ART AS A VENUE FOR SOCIAL COMMENTARY: MODERN ARAB PRINTMAKERS AND SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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Article Info:

Abstract:

Hand-made printmaking is an effective power of art, which intensifies the human touch, unlike the digital process of mass production, which obliterates the human touch traces. In the scope of Arab printmaking artworks, this paper mainly aims to delve into the social commentary art, which involves employing rhetorical means to deliver commentary on important social issues in society. This paper also aims to provide insights into understanding the relationship between social commentary art and printmaking. Moreover, a historical outline of Arab printmaking is provided, which highlights the social commentary art in the Arab World. In its methodology, the study employed Feldman's model of art criticism, which consists of description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment. Based on this model, several Arab artworks, considered social commentary printmaking art, were described, interpreted, and criticized. The study findings revealed that Arab artists like Laila Shawa, Dia Al-Azzawi, Ali Cherri, Kamal Boullata, and Nasser Al-Yousif have constructively documented important social and political issues and delivered effectively spirited printmaking artworks. Therefore, their artworks contributed to enlightening and deepening our understanding of these issues in the Arab region. The study's implication involved enriching our interpretation of social commentary and acknowledging the relationship between social commentary art and printmaking in the Arab World.

Keywords:

Arab Printmaking, Arab Artists, Political Perception in Art, Cultural Perception in Art

Introduction

Art plays a significant role in our daily life, and the importance of social commentary has long been known by art, whereby issues are recognized by artists and conveyed to people through artists' artworks. Art, therefore, has a social function as images can affect the public, and artworks can convey messages, aiming at transforming people's perceptions of some issues. Artists can expose the reality of specific issues and direct people's attention to the existing social situation. Also, art can change the way people think and crack open cemented opinions (Chinoy, 2017). Many artists communicate their reactions and feelings through a specific artwork to display refusal attitudes towards a specific painful activity or scene. Artists assist people in recognizing a misfortune and raising awareness by cooperating with organizations, governments, and political officials (Almusaly, 2017).

In many Arab countries and due to the Arab diaspora, artists have mainly addressed socio-political issues and significant concerns at different complicated levels (Mikdadi, 2017). In the history of printing, the communication revolution, triggered by printing outspread use, was essential in press invention. According to Harold Innis, an economic historian, printing as a medium of communication has been trailed by significant social, political, economic, and intellectual changes in countries like Egypt and Turkey (Roper, 1988). Accordingly, this paper aims to provide a historical outline of Arab printmaking, discusses social commentary art in the Arab World, and highlights the relationship between printmaking and social commentary. However, this paper is limited to some printmaking artworks in the Arab region. Edmund Feldman's Art Criticism model is used in this paper because this model is the most distinguished and profound form of art criticism. Also, it helps to detect the aspects of social commentary in Arab printmaking artworks. Based on Feldman's model of art criticism, which consists of description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment, this paper describes several artworks that show how printmaking can present us with a rich social commentary and how Arab artists document specific issues in their countries through printmaking artworks. In doing so, artists document a long history of Arab art in a regional and global context. The description in this paper contributes to understanding the Arab social commentary art and its development over the years in the printmaking field.

Printmaking in the Scope of Arab Region: The Key Factor in The Development of Printmaking

The history of printing in Arabic script is compressed into nearly 250 years (Ayers, 2004) 2004). However, the contribution of the Arabs to the art of printing is still under appraisal. Generally, the communications role and a specific medium like printing are overlooked and mentioned in passing only by the Middle East's historians (Roper, 1988). Centuries before Gutenberg, block-prints printing was found in the context of Middle East art (Roper, 1988). Based on the Arab printing story, the adoption of printing was slow in the Islamic region because printing did not support the essential normative Islamic values, such as revelation, transmission, and education (Ayers, 2004). The first Arabic book printed in a movable type was the religious "*A Book of Hours*" on September 12, 1514, in Fano, Italy (Hitti, 1942). The first Quran was printed in 1530 in Venice. History, poetical, and grammar books were printed in European cities using the Arabic language and were used in teaching (Krek, 1979).

Meanwhile, typography in the Arab area took place in the Ottoman Empire, but it did not develop because of the fear of sultans that some biased persons might manipulate holy, religious texts. This fact highlights a difference between the history of printing in Europe,

which spanned over 550 years, compared to the printing history in the Islamic region. In European history, printing first appeared due to its role in the Protestant Reformation (Ayers, 2004). However, the production of Arabic books remained firmly in scribes' hands, and the Arab press was not effectively operating in the Islamic region (Roper, 1988).

