



THE ART OF RESISTANCE: VISUAL CULTURE, TESTIMONY AND SPACE CREATIVE REPERTOIRE IN THE CHOBBIISH (24) '36 JULY' UPRISING

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how artistic resistance had a historical bearing on the unfolding of the dramatic events in the political landscape of Bangladesh during July-August 2024. Like several other resistance movements, the Bangladesh protests have been far from modest and the factors are manifold. It can be debated that various artists had a central and noteworthy part in shaping the resistance and communicating the demands of the protestors. Recently, artists' groups and collectives have been dominant in mobilising people together not only in Bangladesh (2024) but also in Sri Lanka (2022) and Hong Kong (2019) and have undoubtedly ushered in resolve and support in the congregation and demonstration for the uprising through cultural activism. Through a literature analysis, this study draws from a historical context the intersections of art and resistance in political and social movements across the globe and the transformations resulting in mobilisation, for instance, the Arab uprising, the Hong Kong umbrella protests, and the Black Lives Matter movement. Firstly, it looks at the perspective of trauma discourse and the production of resistance art and visual expressions by analysing the posters and graffiti used in the July protests. Second, it reflects upon spaces (Lefebvre) in resistance and examines how they emerged and challenged many aspects of the existing social order, focusing on "the wall as a space of resistance" in Dhaka, Bangladesh. This paper offers a vital contribution to understanding the intertwining of art in resistance through a spatial lens and trauma discourse in visual testimony since the trajectory of a resistance movement from its inner emotional core is as important as its outer spatial one.

Keywords: Art, resistance, visual testimony, graffiti, July uprising, cultural testimony, space

INTRODUCTION

*An artist discovers his genius the day he dares not
to please*

Andre` Malraux: 1947

The resurgence of the popular voice in the form of public resistance has been observed in recent times across the world in an attempt to change policy be it political, cultural or social, witnessing the public turning out in large numbers onto the streets and engaging in demonstrations and performances creating waves of protest events in the public sphere, at times mounting to a crisis. Resistance and public mobilisation are located in their specific national, regional, political, economic, social, cultural and institutional milieu which at

times get enlarged and become relevant in a global or international context (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001). Scholarly interest in the subtleties between resistance and social movements, media and politics is not new. The dynamics at work when resistance emerges and develops into a movement in the public space and the underlying factors that moot the action – the reasons, and claims that force men and women onto the streets has its enormous complexities. It is interesting to understand how the locations are chosen to attract public attention and the intersections at play linking the social and cultural factors during times of a turbulent socio-political atmosphere. Resistance movements are mighty and consuming for altering political and cultural hegemony. In contemporary

times when the public has gone to the streets for various causes worldwide, “public spaces” have resurfaced in academic scholarship. Dragging the plight to the public spaces is paramount to expression in resistance which attracts attention to the public at large, the authorities and eventually the media. To this end, the study accords a chronicle of the “July 36” uprising in Bangladesh and is a modest attempt to advance research on art, trauma and space in resistance.

Research Context and Significance

Several forms of artistic protests have taken place across the globe in the form of muralism, music, street theatre, poetry, and performances and have each played a role in influencing and inspiring the respective movement. Caught in the twirl of the oddities in the political scenario in the state, artists have grown to deploy a dominant bearing on political and social life. The month of July 2024 beheld one of the most notable catastrophes in political history recently. An uprising in Bangladesh with students at the forefront ensued in ousting a regime that had been in power for 15 years and was steadily growing to be more authoritarian. A peaceful campaign resisting a quota system gathered momentum and metamorphosed into a countrywide movement that entailed the ouster of one of the longest-serving political leaders and longest-tenured female head of government, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the 5th of August though she was credited for economic turnaround for the country.

The artistic community comprising artists, filmmakers and writers took to the streets and occupied them in resistance along with student protesters and the diverse public until Sheikh Hasina was ousted, besides using social media to their advantage (Rebeiro, 2024). The walls in the city of Dhaka, Bangladesh have been painted with murals, graffiti, slogans and art. “36 July” on the walls of Dhaka University attempts to commemorate the bloodshed and killings during the protest that began on the 1st of June and ended on the 5th of August. It's a quirky coinage by the protesters to describe the 5th of August, and memorialise 31 days of July and 5 days in August (Dutt, 2024).

