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Article

Cultural murals and the evolving nature of the hero concept: an arts marketing context

Abstract:

- **Purpose:** We provide an understanding of how the hero identity is culturally constructed and evolving. We focus on heroism within an arts marketing framework through an interrogation of Northern Ireland murals. We elaborate on the links between arts marketing thought and the notion of hero and draw conclusions around what we see as a fruitful area for arts marketing theory.

- **Design/methodology/approach:** We have adopted a narrative approach, incorporating biographical method, visual analysis and ethnography in interpreting cultural murals. We assess representative examples in Northern Ireland using a thematic framework.

- **Findings:** The murals we assessed have evolved from having a specific community focus to increasing numbers which now represent a 'shared', and therefore more modern, version of the hero.

- **Originality:** Although analysis and evaluation of political murals has been carried out in other disciplines, we add to the limited insight from an arts marketing perspective.

- **Research limitations/implications:** We identify an emerging, aesthetically balanced portrayal of cultural murals, with a different set of heroic priorities compared to the past, which should encourage further related research elsewhere.

- **Practical implications:** Northern Ireland murals are no longer the preserve of specific communities and are now also shared spaces which appeal to both the local population and cultural tourists.

Keywords: hero, folk hero, arts marketing, culture.

INTRODUCTION:

The adoption of the hero concept transcends time and is deeply embedded in the national psyche across countries. The concept is evident in literature and poetry (Drabble, 2000), history (Durant, 2002), art and artist heroes (e.g. Stack, 2000), culture (e.g. Malach-Pine et al., 2005), politics (Gordon, 2017), entrepreneurship (Maritz et al., 2020), marketing (e.g. Stead, Arnott and Dempsey, 2013) and, more recently, firefighters (Perrott, 2019) and healthcare workers (Morin and Baptiste, 2020). However, the notion of the hero shifts as societal trends change. Historical heroes were predominately drawn from the male upper classes, and frequently attracted a level of celebrity (McClelland, 1989). Heroic deeds celebrated and sold through the media quickly become part of the culture and commodification of celebrity. Certain heroic actions will be remembered for a considerable time, while those undertaken by 'celetoids' (Rojek, 2001) are ephemeral (Oliner, 2002). The hero figure is a dominant trope in contemporary society (Seal, 1996), and plays a significant role in the world of arts marketing.

The nature of 'hero' has evolved in response to changes in society. Its contemporary social value should be re-assessed to account for these contemporary views, which impact everyday arts marketing and cultural consumption practices (Paterson, 2017). Our narrative approach (Czarniawska, 1997), seeks to reassess and reposition cultural heroes as both folk hero (Hallsworth, 2017) and anti-hero (Neimneh, 2013). We locate our ideas in the marketing domain by exploring theory debates that we believe provide context for our discussion. We then frame the literatures on the hero concept around the contemporary issues we have identified. We look to provide insight using the cultural grounding evident in the mural depictions of the socio-political hero in Northern Ireland. These murals simultaneously act as social and political statements and commentary, and as visual art, using elements of

symbolism and semantics to communicate their message (Loftus, 1994). Further, their 'meaning' has changed over time, and now reflect issues beyond the original intention, and are now consumed as tourism products (McDowell, 2008). Our findings provide an understanding of how the hero identity is culturally constructed and evolving. We then make conclusions around informing future arts marketing theory. Our findings relate to the ability of mural painting to act as a visual communicator of messages aimed at the local and wider communities in terms of support, conflict and co-creators of a shared vision for cross-community stability. Mural painting can be viewed in terms of local and other heroes in holding up community values, beliefs and myths. This is both direct and indirect arts marketing communication.

Mural painting has broader art, visual communication and persuasion impacts; for example, from an arts and tourism marketing perspective (Waitt, 1997), advertising (Bogart, 1995), politics (Bonnell, 1998) and gender (Schroeder and Zwick, 2004) There are connections with memorialisations and social history in relation to war (Hartnett, 2011), including the promotion of peace (Hill and White, 2012), and the dark side of heritage (de-Miguel-Molina, 2020). Murals and their consumption form part of the wider aestheticisation of everyday life (Cova and Svanfeldt, 1993). They are also concerned with promoting identity, resistance and revolution throughout the world (Rolston, 2014).

Critically, while this paper has the potential to contribute to theory and practice in marketing more broadly, we provide insight for future research on creative, entrepreneurial arts marketing activity within the arts and cultural economy.

LITERATURE:

Developing an arts marketing perspective:

The historical and contemporary nature of the hero concept, in lending itself to the hero as a brand notion, adds to its aura and authenticity (Bjorkman, 2002). Archetypes' reoccurring position in art, literature, myth and fables can be used by marketers to construct deeper brand meaning in order to acquire market share (Sciarrino and Roberts, 2018). Consumption rituals can confer enhanced benefits through the associated myths. Preece, Kerrigan and O'Reilly (2019) investigate brand longevity within an evolving sociocultural environment through the hero (James Bond) lens by developing a multilevel assemblage approach. Similarly, the pantheon of Bond 'villains' provide an example of the branding opportunities offered by a hero. Villains act as counterpoints to the hero's innate 'goodness', but in a branding sense they are simply an attribute of the total 'product' (O'Reilly and Kerrigan, 2013). Goldfinger's comment, in the film of the same name, "No, Mr Bond, I expect you to die", is indelibly part of popular movie history. The villains' role in the franchise has been further expanded by the changing nature of the female villain, now almost indistinguishable from the traditional 'Bond girl' (Garland, 2009). In our mind, this gives villains an almost anti-hero status.