According to Tadrus (1982), the first Arabic printing media opened in 1706 in Syria; however, it was short-lived because of political and economic reasons. After that, several Maronite monks moved from Lebanon to stay in Rome in the early seventeenth century to master the printing technique. At that time, there was no printing press in Lebanon for nearly a century. In 1734, a man named Abdullah Zakher from the Middle East was the first to construct a printing press and, therefore, printed using the Arabic language with a moveable type. Thus, he was the founder of the first Arabic printing press in Lebanon (Figure 1 (Karenkaram, 2016). He skillfully mastered printing with all difficulties without formal training and teachers (Lunde, 1981). In the Ottoman Empire capital, Istanbul, in 1729, the first Arabic book was printed using the alphabet of Arabic under the support of an Islamic government throughout Sultan Ahmed III reign (from 1673 to 1736) by a figure named Ahmet Efendi Celebi with his son Sait, the most skilful writers as the well-known Ibrahim Muteferrika (from 1674 to 1745), the talented artisan and expert printer (Lunde, 1981). Printing using the Arabic script presents a variety of challenges. There are four distinct forms of Arabic letters depending upon the location in each word. Arabic is a form of cursive script. This indicates that most Arabic letters are connected to other prior letters and the following Arabic letters by a specific ligature, which can be changed in direction and length.

Moreover, calligraphy is the most refined Islamic art form, and, therefore, Arabic readers can be critical on aesthetic grounds at times. Nowadays, only a few readers can be delighted with the computerized type in Arabic publications. In 1729, the first Arabic book, Ibrahim Muteferrika, was published, and its printing was approved by the Mufti, who stated that this book was like a pearl (Lunde, 1981). Compared with a famous figure like Ibrahim Muteferrika, Abd Allah Zakhir had encountered difficulties, which were quite challenging for his peers, printing Arabic books using a movable type printing in the Middle East region. He had not received any training, and he managed to master a very challenging craft without being taught or directed by teachers (Lunde, 1981).

Printing using a moveable type was not discovered until Napoleon's expedition arrived in Egypt (from 1798 to 1801), when he decided to use it for several practical reasons. Therefore, the Napoleonic presses prepared the ground for nationalism and democracy. Napoleon's printing presses in Egypt had served to promote French learning, culture, and ideas and a valuable method of propaganda, thereby educating the Egyptians about Napoleon's goals and ambitions. In Cairo, Bulaq Press was founded by the ruler Muhammad Ali (from 1805 to 1849), the Wali (i.e., the Assistant of the Turkish Sultan). Bulaq Press was the most significant Egyptian printing business. Bulaq Press restored a printing practice since Napoleon's campaign in the country. Printing had a tremendous impact on Egypt - it paved the way for Westernization in the Middle East and possibly triggered the renaissance period after a long period of Ottoman domination. Muhammad Ali's development of printing presses in Egypt, notably the Bulaq Press, was one of his most notable achievements. An Italian-Arabic dictionary was the first book published by the Bulaq Press and was printed in 1822. Ink and printing paper were imported from Italy in Europe, but the ink was later manufactured domestically. In 1860, Egypt had established the first paper factory to be the Middle East's centre for Arabic books, whereby

they were sold by every Arab country and imported into the United States, Indonesia, and Pakistan (Tadrus, 1982).

According to Tadrus (1982), printing was introduced to other Arab countries relatively late, in Iraq, e.g., because of the country's geographic isolation and the unstable political situations, which had prevented early relations with Europe. Moreover, in 1856, the Dominican monks introduced the first printing. The first official press, Matba'at al-Wilayah, was founded in 1859. This steam-operated press was brought from France, and, in 1913, private publishers bought it. Matba'at al-Adab (i.e., The Printing of the Arts) was established in Iraq in 1909. In 1947, the first printing (Matba'at al-Ma'arif) was established in Kuwait. There is no doubt that the country's economic prosperity aided tremendously in the growth of printing. In 1909, another press was founded in Haifa, Jordan, where al-Urdun (i.e., the Jordan) newspaper was printed. In 1884, in Saudi Arabia, AI-Matba'ah al-Amiriyah was the first Saudi press that published the famous 'Sahifat Al-Hijaz' (i.e., Hedjaz Journal), whereas another press published 'al-Qiblah' newspaper in 1919. In 1926, when Saudi Arabia was founded by Saudi King ibn Saoud, not many books were published in the country. In 1937, however, the King sent Saudi students to study printing in Egypt and founded the first government press; because of Saudi people's educational needs, as well as training activities, an enormous press known as (Aramco) was founded in Saudi Arabia in 1961 (Tadrus, 1982).

