

Memory Making in Post-Conflict Societies: The Decade of Commemorations in Northern Ireland

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Introduction

2012-2023 marks the centenary commemoration of the Irish Revolution in Ireland. The year 2016 will be particularly contentious due to the key Republican and Loyalist commemorations of the Battle of the Somme and the Easter Rising, and areas of debate have re-opened around memory of the events and their use.

Objectives

To examine:

1. The use and abuse of history within Northern Ireland in both politics and commemoration.
2. The role of history and the historian in the reconciliation of the two traditional communities of Northern Ireland.
3. The problems faced by the Northern Irish government and its associates in commemorating the events of 1916, and whether it can be done neutrally.

Research

Most of my research was carried out in Dublin and Belfast, using the archives at the National Library and the Northern Irish Political Collection in Linen Hall Library.

I found numerous articles and opinion pieces that were valuable and undigitised in the NIPC, including editions of the *Protestant Telegraph*, and I used the National Library in Dublin to look at the commemorations of 1966 and the issues that were faced then.



Independent Newspapers PLC, 'GPO, O'Connell Street, Dublin' (http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/IND_H_0016 last viewed 19/10/2013).

Martin Melaugh, 'Loyalist Mural (1), Belfast', (<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/images/photos/belfast/murloy1.htm> last viewed 19/10/2013).



Eamon Melaugh, 'IRA Easter Commemoration Parade', (<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/melaugh/portfolio5/f5p31.htm> last visited 17/10/2013)



Left to Right:

Bill Rolston, '1991,Whiterock Road, Belfast', (<http://billrolston.weebly.com/1990s.html> last viewed 19/10/2013).

Neil Jarman, 'Orangemen and Bannersmen in Larne, 1995', (<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/images/photos/parade/jarm06.htm> last viewed 19/10/2013).

Raymond McCartney Mural, 'Hunger Strike', (<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/bogsideartists/murals.htm> last viewed 19/10/2013).

Conclusions

- Ireland has a unique relationship with its history that is not evident in any other post-conflict society.
- History has been misused by both Republicans and Loyalists, justifying conflict through the idealisation of the Republic of 1916, and through the perpetuation of conflict through commemoration annually in the form of the marching season.
- Historians have a key role as the constructors of historic memory in post-conflict societies, and must take up the role of reconciler in order to clarify the facts of both 1916 and the Troubles to give a nuanced and complex explanation of events that have been misused in the past.
- The Troubles in Ireland have had a deep impact on the use of history and the representation of the 'martyrs' of 1916.
- Conflict over the past represents a continuation of the conflict within Northern Ireland, but in a different form.
- Despite the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, there are still issues regarding the marching season, flags and reconciliation.
- It is possible to bring together the communities of Northern Ireland with the commemorations of 1916, so long as triumphalism is avoided, and efforts are combined with existing community projects such as the 'A Shared Future' policy (2005) and efforts by former political prisoners in local communities but to name a few.

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