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“Words Through Walls”: Chicano and Northern Irish Mural Traditions in Perspective

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RESUMEN:

La comunidad chicana en Estados Unidos y la lealista y republicana en Irlanda del Norte se han servido de los murales para expresar sus aspiraciones económicas, políticas, sociales y culturales. Sin una intención claramente artística al principio, sino más bien reivindicativa, el objetivo de estas pinturas realizadas por las tres comunidades ha sido el de mostrar tanto a los miembros de su grupo, como a los rivales y, por ende, al resto del mundo, su forma de entender los conflictos de los que han surgido. En este trabajo, nuestra intención es la de presentar las creaciones muralistas de estos pueblos en términos de su evolución histórica, compromiso ideológico, aspiraciones políticas y temas principales que han sido utilizados. Aunque las realidades en las que las tres comunidades se desarrollan son muy diferentes, sí que son apreciables ciertas similitudes. De tal manera que los murales chicanos, lealistas y republicanos se han convertido en el canal para articular unidad, orgullo de pertenencia al grupo y activismo político, convirtiéndose en “palabras a través de los muros”.

Palabras clave: murales, chicanos, lealistas, republicanos, identidad, ideología, temática

ABSTRACT:

The Chicano community in the United States and the loyalist and republican in Northern Ireland have used murals to express their economic, political, social and cultural aspirations. In their origin, these artistic creations lacked a clearly artistic intention, but rather their function was vindicatory. The aim of the paintings was to show the members of their group, as well as their rivals and, therefore, the rest of the world, their way of understanding the conflicts in which they were immersed. In this paper, our intention is to present the muralist creations of these peoples in terms of their historical evolution, ideological commitment, political aspirations and main themes that have been used. Although the realities in which the three communities develop are very different, certain similarities are appreciable. Thus, Chicano, loyalists and republican murals have become the channel to articulate unity, pride in group membership and political activism, then conveying “Words through Walls.”

Keywords: murals, Chicanos, loyalists, republicans, identity, ideology, themes

1. INTRODUCTION¹

Murals have been usually associated to political, economic, social and cultural demands in an explicit and direct way. As Kang and Gammel (2011: 267) have asserted, murals “have increasingly become artworks that are made by the community for the community.” Due to its ideological commitment, this type of art has “blurred distinctions between ‘fine art’ and ‘folk art’ (Donahue, 2011: 72), and has paid more attention to content than to form, thus conveying words through walls. Northern Irish loyalists of the early 1900s,² Chicanos of the 1960s,³ and Northern Irish republicans of the 1980s⁴ would be a good example of groups of people that have displayed their communities’ ideologies on their walls. If murals act as newspapers on walls (Holscher, 1976: 45), then these three communities have used them to teach about their culture, history, reality and aspirations. The messages that the walls carry provide the viewer with insights of the artist’s ethnic and/or religious culture. An information that is very valuable to both the members of their communities and those who do not belong to them.

In this article, we are in line of Kang and Gammel (2011: 267) to whom murals “capture public attention and provoke viewers to explore layers of meaning and find hidden stories.” We do not intend to make an artistic analysis of the murals of these three communities. In fact, to point out a specific example as typical is an arduous task, for they display different themes in different periods, different regional areas and supporting very different issues. Rather, our purpose is to make a presentation of both Chicano and Northern Irish wall paintings in terms of their historical evolution, ideological commitment, political aspirations and main themes. We are aware that although certain thematic similarities are clearly perceived in the muralist art of these three groups, it is undeniable that many differences also exist. But what is undeniable is that Chicano, republican and loyalist murals have become a channel to articulate unity, ethnic pride and political activism.

2. CHICANO MURAL PRODUCTION AND ITS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The development of Chicano artistic expressions was in the importance placed by the Chicano Movement of the 1960s, also known as *El Movimiento*,⁵ upon the need to revise standard histories to include voices that, generally, were concealed or obliterated by the dominant Anglo-

American majority. Visual arts, among other cultural artifacts, were used to accompany the political demands made by the Chicano community to resist racism, discrimination and social injustices (LaWare, 1998: 140; Sperling, and Barnett, 1990: 9). Chicano muralists used murals to promote awareness, encourage multicultural and cross-cultural consciousness, and stimulate community harmony (Kang, and Gammel, 2011: 268; Mesa-Bains, 1990: 70). These murals became both an important organizational tool as well as a means to recuperate Chicano cultural heritage. Breaking with the traditional conceptions of ‘art for art’s sake,’ Chicano muralists created a temperamental art that reflected “el alma de su gente, su sentir, su vivir y su esperanza” (Soto Ramírez, 2003: 39), turning their works into “a vehicle for political and social expression” (Arreola, 1984: 409), which took “an affirmative stance celebrating race, ethnicity, and class” (Goldman, 1990b: 167).

