

How Murals Support Ukraine: Eastern Ukraine-Themed Murals Resembling Berlin Wall Murals

Boram Shim

Northern Valley Regional High School at Old Tappan, USA

ABSTRACT

In 2013, President Viktor Yanukovich suspended a trade pact between Ukraine and the EU, which led to the Euromaidan protests and violence from armed police. Since then, muralists have recorded the reality of Ukrainian politics and the growth of Ukrainians' national identity. Through an exploration of art history, sociology, and the history of Ukraine, this research paper serves as an initial investigation of how newly created murals in Ukraine and past murals on the Berlin Wall convey the same theme of battle against communism and share similarity in the growth process. This paper's comparative analysis was conducted in three stages: an examination of the art's initial transformation from graffiti to mural form, an analysis of the works' emphasis on patriotism, and an exploration of the portrayal of minorities, designed to attract an international audience. Findings indicate that murals depicting conflicts in Ukraine have the potential to reinforce Ukrainians, much as murals on the Berlin Wall were crucial in reunifying Germany during the Cold War.

Introduction

On November 21, 2013, President Viktor Yanukovich suspended a historic trade pact between Ukraine and the European Union (EU). As a result, a four-month backlash uprising against the pro-Russian government began in Ukraine. While the protest stood its ground for nine days, its non-violent ethos faced a major turning point on November 30, 2013. Authorities sent in fully armed riot police to "clean" the protesters occupying the square.¹ Police violently attacked young protesters, leading to circulation of cruel beating videos through the media. These videos caught the attention of muralists around the world. By using urban space as a visual communication channel, muralists became witnesses, interpreters, and historians of the Euromaidan. Not only did their murals expose the truth about Ukrainian politics, but they also strengthened the national identity of Ukrainians.²

During the War in Donbas (2014-2022), a group of separatists in the Donbas region demanded independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk republics from Ukraine, resulting in armed conflicts and countless casualties. In fact, following the War in Donbas, there was an escalation in military conflicts with Russia, a period referred to as the Ukrainian War. Although people in Donbas are broadly known as Russian-speaking separatists, more than 82% of the civilians living in the territory seized by Russia turned out to be anti-Russian.³ This is largely attributed to the fact that they suffered the greatest number of casualties and economic losses

¹ Nazar Kozak, "Art Embedded Into Protest: Staging the Ukrainian Maidan." *Art* 76, no. 1 (2017): 10.

² Elżbieta Perzycka-Borowska, Marta Gliniecka, Kalina Kukiełko, and Michał Parchimowicz. "Socio-Educational Impact of Ukraine War Murals: Jasień Railway Station Gallery." *Arts* 12, no. 3 (2023): 4.

³ Paul Kirby, "Donbas: Why Russia Is Trying to Capture Eastern Ukraine." *BBC*, (2022): 3.

from Russian military attacks. Although eastern Ukraine used to be a “thriving industrial heartland,” its industries faced long-term uncertainty after Russian troops bombed essential infrastructure and facilities.⁴ Not only were industries at risk, but civilians also faced significant dangers due to widespread mines, resource scarcity, and indiscriminate attacks in populated cities. Urban murals in Ukraine began as independent projects by various artists in support of Ukrainians. However, following the military conflicts in 2014, these murals soon began to depict a common theme: the impact of Russian aggression on the frontline cities of eastern Ukraine.

During the Russo-Ukrainian War, murals became weapons to expose how the brutality of war impacted civilians.⁵ Most muralists specifically highlighted the stark contrast between the pre-attack and post-attack states of cities that had experienced Russian aggression.⁶ While some individuals faced the loss of their industries due to environmental pollution or destruction of facilities, others were exposed to the dangers of landmines and deliberate Russian attacks in civilian areas.⁷ Believing in the potential of murals to encourage understanding of the war, muralists in Ukraine began to depict the experiences of Ukrainians living as refugees and victims of barbaric war.

Historically considered illegal vandalism, murals eventually evolved into a form of counter art, vividly expressing “emotional tensions, political frictions, and existential anxieties.”⁸ This transformation was particularly vivid on the Berlin Wall. Before demolition in 1989, the Berlin Wall in Germany represented “a physical and ideological border” that separated the West from the East.⁹ Street art on the Berlin Wall began with simple graffiti by West Berliners sending messages to the East Berliners or the Soviet-controlled government in the East.¹⁰ However, in 1989, the Berlin Wall transformed into an international memorial called the East Side Gallery, where murals depicting the history of the Berlin Wall stimulated unity and empathy.