The Arab press establishment has brought the region forward as Arab countries have long suffered from intellectual neglect and were deprived of modern civilization. However, in the 1800s, artists in the West changed from printmaking in the wake of inventing and developing photography art. In 1919, the German Bauhaus School, which triggered creativity and manufacturing, led to further advancements in the techniques of printmaking. In the early 20th century, a rebirth of this art took place. Pablo Picasso, with other artists, started to explore different printmaking approaches. In later periods of the 20th century, Andy Warhol, Henry Moore, Robert Rauschenberg, and Frank Stella resumed their experiments in this form of art (Kalsi, 2017).

On the other hand, the advent of computer graphics has affected printmaking. Computer graphics is essential, which complement various forms of printmaking like screen-printing and polyester lithography (Hughes & Vernon-Morris, 2008). During the post-war period, Arab artists, who studied in Europe and USA, started to incorporate the versatile medium into innovative practices to produce artworks with a unique philosophy (Kalsi, 2017). According to Roper (1988), the communication medium, particularly printing, did not affect the social, economic, and political systems, but it has exerted a direct psychological impact on individuals and has had far-reaching implications for human development.

Figure 1: The First Arabic Printing Press in Lebanon

Source: (Karenkaram, 2016)

Social Commentary: Definition and Function

Social commentary is practised through various communication forms, from printing to conversations towards computerized communication, and it involves applying rhetorical means for providing commentary on important issues in society. This aims to implement or promote change by telling the general public about problems in an attractive way to the individuals' perceptions of justice (Sangeetha, Phil, Peter, & Phil, 2018). Moreover, the definition of 'social commentary' in the Cambridge Dictionary in which 'social' means something related to the society and the way people live, such as social problems or social and political changes, and 'commentary' means a discussion or an explanation of something – it involves a spoken account of events via a radio or television when the event is currently happening. Therefore, social commentary means explaining, describing, or discussing something currently happening in society, such as social issues. Furthermore, social commentary involves expressing attitudes or feelings toward society, often occurring in literature (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Writers of social commentaries believe that there is an innate feeling of justice and humanity in each person because of the virtue of being a human. For instance, Charles Dickens (1812-1870) wrote weekly novels, a series of social commentary on how the poor orphans lived. Such authors uphold themselves as expressionists or guardians of such inborn sentiments (Hibbert, 2007).

In the function of social commentary art, the key idea involves maintaining good comments about serious issues for the benefit of a given society (Yaacob, 2015). Developing art forms like street art or graffiti is a different form of art, usually used to self-express as a commentary about social issues. However, it is forgotten that graffiti existed a long time ago, and it played a pivotal role in the Ancient Egyptian culture, the Roman Empire, and Ancient Greece (Writer, 2015). Social commentary art is an expression of people's experiences. Moreover, artists express their actual messages about specific issues they want the audience to experience (Yaacob, 2015). Art and politics are linked to each other in Western art (Wong, 2019). Almusaly (2017) pointed out that what makes art a suitable additional tool in the Arab region to resolve conflict is its ability to convey messages across different communities, cultures, and individuals. Previous authors depicted art as a powerful communication tool because it can travel across boundaries. Considering the artist's creative process, it often includes different influences, including ideological, social, and political influences, and artists are considered social individuals that reflect different social conditions (Hawes, 2007).

Relationship Between Printmaking and Social Commentary

Printmaking and social commentary have maintained a solid relationship for a long time. Hand-made prints possess adequate power as they appear different because they fail to be in line with the rest of the environment (Triantafillou, 2010). According to Yaacob (2015), photography demonstrates individuals' situations, feelings, difficulties, happiness, and sadness in the context of social commentary. The researcher debated that printmaking can also involve that as it is a communication tool that transforms people's way of thinking and acting. Usually, artists can be a bit sly, pointing to things that pull us outside our traditional thinking People define art as fiction, according to Picasso, who stated that art is a lie, which makes people realize true things. Nonetheless, art can invent things that might be more authentic about our world than a photographic picture (Zinn, 2012). Artworks create a similar reality, which remains tangible, but the genuine reality has become history (Almusaly, 2017).

Social commentary has occurred along with societies, which were around to comment. Since human beings first started to interact in groups, cultural, religious, and political issues have attracted the attention of artists to fix them. In such an attempt, it must be noted that no hard lines can be found to be separated. Artists, who merge souls to comprehend themselves, often consider life the bigger picture they paint (Almusaly, 2017). An artist's completed artwork represents his thoughts and feelings about a particular phenomenon, such as political, social, and cultural experiences. Kleinsmith (2014) stated that during the complex evolution of printmaking as a form of production, printmaking's graphic and the serialized nature has regularly dealt with radical political and social commentary. In their unique ways, artists have, for centuries, utilized print technologies to express their resentful thoughts of incidences of inequality, social injustice, and war violence.

