the Troubles spanned almost half a century, the conflict between the Protestants and Catholics began centuries prior, with the oppression of the Catholic natives of Ireland. Examined in this paper is the history of The Troubles, the psychological impact on the citizens, and the use of murals as not only a call to action, but as means for healing.

For many, Ireland's Troubles didn't begin with the change of the millennia, it can be traced back centuries, many of which are filled with the oppression of the Catholics. In the 17th century, Ireland was taken over by William III of England, or William of Orange as he is often called, after the overthrowing of his cousin James who was reigning the country under Catholicism. William III sought to make the country Protestant with England and Scotland through suppressing the people's ability to practice their Catholic faith through penal codes and forced conversion (BBC, 2007). Those who did not abide by the new laws or were unwilling to give up their previous values would be persecuted by English militant Oliver Cromwell. Many Catholics were also stripped of their lands and assets during this time (which were then given to English Protestants) and were forced to follow the faith and teachings of the English-Protestant ruler (BBC, 2007). There would be many battles and amends made in the years to follow, however, it was the Celtic Arts Revival that helps inspire the Irish throughout the 18th and 19th centuries.

The celebration and revival of Ireland's roots in art, music, and literature in the 19th century, called the Celtic Arts Revival, brought the history of Ireland (good and bad) back to the people. The lore, legends, and past of Ireland gave the native Irish a sense of belonging, and for some, these stories would be used for political expression and the push towards a unified Ireland, with limited English interference. A bill was brought forward for Home Rule following the start of World War I, but this dissatisfied some who believed it was not separate enough from Britain (Dorney, 2012). As a result, on Easter morning in 1916 an insurgency was planned where 1,000 insurgents battled with approximately 400 military troops in Dublin in an event known today as Easter Rising (BBC, 2016). A week went by, filled with street battles and artillery bombings that cost 450 people their lives, and left almost 3,000 injured before the insurgents surrendered (BBC, 2016). However, the War of Independence had continued to rage on for five more years, which was driven by the political parties Sinn Fein<sup>1</sup> and the RIC which would be major role players in the Troubles. It was evident that the hostilities between the insurgents and unionists weren't changing, so in 1921 a major alteration was made in the government of Ireland.

The British government declared an end to the War of Independence in 1921 through the implementation of the Government of Ireland Act which made Ireland an autonomous state. This act separated the country by borders, giving the South a majority of the counties which they referred to as the Irish Free State, while the United Kingdom retained control of Northern Ireland. Despite the change in government, there were few

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<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1905, Sinn Fein (meaning 'Ourselves') started out as a nationalist group focused on gaining equal opportunities for the Irish through passive resistance. The group did not gain momentum until the Easter Rising in which it was blamed for due to its anti-British stance, thus pinning them also as an affiliate of the IRA later on (BBC, 2014).

changes in the relationship between the states, with violence and hostilities continuing within each such as anti-Catholic aggression in the North and a civil war<sup>2</sup> between factions in the South (Kinealy, 2010). With no attempt on either side to participate in a council to work out their political issues, the Irish Republican Army continued to lose influence and support in trying to bring together the borders. The tensions between the states continued to grow, reaching a height in the 1960s following the televising of one of the United States' most well-known civil rights protests.

In the United States, the 1960s was a time of civil rights activism for racial equality, which brought great losses in the realm of change for a more unified society. One of the most notable civil rights events in the United States was the Selma March, organized by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in response to discrimination against black Americans in voting and the unlawful killing of activist Jimmie Lee Jackson (Stanford, n.d.). Beginning as a peaceful protest, Dr. King led his marchers through Alabama as they were continuously met with aggression from not only locals, but also state troopers and police officials. One day of the march is known now as 'Bloody Sunday' where several protesters were assaulted by troopers with clubs and batons, as well as, gassed as they tried to cross into the county and up until they had left the area (Stanford, n.d.). The news coverage of this event was global, shocking not only the nation but the world with the atrocities and even expedited the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Stanford, n.d.). The broadcasting of this event inspired the Irish who saw a connection between themselves

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<sup>2</sup> Lasting from 1922-23, the Irish Civil War was a series of bombings and assassinations between the IRA who opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the Irish Free State Army, following the War of Independence and establishment of the Irish Free State.

and the black Americans, who, like them, had been oppressed for centuries and were making a move towards equality.

As the United States dealt with racial discrimination and inequality, the Irish were on the brink of an all-out war across their two states. For Ireland, the 1960's was the time of an awakening; where the introduction of the television opened the Irish people up to the events of the Western world. In the Republic of Ireland<sup>3</sup>, the passing of three different Censorship and Publication Acts between 1929 and 1950 restricted the public's access to media sources such as radio, and print<sup>4</sup> (Government of Ireland, 1929). Enacted by a council of conservative clergymen, these acts allowed the banning of media that reflected morals against the values of the Catholic church (Quinlan, 1995). Fortunately, these acts were overturned in the 1960s (Kinealy, 2010), resulting in the exposure of the people to the news coverage of the Selma March, which showed them how others in similar societal standings were treated and how they stood up against it. It wasn't until New Year's Day of 1969 that the Irish organized their own protest that would spark the beginnings of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

The People's Democracy, a subgroup of Northern Ireland's Civil Rights Association (NICRA) that formed to end discrimination against Catholics in N. Ireland (Dorney, 2015), organized their own march for civil rights. For years the Catholics of Northern Ireland had felt discriminated against in housing, employment opportunities and even representation within their Parliament or government offices. This was mainly due to the majority of landowners and officials being Protestant, many of which looked at the Irish

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<sup>3</sup> Formerly known as the Irish Free State

<sup>4</sup> There was censorship later on in Northern Ireland where the government forbid the use of Gerry Adams' (head of Sinn Fein) voice in any interview, with real-time voice overs occurring in his interviews.