The Chicano muralist tradition⁶ is primarily linked to pre-Columbian peoples of the Americas, who recorded their rituals and history on the walls of their pyramids (Holscher, 1976: 43). This influence was essential to the early thematic development of the Chicano artistic creations during *El Movimiento*. Secondly, it is connected to the “Hispanic culture that was introduced from Western Europe, especially in the decoration of church interiors” (Arreola, 1984: 409). A tradition that has been retained by Chicanos, who still paint the interiors of their restaurants or the exteriors of their business (Arreola, 1984: 410). Thirdly, this tradition also comes from Mexican revolutionary-era painters José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, collectively known as *los tres grandes*, who painted murals sponsored by the Mexican revolutionary government (Palomo Acosta, 2003: 1). In parallel to the Mexican case, Chicano murals made visible models and historical events relevant to the community.

However, whereas Mexican murals resulted from well-funded governmental projects to embellish official buildings, Chicano murals were created in the barrios of the inner cities, where the disfavored lived. Sidewalks, freeway bridges, fences and the walls of retail establishments, grocery stores, eateries, public-housing projects and community centers were used by Chicano muralists as blackboards to antagonize the *status quo*, and to “paint up the ugliness of the city” (Simpson, 1980: 521). Mexican Americans visited these places, observed the murals on their walls,

discussed matters related to their content (Kang, and Gammel, 2011: 267), and saw in them a way of reclaiming their denied self-pride, cultural heritage, socio-political presence, and economic empowerment. Murals helped Chicanos to distinguish themselves from mainstream American culture (LaWare, 1998: 141), and to save their barrios from "outsider interests, local speculators, crime, and neglect" (Cordova, 2006: 360).

A characteristic of the Chicano muralist movement is that the artistic results were not the expression of an individual or personal voice, but of a collective one. Especially during *El Movimiento*, local residents joined the artists in the discussion of the content and even in the making-of the murals as "*un nuevo arte del pueblo*" (Ybarra-Frausto, 1990: 57). Professional artists and non-artist worked together to design and paint the walls through which Chicanos would speak to their community, but also to the Anglo majority and the entire world. "This element of community participation," say Sperling and Barnet (1990: 9-10), "the placement of murals on exterior walls in the community itself, and the philosophy of community input, that is, the right of a community to decide on what kind of art it wants, characterized the new muralism." Lacking whatever interest in any formalist experimentation that did not contribute to the community's interests, Chicano muralists were "the artistic counterparts of the student and youth movements which undertook the task of 'changing the world'" (Goldman, 1990a: 24).

Rather than signifying artistic accomplishment,⁷ in many cases reached, Chicano murals stood as a testament to the capacity of Mexican Americans "to organize, plan and direct themselves toward the process of social change and the production of art, including the reconstruction of meaning of their exploited and abused ethnic pre-Chicano period imagery" (Sánchez-Tranquilino, 1990: 93). Curiously, the Chicano muralist movement, affirms Sánchez-Tranquilino (1990: 92), was portrayed by the Anglo-dominated mass media as a "colorful attempt to reclaim the decaying American urbanscape. Murals were to be understood mostly as environmental change and not as art." Despite these sectarian Anglo opinions, through their murals, Chicano artists were able to demonstrate their artistic capacity vis-à-vis Anglo cultural practices, as well as to show their personal and political needs. The painting of thousands of murals throughout the Southwest helped to

demystify the Anglos' notion that Chicanos lacked both history and culture.

It is evident that in the early period (from 1969 to 1975) aesthetic considerations were not the primary goal of Chicano muralists. These artists attempted to create "a code of visual signification that was meaningful, commonly understood, and collectively validated" (Ybarra-Frausto, 1990: 56). As such, they became educators and solidarity builders who showed their people how Mexican Americans contributed not only to American society, but also to humankind; an aspect systematically denied by the Anglo-American majority. The images of their murals highlighted the discredited pre-Columbian cultures with a twofold objective: a) "to show historical continuity and cultural legitimacy" (Sánchez-Tranquilino, 1990: 92); and b) to reflect a mestizo heritage that rejected "Spanish colonialism as much as United States imperialism" (Cordova, 2006: 373). The muralist production of this early stage combined demands for social and economic advancement with nationalistic and identity concerns. Ideas clearly developed by *El Movimiento*.

From mid- to late 1970s, murals continued to be "a mirror of social conditions and group consciousness for the Mexican American community" (Arreola, 1984: 424), but they received much more institutional sponsorship. Federal, state and local governments employed them to revitalize urban spaces, both public and private, and as constructive youth activities. City programs were developed to provide spaces for young artists; national conferences of community muralists were supported to increase communication between artists of different ethnic and racial origins; and several books about murals were published (Sperling, and Barnet, 1990: 12). In this second stage, muralists transcended the identity question to grapple with more general themes, looking for an aesthetic value that had been postponed in the first period. Not only that, Chicano murals influenced so much of the international artistic panorama that they helped to make the Southwest, and specifically Los Angeles, California, one of the most important centers of mural production in the world (Correll 2014: 285).