Printmaking also increases possibilities for participation, expression, and communication between artists and people (Triantafillou, 2010). For example, many of Mexico's 19th-century printmakers were part of a group of radical dissidents. Rather than verbally criticizing the government's political actions, they provided visual images of corrupt leaders who have lost interest in the nation's well-being (Clark, 1997; Pickett, 2009). During the period of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), printmaker Jose Posada (1852-1913) was one of the most important illustrators who used his artworks as a weapon against government injustice and public apathy, as shown in Figure 2 (Pickett, 2009).

The unique theme of Posada's prints presented inspiration for contemporary printmaking and modern art worldwide. One of the primary goals of printmaking is to reflect on society. Posada has influenced many artists because of open accusations regarding social oppression and political corruption (Pickett, 2009). Printmaking, as opposed to photocopying or mass production, is the process of generating unique artwork on paper. Furthermore, printmaking artwork serves to transfer civilizations, communities, and faiths not only in the past but also in the present.
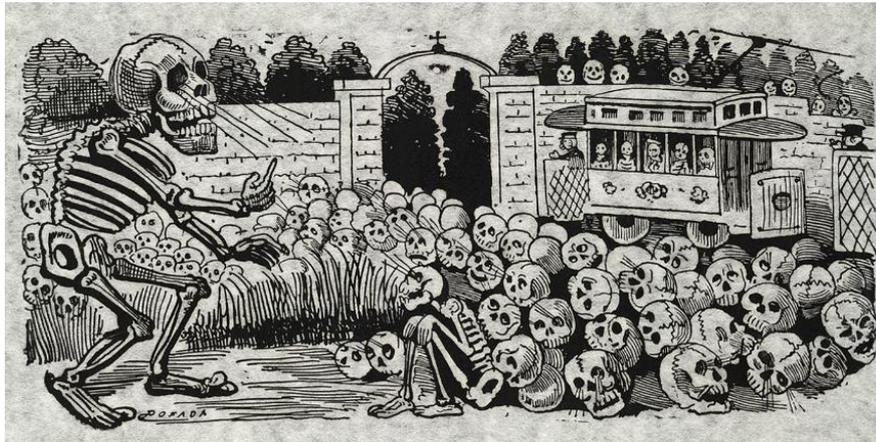
Figure 2: Jose Posada, Gran calavera eléctrica (Grand electric calavera), relief etching; 21.4 x 34 cm

Source: (Arroyo, 1907)

Social Commentary Art and How It Affects Arab Artists Through Printmaking

The social commentary uses art through artworks intended to expose the fact of a situation to promote change and inform society about social problems. It becomes audience art when no one tells you how to execute anything. Taking responsibility, changing people, and confronting the status quo is what art is all about (Godin, 2010). Thus, artists are responsible for conveying a valuable message through their artworks.

Thousands of years ago, rock paintings were the earliest human artworks in the Arabian Peninsula. The paintings about animals and humans were vital because they conveyed symbolic meanings linked to the beliefs of the time (Al-Senan, 2015). However, in the 19th century, particularly in France, art was first appreciated for its crucial role as an intensifying tool against political and social conditions (Almusaly, 2017). Social commentary has proliferated in Western countries, whereas in the Arab region, it has received very little attention. Arab countries were isolated culturally, while modernity developed in Europe and North America. In the early times, education was unavailable for many people – it was also minimal among high-class people, who lived in cities, but gradually art began to be realized among people. For example, in Saudi Arabia, even though these beginnings were disconnected, they motivated artists to practice more and participate in exhibitions held throughout the kingdom (Al-Senan, 2015). A direct protest of government is usually hazardous to an artist, but with some freedom in visual art, artists have the advantage to do artworks freely.

Moreover, adequate evaluation of artworks does not exist because there is little distinction between art as a profession and art as a hobby. During the Islamic period, people considered art part of their daily lives. It appeared on the walls of their mosques, on their furniture, and on the books, they read. Most professional Arab artists can gain respect outside their countries through migration or international exhibitions (Lutfi, 2019). However, according to Khadraoui (2017), in the Middle East region, where accessible criticism of government and cultural standards can be considered heresy, the fusion of art with socio-political commentary thrives.

According to Chrabieh (2018), the artists who express their testimonies to the war destruction and resistance and a transformative vision to change or help can shape the societies, like the Iraqi artist Dia Al-Azzawi, Palestinian artist Laila Shawa, and Kamal Boullata. Those artists

graphically and visually captured the pointless slaughter of millions of people, the deserted landscapes, and shattered settlements by senseless conflicts. They depicted their instinctive feelings when they experienced war traumas, conveying the unity of humankind, particularly contextual resistance voices. An artist's completed artwork represents his thoughts and feelings about a particular phenomenon, such as political, social, and cultural experiences, and, as such, artists are mediators, reflectors, or even translators of social issues in society.