Catholics as second-class citizens because it was their relationship with the British that brought them success. Therefore, they were given housing that was deteriorating, gerrymandered counties so the majority was unionist, and excluded them from job opportunities (Dooley, 1998). The marches sought to bring light to these issues and help the people push for a change in legislation, this was especially true for the People's Democracy March. Led by Bernadette Devlin<sup>5</sup>, the protest was a march from Northern Ireland's capital of Belfast through the neighborhoods of (London)Derry. The marchers consisted mainly of students of Queen's University of Belfast, from both sides of the fence (Protestant and Catholic) who had come together for change (Kinealy, 2010). Similar to that of the march from Selma in America, the marchers were faced with opposition from police enforcement and radical local groups such as, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) who stood armed against them. The marchers were outnumbered and harassed as they walked through the streets, the end result left 13 hospitalized and the images of the abuse circulated around the world. As a response to this, the British government started deploying "peacekeepers" or militant police into the area, but before they knew it, the Troubles had already begun.

Following the People's Democracy march, activism had greatly increased, inspiring the creation of the 'You are now entering Free Derry' mural, painted on the side of a "gable" in the nationalist bogside. Every day the police of Derry would cover up or wipe away the writing, but every night someone else would go out and paint it back on. Almost instantaneously, this wall became the voice of people who during that time didn't have

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<sup>5</sup> A Psychology student at Queen's University of Belfast, Bernadette Devlin was one of the frontrunners of the Troubles, organizing and participating in the civil rights marches of 1968-69. She also became the youngest woman elected to a seat in Westminster that year at the age of 21. Her speech was believed to have incited the Battle of the Bogside riots (RTE Archives, n.d.).

one of their own. However, as quickly as it became a statement for the people, it just as quickly became a militarized zone for both sides of the cause. The corner surrounding the wall was barricaded and guarded with members of the IRA and the Derry Citizens Defence Association (DCDA) on one side, determined to keep out the police and B-specials that were trying to break through the other side. ‘You are now entering Free Derry’ became the equivalent of ‘no-man’s-land’<sup>6</sup> during World War I, with those trying to cross the space fearing they’d be dead before they reached the other side. Unfortunately, this corner would continue to be the site of violence, especially following the chaos of the Battle of the Bogside.

Considered the first major conflict during the Troubles, the Battle of the Bogside was a three-day long riot between the police, unionists, and members of other radical groups. It all started when a loyalist group, the Apprentice Boys of Derry, were granted permission to conduct their annual parade through the Catholic village of the bogside which was then received as an act of aggression. Bracing for an altercation, DCDA came forward in an attempt to keep the peace and protect the neighborhood (Donnchadha, 2019). What had begun as taunting and harassment between opposing parties turned into a brawl between the police, locals, and marchers. Through the days that followed, the people of the Bogside would put up barricades in an attempt to keep out the RUC who were trying to push forward by gassing the area. What followed was 3 days of numerous riots breaking out in the streets, which eventually led to the entire block of Bombay Street to be set ablaze (Dorney, 2015). After days of violence, there were 1,000 reported injuries amongst those involved, including the police, which prompted a reaction from the

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<sup>6</sup> Considered ‘no-go’ areas, which were controlled by paramilitary groups such as the IRA or UVF.

country's officials. On the final day, August 14th, the Prime Minister of England announced the deployment of the British Army to diffuse the situation but not to enter the barricaded bogside itself, thus ending a seemingly-endless situation.

After the Battle of the Bogside, the British government kept their soldiers in the predominantly Catholic neighborhoods of (London)Derry to 'mediate' the issues within the communities. As a result, radical groups had formed in protection of their own interests such as the B- Specials, a unionist militia who were originally to be police mediators, and the Provisional IRA who split from the original IRA.<sup>7</sup> For the Provisional IRA, being militant was the only response to the British, and the fight for Ireland's independence had only been put on pause in 1921. Concerned about these events taking place, the Stormont government<sup>8</sup> was being pressured by the British to make reforms but containing mostly Unionists, it was failing to accommodate for the Catholics. Unable to win over the middle-class Catholics and satisfy their needs, Prime Minister Terence O'Neill became the enemy of many Unionists in the process of trying to reform the state (Kinealy, 2010). Unfortunately, this meant that the UVF would frame the IRA for a series of bombings in order to bring down the already unstable government of Ireland (Kinealy, 2010). But, the worst was yet to come for it was Sunday, January 30th, 1972 that changed everything.

Later named 'Bloody Sunday', on January 30th, 1972 13 civilians were killed, with one dying later from his injuries, during a march to Guillard Square. Organized as a protest of the government's internment of individuals suspected of being affiliated with

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<sup>7</sup> Known originally as the Irish Volunteers during the War on Independence, the IRA formed following the Easter Rising of 1916 and establishment of the first Dail Eireann (Coogan, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> The official government of Ireland following the Easter Rising and Home Rule Bill of 1920, up until 1972.

the IRA without giving them a trial (Joseph, 2001), 10,000 people marched to the center of the city in support of the NICRA<sup>9</sup>, but as in 1969, they were met with blockades of soldiers. They were then redirected towards the corner of 'Free Derry', but while some changed course, others threw objects at the soldiers (mainly youths), taunting them. As a result, the British army opened fire, claiming afterwards that the marchers shot first, and the event erupted into chaos. The soldiers began throwing tear gas into the air and shot down fleeing people with rubber bullets imbedded with various items such as screws, needles and batteries (UK Parliament, 1982). After the smoke cleared and the gunfire had ceased, 13 civilians were presumed dead (one other died weeks later), with 17 others injured and a nation that was now traumatized from what it witnessed.