Since the 1980s mainstream institutions have given greater recognition to Chicano art and murals despite the strong political content always present in these works. Other areas of the country, like Chicago, also with a significant Mexican American population, joined the Southwest as

epicenters of mural production, while including other Latino groups. This is also the case of Philadelphia. After the year 2000, the city has seen a proliferation of Latino street art that has revitalized ethnic pride, erected pan-Latino relationships, and given barrio residents a sense of achievement and self-respect, especially the youth and the disenfranchised. For Van Dahm, this demonstrates that "art has immense power when it escapes the gallery and takes a role in social justice" (2015: 431). It is undeniable that new focuses have caught the attention of Chicano and Latino muralists, yet, the political, social, economic and cultural content of their murals is still greatly influenced by "a cultural and political consciousness developed in the earlier days of the Movement" (Sánchez-Tranquilino, 1990: 100).

3. WALL MURALS IN NORTHERN IRELAND: LOYALISM V. REPUBLICANISM

The tradition of political wall murals in Northern Ireland cannot be understood outside the history⁸ of the country and the relationship between the two larger communities that populate it, Catholics and Protestants. One of the most notable characteristics of Northern Ireland is its residential segregation, which has served as a sectarian division of the territory following religious lines that, eventually, turned political. In cities such as Belfast and Londonderry, this separation has been physically enhanced through the construction of walls to avoid violence between the two groups. Concomitantly, these walls have been used by loyalists (mostly Protestants and defenders of remaining within the United Kingdom) and republicans (mostly Catholics and defenders of becoming part of the Republic of Ireland) to express their political ideas and to state their aspirations. As Sluka (1992: 191) and Goalwin (2013: 189) explain, the messages conveyed in these walls have functioned as both internal and external propaganda, being directed to the people of Northern Ireland as well as the outside world.

As in the Chicano case, Northern Irish murals from both communities have served to establish social cohesion and to produce group identity filled with a sense of tradition that, McQuaid (2017: 35) states, has been associated with "crucial events and historical personages." In Northern Ireland, however, the need of attaching collective ethnic memories to the territory and its control, what Anthony

D. Smith (qtd. in McQuaid, 2017: 35) calls the 'territorialization of memory,' is the result of two competing ideologies that have tried to legitimize their discourse and disavow the adversary's. Thus, republican and loyalist have manipulated cultural and national myths related to the history of Northern Ireland to support each side's ideology (Goalwin, 2013: 192). Along with the paramilitary tactics derived from what has been known as *The Troubles*, cultural practices such as painting walls became another way of gaining support within the more moderate sides of unionists and nationalists, especially during the 1980s and 1990s with the intensification of the conflict. Although nowadays these two groups of paintings still coexist, their origin and development has been dissimilar.

The loyalist paintings date back to the beginning of the 20th century, to 1908, when a picture of William III of Orange appeared on a wall on the Beersbridge Road, in East Belfast (Rolston, 2003: 28). With the formation of the overwhelming protestant and unionist Northern Irish state, in the early twenties, the murals displaying King William at the Battle of the Boyne (1690) were the most frequent and increased with the passage of time. As Jarman states, "they helped to transform 'areas where Protestants lived' into 'Protestant areas'" (1998: 84). Loyalist murals of this initial period were mostly limited to the Twelfth celebrations and the marching seasons. But with the Catholic civil rights movement of the 1960s, the terrorist actions committed by the IRA, the direct rule imposed from London, and the rapid growth of the republican mural tradition in the 1980s, "loyalist murals began to proliferate and move beyond their traditional role" (Goalwin, 2013: 198).

Rolston explains that during the 1970s and 1980s, the commonest murals were those displaying inanimate objects –e.g. flags or heraldic symbols–, most of them epitomizing loyalism (2003: 29). Paradoxically enough, despite being one of the periods of the highest levels of violence, there were not many paramilitary images. However, due to the discrepancy with the Anglo-Irish Agreement signed in 1985 that gave a consultative place to the Irish Republic in the government of Northern Ireland, military icons started to be very prominent. Men posing with guns, frequently hooded, weapons and other violent icons were part of very bleak and frightening murals (Rolston, 1995: iii). With the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, the social and political situation in Northern Ireland

changed even more (Geoghegan, 2008: 185), but muralists continued to highlight military actions, including dead comrades and some other casualties of the war. The impression is that, as Anderson and Conlon (2013: 41) assure, the "conflict-and-blame" murals of both sides still dominate the country.

The republican wall painting tradition is more recent, and it is related to a sense of historical grievance that can be traced back to the 17th century when Scottish and English plantations started in Ulster. During the unionist governments that dominated the country since partition (1921), Catholics were socially segregated, economically discriminated, and their culture and identity, although palpable, were basically hidden. Their place was private rather than public, which explains the lack of murals (Rolston, 1997-1998: 14-15). Nevertheless, the self-assurance of the unionists during the Stormont parliament began to emerge for the nationalists in the 80s, with the hunger strike of 1981 that asked for political status for the, considered by the republicans, prisoners of war. It resulted in the death of ten prisoners, being Bobby Sands the most famous of them, which brought republicans great publicity and support inside and outside Northern Ireland.