Spears, Royne and Van Steenburg (2013) examined the relationship between hero and celebrity, finding that attitudes toward celebrities in advertising were less influenced by whether the celebrity/hero was flawed, and more by the attitude toward advertising in general. In some respects, then, the hero can have utility in a marketing campaign despite a certain amount of 'bad boy/girl' behaviour (Burton et al., 2000). From a consumer research focus, Binkley (2003) assessed the evidence of heroic consumption contained within a lifestyle magazine, tying in with the so called 'heroic' lifestyle of the postmodern consumer of the times (Featherstone, 1991). This type of consumer was viewed as an active, self-aware agent rather than a passive, easily persuaded consumer from previous times (Appadurai,

1996). Clearly, the processes of marketing can produce romantic heroes (Brown, Doherty and Clarke, 2003) through their ability to create and brand individuals, products and institutions with heroic qualities such as charisma, excitement, risk taking and courage. These attributes find their way into the branding of individual, organisations and groups in the arts market.

Hero and heroism:

Given the disparate nature of hero research, we turn to Frisk (2019) who adopts a sociological deconstruction of what constitutes a hero. He pays attention to the perspectives of great men (Carlyle, 2001 [1841]), adventure hero stories (Campbell, 2004 [1949]), heroic actions (Oliner, 2002) and hero institutions (Martiz et al., 2020). There is a gendered bias towards the construction of male heroic identities here.

The hero concept as a gendered notion of the 'great man' theory of history (Brown and Hackley, 2012), is based on Thomas Carlyle's 1841 book 'On Heroes and Hero Worship'. Today's hero is often a media shaped celebrity, rather than an all-action traditional hero (De Groot, 2008). Looking back to Cooley (1897), the great man debate was socially grounded even then, with a focus on what the hero can make people feel, rather than who the hero is, and the production of a more subtle interpretation between the hero and society. So, a more inclusive, socially shaped hero phenomenon emerges by paying attention to the socio-psychological, cultural/ideational and socio-political aspects of heroism. Our research makes a contribution to this emergent area but we also show how the great men thesis can now be redesignated as a more inclusive 'great person' or 'great people'. or 'great community' notion. We also advance Becker's, Scheiper's and Frisk's arguments around hero institutions and the socio-political perspective in relating to cultural institutions and their inherent relationships with their local communities.

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Contemporary perspectives:

The anti-hero

The majority of hero constructs are positive, but a dark side has developed that has changed perceptions. Some people enjoy the status of the anti-hero, despite their apparent immorality (Shafer and Raney, 2012). The female Bond villains have evolved into characters with clear positive aspects to their personalities (Garland, 2009), giving them an anti-hero aura. Clearly, some consumers are attracted towards characters who appear selfish and are intent on breaking the rules, and yet they can ultimately engage in activities which have positive societal impacts or behave in ways that 'do good'. An example of how the tension between hero and anti-hero has found its way into societal perceptions is the case of journalists, perceived as occupying a shadowy world of contacts and sources, but in the end seen as acting in the public interest (Eldridge, 2017). Such tensions colour the way society views certain bad boy/girl behaviours. For instance, many consumers identify with the 'rebel' myth (Holt and Thompson, 2004), while others align themselves with 'outlaw' brands such as Harley Davidson (Sciarrino and Roberts, 2018). This confusion in popular culture is reflected on television shows from the USA, which has produced characters that "the audience likes and wants to see succeed, even though they act an awful lot like villains" (Deggens, 2011): Don Draper in *Mad Men*; Walter White in *Breaking Bad*; and Jackson "Jax" Teller in *Sons of Anarchy*. Clearly, in an arts marketing sense, while the anti-hero persona is imperfect, it can display heroic tendencies in some situations, and significantly, display desirable qualities for certain market segments.

The folk hero

The anti-hero can be seen as a subset of the folk hero who are frequently characters that are rebellious and anti-establishment, but with their own code of conduct that includes a number of positive traits. These folk hero characters are embedded in particular locations and landscapes (Hart 2022). In a study of Australian 'bushrangers' (highwaymen), (Tranter and Donoghue, 2008) found that knowledge of particular characters was very much region-specific. Only one, Ned Kelly, was able to move beyond the location where he was active and take on national folkloric significance: he has "transcended bushranging to symbolize a romantic and rebellious aspect of Australian identity" (Tranter and Donoghue, 2008, p. 371).

In the USA context, there are historical folk heroes such as Davy Crockett, Paul Bunyon, Casey Jones and Johnny Appleseed, whose innate 'goodness' was not reliant on there necessarily being 'a real person'. However, being fictional does not decrease a folk hero's value to society. Stories retold over generations guarantee that characters become 'the stuff of legend'. Mythical characters such as Robin Hood and King Arthur still influence Anglo-Saxon culture (Barczewski, 2000), as evidenced, not least, by the plethora of television shows and movies that still resonate with consumers. That is because bravery, independence and the ability to overcome adversary using only their own resources are the key points when a folk hero's role is to inspire and feed into modern cultural mores. There are, then, common character traits that can be seen in the historical folk heroes and in today's concept of the hero, particularly the 'everyday' hero, and more broadly, the fictional folk heroes that live on the edges of society but that are seen as beacons of popular resistance.

The female hero

Despite the historical reliance on the great man thesis, and the masculinity that surrounds heroism, there have also been moves to acknowledge women's role (Campbell, 2004 [1949]).