For years it had been unclear who had fired the first shot that day, with the Loyalist forces claiming it was the marchers, and an investigation by the British dismissing their possible wrongdoing. Without a government willing to take responsibility for its actions, the PIRA was pushed to their "highest intensity", organizing multiple car-bomb attacks and shootings, of which civilians were a vast majority of the casualties (Dorney, 2015). There were less aggressive tactics used to send a message that still ended in tragedy, however, such as the HM Prison Maze's H-Block hunger strike of 1981<sup>10</sup>. Led by activist Bobby Sands, he believed they were being treated as prisoners of war instead of criminals and was joined by 9 other prisoners for 66 days in protest of their conditions for treatment not being met (Melaugh, n.d.). Over the course of the strike, Sands was elected as a Member of Parliament from prison, but his health began to deteriorate, and the

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<sup>9</sup> Following the events of Bloody Sunday, the NICRA had their largest surge in enlistment and support.

<sup>10</sup> There was a hunger strike a year before started by Sean McKenna which gained the support of 30 Republican prisoners and last approximately 53 days before being called off.

conditions did not improve. By the 66th day he died of malnutrition from the hunger-strike at the young age of 27, pinning him as a kind of martyr for the Catholic community. For years after there were attempts at peace with numerous cease-fires taking place, but they were never abided by for long.

It wasn't until 1998 that both sides would meet in the middle for a peaceful resolution referred to as the Good Friday Agreement. It was here that the opposing parties from across the two states of Ireland came together to create terms that were beneficial to both sides. The agreement entailed that those residing in Northern Ireland: would be granted both British and Irish citizenship, the country would return to their self-governing state on the condition that there was an equal vote between unionists and nationalists, and a disbanding of all paramilitary organizations and affiliations of the conflict (Dorney, 2015). The final condition was the surrendering and destruction of all weapons of the paramilitary groups, however, it wasn't until the early 21st century that the IRA was supervised in the relinquishing of their remaining weapons (Kinealy, 2010).

Even after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the violence did not completely stop, with the tensions remaining throughout some of the communities. This was in part due to the dozens of republican prisoners still being held in prison as "terrorists" and the continuous arrest of those involved in the crimes of the Troubles that took place before the agreement (Dorney, 2015). However, in 2010 Prime Minister David Cameron of England issued a public apology to the people of Ireland for the events of Bloody Sunday in 1972. Three decades after the tragic event, the investigation had concluded that the marchers were unarmed, with the British Army being at fault for the first shot, an order that should not have been given by their commander (BBC, 2010).

Cameron then apologized for the “unjustified and unjustifiable” actions of the military, ringing through the ears of a nation that could finally put their families to rest.

Despite the new shift into a period of peace, the effects of living in a state of terror were still felt, especially in the psyche of the Irish citizens who lived through it. For decades, the people of Northern Ireland were used to living in areas where there were constant bombings and riots, where they didn’t know if they would get shot as they were walking down the street. During the Troubles, many politicians and government officials believed that the conflict wasn’t having a significant impact on the mental health of the people, however, you cannot see the psychological scars they bear from their experiences.<sup>11</sup> Over the years several studies have been completed to evaluate the psychological impact the Troubles have had on not only the people who lived through them, but also on those that came after.

For those growing up in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, civil conflict and violence in neighborhoods was considered a normal occurrence. Being easily impressionable, children are greatly impacted by the experiences and perceptions within the environment they live in. This was especially true during a turbulent time like the Troubles, when many of the youth were either school children caught in the crossfire or young activists involved in a cause they may not fully understand. Following the events of Bloody Sunday, various studies took place in the 1980’s which evaluated the behavior and emotional well-being of the children attending elementary and middle school. In these studies, it was found that many children had begun externalizing behaviors and exhibiting anti-social behaviors issues (Muldoon, 2007). These behaviors consisted of non-violent

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<sup>11</sup> What isn’t discussed during this time was the drastic rise in suicide rates of individuals between 5 and 25 years of age.

actions such as disrupting class or breaking school policies and can be regarded as “acting out” as a result of home-life issues. Unfortunately, a majority of the children acting out came from lower socioeconomic households, located in socially deprived areas that were often plagued with conflict (Muldoon, 2007).

Other studies performed evaluated children through the personality test the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ)<sup>12</sup> which evaluated the levels of Psychoticism and Extraversion (among other things) in individuals. In comparison to other school-aged children in England, the children of Northern Ireland had higher scores of psychoticism on the EPQ (Campbell, 2004). Keeping in consideration the previous disruptive behavior in the beginning of the 1980's, this shift meant that the children were not adjusting to the current state of the conflict. To understand the mental health of these troubled children, one also must understand the circumstances of their home life. A majority of the afflicted children come not only from areas of high political violence, as previously stated, but from segregated communities and fragmented homes.

A major contribution to the mental and emotional adjustment of children is the structure and stability of their environment. For children in the impoverished areas of Northern Ireland, they lived in a time where their schools were segregated based primarily on community affiliation. This meant that it was often the Catholic school or the Protestant school, with the integration of both occurring very rarely. Catholics during this time were living in ghettos where gerrymandering limited their community resources and kept the groups divided. Unfortunately, this also meant that these areas were more likely to be the scene of political violence, which can be confirmed through the children

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<sup>12</sup> The EPQ measured the levels of Extraversion-Introversion and Neuroticism-Stability in relation to individual personalities. It was introduced in 1975 and the final revision occurred ten years later.

reporting that they witnessed events such as bomb explosions and shootings in their neighborhoods (Muldoon, 2007). However, one of the biggest impacts for these children was that of their families who they looked to as a reference for how to react to unfamiliar situations. Since they are more likely to live in areas of political violence, they are also more likely to lose a loved one to these actions which causes a normalization of the violence and conflict. This constant exposure to violence often caused anxiety and phobias to manifest in some children, however, aside from this, other studies conferred that the impact on the children DURING the Troubles was minimal.