After the deaths, people were launched into the streets in support of the prisoners and some slogans appeared. These became more elaborate and turned, at the end, into murals that displayed the strikers as victors and often surrounded by religious symbology (Rolston, 1997-1998: 15). After the strike, issues as the Sinn Féin electoral involvement, army and police repression, history and international affairs were depicted. Military murals were noteworthy as well, but they were not as aggressive as the loyalist ones (Rolston, 2003: 30-31). Murals also reflected how Republicanism emerged as an ideology of national liberation, connected with other peoples around the world who have experienced "imperialism, colonialism and state repression or who struggle for national self-determination, independence, and socialism" (Rolston, 2009: 448-449). Finally, during the peace process, like loyalists, republican murals commemorated the deaths of civilians and people who died for the cause. However, and contrary to their rivals, the peace process was reflected on their walls through issues such as the disbandment of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), the release of prisoners or the demilitarization of the country.

Since 1998, Northern Ireland has seen an enduring but fragile peace that has attracted a lot of foreign money thanks to technology companies, filmmaking (TV shows like *Game of Thrones*) and tourism. Many of the murals painted during *The Troubles* have disappeared and those remaining have turned into tourist attractions. New murals have been painted, even by former members of paramilitary organizations in both sides, promoting "health and harmony," say Anderson and Conlon (2013: 39), but they "lack the conviction and aesthetic power of the old murals born out of conflict and competitive identities." The intention has been to eradicate the images of the conflict from the minds of the Northern Irish, who lived through it, and from new generations. If during the 20th century murals "played a critical role in the strategies of organizations that were locked in a vicious physical and ideological struggle for power" (Goalwin, 2013: 214), present-day Northern Ireland is then becoming a multicultural country, with a society much more diverse than before the peace agreements.

The 2011 census revealed that Catholics constitute 45 percent of the population, whereas the Protestant 'majority' represents 48 percent of the country. Eventually, if the current birthrate continues, in a few years Catholics will outnumber Protestants. Yet, the amount of Northern Irish with no faith or of a different one has also increased. As Cejka (2017: 18) confirms, 10 percent of the population, according to the census, is immigrant (Romanians, South Africans, Filipinos, Moroccans, Indonesians, Pakistani, Lithuanians, Polish and Portuguese among others), and they have little interest in the sectarian divides that have preoccupied the republican and loyalist communities. These facts have logically affected the 'war of walls' between both sides. After the peace agreement, some murals have been jointly painted by republican and loyalist artists. It does not mean that *The Troubles* and the murals produced during that period can completely be whitewashed. But the latest murals portraying a much more diverse Northern Ireland, with the faces of the newcomers, "their cultures and their dreams for the future are, in turn, opening doors to peace" (Cejka, 2017: 18).

4. THEMES IN THE CHICANO MURAL PRODUCTION

For Chicano muralists, communicating to reinforce ethnic identity has been a primary goal. These artists have been able to convey meanings through walls,

making use of the old and devising new images and iconography. We should not forget that, as Goldman (1990a: 26) has said, in representational art "the theme (or subject), as well as the iconography, are the means by which communication is established." At the same time, form and the ways in which color, line, shape, space, value, scale, placement, and framing are used, or the degree to which objects are naturally depicted or expressively disfigured have been used by muralists to communicate and instruct. Through their works, Chicano muralists have tried to 'teach' Mexican Americans about their past, present and future. But this teaching is not a close one. On the contrary, with their works, these artists "dejan un diálogo abierto con el espectador para que se preste a comentarios, controversia y hacer conciencia de la realidad en la que viven" (Soto Ramírez, 2003: 39).

The murals painted during the 60s and 70s were politically conditioned by their intention to argue "against assimilation, against colonialism, and in support of indigenous, pan-Latino, and Third World coalitions" (Cordova, 2006: 375). They were the result of the exchange between the ideological and political struggle of *El Movimiento* against the Anglo dominant society, and the Chicano authors' abilities to illustrate or give artistic form, as their contribution, to that power struggle. Although these first murals lacked drawing, composing or even painting skills, this responded to which Ybarra-Frausto has defined as *rasquachismo*, or "the process of molding worthiness out of perceived deficiencies" (1989: 7). The themes in these early murals, recreated and projected issues that helped to construct, defend, and unify the Mexican American community.

