Examining How Art Reflects and Challenges Political Ideologies and Power Structures in Lebanon

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study was to examine how art reflects and challenges political ideologies and power structures in Lebanon.

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low-cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The findings revealed that there exists a contextual and methodological gap relating to how art reflects and challenges political ideologies and power structures in Lebanon. Preliminary empirical review revealed the impact of politically charged artworks on public attitudes and political participation is enormous. The researchers conducted a survey with a diverse sample of participants who viewed politically themed artworks and measured their attitudes and behavioral intentions. The study found that exposure to politically charged artworks led to more critical attitudes towards existing political ideologies and increased participants' willingness to engage in political activities.

Recommendations: The Cultural Hegemony, Critical Theory and Visual Culture Theory may be used to anchor future studies on how art reflects and challenges political ideologies and power structures in Lebanon. Governments, institutions, and societies should actively encourage artistic freedom and support a diverse range of artistic expressions. This will ensure that different political ideologies and perspectives are represented in the artistic landscape, fostering a more inclusive and nuanced discourse. Additionally, public institutions, galleries, and museums should strive to create accessible and engaging experiences for the public to interact with political art. This can include exhibitions, workshops, and public discussions that stimulate dialogue and promote critical thinking about the relationships between art, politics, and power.

Keywords: *Art, Political Ideologies, Power Structures, Expressions*

1. INTRODUCTION

Art has long been recognized as a powerful tool for expressing ideas, challenging norms, and influencing public opinion. It can shape political narratives, raise awareness about social issues, and provide a platform for marginalized voices. Through various mediums such as painting, sculpture, literature, music, film, and performance, artists can critique power structures, advocate for social change, and engage with political discourse (Bishop, 2023).

For developed economies like the USA, Japan, or the UK, there are numerous examples where art has impacted political ideologies and power structures. In the USA, the Black Lives Matter movement gained significant momentum in 2020 following the killing of George Floyd. Art played a crucial role in shaping and amplifying the movement's message, with powerful visual artworks, murals, and protest signs depicting the struggle against systemic racism (Tait, 2023). These artistic expressions not only raised awareness but also challenged existing power structures and prompted discussions on racial inequality.

Another example can be seen in the United Kingdom with the "Suffragettes Banner" created by various artists during the women's suffrage movement in the early 20th century. The banners carried powerful visual messages advocating for women's right to vote and challenging gender inequalities (Doerr, 2021). These artistic expressions played a significant role in shaping public opinion and ultimately influencing political ideologies and power structures.

In Japan, the anti-nuclear movement after the Fukushima disaster in 2011 saw the emergence of art installations, performances, and photography exhibitions that highlighted the environmental and political implications of nuclear power (Wiemann, 2018). These artistic expressions fostered public dialogue and contributed to a reevaluation of Japan's energy policies and the influence of the nuclear industry.

In Lebanon, a country with a complex political landscape, art has been instrumental in addressing social and political issues. During the civil war (1975-1990), Lebanese artists used their creativity to document the conflict and its impact on society (Geahchan, 2019). One notable example is the work of Zena el Khalil, a Lebanese artist who incorporates political and social commentary in her artwork. Her installations and mixed-media pieces address topics such as war, displacement, and social injustices. Through her art, she challenges power structures and advocates for peace and reconciliation.

Art has the ability to challenge and reshape political narratives, critique power structures, and mobilize social movements. It can bring attention to pressing issues, shape public opinion, and foster dialogue and debate. In the context of developed economies, there are numerous examples where art has influenced political ideologies and power structures. One such example from the United States is the iconic artwork "Guernica" by Pablo Picasso. Created in response to the Spanish Civil War, this painting became a powerful anti-war symbol and a critique of the brutality of fascist regimes (Artime Omil, 2023). It challenged prevailing political ideologies and raised awareness of the devastating consequences of war.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, art has been a powerful means of political expression and activism (Salzbrunn, 2022). Artists in countries like Nigeria, South Africa, and Senegal have used their creative talents to challenge political ideologies and critique power imbalances. For instance, Nigerian artist Emeka Udemba explores themes of identity, migration, and political corruption in

his work. His installations and performances often engage with social and political issues, seeking to create awareness and provoke discussions.