Artists' Perceptions of Politics and War
In social commentary arts, politics has always been a concern for artists. According to Almusaly (2017), art is employed in a political confrontation to produce propaganda for serving one specific party or another over others. However, there were many extensive conflicts and violent incidents in the Middle East due to the struggle between politicians. Therefore, artists are obligated to raise awareness of painful tragedies in their artworks to heal and spread messages of hope and resilience.

According to Al-Bahloly (2013), the artist is a warrior who refuses to stop using his weapon, especially when he considers himself a spokesman for the world and his everlasting sacrifice in the world by expressing his powerful desire to refuse to believe in the false. This paper provides some printmaking artworks for Arab artists, which mirror the harsh reality of political issues. Many artists express their feelings and emotions in artworks to convey a rejection of a painful act. In Palestine, for example, the war has made this effect particularly evident. Artists strive to reflect the harsh political reality of the country and target themes of persecution and injustice.
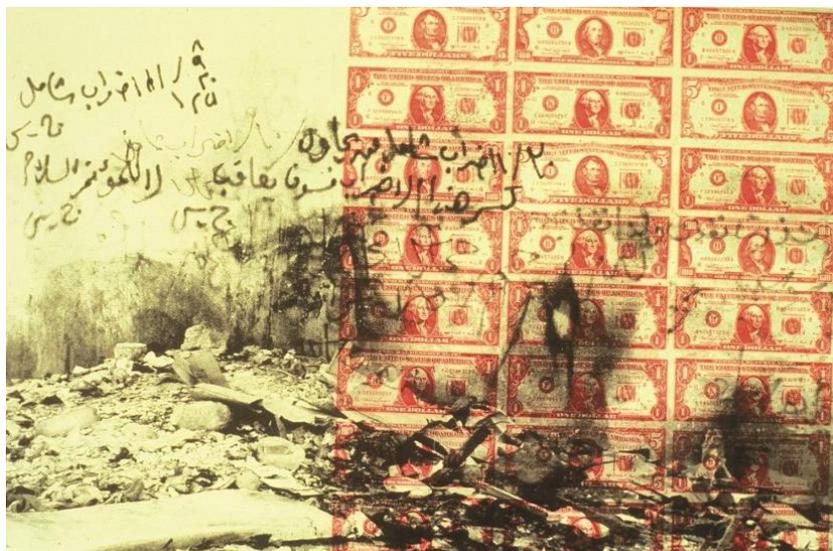

Figure 3: Laila Shawa's Blood Money from the series "Walls of Gaza", 1994, Lithograph on paper, 60 x 44 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

Figure 4: Laila Shawa's the Sponsors from the series "Walls of Gaza", 1994, Lithograph on paper, 60 x 44 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.
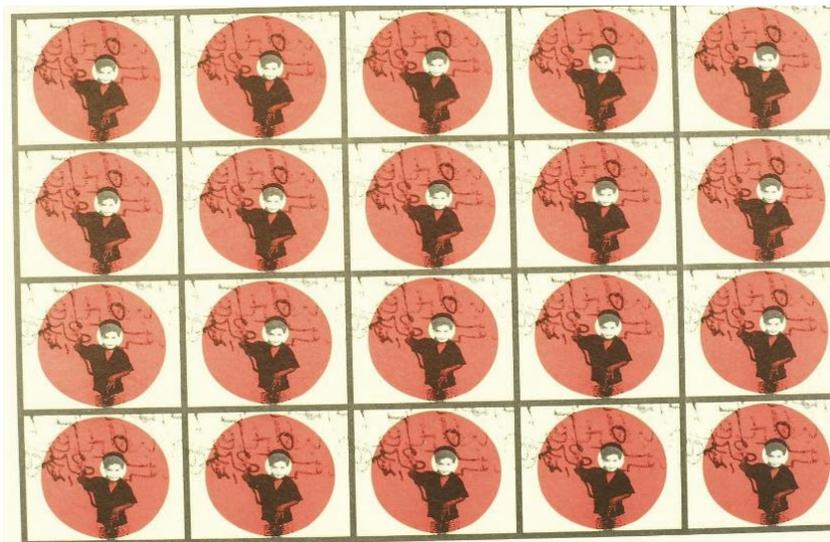

Figure 5: Laila Shawa's 20 Targets from the series "Walls of Gaza", 1994, Lithograph on paper, 60 x 44 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

Artist Laila Shawa, born in 1940, is a Palestinian artist from Gaza. She. She is an oil painter and silkscreen artist. She is an international artist whose works are exhibited in many European countries and the Arab World, China, Malaysia, Russia, and the USA (Barjeel Art Foundation, 2010).