After the Good Friday Agreement and IRA ceasefire, things were believed to be going back to 'normal', but at the same time, there was a spike in suicide rates in the years that followed. As a result, numerous studies were conducted on the adult population of Northern Ireland and their mental stability in relation to their experience during the Troubles. Focusing primarily on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and dissociative disorder, these studies brought to light some of the issues with mental health in Northern Ireland, during and after the Troubles. However, these studies also bring together various aspects of not only the violence that surrounded their society and their ability to cope, but the lasting impact and characteristics which have left their mark on their lives.

Taking into consideration the stark contrast between what was considered 'normal' during the Troubles and present day, the structure of the society and home life drastically impacted the mental health of the people. According to a study done by Tomlinson, it is common for individuals in societies where a drastic shift in their societal structure happens in a short amount of time, to develop PTSD or a dissociative disorder due to not having enough time to adapt to their new living circumstances. Defined as a mental health condition that is brought on through a traumatic experience, individuals with PTSD can

have symptoms such as flashbacks, paranoia and severe anxiety. The most common traumatic experience related to PTSD is that of war, with a majority of those diagnosed being veterans. Although the Troubles wasn't what many may consider a significant war, they have caused Northern Ireland to be associated with the highest rate of PTSD out of the 27 countries surveyed by the World Mental Health Consortium (Bunting, 2013).

With this in consideration, many studies were done to identify the prevalence rates of those who qualify for PTSD in Northern Ireland and its correlation with the Troubles and group relationships. It was discovered that in the groups with higher prevalence rates of PTSD or symptoms of it, were men between the ages of 45 and 65 who had direct experiences with Troubles related incidents (Bunting, 2013). Most of these men were in their teens and early twenties during the most violent parts of the Troubles which put them at a higher risk of being exposed to a traumatic event (Ferry, 2014). Of these those surveyed, almost 70% of them reported that they were a "civilian in a region of terror" during the Troubles (Ferry, 2014). Taking into consideration trauma reported by participants, it was found that over 60% of the participants qualified for PTSD but only 14% of them were seeking treatment (Bunting, 2013).

The Centre for Trauma and Transformation in Northern Ireland conducted a study that found 15% of people who experienced trauma developed PTSD, and one-third of them were not able to recover without psychiatric assistance (Gallagher, 2012). Many of these individuals, however, stated they didn't seek help afterwards due to feelings of grief and anxiety still associated with these events (Bunting, 2013). Any health care professional will state that the longer mental disorders go untreated, the worse they will continue to get, even if the individual is unaware that they have one. Due to the fragility of PTSD, if left untreated in severe cases it can lead to symptoms of dissociative disorder,

which is believed to be a mental function that reduces or prevents painful stimuli from reaching consciousness (Dorahy, 1998). Symptoms include elevated feelings of guilt, anger, resentment, and the individual being disconnected from their surrounds, almost like they are in a daze. As in cases of PTSD, dissociation occurs as a byproduct of events that are considered to be overwhelming or insensitive and is often related to feelings of unresolved grief (Dorahy, 1998). However, it was found that the individual's perception of the traumatic experience, as well as, being directly exposed to violence related to higher dissociation rather than the experience itself (Dorahy, 2003).

However, the current condition of the society in which these individuals live in contributes to their mental state. Even though it is supposed to be an era of peace, Northern Ireland still remains divided in its communities and conservative in its lack of attention to mental health. The Catholic Church has been known for their treatment of issues such as mental illness and suicide. Until recently, the Catholic Church would not even allow victims of suicide to have funeral proceedings or burials on the church grounds. Other churches have even minimized the significance of the mental illnesses experienced by their members, with many officials urging them to just continue praying (OConnell, 2001). Through the Troubles, the citizens of Ireland had very limited access to mental health resources, with psychologists being almost nonexistent, even in the years after. Many did not know what it meant to have a mental disorder, much less what treatment options were available to help alleviate the burden of having one. This issue wasn't addressed until various studies on PTSD and psychological trauma were assessed in the Northern Ireland population decades later. As a result of these studies, some individuals found solace in psychological treatments they did not know existed before.

Other studies, however, show forgiveness and reparations as instrumental in moving past trauma but this is not always an option.

In one case, Stephen Robinson, a Protestant boy, was walking home from school one day when he was shot in the head by a Protestant soldier. Caught in the crossfire of a gunfight between the local Ulster Army and the IRA, he was rushed to the hospital where he was unconscious for two days before a metal plate was inserted where the bullet penetrated (Holliday, 1997). Although Robinson was only 12 years old when this occurred, he had lived through a literal near-death experience. However, he claims he holds no resentments towards the perpetrators due to the violence he has witnessed on both sides (Holliday, 1997). Able to reconcile with his past, Robinson achieved something not everyone was able to: forgiveness for the actions against them.

On the other hand, Gemma McHenry, a young Catholic girl living in Derry had a different perspective when it came to forgiving the Protestants around her. She remarks that “it was normal to feel that you were not important. It had been this way for so long that people started accepting it.” (Holliday, 1997). When the hunger strikes broke out in the ‘80s, the locals would bang bin lids to signal that someone had died, a memory that McHenry recalls vividly. She stated, “When the noise of bins lids broke out it was deafening”, constantly reminding them of the people they were losing. While the Catholics were being killed in their streets and jail cells, the English’s people were going about their normal lives, but what did it matter McHenry wondered, “We were always the stupid Irish to them” anyway (Holliday, 1997). Unlike Robinson, McHenry was not able to forgive the transgressions she faced due to her constant exposure to the way her people were treated for years, a fact many Catholics still hold on to.