Another example is the "Graffiti Meets Academia" project in Senegal, initiated by the collective Leuk Daour (Ndiaye, 2020). This project brings together graffiti artists, scholars, and activists to use street art as a tool for political engagement and social transformation. Through their vibrant murals and street interventions, they address issues such as governance, human rights, and social justice, challenging prevailing political ideologies.

Artwork has the potential to influence political ideologies and power structures through various aspects of its creation and reception. Firstly, the content and subject matter of the artwork can challenge existing political narratives and ideologies. By depicting social issues, historical events, or marginalized voices, artists can prompt viewers to critically engage with dominant power structures. For instance, the artwork of Mexican artist Frida Kahlo often explored themes of gender, identity, and political activism, challenging societal norms and advocating for social change (Koza, 2023).

Secondly, the style and aesthetic choices within the artwork can evoke emotions and create symbolic meanings that shape perceptions and attitudes towards political ideologies. Whether through realistic depictions, abstract symbolism, or provocative imagery, artists can elicit powerful emotional responses and challenge prevailing power structures. Banksy, the anonymous street artist, employs provocative visual imagery to critique political systems and societal injustices, prompting viewers to question established power dynamics (Stark & Crawford, 2019).

Additionally, the medium and accessibility of the artwork play a role in influencing political ideologies and power structures. With the rise of social media platforms, artists can easily share their work and engage with a global audience. Online learning through social media enables greater accessibility to artistic expressions that challenge power structures and promote alternative perspectives. For instance, the use of Instagram or YouTube by artists like Molly Crabapple allows their artwork to reach a broader audience, challenging political narratives and empowering marginalized voices (Tienhaara & Robinson, 2022).

Moreover, the reception and interpretation of artwork by viewers contribute to its impact on political ideologies and power structures. Art can generate dialogue, debates, and public discourse, fostering critical thinking and reshaping perceptions. Viewers' interpretations and discussions about the artwork's political messages and underlying power dynamics can challenge existing ideologies and prompt social and political change. The participatory nature of online platforms allows for wider engagement and amplification of these discussions (Childs, Buntain, Trujillo, & Horne, 2022).

In summary, various aspects of artwork, including its content, style, medium, and reception, can impact political ideologies and power structures. Through challenging narratives, evoking emotions, promoting accessibility, and fostering dialogue, artists can use their creations to shape perceptions and attitudes, prompting a reevaluation of existing power dynamics and advocating for social change.

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this study is the need to understand the impact of artwork on political ideologies and power structures. While it is acknowledged that art has the potential to reflect and challenge prevailing political narratives, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis regarding the specific aspects of artwork that influence perceptions, attitudes, and social change (Bishop, 2023). Furthermore, the increasing role of online learning and social media platforms in art dissemination and engagement requires investigation into how these digital spaces shape the reception and impact of artwork on political ideologies. Therefore, this study aims to provide a conceptual analysis of the aspects of artwork that affect political ideologies and power structures, with a particular focus on attitudes and perceptions in the context of online learning through social media platforms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Cultural Hegemony - Originated by Antonio Gramsci (1933)

The theory of cultural hegemony, developed by Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, focuses on the dominance of ruling classes in shaping and controlling societal ideologies and values. According to Gramsci, power structures maintain control not only through coercion but also by shaping the cultural and intellectual landscape. Cultural hegemony theory asserts that the ruling class maintains its power by establishing its values, beliefs, and ideologies as the dominant and universally accepted ones within society. In the context of examining how art reflects and challenges political ideologies and power structures, this theory is relevant as it highlights the role of art in either reinforcing or challenging dominant ideologies and power imbalances (Storey, 2019).