The 1994 series, 'Walls of Gaza' (set of 12), is one of Shawa's most internationally recognized bodies of work. In an interview with Laila, she hoped for a better future for Palestinians. Laila Shawa has maintained that due to frequently imposed curfews in occupied Palestine and because of the Israeli blockade, any media was banned in Gaza, including newspapers, TV, or radio; every wall in Gaza has become a canvas for written words and elaborate wall paintings, which were means of communication used to deliver messages and announcements between the Palestinians. However, the graffiti art disappeared quickly since the Israeli military forced

Palestinians to remove it (Kuhail, 2020). This artwork is based on photographs. It took several years for the printmaking technique to overly produce the black and white photographic images with primary colours, thereby utilizing aesthetic beauty to spotlight the opposition's tragedies, hopes, and political urges.

According to Edmund Feldman's art criticism model, the artwork (Blood Money), as shown in Figure 3, displays 24 pieces of banknotes that are repeated on the right part in red colour. On the left, we can see prints with black and white of ruins and graffiti writings for Palestine's people. The artist merged money and ruins in the painting. The artwork shows money in red colour. Also, the written phrases are about the all-out strike, and there is a punishment for those trying to break it. The artist did not use different colour values. There is no brush texture since it is a printmaking style. The artist probably used primary colours to refer to existing pain and suffering, and she used red colour for money to express blood and victims. The artwork (The Sponsors) shown in Figure 4 exhibits a USA flag print with original colors, black and white ruins, and a currency sign with the graffiti writing style. The artist merged money, ruins, and assault in this painting. The artwork shows the flag and money sign in considerable size and does not use different colour values. The enormous size of the USA flag and money currency signifies the main reason for the ruins. The artist used primary colours, thereby utilizing aesthetic beauty to spotlight tragedies, hopes, and political urges of opposition. The artwork (20 Target) in Figure 5 displays a 20 square target sign repeated on the whole artwork with red circles. In the middle of each square, we can see prints in black and white of a young boy raising his hand and some graffiti writings for Palestine's people.

Shawa tried to visualize and abstract the issue, which could help people understand it better. She used the visual language linked with pop art in her artworks and repeated silkscreened images, which present an endless cycle of victim and aggressor. According to Bonilla-Puig (2015), "Printmaking's role in the art of protest will continue to evolve in the future as issues that necessitate civil disobedience continue to arise." Using printmaking techniques, especially silkscreen in this series for Laila Shawa, makes it easier and immediate for her to deliver the message to the public and the ability to repeat it. In Laila's artwork series "Walls of Gaza", the viewer can sense the power of images that foreground the long-term effects of war on generations of Palestinians. Shawa documented that and reflected the political realities of Palestine, aiming at manifesting themes of injustice and oppression. She often looks for an absurd aspect and tries to cover it with a sense of humour.

Figure 6: Dia Al Azzawi, Nasheed Al Jassad (Bodily Anthem) Tel El Zaatar (set of 17), 1979, silkscreen, 64 x 65 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

The following artwork, which represents a political plight, is made by Dia Al Azzawi. He is regarded as one of Iraq's greatest artists, born in Baghdad in 1939. As a socially and politically committed artist, Al-Azzawi focuses on human situations and the history and politics of the Arab World (Maasri, 2020). Azzawi commented that something different has to be created, something associated with our history (Kane, 2013). According to Edmund Feldman's art criticism model, as displayed in Figure 6, the artwork shows a silkscreen print of human figures with black colour and some handwriting from the poem with the graffiti writing style. The artist merged the poem and printmaking, and the series is known as, 'The Bodily Anthem', which is based on a famous poem by the well-known Palestinian poet 'Mahmud Darwish', called "Ahmad al-Zaatar", in which he drew his inspiration from human figures from these narratives. This has allowed him to shape the human form and then deconstruct it to serve as a representation of violence (Al-Bahloly, 2013). Azzawi mentioned that he used black as a dominant colour to honour thousands of people who lost their lives to remind the viewers of the victims' plight (Kane, 2013).

"The use of traditional printmaking as a preferred means of communicating activist sentiments throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century ... printmaking has continued to be utilized for advocacy and protest. The medium's capacity for creating visually striking compositions and its ability to be widely circulated to the public via printed publications and graffiti has contributed to this phenomenon" (Bonilla-Puig, 2015).

With artwork that usually directly replies to contemporary events and culture, astute sensitivity towards socio-political history and world events is achieved. A Lebanese artist, Ali Cherri, who is interested in aesthetics, practices, and politic, believes that artworks possess the power to amaze us, trying to emphasize the function of such images in his artwork. Ali mentioned that his works are political, without the capital letter 'P', and whatever a political act can be – even if it involves a polite gesture in a "civil duties" sense – often, my artworks are engaged in events around us (Kabra, 2015). He has a graphic design background and printing, and he makes himself part of the produced artwork through printmaking because he can touch, cut with his hands, and smell the ink.

