

Institute of Art Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire Faculty of Design & Visual Arts.

**“Marking Your Territory: An exploration of the implementation
of Art and Symbolism in conflict areas as a means of subversive
communication.”**

By Jamie Howard

Submitted to the Department of Design & Visual Arts in candidacy.

for the Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree in Visual Art practice with Sculpture

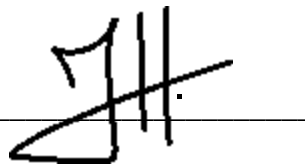
2024

Declaration of Originality

This dissertation is submitted by the undersigned to the Institute of Art Design & Technology, Dun Laoghaire in partial fulfilment of the examination for the BA (Hons) in Art. It is entirely the author's own work except where noted and has not been submitted for an award from this or any other educational institution.

Student Number N00202561

Signed _____

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'H' followed by a vertical line and a horizontal line crossing through them.

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Supervisors: Aoife Herrity and Siobhan O’Gorman.

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I am thankful to my family and friends for their unwavering support and encouragement. Their belief in me has allowed me to pursue these lines of enquiry even further and I deeply appreciate their love and encouragement.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge the artists and activists whose work inspired this thesis, as well as the communities impacted by conflict whose stories deserve to be heard and amplified. It is my hope that this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the transformative power of art in areas of conflict and serves as a testament to the resilience and creativity of those who continue to strive for peace and justice.

Abstract:

Often cities and towns are marked by their inhabitants, these markings tell a story and give an honest uninterrupted insight into the mindset and motivations of the people in that region in numerous ways including through their customs, culture, architecture, and infrastructure.

These markings can provide a glimpse into the history and values of the community and can help others understand what makes that place unique or significant.

In many ways, these markings can be seen as a poem or journal that an area writes to itself, a story written through and by the people who have lived in that place and shaped it over time.

By attention to these markings, we can gain a deeper understanding of a community's unique character and identity and appreciate the diversity of human experience around the world.

This thesis will focus on the occupied West Bank in the Palestine-Israeli conflict and draw a parallel with The Troubles in Northern Ireland.

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INTRODUCTION

It is worth noting that my focus began months before the conflict as the separation wall and the ongoing conflict has been an area of interest to me for some period, both the proposal and foundation of this thesis was conceived between May and October 2023.

In late September 2023 less than 2 weeks before the Hamas incursion into Israeli kibbutz and military bases killing 1200 people, I had the opportunity to visit the state of Israel, Palestine, and the Kingdom of Jordan as part of my research. Traveling to places such as Tel Aviv, Ashkelon & Ber Sheba near the Gaza border, the Golan Heights and occupied east Jerusalem, and deep into the West Bank this was a profound experience, and provided insight into the conflict and culture of both areas I could never have gained had I not had the chance to see and hear first-hand how life works and the motivations of art being produced in this deeply complex set of circumstances.

The way the conflict has developed in the months after my visit has not only made my work highly relevant but also more complex as every day there are more and more elements that are worth shining a light on not only in a humanitarian sense but the art and particularly symbolism has become a defining feature of the conflict as a means of asserting identity and territorial control for both sides of the conflict.

This thesis will not focus on the current situation in Gaza as I realize that it is a highly sensitive subject and my views or opinions on the current situation may have the effect of oversaturating the conversation instead my goal is to focus on sharing both the history around these symbols and my experience to share some of the knowledge gained through this first-hand examination of how living and practicing in areas of conflict such as the occupied Palestinian West Bank and the Gaza Strip along the Israel separation border, with parallel to

the Peace walls in Belfast and Derry and how these conditions manifest in the artworks with particular attention to how these artworks and murals are used as a means of political communication and social commentary.

I will explore the role of guerrilla art and symbolism in the highly contentious areas on both sides of the conflict, with special attention to how they are used to represent both the hopes and struggles of the communities living in these areas. This also formed a large part of my research.

In the West Bank on the border between Gaza and Israel, the use of walls as canvas and the painting of murals and symbols have become an important tool in the Palestinian struggle for independence and sovereignty. The murals here are often highly political, with captions and imagery expressing their struggle for independence and opposition to occupation. The walls here allow a canvas for messages, memorials, and murals all of which seek to represent a way for Palestinians and Israelis and supporters of the people to assert their cause and let their voices be heard in an area of constant debate and threat.

The peace walls in Belfast and murals in Derry are other important sites for politically charged murals painted by those who feel they are under oppression, the walls were built during the Troubles, a period of intense sectarian violence that lasted for over three decades in Northern Ireland.

Embarking on an exploration into the multifaceted relationship between art, conflict, and identity in two distinct regions that have been marked by a history of contention and division at its core, this research aims to unravel how living and practicing art in these areas, amidst the backdrop of conflict and division, profoundly influences the artistic output. Beginning in the Middle East.

CHAPTER 1

For context, I begin this chapter in occupied east Jerusalem in late September 2023 before the conflict erupted and at a point where unrest in Israel was civil due to internal government policies.

In the West Bank and along the Gaza-Israel border, the deployment of walls and the creation of murals have emerged as crucial instruments in the Palestinian struggle for independence and sovereignty. These murals and symbols are imbued with intense political significance, often adorned with poignant captions and imagery that vividly articulate both the Palestinian quest for self-determination and opposition to oppression and occupation along with the Jewish and pro-Israeli imagery on the opposing side of the border.

They frequently depict scenes and messages of unrest, prominently feature both the Palestinian and Israeli flags, and portray influential political messages, figures, symbols, and public opinions on both sides of the conflict such as the Star of David symbol in occupied East Jerusalem or the dozens of eyes painted in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Silwan gazing across at Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Old City of Jerusalem.



Fig 1 Jamie Howard, star of David graffiti in occupied East Jerusalem, 25th September 2023

Above is a reference image taken by me as part of my research in occupied East Jerusalem in September 2023, showing the Star of David scrawled in spray paint by Israeli settlers marking the site of the construction of a new Jewish apartment block in disputed territory ironically and shockingly similar to the ghettos of Europe in the 1940s where homes were marked with the star of David by SS and Nazi soldiers to identify Jewish residents for expulsion

To understand this graffiti and the symbolism behind the Star of David more specifically its origins and popular use leading to a better understanding of the context of its use in occupied east Jerusalem and other flashpoints in the region,

I found that The Star of David emerged in Jewish religious writings and artifacts as far back as the Middle Ages. In the 17th century, the Jewish community in Prague embraced the symbol, and by 1897, the Zionist movement had incorporated it into their flag. Presently, the Star of David is a prominent feature on the flag of the state of Israel.

“In the 19th century, the symbol began to be widely used by the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, ultimately coming to represent Jewish identity or religious beliefs.”¹

“It became representative of Zionism after it was chosen as the central symbol for a Jewish national flag at the First Zionist Congress in 1897.”²

And since then, has become integral to the Jewish people, making its way into the architecture of homes and buildings but its meaning and context has varied and been disputed throughout the past 150 years here are some examples of use and deeper context around its simultaneous use as both an artistic and oppressive symbol.

¹ "Star of David." Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. Accessed February 14, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_of_David#:~:text=In%20the%2019th%20century%2C%20the,First%20Zionist%20Congress%20in%201897.

² "Star of David: Overview & Symbolism." Study.com. Accessed February 14, 2024. <https://study.com/academy/lesson/star-of-david-overview-symbolism.html#:~:text=It%20began%20to%20appear%20in,David%20is%20on%20Israel's%20flag.>



Fig 2 Flag of the First Zionist Congress 1897.

“In the context of a recent, mildly critical interview about the political deadlock between Israel and the Palestinians, a former Israeli general, until recently the chief commander of the West Bank, claimed that the Israeli military has become world champions in occupation’ and has managed to turn its control of millions of Palestinian into ‘an art form’ ”³

This quote can provide some understanding into the attitudes and at times polar opposite perspectives on the issue as a whole with the IDF and Israelis claiming the symbol as

³ Shamir, U. (2018). *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. Verso.

https://www.google.ie/books/edition/Hollow_Land/IWvnDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0

representation of national pride and pioneering spirit, and Palestinians viewing the symbol as a marker of occupation and a symbolic assertion of dominance over them.

Taken directly from the preface to Eyal Weizman's book 'hollow Lands: Israel's Architecture of Occupation', this statement is paired with the following 2 reference images I've taken from an Israeli settlement within the West Bank near Jerusalem leaves the viewer no choice but to question the intent behind the symbolism and artistic expression of those responsible and when taking a closer look what at first glance could be legitimate nationalism and pride, there seems to be a deeper undercurrent of oppression and the need to 'Mark your territory' through the architecture and appearance of these areas.



Jamie Howard, oppressive architecture in Israeli settlement within occupied east Jerusalem

18th September 2023

Reference image 1/2 taken by me 18/09/2023 of Israeli settlement illegal under international law located in occupied east Jerusalem an area controlled since 1967 but formally annexed in 1980 when it was written to Jerusalem law, A basic (quasi-constitutional) law enacted by the Knesset on 30 July 1980, Which declared it to be the “complete and united” capital of Israel.