The significance of the study is that it explores the intersectionality of resistance with art,

testimony and the production of space in protest movements. This article reflects art in resistance movements and attempts to ask broader questions regarding the intertwining of visual culture and resistance using a spatial lens and testimonies of trauma.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Protest Paradigms

It can be observed that research on protest movements was shaped by the time or period during which it was carried out. For example, in the late 1980s academic literature centred around cultural dynamics that motivate protests and collective action (Tarrow, 1994). Literature also digresses from protest movement analysis to contentious politics as deliberated by scholars investigating social movements (McAdam et al., 2001). In the 1970s and 1980s, theorists in the West proposed that the accessibility of resources namely organisational, financial and institutional was paramount for the success or collapse of protests and social movements rather than the existence of latent grievances and supported the resource mobilisation theory (Jenkins, 1983; Zald, et al., 2008). Waters (2016) presents her criticism of the resource mobilisation theory stating that it reflects the materialistic approach due to its origins in economics.

Political and social movement research has in general followed two approaches; first, the comparative studies focusing on international issues and second, studies focusing on weakly resourced social groups (Chabanet and Royall, 2016). Academic literature increasingly provides arguments from theorists who propound that in the era of a highly globalised technologically dependent society, dynamic information flows. Resistance movements are capable of transcending their material and physical limitations in the search for alternative symbolic forms of influence (Waters, 2016).

Predominant frameworks employed in protest or social movement research include frame analysis, political opportunity structures and resource mobilisation. Chabanet and Royall (2016) have hypothesised that the ‘weakly resourced groups’ contour a well-adapted point of departure to evaluate both the cogency and vagueness of the three main protest paradigms – i) resource mobilisation ii)

political opportunity structure and iii) frame analysis. The authors propose that the weakly resourced collectives by definition are a challenge to the protest paradigms and occasionally some groups have no political backing or resources.

Another significant point put forth in literature is that the weakly resourced groups focus a lot on the symbols or meanings which form the crux in mobilising support and help generate interest in them claiming that they exist (Chabanet and Royall, 2010; Cadiou, Dechezells and Roger, 2007). In general, the collectives centre on the same classification of actors namely- students, farmers, unemployed, and immigrants who form the weakly resourced group and at times the resistance movements arise in similar political systems, characterised by a high degree of totalitarianism. Gamson and Meyers (1996) work emphasises the role of visual art in amplifying collectives and expressing grievances.

Melucci (1996) posits the role of resistance is to present strong cultural symbols or codes and meanings and to disrupt the prevailing cultural codes constructed by those in power. Waters (2016) claims that Bourdieu's notion of symbolic power is more apt to analyse the French peasants' movement as against the resource mobilisation or frame analysis approach, which according to her relies heavily on strategic and rational conception of a protest.

Recent scholarship on social and protest movements focuses on the power of social media in the rapid sharing and dissemination of content and emotions through digital art and photographs and helps create a sense of urgency, solidarity of purpose and mobilisation (Altamimi, 2020; Castell, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015). Interestingly, de Moraes et al. (2020) have explored the gender differences in participation in social media protests in a Brazilian context, and their findings indicate that men participate more in online protests than women.

1.2 Art in Resistance

Academic literature on various forms of artistic expression in resistance or 'art activism' in spurring political change has been examined considerably by previous

researchers that documents and underscores the historical relevance of visual culture beginning from the Civil Rights Movement to the contemporary times across the world (Deutsche, 1996; Teune, 2005; Lemoine and Ouardi, 2010; Kraidy, 2016; Reed, 2019; Zecchini, 2019, 2020; Nercam, Ithurbide and Baute's, 2024).