According to Edmund Feldman's art criticism model, Ali Cherri's artwork, as shown in Figure 7, known as 'I carry my flame', is about the sign of flaming oneself in its physical sense, flaming and disfiguring for a purpose. Cherri used amazing footage of someone walking while being set on fire. With different skills, he created a stop motion as he saw this scene. "artists working throughout the long 20th century likely had access to mechanical and eventually digital forms of creating and replicating images, including photography, mediums that were also fairly inexpensive and could be produced more quickly." (Bonilla-Puig, 2015). Cherri redrew the frames using the silkscreen method to move it from an online image to a high-quality artwork with texture and presence (Kabra, 2015). Using landscape pictures of the cities, as displayed in Figure 8, he attracted the public attention to these cities, which were worst hit by conflicts and war in the Arab World. Cherri has depicted in these black-and-white lithograph images split by fault lines, which have an archival, archaeological quality. These images remind the ongoing and historical conflicts between these cities and their wider, respective countries in 20th and 21st-century histories. Lithographs are suitable for printing both pictures and text, and it is faster and more efficient than alternative techniques such as etching (Bonilla-Puig, 2015). According to Bonilla-Puig (2015), "printmaking's role in the art of protest will continue to evolve as issues that necessitate civil disobedience continue to arise." Therefore,

printmaking is significantly related to social commentary, especially political issues. The artists applied different types of printmaking to express themes about politics, and they highlighted different forms of political issues that they experienced.
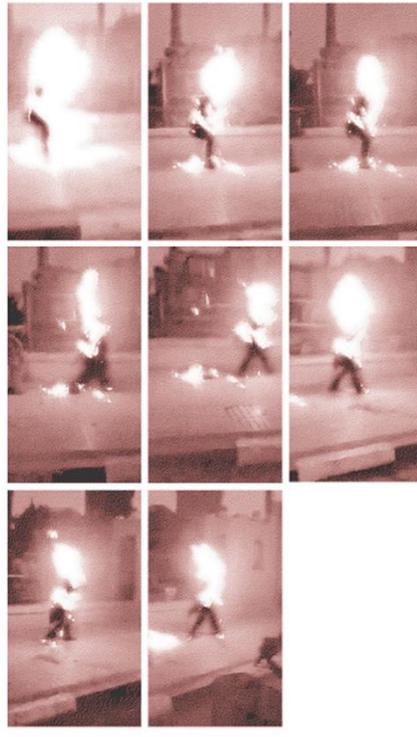

Figure 7: Ali Cherri, I Carry My Flame, 2011, Serigraphy, 54 x 74 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

Figure 8: Ali Cherri, Trembling Landscapes (Beirut), 2012, Lithographic print and archival ink stamp, four frames of 70 x 100 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

Artist's View of Traditions and Cultural Events

In this section, several artworks related to traditions and lifestyle are discussed to appreciate how social commentary is used in printmaking artwork to signify related issues. The following artwork, which used traditions and daily life as the main theme, was created by Nasser Al Yousif. He was born in 1940. Nasser Al Yousif is one of the pioneers of visual art in Bahrain. He withdrew from life, drifting through cities, villages, and neighbourhoods - his visual repertoire is rich with scenes of daily life and Bahrain's famous natural landscape. Nasser Al Yousif was greatly admired in Bahrain as one of the first people who eliminated the idea that science is more important than arts. In 1994, Nasser Al Yousif lost his vision when he started a radiotherapy treatment for a brain tumour, which caused a serious deterioration in his eyesight. According to Ayoob (2015), "Beethoven proved that you can still be a composer without hearing, and Nasser Al Yousif has also proved that you can still be an artist without sight." He experimented with different methods and forms of making art.

Figure 9: Nasser Al Yousif, Dance of Joy, 2004, linocut print, 50 x 56 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

Figure 10: Nasser Al Yousif, Wedding Procession, 1998, linocut print, 51 x 40 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