With so many atrocities committed on both sides of The Troubles, forgiveness is not easy for individuals to achieve. If no one steps up and takes responsibility, how can the Irish begin rebuilding the psychological chemistry of their communities? There needs to be an initiation of the relinquishing of the violent, negative emotions that hold these individuals in a constant state of anger and maintain thoughts of retaliation (McLernon, 2007). With neither side willing to admit their faults, there was an increase in what is now called collective guilt following the Good Friday Agreement (McLernon, 2007). Collective guilt is experienced when a group of individuals strongly identified with goes against a moral value of that group, even if the individual them self was not involved in the act. McLernon's study (2007) concluded that the dwelling or holding onto past traumas and their collective emotions worsens the cognitive as well as the psychological well-being of the individual, therefore stunting their ability to recover. Following this research, it can be observed that recovering through forgiveness and the absolving of intergroup blame is already a difficult task without having to address decades long grudges held against both parties.

In the studies previously discussed, it was found that there was also a high prevalence of PTSD in lifetime and 12-month diagnoses related to weaker ties to group identities (Muldoon, 2007). The ability to relate to the moral values of a group or community is a detrimental part of surviving traumatic experiences, with many of those who weren't affiliated with a side being the psychological victims. These individuals tended to have more "flexible" ways of thinking and did not identify strongly with one side or the other, which made it hard to move past the discrepancies they witnessed during the Troubles (Muldoon, 2007). Today, these feelings of resentment continue to be prominent

and can be related to the individual's sense of identity in relation to their group and how they affect their ability to cope with their trauma.

Despite the identification of the group or individual, forgiveness can only be achieved if the anger towards the transgressor is confronted and addressed (Tam, 2007). A study done by Tam and Cairns (2007) evaluated intergroup forgiveness and collective guilt in relation to victimhood and exposure to violence during the Troubles. Intergroup forgiveness was defined as the process of reducing negative feelings toward the "perpetrator category" rather than the individual, while collective guilt is experienced by an individual whose group is deviating from their moral norm (Tam, 2007). This was a continuous issue throughout the Troubles, with once peaceful protests and organizations meant to mediate making a turn for constant bombings and violence. Unfortunately, a vast majority of the individuals examined who were directly involved in the conflict still hold anger and resentment towards the other side, with no desire to reconcile (McLernon, 2002).

Regardless of the intergroup reluctance to forgive, it was found that those affected commented that it would be "easier" to forgive an individual rather than the whole group due to an individual being more trustworthy than a community (Tam, 2007). Once separated from the identity of the group, the individual may find it difficult to cope with their role in a conflict and thus seeks reconciliation. This is can be compared to war veterans, such as those from Vietnam, who upon returning home are conflicted with post-traumatic stress symptoms stemming from their collective guilt<sup>13</sup>. In collective guilt, the

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<sup>13</sup> American soldiers serving in Vietnam became known upon arriving home for the burning of Vietnam villages, the raping of women, and the killing of anyone resembling a Viet-Cong (Turse, 2013). As a result, they received anything but a welcome return upon arriving back in the United States, with many suffering from PTSD without the means to seek help due to the negative view of their service.

individual doesn't have to be directly involved in the actions of the group but has still identified themselves with that group. For soldiers, they are defined by their squad and during times of war, have been known to deviate from our moral norms in their actions to foreign citizens. This identification was especially true for the Northern Ireland citizens who are still defined by their communities and have been exhibiting symptoms of PTSD, dissociation, and other mental disorders as a result of the conflict.

In Cairns and Hewstone's research, there was a link between the prevalence of mental illness in those who strongly identified with a group and who were affected by the Troubles. Throughout their surveys and research, it was found that better mental health is related to forgiveness, but decreases with heightened levels of collective guilt following intergroup conflict (Myers, 2009). Therefore, the individual must accept the moral deviations made by their group and forgive those done against them in order to improve their mental health and reconcile with their past. However, this does not mean that the individual has to confront their transgressor head on. It means that they will have to personally be able to identify their emotions during and following the conflict. This has been done in settings such as group therapy, and could be compared to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings in which they must take responsibility for the actions and life choices they made while addicted.

Outside of therapy, there are other alternatives individuals have found to cope or reconcile with their traumas. For Northern Ireland, a powerful and instrumental alternative was the murals created which visually represent the values and history of the people. Regardless of which side they stand for, these works were created as a means of sharing with an entire community the emotional impact and reality of living through the Troubles. Through various studies on the relationship between public health and art, and

the evaluation of the murals around the country, this relationship is examined with the art conceptualizing what cannot be vocalized.

### Art & Public Health

For the last three decades, there has been a push to increase research into the impact art can have on an individual and their community. Recent research has focused on the therapeutic properties of not only participating in the art making process, but observing it, which were believed to enhance one's mood (Stuckey, 2010). Taking place primarily in the United States and United Kingdom, the studies conducted evaluated the resident's perception of the art and how it has impacted their communities. There are also local organizations that have formed over the years in pursuit of using their art to promote the well-being of the community. In Northern Ireland there was the forming of the Bogside Artists in the 1980's along with various art institutions, while the United States has formed an organization in Philadelphia called Porch light, amongst other mental health and art services.

In Philadelphia, the Department of Behavioral Health and the Mural Arts Program collaborated to create a community program called Porch Light. This program aims to promote and increase mental health in communities affected by trauma, through the creation of public art such as murals. The Porch Light program targets communities with high risk rates for various social reasons, such as building disrepair or high crime, and is geared towards helping them better relate to one another and build an identity. Connecticut's Yale University conducted a four-year evaluation of the Porch Light program through the experiences of the community members involved in the art sessions. In order to get a closer look into how the arts can impact communities and individuals,

the evaluation studied the impact and take-away the participants received from the experience.