Fig 4 Jamie Howard, close-up example oppressive architecture in Israeli settlement within occupied east Jerusalem 18th September 2023

Close-up of the same Reference image 2/2 taken by me 18/09/2023 of the same Israeli settlement with red circles highlighting the depth of symbolism and political artistic expression within the ‘architecture of occupation’ found in these settlements which are illegal according to international law.

I felt it is also worth noting that I did find contradictions to the origins and symbolism according to Shoah Resource Centre, Yad Vashem which is the national holocaust museum and resource centre. who states in a paper on the official site titled “Badge, Jewish”⁴

⁴ Yad Vashem. "The Holocaust: A Learning Site for Students - Concentration Camps." Yad Vashem. https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/microsoft%20word%20-%2059.pdf. Page 9. Badge.

“Such a distinctive sign had been imposed on Jews in ancient times, in the form of the colour or shape of the clothes, shoes, hats, or scarves they were obliged to wear to differentiate between them and the rest of the population and humiliate them in other people's eyes.”⁵

This began during the 1200s and occurred sporadically throughout the next several centuries but also to Christians and Samaritans.

“The first to introduce such a sign was the Muslims, who in the eighth century decreed that all the dhimmi (protected people) - Christians, Jews, and Samaritans - must wear clothes that set them apart from the Muslims.”⁶

The paper goes on to more modern times and fails to mention the Zionist movement and picks back up at WWII.

“The introduction of a "Jewish badge" did spread, and it became a means of shaming and humiliating Jews.”⁷

The point I found to be most bizarre and contradictory from the paper was in response to Robert Weltsch's article "Tragt ihn mit Stolz, den gelben Fleck" ("Wear the Yellow Badge with Pride") in the context of the use of the star in modern times was the claim that as of April of 1933,

⁵ Yad Vashem. "The Holocaust: A Learning Site for Students - Concentration Camps." Yad Vashem, https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/microsoft%20word%20-%2059.pdf. P.9 Badge.

⁶ 7 Yad Vashem. "The Holocaust: A Learning Site for Students - Concentration Camps." Yad Vashem, https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/microsoft%20word%20-%2059.pdf. P.9 Badge.

⁷ Yad Vashem. "The Holocaust: A Learning Site for Students - Concentration Camps." Yad Vashem, https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/microsoft%20word%20-%2059.pdf. P.9 Badge.

“At that point, no official Jewish sign was in existence and there were no plans to introduce such a sign. Weltsch was apparently referring to the slanderous and abusive inscriptions painted on the windows of Jewish-owned stores and businesses in "Operation Boycott" of April 1”⁸

The paper ended with the atrocities of WWII but failed to provide any context on the use of the symbol from the Jewish perspective or in a positive light instead it seems to be an attempt to deliberately misinform and demonize so avoid answering the unsavoury or optically challenging points. Leaving zero context on why the symbol would be used today in a positive sense.

It also failed to discuss the origin of the formation of the flag of Israel, “Aware that the nascent Zionist movement had no official flag, David Wolffsohn (1856–1914), a prominent *Zionist,*”

In preparing for the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, Wolffsohn wrote:

What flag would we hang in the Congress Hall? Then an idea struck me. We have a flag—and it is blue and white. The talith (prayer shawl) with which we wrap ourselves when we pray: that is our symbol. Let us take this Talith from its bag and unroll it before the eyes of Israel and the eyes of all nations. So, I ordered a blue and white flag with the Shield of David painted upon it. That is how the national flag, which flew over Congress Hall. It became known as the Flag of Zion. It was accepted as the official Zionist flag at the Second Zionist Congress held in Switzerland in 1898 and was flown with those of other

⁸ Yad Vashem. "The Holocaust: A Learning Site for Students - Concentration Camps." Yad Vashem, P.9 https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/microsoft%20word%20-%2059.pdf. Badge.

Fig 5 “Stamped with the Third Reich insignia and the number 2332, this armband was a manifestation of a November 23rd, 1939, decree by Hans Frank, the Governor General of Nazi-occupied Poland.”

Frank's directive mandated that Jewish individuals above a specified age wear a 4-inch-wide white armband with a Star of David in blue on their right arm. The primary objective was to isolate, harass, and humiliate Jewish people, reinforcing Nazi ideology that portrayed them as different from the rest of the population. This practice aimed to further marginalize and dehumanize the Jewish community, contributing to the systemic discrimination and persecution perpetrated by the Nazi regime.

In an eery evolution, in these areas of conflict, it is now used as a tool through art to promote systemic discrimination and expansion with an arguable colonialist connotation when used in this context. Adopting then applying the tactics and symbolism of occupation and extermination that were brutally enforced upon them only decades before, it is also worth noting that the formation of Israel was a direct result of these atrocities making the situation and use of the symbol in artistic and political expression in areas of conflict and around the world today even more bizarre and conflicting.

A final example of the use of this symbol, that for me encapsulated the layers of symbolism and complex connotation depending on the location or group attached to the stars use in artistic or political expression. It comes from an article written about incidents of the symbol being spray painted around Paris.

The symbols were stencilled in blue spray paint along the walls of multiple buildings in the 14th arrondissement of Paris.



Fig 6 A woman walks past a building tagged with Stars of David in Paris, France, Oct. 31, 2023. Reuters/Lucien Libert

“A public prosecutor in France said Tuesday that there may have been foreign influence behind people painting graffiti in and around the French capital featuring the Jewish Star of David.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Star of David symbols may have been painted on Paris buildings "at the express request" of someone abroad, prosecutor says.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/france-star-of-david-paris-antisemitism-israel-hamas-gaza/>

“Prosecutor Laure Beccuau said, “A couple from Moldova had been accused of stencilling the stars onto the front of several buildings.”¹¹

In a statement on Oct. 31, prosecutors said “they didn't know whether these tags were intended to insult the Jewish people or to claim Jewish membership, particularly as they involved the blue star" rather than yellow. Still, they felt it was necessary to investigate "given the geopolitical context and its impact on the population.

"It has ... not been established that this star has an antisemitic connotation, but this cannot be dismissed out of hand," the statement said.”¹²

This highlights the complexity and sensitivity around the symbols use and the adaptation by both the oppressed and oppressor to use the symbol through guerilla art and graffiti to further their political or ideological beliefs.

¹¹ Star of David symbols may have been painted on Paris buildings "at the express request" of someone abroad, prosecutor says.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/france-star-of-david-paris-antisemitism-israel-hamas-gaza/>

¹² Star of David symbols may have been painted on Paris buildings "at the express request" of someone abroad, prosecutor says.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/france-star-of-david-paris-antisemitism-israel-hamas-gaza/>



Fig 7 Jamie Howard, Silwan Reference image 1/2 featuring “I Witness Silwan” installation, 20th September 2023



*Fig 8 Jamie Howard, Silwan Reference image 2/2 is a close up of Reference image 1/2 with red circles highlighting the murals as part of “I Witness Silwan”. Who is watching whom?
20th September 2023*

Above is a second Reference image I took close to The Old City of Jerusalem overlooking the Silwan by me as part of my research in occupied East Jerusalem in September 2023, it shows the Palestinian neighbourhood of Silwan which is an active flashpoint for unrest.

Painted on many of the homes are sets of eyes varying in colour size and location, all with a gaze fixed on The Old City and Al-Aqsa Mosque one of the most sacred sites in all of Islam in a constant reminder from the Palestinian people that they remain resolute and unwavering in their fight for the right to self-determination. Painted by Palestinian-American artist Chris

Ghazala, created and installed by an international collective of artists and activists working with the local population the installation “I Witness Silwan” evokes a sense of resilience and defiance in the face of adversity. The installation features large images of eyes — belonging to philosophers, activists, and artists — that dare to look back at the occupying forces and bear witness to the colonial violence that is wielded against the Palestinian people.

“I Witness Silwan” generates a global gaze within the region, making visible what was invisible and enabling and empowering others to bear witness, in solidarity with the Palestinian people, to colonial violence and dispossession.”¹³

I Witness Silwan – Who Is Watching Whom?" constitutes an act of visual decolonization in Batan al-Hawa, Silwan, East Jerusalem. On the hillside overlooking Wadi Hilwa (Kidron Valley), facing West Jerusalem and the Old City, monumental sets of eyes and goldfinches (tayr hassun) are being installed. These eyes belong to local heroes, international leaders, philosophers, activists, revolutionaries, writers, and artists, providing a visible presence from miles away.