According to Edmund Feldman's art criticism model, '*Dance of Joy*', as shown in Figure 9, exhibits an outline of a repeated woman in the whole painting with black and white colours. On the top, we can see prints in black and white of two women holding a musical instrument called (Tar or Daf). The artist has created levels of women's lines in the painting with a design pattern in their clothes. The women have raised their hands, waving. The artist did not use different colour values, and there is no brush texture since it is a printmaking style. The artist probably used black and white colours to depict the women's Hejab used. He used these colours to concentrate on the content and to be easy for him to do the artwork since he had lost his vision. Figure 10, '*Wedding Procession*' displays an outline of women and men repeated in the middle of the painting with black and white colours. We can see prints in black and white of women holding a musical instrument called (Tar or Daf). The artist has depicted the movement of people celebrating in the painting by repeating the human figure. Also, the artist did not use different colour values. There is no brush texture since it is a printmaking style. The artist used black and white colours to focus only on the topic and concentrate on the content. In Figures 9 and 10, the viewer can see that the artist documented, in detail, the style of music and dance in his linoleum prints. He delivered rhythm and harmony in the music by using relief printing as linocut, which is suitable to repeat the figures and convey the intended message to the public. His style involves no details. He drew the action as an idea and, therefore, he was satisfied. Through his printmaking artworks, the artist promoted visual communication by telling old folktales about traditions. He captured with his printings the traditions and cultures of the Bahraini families of the 1950s. According to Triantafillou (2010), "the ability of older, analogue print media to register the artist's temperament through direct handwork." Artist Orlee Malka has used printmaking in the themes of the female and memory; he stated that "I am thinking of printmaking as a technique to think of mark-making on the body, the face. I like making a mark, a drawing on copper that then can be reproduced."
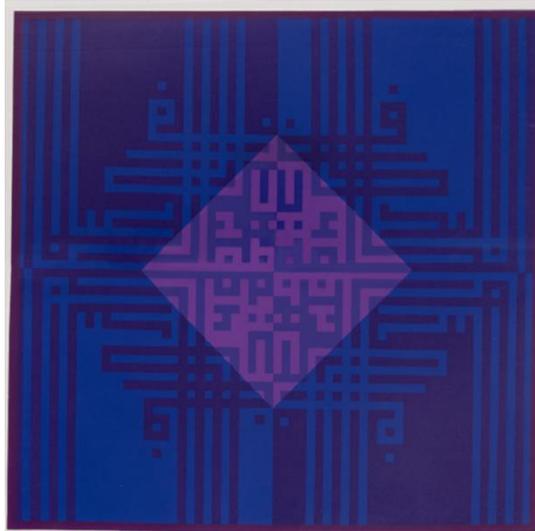

Figure 11: Kamal Boullata, In the Beginning, was the word, 1983, silkscreen, 58 x 58 cm. Image courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah.

For a contemporary artist, who has conveyed his exclusive fascination with geometry as a tool, Kamal Boullata is one of the best historians in Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic art history. He pursued consolidating the memory of Palestinian art in books and encyclopedias that are prominent scientific and historical references. Kamal Boullata was born in Jerusalem in 1942,

and his works are placed in private and public collections like the British Museum, London; Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah; New York Public Library, New York. The first touch that distinguishes Boullata is his combination of creativity, which made him one of the most significant Palestinian and Arab artists in criticism, art history, and aesthetic research (Independent Arabia, 2019).

In his work, '*In the Beginning, was the Word*, ' shown in Figure 11, he has transformed angular Kufic designs in Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem into colourful geometries across his silkscreens. Silk-screen is an appropriate technique for using geometric compositions, repetition and facilitating the layers of colours. His goal is to present a living document that constitutes an honest testimony about the beginnings of the Arab cultural and artistic renaissance in Palestine (Independent Arabia, 2019). His artworks have developed a distinctive pictorial language, incorporating Arabic words and letters in Kufic script in colourful geometric designs. He used geometric compositions because it is the best visual language before calligraphy. According to Barjeel Art Foundation (2014), Kamal Boullata mentioned that his artworks resemble precious products of a prime images writer, where Arabic words represent iconic importance, and its aesthetic components mirror a modern language of abstract manifestation. According to Barcio (2019), his earlier text-based works have influenced the development of calligraffiti, a contemporary street art trend that combines Arabic letters and Abstract Expressionism. The text is aesthetically transformed to produce abstract compositions beyond the literal meaning.

Arab artists have been devoting themselves to documenting the progression of Arab traditions and culture throughout history as they are more interested in what would happen to their culture in the future. Consequently, through using different printing techniques, these artists were able to express their concerns related to their traditions and daily life. Also, they highlighted different forms of themes that they experienced themselves in society.

Conclusion

Social commentary is known worldwide, and it has received many artists' attention. Artists have visualized politics, traditions, and cultural issues via printmaking artworks linked to social commentary. Of course, many existing social issues, such as political or cultural issues, cannot be solved by related agencies and artists. However, collaboration and support are required from both parties to address them. As a symbolic reflection of social reality, this discussion has shown how printmaking can provide us with a rich reservoir of social commentary, thereby providing a rich medium through the lens of Arab printmakers. This paper provided a deeper understanding of social commentary printmaking in the Arab region. Therefore, printmaking artists or researchers can use the discussion of this paper as a reference. The public can also employ the provided description to understand better and appreciate printmaking artworks.

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