As an organization, Porch Light seeks to inspire change in the community's environment through the creation of public art that the people can participate in and connect to. Through cooperation with local outpatient and other health services facilities, Yale was able to interview individuals who participated in the program or who lived within a mile of the area worked on. The study found that individuals living within a mile of the mural sites had an improved perception of the aesthetic and safety of their neighborhood, as well as a decrease in stigma towards those with mental health issues (Tebes, 2015). An example of this is the creation of *Finding the Light* (Fig. 13), a mural memorializing the high schoolers in the city who took their own lives. The mural was meant to raise awareness of suicide within the city which has a suicide almost twice that of the national average (Burns, 2012). The mural stands today, acting as a conversation starter for warning signs and ways to get help for those experiencing the loss of a loved one, or who are having the same suicidal thoughts.

The murals around Northern Ireland can be seen as an interesting precedent to Porch Light's murals, with them holding a similar purpose for their communities. During the Troubles, a trio of men came together to form the Bogside Artists, creating numerous murals around the Bogside neighborhood of Derry even after the conflict. For almost four decades they would create various murals which commemorated the lives lost during the conflict, along with depicted aspects of Irish history. The Bogside Artists were not the only

muralists<sup>14</sup> in Catholic Northern Ireland, with many organizations such as the IRA creating murals (or hiring others) to commemorate members lost or promote their own viewpoints. This was a predominant theme in the Loyalist murals as well where their murals were used by the paramilitary groups to mark protected territories one reason their murals are seen as propaganda by critics. Although there are other Loyalist murals that commemorate the innocent lives lost, a majority of their murals depict historical events, many of which resulted in the death or oppression of Catholics. The following case studies will further examine the iconography or symbolism represented in the murals, as well as the impact they have had on their communities.

## Case Studies

### Republican Art During Conflict

#### *Free Derry Corner (Fig. 4)*

Following the Battle of the Bogside in the summer of '69, the words "You are now entering Free Derry" were plastered onto the side of one of the gable walls. A slogan originally taken from the Freedom of Speech Movement at Berkeley College in California (students enraged by civil rights struggles and in opposition of the Vietnam War), the corner has gone from a no-go area to a symbol of the people (Joseph). The site of many battles between the Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries, Free Derry Corner like many other murals, has been pushed by politicians to get taken down. However, the mural was saved numerous times and has since become an official heritage site, allowing

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<sup>14</sup> Although they technically created art, the Art Council did not consider them to "artists" and often excluded them, referring to their art as propaganda which the Bogside Artists refuted for they saw propaganda as taboo and going against the "true nature" of art (Joseph, 2001).

the community to continue to use it today, with many putting up their own illustrations of civil rights issues going on all over the world.

*Petrol Bomber, Derry* (Fig. 5)

Created to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Battle of the Bogside, *Petrol Bomber* was the first thing anyone entering Derry saw (up until recently with the creation of the John Humes mural). Created by the Bogside Artists<sup>15</sup>, the mural is a recreation of the famous photograph of their cousin during the Troubles which was also featured on the front cover of a local book about the battle (Joseph, 2001). The image echoes the harsh reality of life for children living during that time, many of which became accustomed to their neighborhoods or streets being bombed. The boy in the gas mask is the focal point, as he grasps the petrol bomb in his hand, there are soldiers and Rossville Flats in the distance behind him, the setting of many conflicts (Joseph, 2001). Painted completely in black and white, the image is meant to serve as historical documentation of an event, created by those who had experienced the event firsthand.<sup>16</sup> The Bogside Artists wanted to put a face to the civil rights conflict of their area, along with give a voice to those who have been, or still are oppressed (Joseph, 2001).

*Bloody Sunday, Derry* (Fig. 6)

One of the many murals created as memorials of the event, *Bloody Sunday*, was created from a montage of photographs taken of the event being compacted into a single image by the Bogside Artists. Featured in the center is 15-year-old Jackie Duddy being carried after being shot in the back by a British soldier while trying to flee the scene

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<sup>15</sup> Formed in 1986, the Bogside Artists consisted of brother Tom and Will Kelly and childhood friend Kevin Hasson who all lived through and participated in The Troubles. They have created 12 murals in the Bogside neighborhood of Derry after 1998 as historical visuals of the events they faced during the conflict.

<sup>16</sup> The Bogside Artists did encounter some obstacles in painting the mural such as having to paint over the bullet holes embedded in the gable wall from the various shootings in the area over the years.

(Joseph, 2001). In the front of the group is former Bishop Fr. Edward Daly, waving a white handkerchief as he tries to rush Duddy past armed lines to seek medical assistance, an image which has since become famous (McDonald, 2016). Unfortunately, after the backlash the British military received about their actions, they claimed that Duddy was an armed terrorist, which evoked outrage from the Catholic community. This tension only increased with the prolonged investigation done by the British government into the matter with a formal apology of the misinformation and murder not occurring until 2007 (Joseph, 2001).

However, in the mid-1990's the Bogside artists created this mural in commemoration of the event and as a reminder of what they had sacrificed in pursuit of their civil rights. The focal point of the mural is not Duddy, however, but the civil rights banner in the foreground containing the only color, the red of the blood stained on it. Using the banner reconstructed from the march, the artists sought to resonate with those who were witnesses of the march. Representing years of forced silence by the British, the soldier standing on the blood-stained banner is a clear visualization of how the people felt. For centuries the British had been oppressing their basic civil rights, and the people had sacrificed everything to be where they are today.