¹³ | Witness Silwan: Who is Watching Whom? Author Susan Greene, Summer 2020
<https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1650290>



Fig 9 Photo by Kobi Wolf "National Bird of Palestine," designed by Susan Greene, mixed media. Image of sitting finch by Eric Norberg (USA). 2019



Fig 10 Photo by Kobi Wolf for Art Forces, Hamed Mousa 'Eyes of Hamed Moussa' vinyl print. 2019

Image by Palestinian-American artist John Halaka, and is part of his photo exhibition, Faces from Erased Places. Hamed Moussa (circa 1909-2013) was a farmer from Dayr El Assad, a village in the Akka district of Palestine.



Fig 11 Photo by Leora Rosner. Installation by local community members. 2019



Fig 12 Photo by Afif Hanna Amireh. Youth Freedom (hurriyyah) Mural in Batin Al Hawa

2019



Fig 13 Photo by Afif Hanna Amireh 'Eyes of Nizar Shweiki' 'Eyes of Muhammed Fataftah'

2019



Fig 14 George Floyd 'Eyes of George Floyd' banner with acrylic. Photo by Jenan Maswadeh, 2019

George Perry Floyd Jr. was a Black man killed by Derek Chauvin, a police officer who knelt on Floyd's neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds.

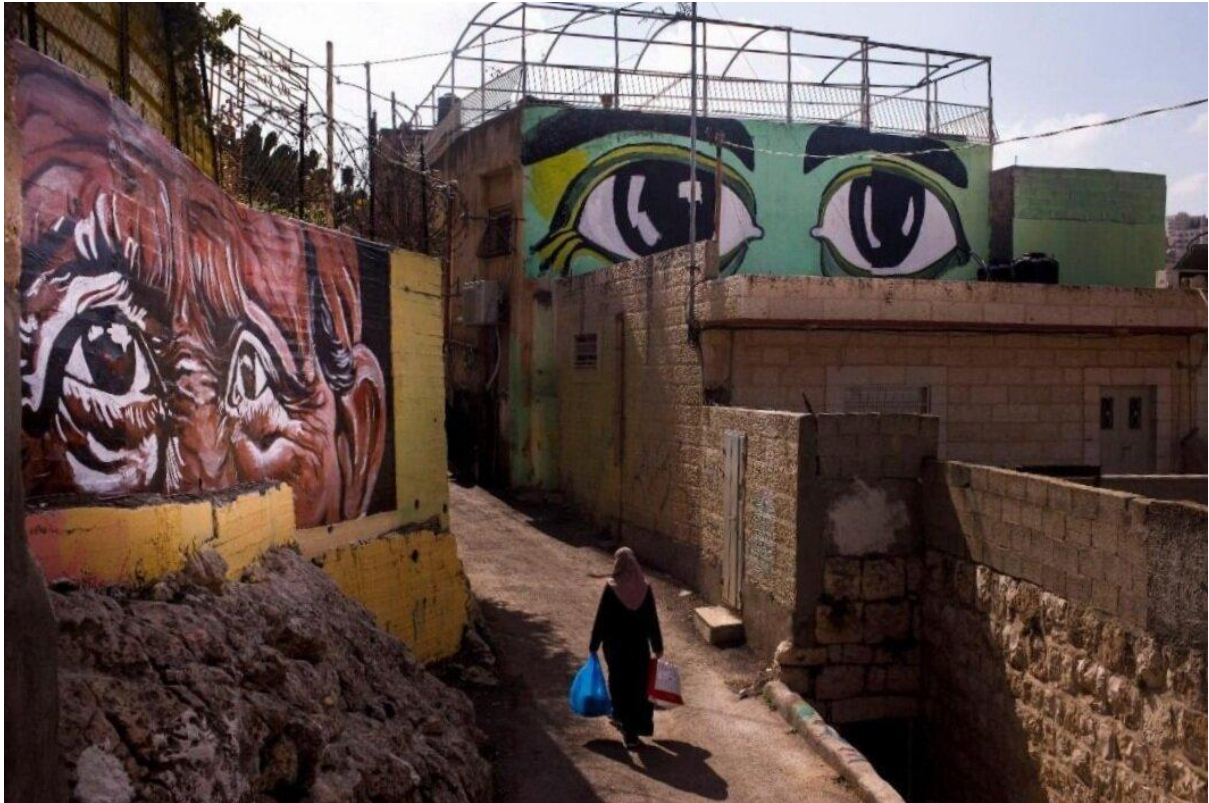


Fig 15 Silwan Murals, Photos by Kobi Wolf for Art Forces, 2019



Fig 16 Bai Bibiyaon Ligkayan Bigkay (left) & Silwan Community Member (right) vinyl print with acrylic. Image by Cece Carpio. 2015

Bai Bibiyaon Ligkayan Bigkay is a Lumad leader and Talaingod woman-chieftain in the Philippines. She is an organizer, leading her tribe in defence of ancestral lands.



Fig 17 Eyes of Silwan Community Member 1/2, acrylic on concrete. Photos by Kobi Wolf for Art Forces. 2015



Fig 18 Eyes of Silwan Community Member 2/2, acrylic on concrete. Photos by Kobi Wolf for Art Forces. 2015



Fig 19 'Palestine Flower Eyes' Photos by Jenan Maswadeh for Art Forces 2019 Painted by Loo Rosner, Jenan Maswadeh and Manar Shreiteh.

Quoting from the I witness Silwan website provides more context into why certain motif are chosen and repeat especially those that are not immediately obvious in their symbolic value “Anemone, “shaqayiq al-numan,” is across the countryside of Palestine, symbolizing the approach of spring. The flower is considered a part of Palestinian environmental and cultural heritage.”¹⁴

¹⁴ “أنا شاهد على سلوان I Witness Silwan”

<https://www.iwitnessilwan.org/#~:text=Painted%20by%20Palestinian%20%2D%20American%20artist,of%20Wadi%20Hilweh%20neighborhood%20%2D%20Silwan.>

“We painted two large anemones with eyes in their centres to re-emphasize that the people of Silwan gaze back at the occupation, and to those who are complicit in the occupation’s activities.”¹⁵

The Israeli state has placed all Palestinians under extensive systems of surveillance, a “colonial gaze” that renders the population hyper-visible as objects but invisible as subjects. Zuhayr Rajabi, a community leader, and director of Madaa Cultural Centre in Batan al-Hawa explains: If you take a look, you can see all of the cameras that are installed [by the Israeli state]. These cameras intervene in the privacy of Palestinians here.”¹⁶

“I Witness Silwan” looks the “colonial gaze” in the eye, asking: Who has the power to look and why? Whose sight counts?”¹⁷

These murals are one of the key tools that can serve to solidify Palestinian identity and culture within the communities of the occupied West Bank while simultaneously being used by the opposition to cement the views and aims of the occupation. These walls are frequently utilized as a means to immortalize promote or lay bare key figures who have played direct or indirect roles on both sides of the wall and both sides of the conflict, such as Donald Trump, symbolizing the United States' unwavering support for Israel and its settlers on Palestinian territory, despite the enduring hardships and occupation faced by the Palestinian people. The walls themselves serve as expansive canvases for conveying messages, preserving memories,

¹⁵ “أنا شاهدٌ على سلوان”

<https://www.iwitnesssilwan.org/#:~:text=Painted%20by%20Palestinian%20%2D%20American%20artist,of%20Wadi%20Hilweh%20neighborhood%20%2D%20Silwan>

¹⁶ I Witness Silwan: Who is Watching Whom? Author Susan Greene, Summer 2020
<https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1650290>

¹⁷ I Witness Silwan: Who is Watching Whom? Author Susan Greene, Summer 2020
<https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1650290>

and creating murals, all of which collectively serve as a powerful means for Palestinians and their supporters to voice their grievances and convictions in an environment characterized by perpetual debate and impending threats.

Overall, I will seek to provide a comprehensive examination of both of these turbulent regions on which walls are leveraged as potent tools for political discourse and social commentary. They play an ever-expanding role in the overarching struggle for freedom, peace, and justice but also occupation. the role of art, murals, and symbolism in the West Bank on the Gaza-Israel border and the peace walls in Belfast, with a particular focus on how these markings are being used to express both the aspirations and struggles of the communities that live in these areas. Doing so will seek to shed light on the intricate role that art can occupy within political and social movements, thereby providing a deeper understanding of the complex role that art can play in political and social movements and contribute to broader debates on the significance of public art in contemporary society.