Goldman (1990a: 29-30) has proposed twelve, Holscher (1976: 45-52) four, Cordova (2006: 374) four, and Van Dahm (2015: 424) six flexible thematic categories for the Chicano mural production. Themes that, with variations, were used in the early stage and the following ones. For the purposes of this article, we will be using Goldman's categorization, but complementing it with the other three. Chicano mural themes would be:

(1) Religion: Living in a syncretic world, Chicanos employed pre-Columbian religious topics to stress their non-European racial and cultural history. This would include the representation of: (a) deities such as Quetzalcóatl, Ehecatl, Mictlantecuhtli or Tlaloc; (b) signs and symbols like the Aztec 'Calendar Stone'

or the Chac Mool; and (c) pre-Columbian rituals, pyramids and temples. Being raised as Catholics, which linked Chicanos to their European and Conquistador identity, was also visually represented in their murals. Chicano muralists depicted Christian elements such as: churches, altars, the crucified Christ and/or crosses, bleeding or flaming hearts, thorns and bishops and parish priests (very often sardonically). Probably one of the most syncretic images is that of the Virgin of Guadalupe, a clear representation of the mestizo character of *La Raza*, and who exemplified "concepts of group identity and class struggle" (Arreola, 1984: 418).

(2) Indigenous motifs: The topics included in this section were also an alternative to the dominant historiography that undermined Native values when compare to European ones. Aztlán, the mythical land of the Mexica, and pre-Columbian warriors were represented, but also the tripartite head (Indian on the left, Spanish on the right, and Mestizo/Chicano in the middle), or contemporary Native American figures. They were the answer to the urge to establish a strong heritage and a heroic mythology (Goldman, 1990b: 168).

(3) Historical events: Here we would find figures of pre-Columbian rulers and Mesoamerican warriors like Moctezuma, but also Spanish conquistadors, like Cortez; the American occupation of the Southwest and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo; and the Mexican Revolution.

(4) Modern portraits: They would incorporate influential individuals from the history of México, for example Father Miguel Hidalgo, Benito Juárez, 'Pancho' Villa, Emiliano Zapata, or 'Las Adelitas,' which stressed that Chicanos were not only the sons and daughters of Indian royalty and Spanish Conquistadors, but also of patriots and revolutionaries. They would also include portraits of more contemporary leaders such as Ernesto 'Ché' Guevara, John F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King. And finally, Chicano leaders like César Chávez and Reies López Tijerina, who became symbols "in the struggle against economic, social, and political discrimination" (Holscher, 1976: 49).

(5) Political and social emphasis: Due to the political and social content of *El Movimiento*, some mural issues were related to: (a) local matters: education as the key to confront Anglo ethnocentrism; health care and portraits of community people who served as examples for the barrios; police brutality and clashes with police forces; drug abuse and prison

conditions; 'home boys,' and 'home girls;' gang warfare and gang pride manifested in paintings that evoked deceased members, but also images "to end the battles and stop the bloodshed, and join together as 'carnales'" (Holscher, 1976: 49). (b) National issues: the strikes, marches, boycotts of the United Farm Workers (UFW); working conditions of Chicanos and Mexican migrant workers; caricatures of 'Uncle Sam;' a paramilitary self-defense Chicano group called 'the Brown Berets.' And (c) international issues: images of US military actions abroad; guerillas in the Third World; the war in Vietnam; and the celebration of Latino cultures.

(6) Non-religious symbols: Caught in a bicultural world, Chicano murals used symbols to present the influence of the Mexican and the Anglo-American culture on them. An example of this would be the use of flags: the American and the Mexican together, or the use of the Bald Eagle of the United States, the Brown Eagle of Mexico, and the UFW Black Eagle. Other flags would include those of the UFW, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Pan-African. More symbols in this category would be the scales of justice, tomb stones, hearts, feathers, broken and unbroken chains, mirrors, animated skeletons and skulls; atomic symbols; suns and sun symbols; fire; extended hands and clenched fists; moons; bags of gold; and dollars.

(7) Landscapes, flora and fauna: One characteristic of this period was "the incorporation of local landmarks and the use of place-specific themes" (Arreola, 1984: 418). Chicano murals incorporated environmental themes like: images of volcanoes, mountains covered with snow, deserts; cactus plants (nopal or prickly pear, and maguey), palm trees, corn plants; wildlife scenes (some disapproving whales killing); and environmental pollution and the greenhouse effect.

(8) Decorative motifs: Supergraphics and geometric abstractions; pre-Columbian geometric forms used decoratively; organic abstractions; and decorations from Mexican folk art.

(9) Family: The representation of families in many social situations was related to the ideas of 'Chicanismo and carnalismo,' which associated Chicanos as a community or a big family troubled by the same problems and worries.

(10) Urban culture: Images of 'vatos,' 'huisas,' 'low-riders,' 'pachucos/as' and

cholos/as,' graffiti, cityscapes, skyscrapers, barrio homes, and freeways.

(11) Legendary or mythical figures: Pictures of 'la Llorona,' Superman, Popocatepl and Ixtaccihuatl (Mexican volcanoes).

(12) Texts: Words and phrases used to illustrate the topic of the mural like manifestos, titles, names of personalities, historical and contemporary documents, poems, and slogans like 'Viva la Raza,' 'End Barrio Warfare' or 'Con Safos'.