### Loyalist Art During Conflict

*Sandy Row, Belfast (Fig. 1)*

Considered the Loyalist response to the "Free Derry" corner, this mural states "You are now entering Loyalist Sandy Row Heartland of South Belfast Ulster- Freedom Fighters". Done in the same stylized font of "Free Derry", the mural confronts all who enter the known Loyalist working class neighborhood, a place proud of its history and is heavily protected by the UFF. Complete with the red hand of Ulster and the masked

gunman, this mural was one of the many militant murals created during the conflict. Under the large, somewhat threatening words, is the saying “Quis Separabit” which translates to “Who will separate us?”. Adding to the overall aggressive tone of the mural, this statement further emphasizes the hostility and militantism of the Sandy Row area. Altered and touched up over the years, the background of the mural has since changed color from the original yellow to blue and white. However, as part of the Re-Imaging program discussed later on, in 2012 the mural was painted over by the community as an attempt to eliminate some of the more problematic imagery in the area.

*Mona Lisa, Belfast (Fig. 2)*

A prime example of paramilitaries using the murals can be seen in the creation of what is referred to as “Belfast’s Mona Lisa” which is located on the gable wall in the lower Shankill area. Formerly the stronghold of the UDA, the mural on the side of the gable encompasses the values held by the group controlling the area. The focal point of the mural is clearly the masked gunman placed in the top center, who is staring down the barrel of his gun as if ready to shoot. As in Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, it is as if the viewer is being followed no matter where they go, except it’s by the end of the barrel that follows you instead of a pair of eyes.

Placed below the gunman are two fallen members from the original UDU and UDA organizations depicted through painted photograph portraits. Below either portrait are the corresponding British flags and logo or crest for that organization along with their founding year. Clearly an aggressive and militant mural, it was created by the local paramilitary group to make a statement that they had been here decades, this was their territory and they were going to “protect” it by any means necessary. Although one of the most popular murals to visit (especially on Black Taxi tours conducted by locals to

contested areas) the mural has received a lot of backlash. The community and country's officials were disturbed by the presence of the mural, resulting in the entire building being demolished in as a way of renovating and reviving the area (Hughes, 2015).

*Shankill Bombing Memorial, Belfast (Fig. 3)*

Located in the known contested Loyalist area of Shankill Estates, the *Shankill Bombing* mural can be considered closer to the style of the Republican muralists than that of the Loyalists. The mural pays tribute to the lives lost during the Shankill Bombings of the IRA in the 1990's which resulted in the death 9 civilians, a majority of which were women and children (Melaugh, n.d.). The mural is done in blocks with each containing a painted photograph from an IRA attack along with the date, location, and number of lives lost painted in red on top of them. Each block is also separated by large red lines, the only color throughout the entire composition, which brings out the dark details of the demolition of the various areas. Written above the mural is "30 years of Indiscriminate Slaughter by So-Called Non-Sectarian Irish Freedom Fighters" along with the words "No military targets. No economic targets. No legitimate targets." and "Where are our inquiries? Where is our truth? Where is our justice?". This mural and the outcries written are visual representations of how the Protestant civilians felt that were being unfairly targeted by the IRA, as the Catholic civilians had been with the UDA, UFF, UVF, etc.

Post-Conflict/Peace Murals

*The Peace Mural, Derry (2004)*

Created by the Bogside artists, the Peace Mural was intended to commemorate the peace within Northern Ireland and push toward a new beginning. Wanting to create an image that resonated with everyone, the Bogside Artists decided on the grid design to represent the equality of the people while the colors represented the

harmony and promotion of well-being (Joseph, 2001). However, the image of the dove has many meanings, the most known being that it is the universal symbol of peace, while locally it is the symbol of Derry's patron Saint Columba. The dove also has symbolic meaning to children from both sides whom the artists asked for inspiration, with the dove being a recurring theme. The mural was created to bring together the communities and, with it being the last thing you see as you leave the Bogside, show that they are embracing peace and the turning over of a new leaf.

*Holy Cross Remembrance/Walls of Hope, Belfast (2011)*

Created as a reaction to a shocking event, this mural illustrates the conflict experienced in the Holy Cross dispute of the late 1990's and early 2000's. This dispute was a case of several attacks against Catholic children who had to walk through Protestant neighborhoods in order to attend Holy Cross Primary School, an integrated school in Ardoyne located on the divide of the two communities. These children had slurs yelled and objects thrown at them as they walked to school, which resulted in the local pastor Rev. Aidan Troy escorting many of them through the area (Hammer, 2009). The central image of this mural depicts Rev. Troy and two students, dressed in red uniforms (the only color in the image) walking down the street to the school. Flanking this central image are scenes of the integration of black American students were being attacked on their way to a newly integrated school in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Done strategically in black and white, the

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<sup>17</sup> Following the Brown v the Board of Education, many schools were desegregated, the first being Central High School in Arkansas where 9 black/African-American students were admitted to a predominantly white school. As they walked to school, they were confronted by not only parents and students but the National Guard (Stanford, n.d.).

image echoes the connection between the countries' civil rights issues and dramatizes the scene to emphasize the importance of the event.<sup>18</sup>

### Transforming Murals in NI

After the Good Friday Agreement, there was talk of moving forward from Northern Ireland's conflicted past, and to do so, the scenery of the neighborhoods had to be changed. Many of the political and government officials believed that the murals scattered throughout Northern Ireland should be stripped down and changed in order to adapt to the changing times and identity of the areas. For years the murals on the neighborhood gables were symbols of the territory control of paramilitaries, the promotion of political agendas, and memorials for the lost. However, many believed that allowing the communities to design the murals in their area, would help them create their own identity and separate them from their controversial past. Some artists have even come to accept the idea, such as Loyalist painter David Craig who spends his time creating community history paintings/murals to put over many political murals designed during his time in the Troubles (Vaughn, 2012). Although the shift is seen as problematic, with some thinking that they are trying to wash away years of wrongdoings, the murals were never meant to be permanent. Even over the course of the Troubles, the muralists would paint a new mural over the previous one, because as the times and issues are changing so is the art (Rolston, 2012).