The extensive use of graffiti art, Chicano and murals in movements and the rise of muralism in Mexico post-revolution has been studied by many researchers highlighting the catalytic role of various muralists (Latore, 2008; McEvoy, 2012; Carter, 2014). Mobaraki (2021) explores the effectiveness of art in the "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) movement and the strategies employed including movement art, graffiti art, design and story-telling in fostering emotional connections that propel and galvanise a movement. It has been well established that art has been an effective tactic in resistance that has contributed to the success and mobilization of the "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) movement in the United States (Hoffman 2017; Mobaraki 2021).

Farrell (2015) engaged street art and graffiti as a case study and argues that the artistic protest movements have wedged the aftermaths of the Egyptian Revolution in three main ways in mobilizing people to be part of it, besides the other major factors. McGarry et al (2020) in their study of the aesthetics of art in the Gezi Park protests in Turkey claim that their research draws parallel with other protests in the world.

Several artists along with protesters used paintings, artworks, graffiti and music as a device during the Hong Kong protests (2019-2020). Protest art in Hong Kong sustained the impetus of the movement and had a wide reach because of the use of social media for distribution besides being displayed on walls. In Myanmar, artists employed visual art to advocate freedom for their people through paintings, artworks and photographs displayed in exhibitions (Lynn, 2024). The underlying framework of cultural hegemony by Gramsci (1971) in challenging power structures and dominant narratives in cultural production by the marginalised for political change has been explored by prior researchers for instance in the study of the Occupy Wall Street movement and the Brazilian protests.

1.3 Sites as “foundational” element in the production of protest spaces

This section begins by outlining diverse views of using public space as a site of protest from academic literature, to pivot on the specific case of Bangladesh. “Public Space” often typifies a legal parlance that defies the conception of individual land proprietorship and implies that it belongs to the State. These open spaces, street corners, squares and maidans are accessible to the public and exist as a consequence of the practices they hold, defined by how people use them and produce meanings (Harrouk, 2020).

Any resistance or protest movement endeavours to articulate their demands vociferously and while doing so also entreats to shape the “production of space”, a term propounded by sociologist Henri Lefebvre who coined the phrase “right to the city”. Activism requires space for the public to congregate as a collective, to interact and express their voices through demonstrations, performances, marches and other means of protest and the streets, squares and boulevards are all protest spaces (Koppikar, 2023).

To denote the political role of resistance art in public spaces, Deutsche (1996) claimed, “social space is produced and structured by conflicts. With this recognition, a democratic spatial politics begins”. ‘Established’ sites can become expressions of social and cultural norms in the ‘rhetoric’ of place and protest sites have temporal qualities and this can present challenges to researchers Price and Sabido (2016). Kraidy (2016) asserts that public space had a significant position in the Arab uprising in Egypt and Tunisia.

1.4 The emotional and trauma discourse

According to Ainger (2016), the emotional energy that drives resistance is arguably the most crucial factor and this deep-rooted collective sentiment has led to the triumph of several social movements giving the protestors the sense of agency to propel the movement from isolated sadness to public resentment. Critically, this is not to diminish the idea of resistance to individual psychology but to view it as a collective phenomenon. The collective emotional energy of the youth in particular is contagious and spearheads euphoria and Meyer (1987) describes this

propelling of a movement as the “take off” moment. Most times, in a revolt or protest these charged-up intense emotions lead to disruption and devastation as observed among young activists during the Arab Spring (Meyer 1987).

As Buckland (2014) quotes, a Gezi Park protest participant in Istanbul compares being in the movement to falling in love. Trauma is one of the most common yet least studied ways in which individual activists reach burn out or exit a movement. As Fillieule (2005) comments, research on social movements has underestimated the cultural factors as well as the ability of social actors to help in a given political situation to evolve.

This study’s key departure from the existing scholarship is the approach of analysing visual testimony in resistance and the use of spatial reading and a trauma lens in interlinking art in resistance.

METHODOLOGY

The research design includes scholarly literature analysis of other resistance movements, visual methodologies of graffiti and key images (posters and symbols), analysis of media reports and interviews with prominent artists in Bangladesh. Interviews were conducted with artists in the *Bangla* language, transcribed and translated. As explained by Rose (2001), visual methodology involves understanding the meanings of an image at three levels, the site of production, the agency of the image and the audience. This study of protest art in Bangladesh explores the space of protests, the testimony of the images and the mobilised public. A similar study by Mobaraki (2021) in the United States on the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in Richmond employs observation, literature analysis and research of other social movements.