If a woman has performed exceptionally, she has often been portrayed as a 'goddess, temptress or earth mother' (Frisk, 2019: 97), or in terms of her female virtues (Kinsella, Ritchie and Igou, 2015), rather than someone who is noted for their actions. While there are recent moves in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion, public discourse around the hero notion still often reverts to the masculine (Becker and Eagly, 2004The aforementioned female villain is also relevant here, as is the so-called Marvel Universe, with its increasing number of heroic female characters (e.g., Carol Danvers AKA Captain Marvel, Natasha Romanoff AKA Black Widow, and Wanda Maximoff AKA Scarlet Witch) (Cooke, 2018). Certainly, the notion of 'hero' in contemporary society is much more inclusive. One might postulate that the changing roles of women in the workforce, where more women work in occupations formerly male-dominated, partly explains this phenomenon. The armed forces, the emergency services and health and allied services, while not necessarily perfect, are now more reflective of the gender mix in broader society.

Research questions:

While the above discussion evidences a breadth to the hero concept, there is an argument that there has been a dilution of the meaning of 'hero' and 'heroism' through its wider distribution and allocation throughout society. That is, what is conceived as 'heroic' now is a lesser form of heroism than it was in the past. Perhaps, as Frisk (2019) notes, the focus should be on what actually counts as heroism and how this evolves, rather than who actually is a hero. An alternative approach is to consider that the worlds of the past produced heroes that reflected their times, and these times are simply not contemporary. Modern concerns with issues such as gender balance and diversity come into play, as does the range of possible societal activities that might 'generate' heroes. For our purposes, then, the notion of hero is culturally grounded, is strongly influenced by the past, but has evolved to encompass a range of modern

influences. Furthermore, we see aspects of this evolution having direct impacts on arts

marketing theory and practice. Within this context, our research looks to answer the

following question: *In what ways does the evolution of the hero concept inform arts*

marketing and cultural consumption theories? More specifically, what are the implications

for the Northern Ireland context?)

The Northern Ireland context:

We focus on Northern Ireland and its murals as the core data source because of what

Mulholland (2020) calls its unique position in the United Kingdom as a case study of civil

conflict and peace building. Northern Ireland was founded in 1921, as part of the United

Kingdom following the partitioning of Ireland (Rankin, 2007). The social and political

change experienced during these times is illustrated through the murals, from the historical

past, to The Troubles and post Troubles peace (McKittrick and McVea, 2012). Over 3,500

people died during this conflict between 1968-1998. These murals serve as visual expressions

of socio-political identity. The particular place chosen for mural construction anchors the

image in making it effective (Schudson, 1989).

Northern Ireland's population is relatively small (1.5m at the start of the Troubles and now

almost 1.9m). In the late 1960s, civil rights organisers began to agitate for equal rights for

Roman Catholics. Protestants were being allocated the best jobs and housing. In 1969, the

British Army were deployed, and initially received a warm welcome by the Catholic

community (Chaplin et al., 2017). However, this quickly turned into anti-British sentiment.

The Irish Republican Army saw this as an opportunity to re-ignite the armed struggle for Irish

independence. Internment was introduced where members of the IRA, and other paramilitary

organisations, were imprisoned without trial. As part of the associated protest movement,

murals, flags and other devices began to be used. The Protestant community also adopted this approach in order to assert their identity. Tensions rose further following Bloody Sunday in January 1972, during a civil rights demonstration. Conflict continued until 1998, including Nationalist prison hunger-strikes from 1980-81. The Peace Process began in 1993, followed by ceasefires and weapons decommissioning. A meaningful breakthrough developed between 1997 and 2000, with the reforming of the Northern Ireland Assembly following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement on April 10th, 1998.

METHODOLOGY:

Northern Ireland's murals are demonstrably social and political statements and commentary (Goalwin, 2013), but also visual art 'consumed' by locals and now tourists. This case also serves as a representative lens for similar contexts elsewhere. We believe that the explicit tension of opposing cultural perspectives and the depiction of heroes in the murals of Northern Ireland provides us with a rich data source with which to investigate our research question. We view the data we have analysed as the visual, narrative and metaphorical content of the murals we have examined, including the traits and themes we identified. We also set this against the historical backdrop of Northern Ireland and it socio-political development, mainly since the late 1960s. Broadly, we have adopted a narrative approach, incorporating biographical method (Roberts, 2002), visual analysis (Schroeder, 2006) and ethnography (Peñaloza, 1998; Schwartz, 1989). Such an approach involves researching cultural heroes through the analysis of visual depictions and written text (Prosser 2012) which enables conceptual, epistemological and methodological reflection (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004). Our analysis was based, firstly, on a conceptual framework that incorporated the key attributes of the hero character from traditional and contemporary perspectives, as

established in our literature review. This framework is set out in Table 1. We then utilised a process of visual analysis, based on the premise that the murals are cultural artefacts and therefore can provide the intellectual focus for social research (Wagner, 2020). We took Schroeder's (2006) work as a starting point, with the clear idea that the murals were first and foremost communication, and were (and are), in effect, 'consumed' by an audience. In that context, we performed a series of steps in our analysis starting with an identification of the key components in each mural under analysis. We then compared the contents of each mural, looking for broad themes that aligned with our conceptual framework and that would provide insight into the narrative being presented. Each researcher undertook this task separately, with a second analysis performed as a team, to ensure agreement on the thematic elements. The elements are set out in Table 2.