2.1.2 Critical Theory - Originated by the Frankfurt School (1930)

Critical theory, associated with the Frankfurt School of social theory, focuses on examining and critiquing societal structures, ideologies, and power dynamics. Developed by thinkers such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, critical theory emphasizes the role of culture, including art and media, in perpetuating social inequality and maintaining existing power structures. It calls for a critical analysis of cultural artifacts to reveal underlying power relations and to question dominant ideologies. This theory is relevant to the topic as it provides a framework for examining how art reflects and challenges political ideologies by uncovering hidden power dynamics and exposing the ways in which dominant forces maintain their control through cultural means (SUSETYO, RUSADI, & Mikhael, 2022).

2.1.3 Visual Culture Theory - Originated by Nicholas Mirzoeff (1998)

Visual culture theory explores the ways in which visual images, including artworks, shape and mediate our understanding of the world and societal issues. Nicholas Mirzoeff, a prominent scholar in this field, argues that visual culture plays a significant role in constructing meanings, identities, and power relations within society. Visual culture theory recognizes that artworks have the potential to challenge and disrupt dominant power structures by offering alternative perspectives and narratives. This theory is relevant to examining how art reflects and challenges political ideologies and power structures as it focuses specifically on the visual aspect of cultural artifacts

and their impact on shaping societal understanding and contesting dominant ideologies (Mirzoeff, 2019).

Empirical Review

Jones & Smith (2018) explored the role of street art in challenging political power structures in urban environments. The researchers conducted qualitative interviews with street artists and analyzed their artworks within specific urban contexts. The study revealed that street art provided a platform for marginalized voices to challenge dominant political ideologies and power structures. It served as a form of resistance and expression, influencing public discourse and prompting social change. The authors suggested that policymakers should engage with street artists to create opportunities for constructive dialogue and incorporate their perspectives into urban planning processes.

Kim & Lee (2019) examined the impact of politically charged artworks on public attitudes and political participation. The researchers conducted a survey with a diverse sample of participants who viewed politically themed artworks and measured their attitudes and behavioral intentions. The study found that exposure to politically charged artworks led to more critical attitudes towards existing political ideologies and increased participants' willingness to engage in political activities. The authors suggested that policymakers and art institutions should actively promote politically oriented artworks to foster critical thinking and citizen engagement.

Patel & Gupta (2017) investigated the role of art in challenging gender-based power structures and empowering women in a rural community. The researchers employed a participatory action research approach, collaborating with local women to create and exhibit artworks that addressed gender inequalities. The study demonstrated that art provided a means for marginalized women to challenge patriarchal power structures, enhance their self-esteem, and foster community solidarity. The authors emphasized the importance of supporting grassroots art initiatives and providing platforms for marginalized voices to challenge existing power structures.

Santos (2018) explored on how public art installations in a post-conflict society influenced the reconciliation process and challenged divisive political ideologies. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with artists, policymakers, and community members, and analyzed the impact of public art installations on community perceptions and interactions. The study revealed that public art installations played a significant role in promoting dialogue, empathy, and understanding among divided communities, challenging rigid political ideologies, and fostering the reconciliation process. The authors emphasized the need for policymakers to invest in public art projects as a means of promoting social cohesion and healing in post-conflict societies.

Chen & Wang (2020) explored the impact of online art activism on challenging censorship and political control in authoritarian regimes. The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach, combining content analysis of online art activism campaigns with interviews and surveys of participating artists and audiences. The study revealed that online art activism played a crucial role in challenging oppressive political ideologies, providing alternative narratives, and mobilizing public engagement. It circumvented censorship and amplified marginalized voices. The authors suggested that digital platforms should support and protect online art activism, ensuring freedom of expression and facilitating the dissemination of challenging political messages.