The Art of Resistance: Visual Testimony

I tremble to speak the words of freedom before the tyrant.

– Euripides, *Bacchae*.

The articulation of veracity infallibly gives the impression of being idealistic, paradoxically in modern democracies, and this undoubtedly seems quixotic at times and hence rarely

practised. Speaking the truth has its myriad complex ways of communicating issues that need an expression that interests various socio-political situations. When art is produced from the powerless margins targeting the powerful centres for seeking attention, for the sake of the truth, for the people and by the people, some bold, straightforward and testimonial forms of design and visual discourse are chosen to elicit both shock and empathy in the socio-psyche. Testimonial or resistance art is produced in the moment of crisis, and determines the truth factor with the means of expression, social identity formation and rebellion against the trauma. The visually compelling nature of testimonial art or resistance art leaves a mark in the public space of socio-psyche, which intends to seek visibility and recognition for the anti-establishment identity and trauma. The role of this art practice is to expose injustice, bring perceived evils out in the open and get the collective to care for and stand up for the truth and justice.

Throughout history, the political and powerful role of art has been used as a form of resistance against oppressive systems or ideologies to voice the collective's concern and advocate for change. When the visual art is testimonial to the politics of resistance it transforms the trauma as many theorists have pointed out that it is an "age of trauma" (Miller and Tougaw; 2001) or a "catastrophic age" (Caruth 1995, 11). Modernity is marked by the modern subjects or by the signs of wounds entangled in shock and trauma. Modern literature is transformed into a repertoire of gripping stories reflecting a conundrum of memory, labour and identity.

The Indian subcontinent including Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the eastern part of our country are now going through some traumatic socio-political issues when protest, resistance and rebellion are part of our everyday history. The production of visual art discourse usually testifies the post-traumatic stress (PTS) in such crises. The resistance art from the memory of trauma is multidimensional and multidirectional. The act of textualizing the memory ties up with the act of bearing witness (Luckhurst, 2008). There is a connection between suffering and creation. In different ways, political and cultural communities are constructed through

their experiences in society. Suffering and the consequent testimony have a critical role in reforming social groups and their modes of rebellion or revolution. In this way, cultural testimonies remain the inherent properties of a particular community. Testimony as a cultural, literary or individual intellectual product may stand as a cultural property or a cultural asset of a particular community or for everyone.

Testimonies are significant cultural productions which determine the historical context of any dynamic move of the masses. The normal or the normative forms of any cultural repertoire have their signs of coherent explanations of time and life. Testimony articulates many different contexts of mass suffering and rebellion as traumatic aftermath of different catastrophic historical events.

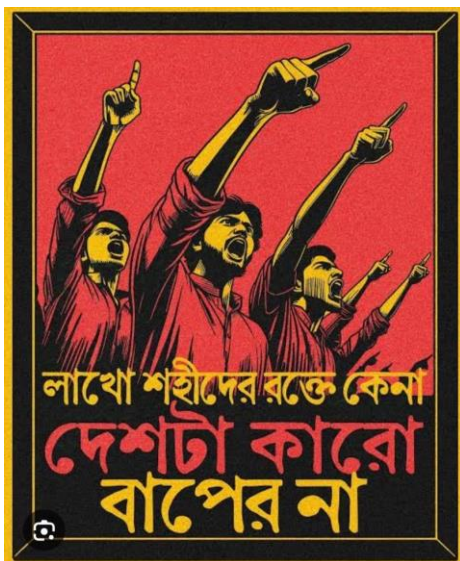
The role of urban spatiality in testifying to the traumatised art of resistance in the July 2024 movement in Bangladesh is very transformative. The visual arts of protest testified on the urban sites of Dhaka, like on the buildings and the walls, on the streets of the city, perpetuating the traumatic experiences of the revolution are the signposts of the anti-establishment counter-discourse. The collective identity's common trauma discourse shaped the movement's identity and the political post-structuralist discourse theory imparts a progressively fashionable outlook to political dominance and social identity scholarship. Cynthia E. Cohen in her *Reimagining Transitional Justice*, (2020) asserts that for re-politicizing the traumatic experiences, identifying the self and the communal collectivism are the basic needs of any revolution. The socio-political space takes the creative initiative to reactivate the sufferings to identify the perpetuation of common trauma. The artistic transmission of traumatic memories actualises the power position determining the bond between the testimonial protest artwork and the spectator in contemporary history. This is how the common memory is created identifying the power position of the common collective and hence power remains an active cogent in the construction of the self in a cultural space.