Table 1: Conceptual framework

Traditional heroic character traits
Bravery; Conviction; Courage; Determination; Helpful; Honesty; Inspirational; Moral integrity; Protective; Self-sacrifice; Selflessness; Strength
Contemporary views of the hero
They can feel what those in need of help are feeling
They genuinely care about the safety and well-being of other people
They are able to see things from the perspective of others
They live by their values
They are willing to endure personal risk to protect their values
They have the training and physical ability to deal with a crisis
They may be male or female (or other)
They may be flawed, which will impair the perfection of their actions
They can come from all walks of life and do not necessarily have an occupation that lends itself to heroic deeds
Their heroic actions can be geographically localised

Adapted from: Kinsella, Ritchie and Igou (2015); Staats et al. (2009); Franco, Blau and Zimbardo (2011).

Table 2: Thematic elements

Element	Description
Heroic figure/s	Includes either an identifiable person or a generalised figure either performing a heroic act or posing as such
Identifiable protagonist/s	Has a central character/person that can be clearly identified and is explicitly
Community members	Includes a number of figures that are explicitly members of the local community
Historical context	References a specific historical event or provides an historical context for a current event
Location-specific symbols	References a specific location, either local, national or global
Time-specific symbols	References dates and times of specific events
Peace symbols	Incorporates well-known symbols of peace, e.g., a dove, an olive branch, etc.
Conflict symbols	Incorporates well-known symbols of armed conflict, e.g., guns, uniforms, etc.

We adopted a purposive approach to sampling (Cavana, Delahaye and Sekeran, 2001), based firstly on murals identified by Bill Rolston (https://billrolston.weebly.com). His work is central to understanding the creation and development of Northern Ireland socio-political murals during and following The Troubles as a period of conflict. The qualitative data that formed the basis of this study were collected following the approach suggested by Peñaloza (1998). That is, we utilised methods of participant observation, photography and ethnographic reflections of our experiences. We firstly made a field visit to Belfast, specifically to embed ourselves in the location and observe the murals in situ. There we photographed a range of murals to allow us to reference against those from Bill Rolston's work, choosing those with an attached and known narrative. We also used the images as

memory prompts during our analysis. As suggested by Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018), we also made field notes which allowed us to document vital contextual information.

In the following section we present our findings using six Northern Ireland murals as representative of our argument. We use our researcher judgement and experience in selecting the murals for evaluation and believe any bias is minimised. One of the researchers is originally from Northern Ireland but the other one is not. We frequently discussed our interpretations in order to reach mutually agreed conclusions stemming from the very rich culturally and historically contexts being uncovered. The six selected murals located in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry represent the longitudinal transformation of N.I. murals, pre, during and post Peace Process. By selecting these particular murals, we can trace the development of their content, core message and wider visual representations. From an arts marketing perspective, we can see the evolution from direct socio-political visual communication to a more subtle co-created position. In comparing our findings with previous research and assessing their anchoring within appropriate theoretical and conceptual constructs (Spiggle, 1994), we focus on "what the narratives tell the researcher and how they relate to other literature in the field, as well as appraising the emergence of new material in addressing the theory versus practice gap" (Fillis, 2005: 433).

FINDINGS:

Our analysis, based on the thematic elements we identified in Table 2, evidences the strongly heroic, but contentious, nature of the murals of Northern Ireland. Heroes held up by one side of the cultural divide are derided by those on the other, while those caught in the middle of cultural debate and civil disturbance attempt to express their neutrality (Crowley, 2011; Rolston, 2004; Rolston, 2012). Jarman (1997) investigates how parades and visual displays in

Northern Ireland celebrate a divided history of the people who live there, at a time when the peace process was in its infancy. Heroes emerge from the rituals involved (Blake, 2019) as part of the wider material culture located in each community (Purbrick, 2013). Depicting heroism through imagery and material culture has a significant role in society in Northern Ireland, with sense of community, faith, visual communication through mural painting and flag displays being important platforms. These acts of communication can also be viewed as political marketing interventions (Butler and Collins, 1994), as well as a form of visual consumption (Schroeder, 2002), visual culture (Mirzoeff, 1999) and aesthetic activity (Csiksentmihlyi and Robinson, 1990).

The first protestant murals emerged in the 1920s, painted by artisanal coach or house painters. Nationalist murals were a more recent phenomenon, emerging from the hunger strikes of the early 1980s, often containing imagery relating to political struggle elsewhere in the world (Rolston, 1992). Many established artists and art historians do not view these murals as art, while others see them as colourful backdrops, dismiss them, or seek to have them removed. However, they cannot be dismissed since they tangibilise current political ideology, while also containing varying degrees of artistic talent in their construction. Loyalist murals tend to be ritualised in terms of their style, but Republican murals are less so. The more recent cross-community murals are deemed to be much more permanent and can be viewed more as art than political statement. Nationalist murals are often deemed more innovative in style and symbolism, often drawing on murals and posters from other parts of the world. The celebratory, historical and contemporary heroic depictions of one side of the community (Claydon, 2014) are simultaneously seen as both heroic and anti-heroic, depending on the viewer's position (Figure 1). (Identified thematic elements: Heroic figure/s; Historical context; Time-specific symbols; Conflict symbols).