"Gaza is often described as 'the world's largest open-air prison' because no one is allowed to enter or leave. But that seems a bit unfair to prisons - they do not have their electricity and drinking water cut off randomly almost every day."¹⁸[13]

As have many other artists living through this situation of permanent war. As well as the ability of art and symbolism to provide a raw alternative visual narrative of a city at war, I feel that art can be used as a participatory tool in the resurgence of a city its people, and its culture. Through a deeper analysis of arguments of various texts, including, 'Contemporary art from a city at war: The case of Gaza (Palestine)' by Marion Slitine,¹⁹ which examines

¹⁸ Banksy in Gaza: Street artist goes undercover in the Strip, February 26, 2015. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/banksy/11436286/Banksy-in-Gaza-Street-artist-goes-undercover-in-the-Strip.html>

¹⁹ Contemporary art from a city at war: The case of Gaza (Palestine) by Marion Slitine

how contemporary artists from Gaza respond to the ongoing conflict and its impact on their daily lives. The article illustrates the multiple difficulties that artists from Gaza confront, including a lack of funding, censorship, and difficulty holding exhibitions of their work in an area of conflict. Slitine contends that despite these difficulties, modern art in Gaza has flourished in recent years, noting that creative artists deal creatively with conflict and its impact on their lives through their artwork. For example, some artists have used their work to express their frustrations with the ongoing blockade of Gaza, while others have used art to document the destruction and displacement caused by the conflict.

After referring to the book, 'Speaking Graffiti: Imaging Human Rights from Belfast to the West Bank' by Philip Hopper and Evan Renfro,²⁰ I will argue the importance of the use of art as a means of dialog and the application of justice and human rights to people living in the past or present conflict zones with a focus on the art and significance of the Israel-Palestine Border in The West Bank and The Peace Wall in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Another source is a research article, 'Multimodal Metaphors in the Wall Murals of Northern Ireland' by Roberto Asenjo Alcalde,²¹ which examines how murals in Northern Ireland use both visual and textual elements to convey complex and layered meanings that reflect the social, political, and cultural landscape of the region. The thesis analyses several specific murals and emphasizes the importance of understanding the context in which they were created to fully

Marion Slitine. Contemporary art from a city at war: The case of Gaza (Palestine). *Cities*, 2017, 77, pp.49 - 59. [ff10.1016/j.cities.2017.11.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2017.11.010)ff. fffhal-03059302f January 19th, 2021
<https://hal.science/hal-03059302/document>

²⁰ Speaking Graffiti: Imaging Human Rights from Belfast to the West Bank by Philip Hopper and Evan Renfro Hopper, P., & Renfro, E. (2022). *Speaking Graffiti: Imaging Human Rights from Belfast to the West Bank. Humanity & Society*, 46(2), 202-225. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597620987006>

²¹ Multimodal Metaphors in the Wall Murals of Northern Ireland by Roberto Asenjo Alcalde MÁSTERES de la UAM Facultad de Filosofía y Letras / 15-16 Multimodal Metaphors in the Wall Murals of Northern Ireland Roberto Asenjo Alcalde <https://libros.uam.es/tfm/catalog/download/621/1189/972?inline=1>

grasp their meanings. Overall, the thesis offers valuable insights into the role of art in exploring complex social and political issues.

Multimodal metaphors incorporate multiple modes of representation, visual, and spatial representations, according to the article. These metaphors are frequently employed in political discourse to communicate complicated ideas and emotions effectively through art and using architecture as a form of political intervention referencing, *Contested Terrain: A Lecture with Eyal Weizman*. Walker Art Centre, Oct 9, 2012.

The wall paintings in Northern Ireland, according to Asenjo Alcalde, are a significant illustration of multimodal metaphors used in political discourse. Through studying this along with various other texts, I will gain a deeper understanding of his arguments and provide my response and perspective on the findings.

CHAPTER 2

In this chapter, I will focus on the struggle of Palestinian people and artists who are creating work in an area of conflict, and I will also talk about artist Laila Shawa and her perspective as a Palestinian artist creating socially and politically charged work in a hostile environment, where artists face persecution for their creative expression. For over 2.3 million inhabitants, entering and exiting the Gaza Strip through the designated and Israeli controlled border crossings is practically impossible and depends on a system of permits created and run by the Israeli authorities,

“The Gazan population has been regularly prevented from moving since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967. However, it was only in June 1989 during the First Intifada that exit permits were restricted, with Israel allowing only humanitarian aid and commercial dealings with the Strip. In January 1991, the Israeli authorities suspended all exit permits during the Gulf War, and all such permits were revoked altogether after 2000 and the Second Intifada, meaning that the entire territory was hemmed in”²²

This limits the natural circulation of people and culture between Israel and Palestine and even parts of Palestine from itself. Artists from Gaza, though often invited abroad, are rarely authorized to leave the shrinking territory they call home.²³

²² "Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - Occupied Palestinian Territory (OCHA oPt)." United Nations, [specific publication date if available], www.ochaopt.org

²³ Schneider, Mirjam, Rapport de l'Union Européenne, Preparatory action Culture in EU External Relations, Palestine Country Report, 2013–2014.

The blockade has also massively affected the supply of materials necessary for conventional artistic expression and the creation of artworks. Before 2015, only one shop in all of Gaza was selling acrylic colours, and at a hugely inflated rate per tube. Which has doubled since 2007, when Israel imposed import restrictions in response to Hamas' victory in the 2006 legislative elections and the organization's takeover of Gaza in June 2007.²⁴

This tactic can be used by the occupying force as a way of silencing the people and minimizing the reach of the message but more divisively it is an effective technique of crushing a culture and violating freedom of expression to ensure control of the narrative.

Restricting this freedom of expression through art can have profound and far-reaching consequences for a culture. It stifles artistic creativity, limiting innovation and diversity in artistic endeavours. Moreover, it suppresses dissent and the ability to critique the status quo, in the case of the Israel-Palestine conflict hindering not only the ability of the people to critic the actions of the Israeli forces but also express dissent towards the Hamas government who has had a stranglehold on the Gaza Strip since 2007 and have arguably made the situation more dire and the prospect of peace even further if not out of sight totally due to their stance of the formation of an Islamic Palestinian state and the total eradication of the state of Israel.

Also, cultural growth may stagnate as fresh perspectives and ideas are curtailed, and societies risk losing the richness of their cultural identity. By suppressing artistic expression, societies compromise fundamental human rights and set a dangerous precedent for further liberties.

This limitation also hampers cross-cultural dialogue and understanding and negatively

²⁴ Contemporary art from a city at war: The case of Gaza (Palestine) by Marion Slitine
Marion Slitine. Contemporary art from a city at war: The case of Gaza (Palestine). *Cities*, 2017, 77, pp.49 - 59.
ff10.1016/j.cities.2017.11.010ff. fahal-03059302f January 19th, 2021
<https://hal.science/hal-03059302/document>

impacts artists' well-being, often leading to self-censorship and discouragement.

Additionally, the economic contributions of the arts and creative industries may suffer, underscoring the multifaceted ramifications of restricting artistic freedom.

An example of a Palestinian artist creating work related to their perspective on life in Palestine specifically the Gaza Strip entering the Western art market and representing the vibrant culture of the people forced to live there is Laila Shawa,

A Palestinian artist known for her work in various artistic mediums, including painting, sculpture, and printmaking. She was born in Gaza City in 1940 and grew up in Palestine. Shawa's artwork often explores themes related to the Palestinian experience, including displacement, identity, and resistance. This style, dubbed “Islamo-pop” art, she added her own originality: taking complex, politically fraught subjects, and commenting on them with a vibrant palette across paintings, sculpture, and prints, the last of these often-incorporating photography.



Fig 20 Laila Shawa, Blood Money, 1994 Edition 38/50, from the series Wall of Gaza II, Lithography on paper, 15 × 19 7/10 in | 38 × 50 cm

Her artwork "Blood Money" is a part of her series known as "The Walls of Gaza." It is a poignant and thought-provoking piece that addresses the enduring Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the profound human suffering it has inflicted. Shawa created this series in response to the Israeli military's Operation Cast Lead, which occurred in 2008-2009 and resulted in significant casualties and widespread destruction in Gaza.

I believe that one of the roles of contemporary artists is to record the signs of their times and to communicate that reality to their audiences. During a period of four years, and since the beginning of the First Intifada—the Palestinian uprising—I have been searching for the method and medium with which to record the raw dialogue appearing on the walls of Gaza, between the Palestinian different factions, and between the Palestinians and their Israeli occupiers. The dialogue on the walls of Gaza is a method of communication resorted to by Palestinians. Very different from Graffiti known in the West, and, in the absence of any mode of communication, completely banned by the Israelis such as newspapers or TV. It became the only method of self-expression and communication left to them during a ruthless and destructive occupation indifferently observed and ignored by "the civilized world", still in place to date. I chose photography as my medium in order to give true dimension to the constant changes of this dialogue and its spontaneous form of calligraphy, which disappeared daily and was replaced by new messages by nightfall., and to capture the ever-changing textures of the walls with their impasto of spray paint, whitewash, and tar, which were applied alternately by

*all sides of the divide. I also wished to convey the urgency of the messages which would be painted over almost as quickly as they appeared.*²⁵

The title "Blood Money" conveys the idea that the conflict exacts a significant human toll and raises questions about those who may benefit from this suffering. It highlights the urgent need to draw attention to the human cost of the conflict. Shawa's work serves as a poignant commentary on the ongoing challenges in Gaza and issues a call for empathy and action which has only become more relevant and necessary as time has gone on up until the present (November 2023),

The focus on survival in Gaza limits opportunities for artistic reflection. Urban destruction, attributed to occupying forces, adds challenges for artists. In this conflict-ridden region, artistic expression is stifled by the harsh realities of war.