Creative Repertoire

The style of drawing used in the posters and artworks are replications of the style and technique used during the liberation war in

1971 and most of them are criticisms of the regime and satirical and exasperated, expressing resentment, bitterness, rage and anger. The posters reflect strong visual elements and the colours used are predominantly red, yellow and black with bold lettering in the language of Bangla.

The poster by Debashish Chakraborty says that the country belongs to nobody's father as freedom is here in exchange for the blood of millions of martyrs signifying that Sheikh Hasina's father Sheikh Mujibur Rehman who was the first prime minister of Bangladesh after 1971's freedom war may be the most powerful fighter leader of the movement but his daughter's fascist government rules over the people as if the country is her ancestral property which she got as lineage. The interesting fact is that the painting of the poster is influenced by the old posters of the Bangladesh freedom movement of 1971 testifying that the time changes but not the revolution of the people. Thus, testimonies recreate the socio-cultural ethnography of a collective body. Caruth (1996) offers the image of the voice of trauma that emerges from the wounds of the survivor foregrounding her concern about speaking or crying wounds which takes a form in the testimonies. The discourse of resistance art testimonies must be analysed based on "Memory" and "History". These interchangeable terms are often linked in opposition but to two different ends. Memory can be documented as a mode of expression.



Source: Business Standard

Poster by Debashish Chakraborty

In 'A Discourse on Voluntary Servitude' (1576), French political philosopher Estienne de la Boetie writes "The Labourer and the Artisan, notwithstanding they are Servants to their Masters, are quit by doing what they are bid". The position of the victim or the artist or the protestor creator is passive whereas the position of a witness is an active one and the role of the art producer is the best possible productive one. This transformation from being a victim to being a protestor artist and arguing about their past is a journey of a witness from passivity to activity. Testifying through traumatic discourse is a process of giving voice to the past. But there always remains a problem about the extended speech situation of memory which creates the need for caption textualization in the art of resistance and automatically the discourse is defined as 'Text in context' (Van Dijk; 1990). In terms of the range of concepts of Discourse, there is no generic beginning or end. It can be contended that this way the testimonies set the contextualization of historical background and the necessity of writing memory.

In the interview for this study, Mainul Abedin, the artist son of Zainul Abedin, the renowned artist of Bangladesh shared his opinion regarding the role of art in the July 24 protest in Bangladesh. He expressed, "The role of non-artist young students was crucial as I found during my visit to Dhaka and Mymensingh. All the walls were full of amazing paintings which I felt very proud of. The students of art did the job incredibly by collecting money for buying the colours on their own but the non-artist students were more powerfully expressive in their traumatized visual discourse".

Moreover, in this context, he could clearly remember his father's artwork 'Monpura 70', a 36-foot-long scroll painting portraying the trauma of the Bangladesh Liberation War. He also mentioned the two exhibitions at Drik Gallery in Dhaka in August 2024, a photograph of the protest movement under the title 'Buk Petechhi Guli Kor' which roughly translates into 'Shoot me in the chest' and the other cartoons on the protest under the title 'Cartooney Bidroho' which means 'Rebellion in Cartoon'.

Most of the posters used in the protests reflected anti-totalitarian themes and images,

and the style and theme used were dystopian. Artist Debashish Chakraborty's iconic bright red and yellow posters were widespread throughout the resistance. He comments that he tried to engage with the masses through his artworks depicting power dynamics and envisioned liberation (Naher, 2024).