After the 1970s, Chicano muralists abandoned the more militant images and iconography and began to create more 'acceptable' representations of Chicano demands. This change coincided with the artistic consolidation of many muralists thanks to governmental grants. With their turn to 'respectability,' Chicano mural artists began to restrain their murals' thematic content, which led to the "subtle, and not so subtle, censorship and to self-censorship in the form of decorative solutions to murals" (Goldman, 1990a: 53). The newest murals won artistic value, but lost political strength. And in this process of institutionalization, Chicano murals became tourist attractions of cities like Los Angeles or San Diego, in California, or Tucson in Arizona (Sperling, "Contradiction": 5). Chicano muralists, then, explored issues that did not have "an immediate Mexican American ethnic focus," says Arreola (1984: 423), and they tried to connect the traditional Chicano iconography with topics that involved mankind in general. This led to the "appearance of Chicano mural art outside barrios and a quest for recognition from viewers who are not Mexican American" (Arreola, 1984: 423).

Early in September 2017, a huge toddler picture overlooking the US-Mexican border wall in Tecate was made by French artist JR with the intention of opening a debate over immigration. In the Trump Era, the 20 meter boy rapidly caught the attention of world-wide media. It was not the first example of this sort. Across the border cities, some of the walls built to physically separate the US and Mexico has served to the painting of murals that denounce US immigration policies. This is the case of the "Mural de la Hermandad," running from San Diego to Tijuana, whose objective is to bring some happiness to the sadness that the wall represents for immigrants. We can state that current Chicano murals continue to be a very good example of how a landscape, being the barrio or the border,

still “functions as an enculturating medium to strengthen group memory” (Arreola, 1984: 417). Recent Chicano murals on the walls, doors, and windows of restaurants, butcher shops corner markets, bakeries, and mobile food trucks of the barrios, or in the fences that separate Mexico from the US still represent “a cultural repertoire laden with social implications, personal meanings, and shared aesthetic values” (Correll, 2014: 286).

5. THEMES IN NORTHERN IRISH MURALS

In Northern Ireland, due to the different origin and development of the murals as well as the political commitment of the loyalists and the republicans, muralists of both communities depicted unlike thematic contents. However, the artists of both groups tried with their works to advance their political aspirations and gather greater support for their causes. In fact, loyalist murals exhibited the clear intention of evoking “images of a glorious and dominant unionist past” and of conveying “the historical legitimacy of the unionist presence in Northern Ireland as well as its hegemony and control of society” (Goalwin, 2013: 195). On the contrary, republican murals expressed a wide variety of themes which were grounded on the need to voice resistance and to assert that the republican movement -in all its spheres, including the military actions, - was in Northern Ireland to remain (Goalwin, 2013: 195).

To make a list of both loyalist and republican themes, we have mostly followed the divisions made by Rolston in his book *Drawing Support 2* and Goalwin’s article “The Art of War: Instability, Insecurity, and Ideological Imagery in Northern Ireland’s Political Murals, 1979-1998.”

On the loyalist side, themes would involve:

1) History: The depiction of historical events connecting Northern Ireland with the United Kingdom like The Battle of the Somme during World War I (1916), the Siege of Derry (1689) and the Battle of the Boyne (1690), or the celebrations for the formation of paramilitary groups.

2) Inanimate icons: The representation of flags, crests, and coats of arms of loyalist groups, like the Red hand of Ulster, the Union Jack, the Ulster Flag, the Flag of St. Andrew, St. George Cross, the orange sash, or the Crown as symbolic expressions of identity. Other images like the shamrock,

the white ribbon or the harp were also represented, yet they make a body of symbols shared by the two communities.

3) Messages and slogans: Loyalist and republican murals have commonality, in that they “combine specific verbal messages about nationality and territoriality with polysemous visual messages” (Santino, 2001: 37). Therefore, it is recurrent the mixture of loyalist and republican slogans and messages with some of the other themes. Some examples of loyalist words are: “Some Gave All, All Gave Somme,” “Tomorrow belongs to us,” “Still under siege/ No surrender,” “Ulster says no,” “We will never accept a united Ireland” or “Ulster is British.”

4) Military: The portrayal of members of paramilitary groups, such as the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) or the Red Hand Commando (RHC), in action or posing with weapons. These threatening murals would contain hooded men or well-known people that have fought for the loyalist cause.

5) Memorials: To remember both well-known and unknown characters like King Billy, Trevor King (UVF), Billy Wright, Aidrian Porter and Mark Fulton (LVF), Brig. J. McMichael (Ulster Defence Association (UDA)) or William Campbell (UFF); War World I soldiers; and civilians.

6) Peace process and ceasefire: Images of the release and support of prisoners during and after *The Troubles*.

7) Mythology: Fabulous beings such as Cú Cuchulainn and Finn McCool.

8) Humor: The use of cartoon characters like Bart Simpson, Tom and Jerry or Spike.