Her work has the ability to provide an uncompromising commentary on events in the Middle East. Her acclaimed 1994 series "Walls of Gaza" featured images capturing messages of both hope and defiance that had been spray-painted onto the walls of The Gaza Strip by its citizens; they were given heightened meaning through the artist's inclusion of symbols and symbolism such as targets and dollar signs. Irony features heavily in her work as she underscores the absurd to help viewers comprehend the horror of a situation.

²⁵ Shawa, Laila. *Blood Money*. 1994. Artsy. www.artsy.net/artwork/laila-shawa-blood-money.



Fig 21 Laila Shawa Where Souls Dwell V, 2013, Gun with plastic, rhinestones, Swarovski crystals, peacock feathers and wire

“The series Where Souls Dwell began with a commission from AKA Peace in 2012, an anti-arms exhibition and subsequent auction.”²⁶

“AKA Peace was the 2012 Art Project of Peace One Day, a non-profit organisation aimed at promoting Western awareness of global injustices.”²⁷

²⁶ Lewis, Briony. "The Importance of Context: A Study of Laila Shawa, Where Souls Dwell V." University of Bristol, Department of History of Art, Best Undergraduate Dissertations of 2015. <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/arthistory/documents/B%20Lewis.pdf> (page 5)

²⁷ Lewis, Briony. "The Importance of Context: A Study of Laila Shawa, Where Souls Dwell V." University of Bristol, Department of History of Art, Best Undergraduate Dissertations of 2015. <https://www.bristol.ac.uk/media-library/sites/arthistory/documents/B%20Lewis.pdf> (page 5)



Fig 22 Laila Shawa, Where Souls Dwell V, 2013.

Steel, wood, Swarovski crystals, rhinestones, and feathers.

Twenty-three contemporary artists were presented with a decommissioned AK-47 and the simple brief to ‘transform’ it. These artworks propose an aesthetic challenge to the audience as the distance between weapon and artwork becomes blurred and context becomes more relevant.

The exhibition curated by artist Jake Chapman, which featured a host of renowned contemporary artists, such as Damien Hirst, Antony Gormley, Marc Quinn, and Nancy Fouts along with many others.

Jeremy Gilley, the founder of one day peace described the project as “turning a weapon of destruction into a weapon of peace”²⁸

²⁸ "Where Souls Dwell." *Geographical Imaginations*, 17 Apr. 2013, <https://geographicaliminations.com/2013/04/17/where-souls-dwell/>

Laila Shawa said when asked about the work “According to mythology, the souls of people killed return as butterflies to the place where they were killed. The butterflies in this work represent those souls.”²⁹

The butterflies not only symbolize the potential for death but also suggest that the gun itself embodies death, representing the return of these souls. The butterflies also serve as a metaphor for the fragility of human life in contrast with the machine.

The Soul’s V is characterized by increased extravagance, maintaining the basic decorative elements but with the later edition being more ornate and covered, the abundance of butterflies on Souls V may overshadow the original sentiment, possibly driven by commercial motives to enhance visual appeal for potential buyers.

This underscores how Shawa's work has been influenced by its placement in the Western art world and the specific conditions of the AKA Peace project. Understanding this context allows for a more comprehensive assessment of the effects.

In 2014, Souls V was featured in a Palestinian art exhibition hosted in Beirut. Mark Hachem, a Lebanese gallery owner and curator from Galerie Mark Hachem (with locations in Paris, Beirut, and New York), organized "Bridge to Palestine," a collaborative exhibition featuring seventeen Palestinian artists. The showcase took place at the Beirut Exhibition Centre, Lebanon, spanning from June 26th to August 3rd, 2014. Which also drew criticism for its blatant use of symbols of conflict with a direct connotation to Palestine.

Hachem claimed that the “exhibition liberated Palestinian artists and aimed to ‘transform the wall that oppresses them into a canvas to communicate.” He also pointed out that “the

²⁹ "Where Souls Dwell." *Geographical Imaginations*, 17 Apr. 2013, geographicalimagination.com/2013/04/17/where-souls-dwell/.

artworks presented were all ‘charged with symbols [and] evoke the bittersweet taste of longing for something forbidden’ ”³⁰

However, some critics believed it deepened the association between innocent Palestinian civilians, and symbols of war, and as a result violence unintentionally harmed the aim of the artists to alter the interpretations of arms.

*One could assume the common principle of the promotion of peace in both exhibitions implies compatibility of perspective and intentions. This is too simple an assumption as it underplays the significance of the context of Lebanon and its involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as explored later. The artist was aware of the consequences this could have, and she disputed the curator’s decision to include this artwork*³¹

“Mark wanted it [the gun] irrespective. The gun had nothing to do with Palestine [...] this work just happens to go there the curator wanted it, but it was not anything to do with what I think of Palestine, it is nothing to do with Palestine!”

“This defensive statement by the artist highlights the importance of discussion of the implications of displaying this artwork in the Palestinian context, and the effect this had on the audience’s interpretation of the artwork.”³²

³⁰ Author’s interview and discussion, Ramallah, July 2018.
Ibrahim Fraihat & Hamid Dabashi (2023) Resisting subjugation: Palestinian graffiti on the Israeli apartheid wall, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*
<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F01419870.2023.2247473>

³¹ Author’s interview and discussion, Ramallah, July 2018.
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<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F01419870.2023.2247473>

³² Author’s interview and discussion, Ramallah, July 2018.

“The irony of taking the most devastating weapon in the world and seeing the reinterpretation of it through these artists' eyes into one of beauty or intrigue is a powerful catalyst for hope and peace.” Bran Symondson, AKA Peace co-founder, 2012. ³³ (page 6/7)

At this critical juncture in their political struggle, examining the murals created by Palestinians offers insight into their nuanced approach to resistance. A snapshot of the imagery and messages adorning the Apartheid Wall presents a dilemma. By "beautifying" the wall, there is a risk of trivialising its ominous presence). These artistic expressions seek to transform the Apartheid Wall, described as an "ugly infrastructure of occupation," into a visually more appealing form. However, the underlying concern persists: should an Apartheid Wall, emblematic of a hateful monstrosity, be rendered "beautiful"? This juxtaposition prompts a contemplation of the complex dynamics at play in the Palestinian struggle for autonomy.

“It is beautifying the ugly! Don't beautiful murals make the wall look pretty despite its ugly function that segregate, oppress, and control the freedom of our people?”³⁴

Ahmed, an active member of *Hayeit Mukawamat Aljedat* (the Wall Resistance Body) asked us: “don't paintings on the wall contribute, at least indirectly, to normalizing the abnormal?”

Ibrahim Fraihat & Hamid Dabashi (2023) Resisting subjugation: Palestinian graffiti on the Israeli apartheid wall, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*
<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F01419870.2023.2247473>

³³ Author's interview and discussion, Ramallah, July 2018.

Ibrahim Fraihat & Hamid Dabashi (2023) Resisting subjugation: Palestinian graffiti on the Israeli apartheid wall, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*
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³⁴ . Author's interview and discussion, Ramallah, July 2018.

Ibrahim Fraihat & Hamid Dabashi (2023) Resisting subjugation: Palestinian graffiti on the Israeli apartheid wall, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*
<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F01419870.2023.2247473>

Why should we make the Wall look pretty while we know what injustices it inflicts on us in Palestine?”³⁵

A man passed by the famous artist, Banksy, when he was drawing on the Wall and told him, “You are making the wall beautiful.” When Banksy thanked the man for the compliment, he responded: “No this is not a compliment, we want to tear down the wall not make it look beautiful”³⁶

Painting positive murals on walls in conflict zones, while visually appealing, could inadvertently detract from the underlying issue at hand. The act of beautification may risk diminishing the gravity of the situation, especially when dealing with structures like the Apartheid Wall. By adorning it with positive imagery, there is a potential to divert attention from the oppressive nature of the wall itself, diluting the urgency of addressing the core problem – the occupation. This aesthetic transformation might inadvertently contribute to a superficial narrative, overshadowing the critical need for substantive discourse on the wall's impact and the broader socio-political context.

In conclusion, the narrative surrounding Palestinian artists, particularly exemplified by the powerful work of Laila Shawa, underscores the multifaceted challenges they face in a conflict-ridden environment. The Israeli blockade, restricting both movement and access to artistic materials, serves as a tool of silencing and cultural suppression. Shawa's art, such as the impactful "Blood Money" series and the transformative "Where Souls Dwell V," not only

³⁵ A story by locals in the city of Bethlehem was told to the authors, Bethlehem, 2018
Ibrahim Fraihat & Hamid Dabashi (2023) Resisting subjugation: Palestinian graffiti on the Israeli apartheid wall, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, DOI: [10.1080/01419870.2023.2247473](https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2023.2247473)
<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F01419870.2023.2247473>

³⁶ A story by locals in the city of Bethlehem was told to the authors, Bethlehem, 2018
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<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080%2F01419870.2023.2247473>

bears witness to the human toll of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also challenges conventional perceptions and fosters dialogue.