The democratisation of public space:

The occupation of spaces and the creation of spaces shape our understanding of resistance as the people reclaim streets and squares as their own. Harrouk (2020) argues that public space is "a manifestation of democracy where there is freedom of expression and movement profoundly inspiring exchange and as a result, these places of protest transform into spaces of resistance where uprisings emerge". Mumbai-based media educator and journalist Koppikar asserts, "Protests and protest spaces form a part of our right to the city" and the sites of protests come to symbolise something greater than the resistance itself.

During a resistance movement, the people assert ownership, claim and occupy public spaces as observed from the Civil Rights Movement (1968), Nationalist movements against colonial rule (1930 - 1940) and Post-Independence political movements mostly in South Asia, and more recently in the Arab Spring (2000), Tunisian revolution (2011), Black Lives Matter movement (2019) in the United States, Gezi Park Protests (2013) in Turkey, Hong Kong Umbrella Movement (2014), 17 October Revolution in Lebanon (2019) and in India, the Farmers Protests (2020-2021, 2024), Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) (2019) and the Marina Uprising (2017).

The state-controlled public spaces have come to frame the various protests when the various governments and regimes exercised control over them by barricading and employing force like tear gassing or lathi charging and shoot outs in the instance of the Bangladesh protests when the public spaces loomed as a threat. The popular public sites of protests include the Jantar Mantar (New Delhi, India), Marina Beach, (Chennai, India) one of the first where a vast beach was filled with millions of protesters, Red Square Moscow in 1968 against Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Tahrir Square in Egypt, Tiananmen Square (China) (Rabbat, 2012; Harrouk, 2020; Koppikar, 2023).

Lefebvre's *magnum opus*, 1974's 'The Production of Space', denotes the term 'spatial triad' which comprises spatial practice, representations of space and representational space. The embodied protest art is a kind of traumatized activism that establishes the identity of the movement and the community, forming a feeling of being less powerless. The community and collective selves find the space to testify to trauma anywhere to take refuge. In the 36 July Movement of Bangladesh, the common urban public spaces, the walls and the streets became the trauma sites, as not only the psychological or the cultural or socio-political space was insecure but also the individual body spaces.

The wall as a space of resistance

This section aims to delineate how the wall functioned as a space of resistance during the July uprising in Bangladesh (2024) and how it compares to and contrasts with the *Lennon walls* of the Hong Kong Protests (2014, 2019). The walls in Dhaka bright with thematic murals and spray-painted graffiti echo the creation of democratic imaginaries and how protesters use public space to manifest agency and citizenship. Space is all about power and in this context, art forms like wall graffiti, illustrations and posters that are not part of 'high culture' provide a representation of the weakly mobilised social groups and contests against the gentrified spaces like the gallery, and museum. Graffiti art on the walls as sites of resistance can operate at three levels- 1. as the physical structure 2. the content and 3. as a collective expression (Sabido, 2016).

Exactly a decade ago in another space in East Asian Hong Kong, a special administrative region of China since British colonial rule erupted a resistance movement called the Umbrella protests in 2014. After months of protests that resulted in little action from the government, posters carrying the message "We will be back" were left in the space occupied by protesters for weeks. Again, in June 2019, the public returned to the streets participating in mass demonstrations against the extradition bill that would send residents extradited to China. In the Hong Kong protests in July 2019, artwork in the form of posters was displayed on *Lennon walls* and these photographs were shared on social media. Taking inspiration from the "*Lennon*" wall in 1980 Prague, a wall in Hong Kong was

turned into a landmark to exhibit artworks and colourful post-it notes carrying messages of freedom and democracy. Changing strategy and tactics by protesters included using Lennon walls to spring up all across the city colourful with Post-it notes (Wright 2019).

On August 11th, 2024, Sarah Anjum Bari wrote in the opinion column of *The Daily Star*, "The walls of our streets have long been one of the truest aspects of our public existence". She brought in an ethnographic viewpoint and paralleled the wall to a metaphor for life in Bangladesh, describing that the walls of the country embody the degree and pandemonium of "thousands of people jostling for ever-shrinking space". According to her, the walls reflect the proclamations of emboldened collectives, layering the grievances and desires of the suppressed. She testifies to the trauma of the July 2024 movement, stating that July, for them, is the month of mourning, and they will all reminisce about the victims who were brutally killed for fighting for basic rights. She continues to emphasize that the spray-painted graffiti is an expression of hate and lewd language mirroring the rage and angst of the people. The creative repertoire and deployment of the aesthetics of art as a weapon in resistance is changing with newer tactics and powerful symbols in these leaderless movements creating an immersive experience as seen in both Hong Kong and Bangladesh.