On the republican side, topics would include:

1) History: Although historical events important for Republicanism as testimonies of resistance to British authority were depicted, like the Penal Law Times (1685-1829), the Rebellion of the United Irishmen (1798), the Great Famine (1845-50), or the Easter Rising (1916), republican murals focused much more on *The Troubles* and their continuous struggle against unionists and the British. Thus, the Battle of the Bogside (1969), the Bloody Sunday (1972), or the Hunger Strike (1981), which

"remains sacrosanct" (Crowley, 2015: 70), occupied most of the republican mural historiography.

2) Inanimate icons: Symbols inherent to Republicanism such as flags –the Tricolor, the Four Provinces of Ireland Flag, Sunburst *Fiana na hÉireann* flag or the Starry Plough of James Connolly's Irish Citizen Army, the green ribbon, the Celtic cross or the orange sunburst.

3) Messages and slogans: Some of the republican messages are the following: "Re-Route Sectarian Marches," "Time for Peace, Time to Go," "End Collusion. Release POWs," "Disband the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the Royal Irish Regiment (RIR)," "End Unionist Veto," "Slan Abhaile. Fag ar Sraideanna" (Safe Home. Leave our Streets), and "Partition has Failed. End British Rule Now."

4) Military: Representations of members of the paramilitary organizations, weapons, and armed struggle itself.

5) Memorials: Some murals have been turned into shrines for the fallen in the conflict, like the murals that remember Patrick Pearse, Wolfe Tone, James Connolly; Bobby Sands or the blanketmen; the New Lodge Six; and IRA volunteers such as Martin McDonagh, Louis Scullion or Francis Liggett.

6) British army and police repression: Violence exercised against republicans by the RUC, the RIR or the British Army.

7) Peace process and ceasefire: Images related to peace, the disbandment of the RUC, the departure of the British soldiers, or the release of republican prisoners.

8) Elections: Murals demanding support for the Sinn Féin and Gerry Adams, or on the cancellation of the Elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly by British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

9) Mythology: Irish mythical characters such as Cú Chulainn, King Nuada of the Tuatha dé Danaan or the Queen Ériu.

10) International relations: Connections with other revolutionary movements (i.e. Euskadi, Catalonia, Palestine or Namibia) and civil rights movements around the world (Cashman, 2008: 368), for example, the American Indians, the African Americans or the Australian Aborigines.

As has been explained, loyalist and republican murals were a result and, in some cases, a response to the changes of the Northern Irish situation. By looking at them, one can achieve the picture of a society that was in conflict, in which two communities were fighting for opposing objectives. They were part of the politics of the place, but they have also attracted many tourists and researchers. Considering them as separate entities, several critics have pointed out the non-evolution and lack of diversity of themes in loyalist murals.⁹ For instance, Rolston pinpoints that whilst republicans wall paintings looked to the future, loyalists focused on the past (2003: 38). In a similar light, Woods is the opinion that republican murals were more varied because they were not only concerned with the past (*Seeing is Believing*). Besides, some murals relied on republicans demands the loyalist did not make. Connected with this idea, one of the most salient differences for Rolston is the "relative flexibility" of the republican murals and the "inflexibility" of the loyalist ones regarding the repertoire of themes displayed as well as the style (1997-1998: 25). For Sluka, lastly, the loyalists were the result of "a dominant or hegemonic culture" whereas the republicans were the product of a "culture of resistance" (1992: 190).

6. CONCLUSION

The muralists of the three groups analyzed coincide in the presentation of historical events as a means to teach their communities. 'The Battle of Boyne', the siege of 'Derry', the 'Bloody Sunday', 'The Hunger Strike of 1981', 'The Mexican Revolution' and the American conquest of the Southwest have been employed to historically position the communities against their adversaries (i.e. British, Irish, or Anglo Americans). At the same time, these topics have showed pride in their participation during these events. Modern portraits of relevant personalities that have played a significant role for their 'cause' –even giving up their lives for it–, are presented as contemporary heroes and tokens to be imitated by the rest of the population.

Within the political and social themes, one aspect that has greatly caught our attention is the portrayal of paramilitary self-defense groups. Especially during *El Movimiento* and *The Troubles*, these groups were presented as defenders of the more radical visions against injustice or menace to their communities. Another political and

social aspect is the demand of freedom for 'prisoners' of the three groups as a sign of communal support. Emblems and propagandistic symbols show up in many murals, although obviously, thematically they are different for they are addressed to specific targets. Shields of arms, flags, guns, rifles, etc. are employed to manifest allegiance to the 'cause' and to emphasize the more militant actions. Legendary and mythical figures are utilized as glorious reminiscences of the past that transmit both cultural and nationalist sentiments. And, finally, texts, slogans, historical documents, etc. appear in the murals of the three communities as throwing political weapons against rivals or to inspire their own people in their feuds.

