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‘Painting Peace? Belfast Murals and the Northern Ireland Peace Process’

Like other parts of Northern Ireland, in the last forty years’ Belfast’s urban architecture has reflected the vicissitudes of the ‘Troubles’ and, latterly, the Peace Process. This paper will focus on one manifestation of this: the elaborate republican and loyalist murals that adorn the gable walls of homes mainly in publicly-owned housing estates, and which proliferated from the early 1980s onwards. The character of these murals, especially in loyalist areas, did not change that much in the immediate aftermath of the 1994 republican and loyalist ceasefires, but in recent years both the host communities and statutory agencies have made efforts to try to make the mural landscape of Belfast less martial and hence more reflective of the wider contemporary politics of Northern Ireland. This paper will focus on some of these recent initiatives, and discuss the implications of state intervention in an area where local political activists previously had almost unchallenged autonomy.