CONCLUSION

*When the rug is pulled out from under you
All that has been swept beneath rises*

Art in resistance has manifold expressions and is not only influential to the movement's political schema but also crafts imperative and inimitable contributions to social change (Olcese, 2009). The cultural symbols, in this case, words and images had the power to stir consciousness in the public sphere and assisted in augmenting awareness amongst the wider population in addition to sustaining momentum to evoke collective emotional experience. According to Sabido (2016), it is forms of art including music that stir a definite emotion and that in turn stirs the public's consciousness in plenty of ways.

The artistic expressions be it songs, art, slogans or graffiti born out of deep-rooted anguish, bitterness, helplessness, and fear lead to resistance and serve as a backbone to a political or social movement galvanising mobilisation that drags the public to navigate the complex path. Individuals or the public who have never considered themselves as political actors very quickly understand artistic expression be it lines of a song, slogan or motto progressing to collective defiance and solidarity (Ainger, 2016).

Resistance has been against failed political systems and the intertwining of the social, political and cultural determinants add to the complexities. A sense of shamefulness and anger in the governance of the country and the lack of a strong leader resonates among the public accentuating in the form of protests and the youth in particular taking to social media. It has been established that for some, protests become a matter of survival at some point in their lives (Price and Sabido, 2016). The built-in anxieties, expectations and frustrations over a long period of not being heard erupt in a protest movement in the context of an unstable political background.

Visual culture employed to promote resistance agendas fathoms out as compelling and intense forms of the movement and strikes as an evident tactic in South Asian resistance movements. It can be concluded that guerrilla art in resistance enriches the movement by offering additional support in public mobilisation without sapping the force and intensity of the protest and demands. The essence of art in resistance is the aesthetic intrusion that communicates the emotions and internal undercurrent locked within individuals through powerful collective visual expression.

Revival after Resistance

The Kuwait Times carried a report on 13 August 2024, that the students were back on the streets of Dhaka giving a makeover and whitewashing walls that earlier carried protest graffiti replacing them with colourful murals that spread the message for a better future and finding ways to overcome the trauma. An alternative viewpoint is presented by Tasnim (2024) who asserts that in Dhaka, the walls narrate the country's vehemence and carry the trauma of the citizens pushed to the

periphery. She emphatically notes that the graffiti is an expression of resistance that captures the essence of labour, despair and anger.

In any movement what transforms a peaceful resistance into an upsurge or uprising is a trigger be it a shooting, a killing, the use of tear gas as in Hong Kong, or a police shooting of an unarmed student in Bangladesh, which becomes the last straw on the overburdened camel's back. The sea of people in a protest transforms metaphorically from a calm ocean to a turbulent one –causing devastation and events then unfold like a climax. The resistance movements like these give the artists and students a sense of agency and power to initiate change.

Limitations of the study:

This paper did not analyse cartoons that were published during the protests. Social media analysis and the impact of social media in mobilising resistance have been dealt with in other studies. This article also does not discuss art in queer and feminist activism. First-hand observation and experience at the site of the protest were not obtained. Hence, this is an outsider's view, with neither of the authors experiencing the binaries in the country of Bangladesh of being the beneficiary of the quota system or losing out on the opportunity for government jobs.

Implications for future research

There is a need for newer theoretical frameworks as well as methods to analyse mobilisation and the role of art and aesthetics in resistance. This study documents relevant actions and key timelines in the history of art and cultural production in resistance.

Ethical Statement: Informed consent was obtained from the artists during the Interviews.

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Image: AP Photo/Fatima Tuj Johora. <https://thecontrapuntal.com/bangladeshs-creative-mass-uprising/>

Students create graffiti in the capital Dhaka on 10 August 2024.