(Mural at Sevastapol Street, Belfast, 1989, to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the arrival of British army in Belfast and Irish Republican Army campaign Rolston 1992 Vol.1, p.38)

Memorialisations of World War One such as the Battle of the Somme (Figure 2) and figures are also depicted, such as Cuchulainn (Rolston, 1997) the central character of the Ulster (Uliad) Cycle (Aitchison, 1987). (Identified thematic elements: Heroic figure/s; Historical context; Location-specific symbols; Time-specific symbols; Conflict symbols).

(Mural at Donegall Pass, Belfast, 1990. Memorial to the Ulster Division and the Battle of the Somme, 1916. Rolston 1992 Vol.1, p.12)

In his second volume, (Rolston, 1995), the same themes continue as he assesses how the murals painted between 1992 and 1995 deal with calls for peace and ceasefires, while also looking towards the future. (See Figure 3) (Identified thematic elements: Heroic figure/s; Community members; Peace symbols; Conflict symbols).

(Mural at Racecourse Road, Shantallow, Derry. Call for peace. Rolston Vol.2 p.41.

Mural themes now include King Billy, flags, the Red Hand of Ulster, the military, freedom fighting, prisoners, repression and resistance, history (including the Great Famine, Oliver Cromwell, Ulster heritage in the United States, Ulster Scots connections), elections, sport, humour (e.g. Bart Simpson standing on the neck of Gerry Adams, while holding a Northern Ireland flag, international perspectives (e.g. visualisation of solidarity with (armed) struggles elsewhere, and the peace process. As an example of how contemporary motifs are now being

incorporated into the murals, Figure 4 shows a Sinn Fein election mural that utilises an image of Edvard' Munch's The Scream. (Identified thematic elements: Heroic figure/s; Location-specific symbols; Time-specific symbols; Conflict symbols).

Figure 4 – Click here to view image
(Mural at Rossville Street, Derry, 1993. Sinn Fein election mural 'Give them that screamin' feeling', Rolston Vol.2 p.30)

In his third volume, Rolston (2003) examines how the murals from 1996-2003 portray the period just before the Good Friday Agreement (Fenton, 2018), with Republican scenes of political prisoners, terrorists in active service, gun smuggling in the lead up to the Easter Rising, murals dedicated to fallen comrades, sectarian harassment, commemorating the 20th anniversary of the 1981 hunger strikes, Bloody Sunday and those killed by plastic bullets. (See Figure 5). (Identified thematic elements: Heroic figure/s; Identifiable protagonist/s; Community members; Historical context; Location-specific symbols; Time-specific symbols; Peace symbols; Conflict symbols).

Figure 5 – Click here to view image
(Mural at Hugo Street, Belfast, 1991. Protesters in support of 1981 Republican hunger strikes, Rolston Vol.3. p.20)
Loyalist murals during this period memorialised events, the peace process (including celebratory depictions of victory and the proviso that the UVF are still ready for war), mythology, military groups, territory, Ulster Scots history and culture, and the Royal family.

Although there are still murals containing traditional content, there is now growing evidence of a mixed economy of mural painting, with more of a shared sense of heroic figures and identity and a reimagining of the state and the role of culture and a peaceful, shared, future. In Derry's Bogside, for example, Nobel Peace Prize winners Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother

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Teresa, and Nelson Mandela are represented (Crowley, 2011). There is even a mural depicting all the political parties in a plea for peace. A number of joint murals by republicans and loyalists have been produced, including a recreation of Picasso's Guernica (see Figure 6). Nonetheless, this mural still follows the heroic tradition, albeit now representing a 'shared', and therefore more modern, version of the hero. (Identified thematic elements: Heroic figure/s; Historical context; Peace symbols).

Figure 6 – Click here to view image
(Mural at Divis Street, 2007. Reproduction of Picasso's Guernica, the first mural jointly painted by Republican and Loyalist muralists. Rolston Vol.4 p.28).

Moving forward to 2021, the Executive Office of the Northern Ireland Assembly was due to publish a report drawn up by the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition (FICT) with a view to reaching a consensus on the use of flags by both sides of the community (McCormack, 2021). These flags as communication carriers, like the murals, also depict heroic representations of both individuals, organisations and countries. The intention is to then form an Office of Identity and Cultural Expression, which would deal with any issues identified concerning flags, emblems and identity in Northern Ireland by either community.

Our interpretation of the murals:

Our reading of the murals we have selected uncovers how the hero institutions perspective (Frisk, 2018) has impacted and evolved through changes in marketing communications messages, perceived shifts within communities and the associated socio-political forces. There have been alterations in the meaning and collective discourses of the inherent narratives. We believe that the great man thesis has been challenged through our uncovering of an emergent, co-created future of cross-community efforts (Pongsakornrungsilp and

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Schroeder, 2011). Values and beliefs are beginning to be shared, although distinctive identities will always be evident too.

The hero concept is firmly embedded in the Northern Ireland psyche, although with hero/anti-hero splits depending on the community. Originally static, it is now more dynamic as seen through cross-community construction. However, Northern Ireland heroes are not ephemeral. Our thematic analysis has revealed that authenticity has moved from apparent and claimed, based on historical, visual and written narrative, to a more inclusive shared status e.g., the Guernica mural has cross-community appeal when compared to the often-closed community nature of earlier murals. The Northern Ireland social world has changed post Troubles, as have some of the mural heroes. The nature of symbolism and associated semantics is gradually evolving to reflect this shared future, with more positive shared community values, but not exclusively. Clearly, there has been a gradual shift in the socio-political values being communicated. The murals are now part of Northern Ireland's arts and culture landscape, and everyday aestheticisation (Cova and Svanveldt, 1993), including the link between art and tourism (Özdemir, Fillis, and Collins, 2020).