There are thematic differences in the wall paintings of Chicanos, loyalists and republicans. One of them is religion. Even though the Northern Irish conflict lays part of its remote foundations on religion –Protestants and Catholics–, this topic is not preponderant in their murals. However, religion and religious artifacts, both Pre-Columbian and Catholic, are depicted in Chicano creations in order to assert their mestizo (Indian and Spanish) cultural identity and tradition. For obvious reasons, indigenous motifs, that emphasize the Indian origin of Chicanos, only appear in this community's murals, although, it is also possible to see Celtic elements in the republican creations. The use of familiar landscapes, flora, fauna and Native American decoration motifs by Chicano muralists try to accentuate Mexican Americans' right to be in the Southwest, which once was part of the mythical Aztlan and belonged to the Mexican Republic. Loyalists and republicans concentrate more on the political aspect of their conflict, generally avoiding the focus on art for its own sake –an aspect that could be studied in the future.

Another difference, as Sperling ("Contradiction": 2) has stated, is that Chicano muralists have paid attention to "internal problems like gang violence, drugs and other self-destructive behavior attributed to racism and poverty." These urban evils are not reflected in Northern Irish murals, because their key element is the conflict between both communities rather than their own particular problems. Therefore, issues such as the peace process, the ceasefire or elections permeate some of their creative works. The last difference we would like to call attention to is that, though references to international conflicts appear in both the Chicano and republican

muralist traditions, to our knowledge, only the latter has mentioned the former. The reason might be that Chicano murals tend to give more emphasis to Third World conflicts, particularly those in which the US has been militarily involved, than to European nationalist confrontations.

Despite the geographical, historical and cultural distance between Chicanos and Northern Irish, wall paintings constitute a fundamental propagandistic weapon for the three communities. In this article we have focused on the historical evolution and the thematic representations with the objective of finding similarities and differences in their muralist creations. Firstly, we can conclude that the three muralist manifestations are political, ideological and culturally committed constructs that have varied with the pass of time. Secondly, that they present thematic similarities in terms of socio-political aspects and cultural self-determination. And thirdly, that apart from the propagandistic function of murals in the three cases, it is possible to find non-politically biased murals essentially in the Chicano case, where artistic values are more important than political, combative messages. In any case, wall paintings will almost certainly continue being a tremendously important artifact in the defense of cultural identity for the three groups.

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NOTES

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² "The loyalist tradition of mural creation dates back all the way to 1908. Mural painting was a traditional part of the unionist celebration of The Twelfth, a commemoration of the Protestant victory over Catholicism at the Battle of the Boyne on the 12th of July 1690" (Goalwin, 2013: 197).

³ "The Chicano street art movement is considered to have originated in 1967, in Venice, California, and from there spread quickly to the barrios of East Los Angeles" (Simpson, 1980: 516).

⁴ "In 1981, there was an explosion of mural painting in republican communities. The trigger was a hunger strike undertaken by republican prisoners demanding to be treated (as they had been previously) as politically motivated detainees rather

than common criminals" (Rolston "The Brothers", 1988: 456).

⁵ The Chicano Movement started along with the African American demands for Civil Rights in America. Those Mexican Americans who were part of *El Movimiento* shared a broad consensus on the idea of a perceptible economic, political, social and cultural discrimination against the Hispanic population of the United States. During the 1970s, *El Movimiento* lost much of its strength, but it has maintained since then a historical relevance for Chicanos for a simple reason: it encouraged the growth of a Chicano activism that was still much combatant than the existing before the demonstrations of the 60s. With the vanishing of The Movement, many of its leaders rejected expressions of radicalism, prioritizing other issues such as voter registration, political participation and lobbying. See Cañero, 2017: 112-113.

⁶ Chicano murals are examples of the capacity of Chicano artists to freely combine the creative practices of their cultural precedents through a process of hybridization, juxtaposition and integration, which eventually turned into a form of resistance. See Gunckel, 2015: 394-395.

⁷ As Holscher (1976: 43) defends, many of the murals "are outstanding in terms of color, line, and depth. Others are amateurish, with figures and scenes oversimplified or out of proportion; some are mere copies of famous murals in Mexico. Of most interest is the intent which lies behind the painting of the murals."

⁸ Northern Irish murals "constitute a complex, changing, fascinating body of public art that brings an added element to the understanding of the conflict in Northern Ireland and the 'peace' that has followed. Taken together, these materials provide an important record that renders significant insights into the complicated and strange history of Northern Ireland as it has passed from a state of war to the unstable and as yet precarious 'peace process'" (Crowley, 2015: 58).

⁹ We are aware of some critic opinions that are against this assertion, for example Goalwin who states that unlike the loyalist murals, "there was very little progression over time in the themes chosen by republican muralists" (2013: 206). On the contrary, says this author, there was a historical progression in the use of themes by loyalists. Thus, "images of historical events were most common in the early loyalist murals, created during the 1970s and early 1980s; more explicitly threatening images of paramilitaries during

the mid1980s; and the crests of their organizations in the 1990s predominated as the conflict intensified" (199-200).

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