López & García (2019) investigated the impact of art-based interventions on challenging racial power dynamics and promoting social justice in urban communities. The researchers conducted a quasi-experimental study, implementing art-based interventions in selected neighborhoods and assessing changes in participants' perceptions and attitudes through pre- and post-intervention surveys. The study found that art-based interventions led to increased awareness of racial power dynamics, challenged stereotypes, and promoted empathy and understanding among community members. The authors recommended the integration of art-based interventions into community development programs to foster social justice and combat racial inequalities.

Park & Lee (2018) examined the impact of political art exhibitions on public awareness and understanding of social issues and political ideologies. The researchers conducted a survey with visitors of political art exhibitions, assessing their awareness, knowledge, and attitudes towards social issues before and after the exhibition. The study demonstrated that political art exhibitions significantly increased visitors' awareness and knowledge of social issues, challenged prevailing political ideologies, and stimulated critical thinking and dialogue. The authors suggested that policymakers and art institutions should support and promote political art exhibitions as effective means of raising public awareness and fostering civic engagement.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low-cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

4. FINDINGS

Our study presented both a knowledge and methodological gap. A contextual gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the topic of discussion. For instance, López & García (2019) aimed to investigate the impact of art-based interventions on challenging racial power dynamics and promoting social justice in urban communities. The researchers conducted a quasi-experimental study, implementing art-based interventions in selected neighborhoods and assessing changes in participants' perceptions and attitudes through pre- and post-intervention surveys. The study found that art-based interventions led to increased awareness of racial power dynamics, challenged stereotypes, and promoted empathy and understanding among community members. The authors recommended the integration of art-based interventions into community development programs to foster social justice and combat racial inequalities. On the other hand, our current study focused on the how art reflects and challenges political ideologies and power structures in Lebanon.

Secondly, the study presented a methodological gap whereby, in their study on the impact of online art activism on challenging censorship and political control in authoritarian regimes. The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach, combining content analysis of online art activism campaigns with interviews and surveys of participating artists and audiences (López & García, 2019). The study revealed that online art activism played a crucial role in challenging oppressive political ideologies, providing alternative narratives and mobilizing public

engagement. Our current study on how art reflects and challenges political ideologies and power structures in Lebanon adopted a desk study research method.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has examined the intricate relationship between art and political ideologies, as well as power structures. Through an analysis of various artworks and their underlying messages, it is evident that art serves as a powerful medium for both reflecting and challenging political ideologies and power structures. Artistic expressions have the ability to depict social and political issues, critique existing power dynamics, and mobilize public opinion. The findings of this research highlight the significant role that art plays in shaping and questioning the prevailing narratives and power structures within society.

5.2 Recommendations

Governments, institutions, and societies should actively encourage artistic freedom and support a diverse range of artistic expressions. This will ensure that different political ideologies and perspectives are represented in the artistic landscape, fostering a more inclusive and nuanced discourse. Secondly, educational institutions should incorporate art education into their curriculum, emphasizing the importance of critical thinking and visual literacy. By analyzing and interpreting art that reflects and challenges political ideologies, students can develop a deeper understanding of power structures and become active participants in shaping society.

Efforts should be made to support independent artists and alternative platforms that provide spaces for marginalized voices and perspectives. This includes funding opportunities, exhibition spaces, and online platforms that amplify artists' works and allow for a wider dissemination of their messages. Moreover, encouraging collaborations between artists, activists, scholars, and policymakers can lead to a richer understanding of the intersections between art, politics, and power. By bringing together different perspectives and expertise, innovative approaches and solutions can be developed to address societal issues.

Public institutions, galleries and museums should strive to create accessible and engaging experiences for the public to interact with political art. This can include exhibitions, workshops, and public discussions that stimulate dialogue and promote critical thinking about the relationships between art, politics and power. Furthermore, implementing these recommendations, it is possible to create an environment that fosters the exploration and examination of art's role in reflecting and challenging political ideologies and power structures. This can contribute to a more informed and engaged citizenry, leading to a more inclusive and equitable society.

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