Shawa's journey from Gaza to the Western art market highlights the complex interplay between artistic expression and the global art scene. Her participation in the AKA Peace project, transforming decommissioned weapons into works of art, adds another layer to the discussion. The context of displaying such works, as evidenced by the "Bridge to Palestine" exhibition, reveals the delicate balance between artistic intent and potential misinterpretations.

Examining the role of murals in the Palestinian struggle, as well as drawing parallels with the Irish experience under British rule, provides insights into the unifying potential of artistic expression in times of conflict. However, the act of beautifying structures like the Apartheid Wall raises questions about inadvertently normalizing oppression and diverting attention from the core issues.

In navigating the complex terrain of artistic resistance in conflict zones, the power of visual storytelling emerges as a force capable of transcending borders and fostering empathy. While recognizing the potential pitfalls of aesthetic transformation, it is crucial to acknowledge the resilience and resourcefulness of artists like Laila Shawa, who continue to navigate the challenging landscape of creativity in the face of adversity. This exploration prompts us to reflect on the broader implications of artistic freedom, cultural preservation, and the role of art as a catalyst for social and political change in the midst of ongoing conflicts.

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter, I will examine the role of these murals and artworks and the unifying effect of this form of social or political activism through artistic expression. I will also draw parallels with the conflict, occupation, and resistance also known and experienced by the Irish people while under British rule specifically the troubles in Northern Ireland on the emergence and importance of murals and artwork as a form of both communication and information warfare.

The peace walls separated the predominantly Catholic Irish nationalists who wanted a transfer of sovereignty to an all-Ireland republic and Ulster unionist communities who sought to have Northern Ireland remain part of the United Kingdom. Although violence has significantly decreased since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, tensions remain high. Similarly, to the murals in Gaza, the murals on the peace walls often depict political martyrs, messages, and themes associated with the conflict and are used to assert the identity and culture of each of the communities that live segregated on either side of the wall. In both regions of the world, murals on walls are being used as a means of political communication and social commentary and are playing an increasingly significant role in the wider struggle for freedom, peace, and justice. This thesis aims to explore how these murals and symbols are being used and to consider their significance in terms of both the political and social context in which they are being created.

The term “Urbicide” has roots in the Latin word *urbs*, meaning "city", and *occido*, meaning "to massacre". This word could be used as an umbrella term to describe the common motifs in these guerilla artworks.

This feeling of systematic destruction and suppression of the people and their beliefs from both regions in the world and the effect it has on expression in everyday life to feel as if your

land and human rights are being violated with the guise of religion or history with no repercussions or justice.

The profound sense of division unifies the majority Muslim population of the West Bank and, notably, the Gaza Strip, where the rule of Israel and Israeli settlers prevails. This shared experience of living under external control creates a common ground among the Palestinian people. Drawing parallels with Northern Ireland, a region unified with these areas through similar experiences of external rule and internal conflict, underscores the global resonance of struggles against oppression and the pursuit of self-determination.

The State of Israel was established after an agreement with the British government post-World War II, intended as a secure homeland for Jewish people. The conflict originated from the British decision to liberate Palestine from Ottoman rule, yet the priority shifted to the formation of Israel for geopolitical advantages, resulting in the Nakba ("Catastrophe"). Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expelled from their homes by Israeli forces with British support. Presently, the West Bank and Gaza Strip face internal disputes with illegal Israeli settlers and external challenges from overwhelming Israeli forces.

This situation draws parallels with the Irish struggle for independence, notably the 1916 Easter Rising by the Irish Republican Army. The resulting Irish state liberated most of Ireland but left six northern counties under British rule, leading to the Troubles (1960s-1990s). Similarities between Palestine and Northern Ireland extend to their unification through street art, reflecting shared experiences of oppression and resistance.

This chapter is an inquiry into the significant role of the murals in Belfast and Derry and why they are important today. I will also introduce and talk about Irish artist Danny Devenny and his murals in Northern Ireland that have become famous for their deep social and political context. Murals in Northern Ireland are a form of public artistic expression that have been

used to express political and cultural ideologies identities and affiliations since the Troubles in Northern Ireland that lasted over three decades this was a period of sectarian violence between the Catholic Irish nationalists and the Protestant Ulster unionists.

These murals are often found in working and lower-class areas of Belfast, Derry, and other cities throughout Northern Ireland and often depict themes related to the conflict known as the troubles, such as paramilitary groups, political figures, and events stemming from the violence, however, many of these murals still remain as landmark events of the times such as the “You are now entering free derry” mural located in the Bogside in Derry, a free-standing gable wall that commemorates Free Derry, a self-declared autonomous nationalist area of Derry in Northern Ireland that existed between 1969 and 1972 It is still a predominantly Irish Catholic area to this day.

Brexit is also a topic for consideration when talking about tensions and the potential for conflict in Northern Ireland in my thesis I will cover this topic in chapter three as a way to allow for more research and context as news develops over the next year.

With the nature of street art to be everchanging and developing as events take place as live social commentary new murals often pop up in commemoration of past events or those who have lost their lives as part of the struggles faced by the people of that area and include messages, reflecting a growing desire for peace and reconciliation in the region. I will conclude my research by giving context for where the art in both global areas of conflict is today and the significant role of street art globally in bringing attention to issues and people who cannot speak for themselves.



Fig 23 Danny Devenny, Untitled mural, 2014. Acrylic and spray paint on brick. 4.5m x 7.5m (approximately)

Devenny's artistic journey is deeply intertwined with the socio-political fabric of the region. His murals are not merely decorative but serve as visual narratives, reflecting the struggles, aspirations, and resilience of the Northern Irish people. His commitment to using art as a means of dialogue and expression is evident in the way his murals engage with the community, sparking conversations about history, identity, and the path forward.

One notable aspect of Devenny's work is his ability to blend traditional artistic techniques with contemporary themes. His murals may draw inspiration from folklore, historical events, or contemporary issues, creating a dynamic visual language that transcends time periods. This fusion not only highlights his artistic versatility but also speaks to the continuity of Northern Ireland's cultural heritage.

Beyond the aesthetic appeal, Devenny's murals often carry messages of unity and reconciliation, encouraging viewers to reflect on shared histories and envision a harmonious future. In a region where murals have long been used as political and cultural expressions, Devenny stands out for his nuanced approach, promoting inclusivity and understanding through his art.

While the specifics of Danny Devenny's murals may vary, his contribution to the Northern Irish art scene is undoubtedly significant. Through his visually compelling and thematically rich murals, he continues to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about identity, history, and the power of art to foster positive social change.



FIG 23 Peace cannot be kept by force. Conference: Building Momentum for Peace. Skainos Centre, Belfast, Northern Ireland. @GlobalPeace @CDPB_NI @CooperationIrl @BeyondSkin (c) Allan LEONARD @MrUlster

On the morning of January 5, 1969, amidst civil unrest in Derry, Eamon McCann, a renowned writer, and activist, coined a historic slogan. The catalyst was the eruption of riots following the attack on the People's Democracy march at Burntollet, as the police stood idly by.

In the midst of the tense crowds, the idea to emblazon a slogan on the gable wall, a well-known assembly point, surfaced. After considering several suggestions, Eamon McCann proposed the iconic phrase, "You Are Now Entering Free Derry." Inspired by a similar message in the United States, specifically "You Are Now Entering Free Berkeley," this slogan became a powerful symbol of the resilience of the people in Derry during a pivotal moment in their history. It was then that a young Mr Hillen arrived with a paint brush and pot of paint. It was later re-painted in the now familiar block letters by another Bogside native, John 'Caker' Casey.