The murals that are being taken down now were chosen by the Northern Ireland Arts Council (NIAC) due to the content and symbols represented. Many of these murals

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<sup>18</sup> Aside from the murals created post-conflict, there was various sculptures and landmarks that showed the literal bridging of the gap between the two sides involved. These works included the sculpture *Hands Across the Divide*, Peace Flame, and the Peace Bridge, all of which are located in Derry.

hail from the Loyalist side, due primarily to the abundance of masked gunmen and presence of paramilitary groups' crests. Despite the push to take down these problematic images, some groups are still putting up militant murals depicting the conservative values of their past. There has been speculation that this is due to the lack of other topics to paint, for it was the Republican murals that varied in the themes portrayed, moving from civil rights, to the hunger strikes and eventually memorials (Rolston, 2012). Despite this, officials have begun negotiating with the leaders of various groups like the UVF and RHC (Red Hand Commando) to take down their more aggressive murals and replace them (Rolston, 2012). Part of NIAC's 'Reimaging' program, these new murals ranged from those paying homage to local sports icons along with historical depictions from the World Wars. Still going strong today, the Reimaging program has consistently replaced various murals around Northern Ireland, whether they be in support of paramilitaries or represent events that some would like to move past.

*History of Shankill, Belfast (Fig. 10)*

Replacing the Drumcree Church mural (Fig. 9) depicting two Loyalist soldiers carrying the coat of arms for the local paramilitary groups is the *A-Z History of Shankill* mural. Placed in the formerly known Loyalist area of Shankill Estates, this mural depicts the major historical contributions of the area alphabetically. Created by members of the community, each block is a photograph that has since been altered to be represented on the wall. Included in this history is the local children's band (seen as B) along with the creation of various buildings and landmarks marked in J, K, and L. This mural is an effort to bring together not only the values held by the community today, but to also have the members involved in the creation of what can be seen as the identity of their neighborhood. Now, instead of walking past a mural dedicated to groups known for their

conservativeness and involvement in The Troubles, there is a clear image of what the community itself believes defines them: their collective history.

*Caed Mile Failte, Belfast (Fig. 12)*

As mentioned earlier, some murals were taken down due to the representation of events that the community would rather not be reminded of. One of these events was the Holy Cross dispute seen depicted in the memorial mural aforementioned. Today the mural has since been painted over but still represents the Holy Cross school and the community that it is a part of. The mural now consists of various Irish symbols such as the animal interlacing, reminiscent of the manuscripts created centuries prior. Instead of depicting a violent scene against children, the mural pays homage to the community-culture as a whole. The central image is of the same street represented previously, except the road has “Welcome to Ardoyne” written in Gaelic, followed by a banner above the street saying a hundred thousand welcomes in Gaelic (*caed mile failte*). There are also illustrations of the school children around the composition with a statement below saying “Ardoyne: a confident, colorful, creative community and the people who made it. Replacing an iconic mural that represented the negative shared experience of the Catholic school children, the mural now serves as a promotion of a sense of belonging and connectedness of all those living there now.

*King William III, Belfast (Fig. 11)*

One of the first murals to lose its place in the Northern Ireland community was *You Are Now Entering Loyalist Sandy Row*. Standing in place of it now is a mural of King William III, known by Protestants as “King Billy”. The mural still welcomes visitors to Sandy Row on the right of the image of King William which takes up most of the composition. Written around his image is the date in which he came over to Ireland

(1690) followed by various quotes and statements of his conquest of the country. Although it might be discouraging to the Catholic locals, the mural is located in a predominantly Protestant area, which is still influenced by their dedication to the colonist that got them there. The mural itself is sending a more positive message about the area to those entering: the community is no longer run by paramilitaries, they are a community committed to the values of their cultural founding and faith.

### **Murals Conclusion:**

These murals had a significant impact on citizens from both the Catholic and Protestant communities. Used as a means of gaining support for their causes as well as voicing the concerns of the community, these murals speak volumes, providing a voice for those who felt they were not being heard. Although the imagery and messages behind these murals vary by the side of the conflict they were created for, they were all made with the common goal of bringing together the community. The case studies discussed earlier provide a glimpse into how the murals were used to communicate both the aggression and the hope for peace.

## **Conclusion**

The Troubles in Northern Ireland brought extreme sectarianism and casualties on both sides, until 1998 when the Good Friday Agreement moved to rectify some of the damage done over the three decades. Studies conducted since The Troubles have shown that there were lasting psychological effects on those who lived through the conflict. The studies discussed in this paper demonstrate that many individuals have exhibited symptoms of PTSD, dissociative disorder, and a steady increase of suicide rates. These

symptoms have been attributed to the loss of group identity felt by those who had identified with either group during The Troubles.

The murals created were different for each community during the conflict, with the Loyalist (Protestant) murals primarily being used as territory markers for paramilitaries or for anti-Catholic sentiments. The Republican (Catholic) murals were mainly about the civil rights struggle they continued to face, paired with memorials to those who were killed by Protestants during this period. However, after the Good Friday Agreement, the Reimaging Program was created specifically to remove the problematic or aggressive murals and allow the communities to create positive art that reflected their own identity. Public art programs such as the Bogside Artists in Derry and the Porch Light program in Philadelphia support research on the impact and power of art on a community's mental health. While the research on this topic (public art used as a means of improving mental health in the community) is relatively new, there has been an increase in support for the creation of these types of murals around the world. After conducting this research project, it is clear to me that public art created in response to conflict helps provide a voice and a history for the community, while at the same time, assists in the healing process for all citizens involved.

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