It is doubtful whether Northern Ireland murals are perceived to be romantic, but they transcend myth with reality. Shared cross-community values and the focus on great people of all status are the new future as portrayed in many of the recent murals. There will always be a look back to the former dominant socio-political structures, but cross-community-based heroism involving men and women is now evident. It is our contention, then, that our analysis of cultural murals within the Northern Ireland context has informed arts marketing theory in terms of shifting emphasis on what constitutes art in the first place, through to the

insight generated in terms of arts marketing communication processes and the move towards a co-created community focus.

DISCUSSION:

Our findings align with Becker and Eagly (2004) and Frisk (2018) who note that heroes are no longer held up solely as men but that women can also be recognised too as part of the socio-political institutional relationships within local communities where collective, prosocial risk taking behaviours are increasing. The cultural shift which we have uncovered may contribute to future views of heroism being more on androgynous. The changing nature of the institutions involved in the Northern Ireland context have evolved, some might say, beyond all recognition, since the start of the Troubles. The forces at work here have impacted collectively on the narratives in display through the interaction of political, community and the power of visual marketing communication activities. What has happened in Northern Ireland also relates to what Scheipers (2014) calls Post-heroism as an important contemporary lens on the changing nature of conflict. Understanding here focuses on how war is no longer shaped by heroic motivations and, therefore, does not produce popular public heroes. Instead, a post-heroic position has been reached.

Many of the murals we assess relate to Campbell's (2004 [1949]) heroic tradition, with a number of monomythical and real journeys, victories, defences and other trials and tribulations are portrayed, communicated, marketed and consumed, each side offering a pathway out of the turmoil. Heroes can be shared, with anti-hero fall out being absorbed as time passes. Displays of power among paramilitary groups are slowly being displaced by a collective sense of support and understanding. Instead of being drawn towards hero worship based on miscommunication and fake news, as history is explored further, it becomes clear

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that a shared past has always been there, despite earlier socio-cultural political polarisation across communities. We have utilised a historically situated perspective to aid understanding, helped by the critiquing of power relations within multiple social, cultural, institutional, religious, and uncomfortable discourses.

We have identified a neutral, inclusive approach, which acknowledges the heroic deeds of both men and women. However, within particular silos of arts and culture, men still dominate over women despite long running efforts to convey more accurate representations around equality of struggle (Sayej, 2020). A more aesthetically balanced portrayal, however, is gradually emerging, with a different set of heroic priorities. We have provided evidence of an emerging tide of People of Action Heroes and Communities of Action Heroes, regardless of gender, religion, socio-economic status and political views, all seen through the arts marketing communication lens of community mural construction. In Northern Ireland, for example, new iconic heroes and hero brands can now be more to do with industry, including industrial heritage, tourism, and the arts and culture than about division and grandstanding. In the arts and cultural sector more generally, new forms of shared governance, management and leadership can create different, more appropriate aesthetic heroes, implementing more meaningful entrepreneurial creative visions of future practice which can be embraced and understood by a much wider demographic than before. A post Covid-19 world enables these opportunities to be explored.

We have unpacked evidence of the folk hero, the use of mythology and anti-establishment actions through our narrative, biographical approach. We have generated insight from cross-cultural, comparative reflective perspectives through our interrogation of a range of primary and secondary data. This has been done in order to inform understanding of the power of

visual communication in community constructed murals. This contributes to the wider understanding of the power of art from an arts marketing perspective. We have demonstrated extensive grounding in the hero notion, starting from broad perspectives before focusing on our focal points within the arts and cultural environment. In doing so we are helping to reclaim the heroic from everyday marketing and consumption practices by interrogating socio-cultural hero depictions. In doing so we uncover broader implications for leadership, governance, mentoring and creative arts marketing more generally.

Socio-political protests will continue challenge the status quo and new forms of control. However, there is unsureness around individual and collective heroism in these contexts. The anti-hero is a counter to traditional values and therefore appeals to some sections of society. This sits alongside contemporary notions of heroism which addresses the common good. Nevertheless, some aspects of hero worship are still problematic, such as celetoid popularity, media and marketing manipulation and failure to acknowledge the dark side of supposed heroes. In order to overcome these issues, we need to culturally ground the heroism narrative and take a more nuanced view of the nature of the contemporary hero.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH:

This paper sought to answer the following research questions: *In what ways does the evolution of the hero concept inform arts marketing and cultural consumption theories? More specially, what are the implications for the Northern Ireland context?* Broadly, we have sought to add insight and contribute to theoretical development through an analysis of a cultural phenomenon using the evolving notion of hero as our lens. There are similarities, and of course differences, in what we have found, for example, in our evaluation of Northern Ireland heroes depicted in the murals, these are mainly due to heightened socio-political

issues. Visual communication displays tangibilise apparently intangible relationships and the rituals involved. Effective ingredients include visual storytelling, recall and memory of authentic and imagined voices, as well as a collective stance within communities and resistance to and from the other. Overall, we believe that the murals of Northern Ireland have provided a rich source of data for arts marketing theorists. We call on academics and researchers to 'draw a long bow' and explore a world where phenomena can be simultaneously positive and negative, where the hero can simultaneously be an anti-hero, or be a woman, or even the person next door, but importantly, is a product of their time. Extending the potential from our research, we encourage others to investigate the broader aspects of institutional interactions, including the influences around co-created community outcomes from socio-political but also cultural value lenses within the visual arts specifically and in the wider arts and cultural landscape. Our research focused on the Northern Ireland context so it would be valuable to see what occurs in other cultures.