Fig 24 "YOU ARE NOW ENTERING FREE DERRY "First painted January 1969 by Liam Hillen. Soldiers Photo



Fig 25 "YOU ARE NOW ENTERING FREE DERRY" First painted January 1969 by Liam Hillen. Tank photo



Fig 26 1979 iteration of the mural at Derry Corner, Artist unknown

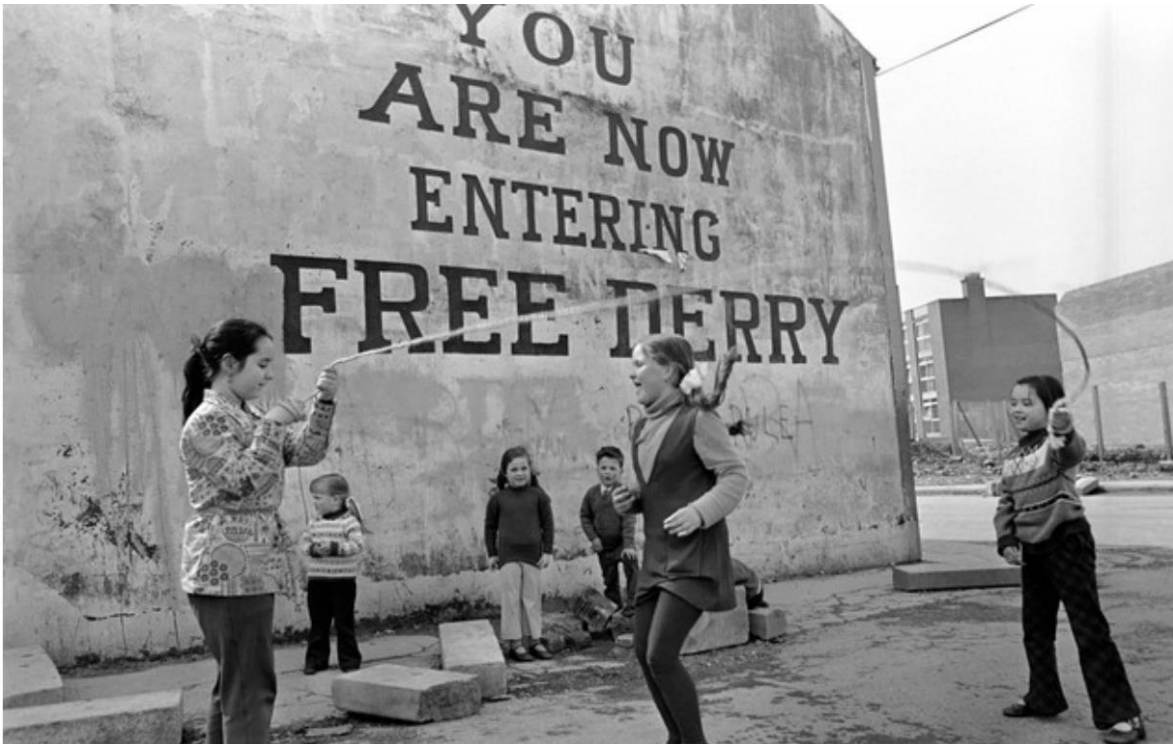


Fig 27 Children playing with skipping rope at free derry corner artist and date unknown (presumably 1979 or before as the previous image of the same mural has been vandalised by 1979)



Fig 28 The most famous Mural of all – “You Are Now Entering Free Derry” at the Free Derry Corner. 1969-Present (various iterations)

The Free Derry Mural stands as a powerful and iconic symbol of the political and social history of Northern Ireland. Located in the Bogside area of Derry, this mural encapsulates the spirit of the civil rights movement and the tumultuous events surrounding the Troubles. Painted in 1969, the mural emerged during a period of heightened tension and marked the self-declaration of the Bogside as "Free Derry."

The mural's imagery is deeply rooted in the political climate of the time, featuring stark, black-and-white depictions of key events and figures associated with the struggle for civil rights in Northern Ireland. One of the central images is the infamous "You Are Now Entering Free Derry," mural in the Bogside of Derry serving as both a declaration of autonomy and an invitation to reflect on the complex history of the region.

The Free Derry Mural became a rallying point for those advocating for civil rights and opposing British rule in Northern Ireland. Its creation was a response to a series of events, including the Battle of the Bogside in 1969, during which the Bogside community clashed with the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The mural was a defiant expression of the desire for political and social change, encapsulating the aspirations of a community seeking justice, equality, and self-determination.

Over the years, the Free Derry Mural has undergone several transformations, reflecting the evolving political landscape and commemorating key moments in Northern Ireland's history. Despite its changing appearance, the mural remains a poignant reminder of the struggles and resilience of the people of Derry during a tumultuous period. It has become a symbol not only of the specific events it depicts but also of the broader quest for justice, equality, and peace in Northern Ireland. The Free Derry Mural stands as a testament to the enduring impact of public art in conveying the collective memory and aspirations of a community.



Fig 29 Local artist Jim Collins painted a Palestinian flag on the iconic Free Derry Wall in Bogside, Derry, Northern Ireland. 24th May 2018



Fig 30 “You Are Now Entering Free Gaza,” 2009 (Palestine Poster Project) Derry.

“This mural is a repainting of the “You Are Now Entering Free Derry” mural. That iconic mural was created in 1969 after barricades were put up to enclose Catholic neighbourhoods in a reaction to sectarian violence and was, “emblematic of communal attitudes and collective resistance” (Jarman). The area is repainted at different points and in these iterations the “Free Derry Corner remains a defiant public space” (Jarman). Thus, the changing of this particular public space to read “You Are Now Entering Free Gaza” loads this message with a particular amount of significance and develops a sense of community solidarity between Ireland and Palestine. This is a good example, in

*general, of the weight given to international themes through their physical placement on the walls in Northern Ireland. Such placement interpolates audiences to see these international problems as parallel to local ones while also reimagining local struggles in a constantly updated global framework. It is also interesting to note that while some people and artists see the space occupied by these murals as a part of Irish history to be preserved, others see them as part of the larger system which is important in its continual reflection of the modern global situation, and thus must be updated and reconsidered”*³⁷

The murals that reference Palestine make up a specific subset of the international murals and can be viewed through the same lens. They similarly interpolate their viewers and draw power from the tradition of their form and the physical space in which they exist. They too are reimagining of Ireland:

*Even though many of them make direct political statements about Palestine they also create new narratives of Ireland because they draw on connotations from their physical surroundings (“You Are Now Entering Free Gaza”) and the support which they lend (“Palestine... The Largest Concentration Camp...,” “Free Palestine...”) is necessarily reflected back to be compared with Ireland’s historical and cultural perspective.*³⁸

³⁷ "You Are Now Entering Free Gaza." Irish Studies @ SUNY Geneseo, URL:

<https://irishstudies.sunygeneseoenglish.org/you-are-now-entering-free-gaza/>

³⁸ "Representations of Palestine." Irish Studies @ SUNY Geneseo, State University of New York at Geneseo,

URL: <https://irishstudies.sunygeneseoenglish.org/representations-of-palestine/>

I chose to have a specific focus on the depiction of Palestine in Ireland to highlight the solidarity and unity between us and felt that the references to Ireland in murals in Palestine constituted a direct conversation between the two places allowing for exposure to a broader audience.

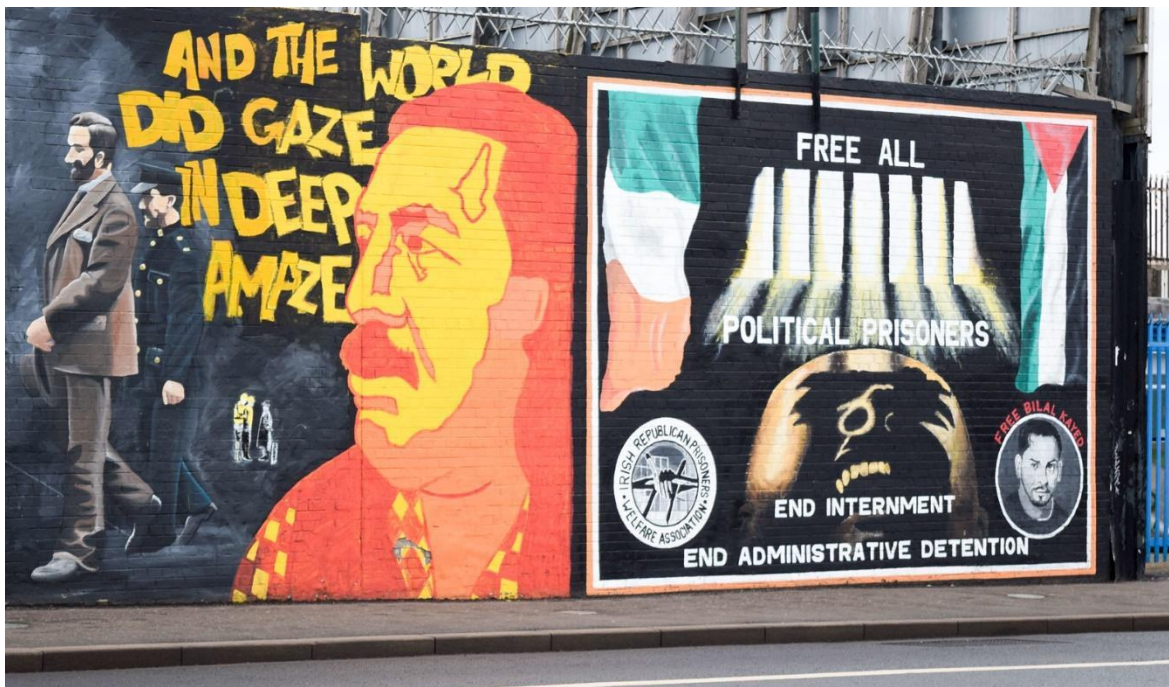


Fig 31 End British Internment and Free Bilal Kayed – End Administrative Detention. Belfast Artist and year unknown.