In our exploration of this world, we have uncovered evidence of portrayals of heroic identity, power, control and humiliation. Commemoration, community, conflict, propaganda, humour and politics have also played their part in shaping the hero. However, there is now emerging evidence of a mixed economy of these portrayals, with protagonists from each side now working collectively in constructing depictions of an aesthetic, community focused hero. Clearly, there is considerable scope for multi-discipline research that explores the interconnections between notions of hero and heroism and their manifestations in social discourse, in arts marketing communications, in political and policy statements, and in consumer behaviour. These interconnections are indeed a valid area of interest for arts marketing.

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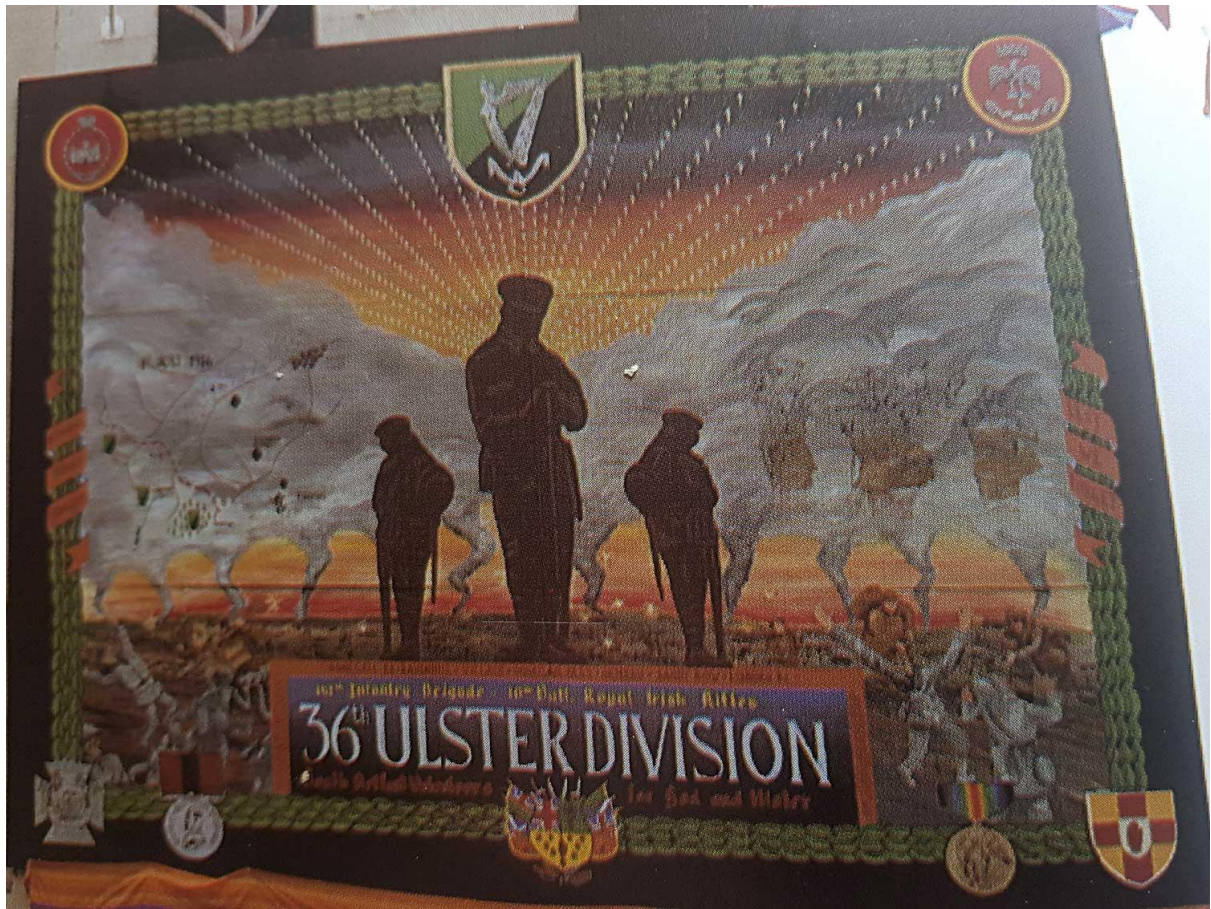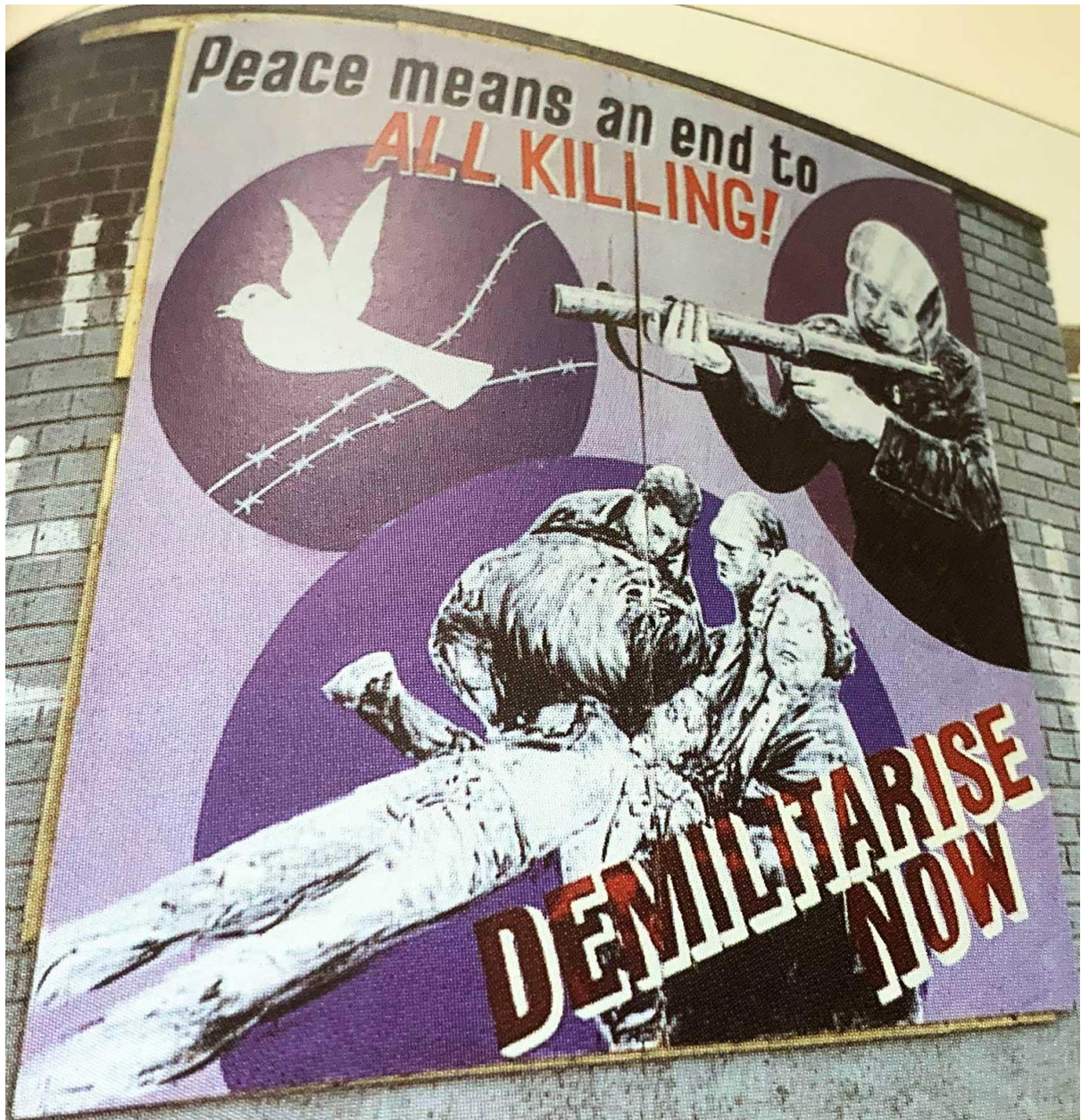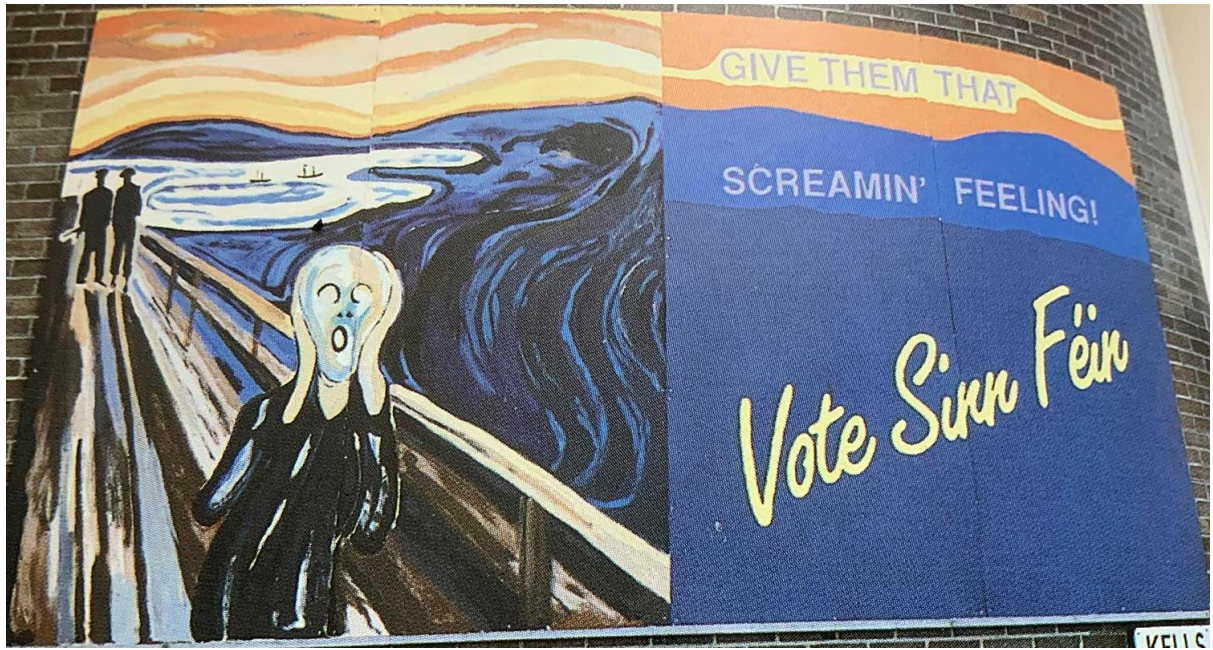
Figure 1

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