Since there are over 2,000 documented Belfast wall murals since the 1970s, all with an important message or issue to shine light on in a way it has become the notice board of injustice around the world picking up where others may not have the ability or being in a position to not fear the repercussions of true critical art no matter how upsetting or politically unsavoury the content may be, through doing this it allows for the issues to be kept in public consciousness as an unrelenting reminder to do better and strive for peace and justice for all those who are oppressed or living under occupation in areas of conflict and where freedom of artistic expression is actively punished.



Fig 32 "Palestine... The Largest Concentration Camp..., " 2002 (Claremont) Artist unknown



Fig 33 “Free Palestine....,” 2009 (Claremont) Artist unknown.



Fig 34 Former Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams with the Bobby Sands mural on the Falls Road in west Belfast in the background. Picture by Mal McCann.

The mural created in 1995 by Danny Devenny featuring Bobby Sands is a subject of political and cultural interpretation when considering the most renowned mural in Northern Ireland. Arguably, the singularly most well-known mural is the depiction of Bobby Sands, an IRA hunger striker. This mural is prominently situated at Sevastopol Street on the Falls Road in West Belfast, right next to Sinn Féin headquarters.



Fig 35 Danny Devenny pictured besides another Bobby sands mural he created in Belfast.

In the exploration of murals as a form of social and political activism, this chapter has uncovered profound parallels between the experiences of the Palestinian people and the Northern Irish during their respective struggles. Rooted in the concept of "Urbicide," which signifies the systematic destruction and suppression of identity, these guerilla artworks emerge as powerful tools for communication and resistance in the face of external control.

The establishment of the State of Israel, born out of post-World War II agreements, and the subsequent Nakba draw uncanny resemblances to the Irish struggle for independence, paving the way for the Troubles. Both narratives involve mass expulsions, internal conflicts, and the enduring impact on the collective memory of these regions. Street art, particularly murals, stands out as a medium that not only documents these struggles but also becomes a symbol of resilience and defiance.

Irish artist Danny Devenny's murals, exemplified by the iconic Bobby Sands depiction, play a pivotal role in encapsulating the socio-political fabric of Northern Ireland. His fusion of

traditional techniques with contemporary themes not only exhibits artistic versatility but also promotes unity and reconciliation. Devenny's murals serve as dynamic visual narratives, sparking conversations about history, identity, and the way forward for the Northern Irish community.

The "You Are Now Entering Free Derry" mural, born in the midst of civil unrest in 1969, symbolizes the resilience of the people in Derry during a pivotal moment in their history. It transcends its local context, becoming a rallying point for civil rights and opposition to British rule in Northern Ireland. The evolution of this mural over the years reflects the changing political landscape and acts as a poignant reminder of the community's struggles and aspirations.

The repainting of "You Are Now Entering Free Gaza" demonstrates the global solidarity that murals can inspire, connecting the struggles in Ireland and Palestine. Specific subsets of international murals referencing Palestine serve as a dialogue between various places, interpolating viewers and drawing power from their physical surroundings. The Belfast wall murals, numbering over 2,000 since the 1970s, function as a notice board of global injustices, challenging oppression and serving as a relentless reminder to strive for peace and justice. Through these murals, issues that might be overlooked or ignored are kept in the public consciousness, fostering an unrelenting demand for change.

In conclusion, the murals in Northern Ireland, particularly those by Danny Devenny, and their connections to global struggles, reveal the enduring power of public art. They not only document history but actively shape the ongoing dialogue about identity, justice, and the potential for positive social change, underlining the universal language of art in the pursuit of equality, freedom, and peace.

Conclusion

As this thesis draws to a close my research and perspective on the subject continues to widen and I intend to continue my writing and practical art practice on this subject as a means of both understanding and communicating my perspective and knowledge gained.

A past lecturer once mentioned that it is the job of an artist is to live breathe and sleep art, to go the fringes of society and dedicate yourself to reporting your findings back to the world, as an honest and unfiltered view into a corner where nobody may have been looking however dark or complex it may be.

Having gone to the fringes of the subject physically and conceptually by studying and visiting these areas, witnessing first hand life in areas of conflict as part of my research. I feel a sense of personal and artistic duty to report my findings back in an attempt to add to the conversation and awareness of these conflicts and the fascinating and selfless work of artists and activists practising in these places and under such conditions.

Parallel to my writing I have been curating my experiences and knowledge into my practical work and creating works for exhibition, having explored many different materials and forms of representing my reaction to the experience and critically analysing myself through practical work. My hope is the work will stand as tangible manifestations of the profound impact and transformative potential of art and symbolism within areas of conflict, echoing the themes explored in this thesis with the title of “Cultural Equilibrium.”

As part of the exhibition, I will include booklets containing the thesis. This way, viewers can learn more about the art's background and motivations. It ensures that even those who would not typically read the thesis get a chance to explore the ideas behind the work while also allowing me to exhibit the academic research itself in an alternative way.

In extending the dialogue initiated by my exploration, I aspire to foster a broader engagement by collaborating with other artists, scholars, and activists and members of the public in conversation. By organizing this interactive installation, I aim to create a dynamic platform for discourse, encouraging a collective exploration of the intersection between art, cultural equilibrium, and conflict. Through these grassroots endeavours, I seek to amplify the voices of those dwelling on the fringes, providing them with a space to articulate their experiences and insights.

Moreover, the integration of multimedia components within the exhibition will enable a more immersive experience, utilizing academic writing to further convey the visceral nature of the environments explored. Ultimately, my artistic journey stands as an ongoing commitment to transcending boundaries, both in the physical and conceptual realms, while instigating meaningful conversations and inspiring societal introspection.

Thank you for taking the time to explore what I hope was a unique perspective into art, symbolism culture and conflict and joining me as I unpack and present my experience and knowledge through both academic writing and contemporary art practice. This journey for me shows how art can transform, capturing the strength and understanding we find in tough times and tough places.

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Appendix. (Reference Photos)

All of the following images were taken between September 23rd and September 30th in Occupied East Jerusalem and Beit Sahur in an A zone of the West bank Under palestinian Authority



Figure 1. Jamie Howard, entrance to al-Aqsa mosque complex in the old city of Jerusalem

Taken 23 September, 2023. Handala Graffiti: The iconic character Handala, representing Palestinian identity and resilience, appears as street art on a wall. Created by Naji Al-Ali, Handala is shown with his back turned and hands clasped, a stance taken since 1973 to symbolize the ongoing struggle and witness of history.



Figure 2. in another angle of figure 1, Jamie Howard 23 September 2023



Figure 3. Jamie Howard, „Doorway in the old city of Jerusalem with moon and star graffiti.

23 September 2023



Figure 4. Urban Landscape with Warning Sign: A view capturing the contrast between urban development and a prominent red warning sign on the road to Area A under Palestinian Authority, indicating restrictions for Israeli citizens. Beit Sahur, Jamie Howard on September 24, 2025



Figure 5. Jamie Howard, "Ireland written in Arabic graffiti in Bethlehem, West Bank,

23 September 2023,



Figure 6. Street Art of Resistance: A couple walks past a graffiti depiction of a figure with a slingshot, symbolizing defiance and protest, Bethlehem, Jamie Howard on September 24, 2023.



Figure 7. Continuation of Resistance: More graffiti in the same series, depicting figures with slingshots, a recurrent motif of defiance. This piece complements the previous work, illustrating the ongoing narrative of protest. Bethlehem, Jamie Howard on September 24, 2023.



Figure 8, Jamie Howard, West bank border wall with Hebrew graffiti, 25 September 2023.



Figure 9, Jamie Howard Graffiti on Concrete tunnel entrance in occupied east Jerusalem,

25 September 2023.



Figure 10, Jamie Howard, West Bank border wall graffiti, 25 September 2023.



Figure 11, Jamie Howard, Mural showing hands reaching out, Occupied east Jerusalem,

27 September 2023.



Figure 12. Cultural Fusion Mural in East Jerusalem: Photograph by Jamie Howard, September 27, 2023.



Figure 13. Cultural Fusion Mural in East Jerusalem: Photograph by Jamie Howard, September 27, 2023.



Figure 14. Urban Sticker Depicting Benjamin Netanyahu, Jamie Howard, September 28, 2023.



Figure 15. Israeli Flag Merged with War Imagery, Jamie Howard, September 28, 2023.



Figure 16. Distinctive Pedestrian Crossing Sign Featuring an Israeli Figure, East Jerusalem, Jamie Howard, September 24, 2023.



Figure 17. Israeli Pedestrian Crossing Sign with Figure in Traditional Clothing, East Jerusalem, Jamie Howard, September 24, 2023.

I appreciate you taking the time to read my thesis. Thank You.