By integrating sociology, art history, and the history of Ukraine, this paper will suggest that mural painting in Ukraine is a continuation of the Berlin phenomenon, in which murals on the Berlin Wall played a key role in the reunification of Germany during the Cold War. First, I will begin with a historical overview of the Berlin Wall and an examination of how graffiti and murals first appeared on the wall. By introducing the history of Ukraine from the Euromaidan to the current Russian invasion, I will explain how Ukrainian murals resemble the Berlin Wall murals, and how they repeat the same mistakes. Then, I will provide examples of political murals on the Berlin Wall that depicted the division of Berlin and contributed to the reunification of East and West Germany. I will draw comparisons between the murals of Berlin and those of Ukraine, demonstrating how murals that portrayed the eastern frontline cities provided hope and confidence to the Ukrainian

⁴ Jason Beaubien, “Russia’s War in Ukraine Pushes Ukrainian Steel Production to the Brink.” *NPR*, (2022): 2.

⁵ Kozak, 10.

⁶ Elena Chervonyk, “Light Image of Ukraine Against the Background of War: Extragraphite Implementation.” *The Culturology Ideas* 22 no. 2 (2022): 116.

⁷ Yevheniya Volk and Mykola Tymchenko, “Battlefield: When Will the Farmers of Donetsk Oblast Be Able to Use Their Land Again?” *Ukraine World* (2023): 1.

⁸ Maria De-Miguel-Molina, “Visiting Dark Murals: An Ethnographic Approach to the Sustainability of Heritage.” *Sustainability* 12 (2020): 2.

⁹ Libo Yan, Jing Xu, Zhen Sun, and Ye Xu, “Street art as alternative attractions: A case of the East Side Gallery.” *Elsevier* 29 (2019): 77.

¹⁰ Rian Dundon, “This Photographer’s Collection of Berlin Wall Graffiti Photos Show the Politics of Paint.” *Timeline* (2017), 3.

people. Finally, I will demonstrate how the murals on the Berlin Wall were effective in garnering global attention, and illustrate that Ukrainian murals share this characteristic by exposing the impact of military attacks on civilians. Thus, I hypothesize that the murals depicting eastern Ukraine conflicts have the potential to reinforce Ukrainian morale during Russian invasion, in the same way that the murals on the Berlin Wall led to active communication and reunification efforts.

Development of Graffiti

Following World War II, Germany was partitioned, with the East falling under the communist rule of the Soviet Union (known as the German Democratic Republic), and the West being governed by the capitalist coalition of the United States, United Kingdom, and France (forming the Federal Republic of Germany).¹¹ Germans in the Soviet-controlled East were gradually dissatisfied with the lack of freedom and economic opportunity under the communist Soviet government.¹² Soon, their dissatisfaction led to a massive increase in the number of migrants escaping the communist East to reach West Germany or West Berlin.¹³ In order to avoid population loss, the East Germany and Soviet government made a decision to separate the West from the East with a barrier called the Berlin Wall.¹⁴

Even though West Berliners avoided publicly talking about the “wall of shame,” the Berlin Wall eventually became an “artistic public display” for them to express their sentiments.¹⁵ The significance of graffiti on the Berlin Wall arose in the 1970s when street artists began covering the wall on the West side with political graffiti, including slogans, jokes, and figures portraying the Cold War.¹⁶ Diverse messages were shared on the wall: open cries for unity (“make love not wall”), humorous comments insulting the East (“nyet, nyet Soviet”), and powerful tributes to family and friends trapped on the other side of the wall.¹⁷ In addition, many Berliners enriched the vitality and vibrance of the West Wall by inscribing messages that spanned various languages and cultures.¹⁸ In stark contrast, the East Wall remained a gray expanse, devoid of any markings. This was due to the presence of the “death strip,” a forbidding barrier that prevented East Berliners from accessing the wall.¹⁹ Hungarian photojournalist Tamas Urban captured this difference in atmosphere between the East and West sides of the Berlin Wall.²⁰ He portrayed the West Berliners’ “yearning for a unified future” through photographs of their graffiti, while simultaneously exposing the oppression of the East Berlin government, as evidenced in his poignant image of the barren East Wall.²¹ Thus, the clear contrast between the graffiti-covered West Wall and the barren East Wall vividly demonstrated the significant impact the Berlin Wall had on the people of Berlin.

In order to avoid getting caught, street artists had to be very quick when they were painting the Berlin Wall.²² Since the wall was located in East Berlin, guards and authorities from the East side constantly blocked

¹¹ “Berlin Wall.” *Britannica* (2023): 2.

¹² Daniel Grither, “The Art on the Berlin Wall: Sentiments of East and West Berlin.” *The Collector* (2021): 1.

¹³ Grither, 1.

¹⁴ Lucy Howie, “Keith Haring and the Berlin Wall.” *MyArtBroker*, 1.

¹⁵ Grither, 2.

¹⁶ Grither, 2.

¹⁷ Dundon, 1.

¹⁸ Grither, 4.

¹⁹ Dundon, 1.

²⁰ Dundon, 2.

²¹ Dundon, 2.

²² Grither, 5.

street artists from vandalizing the wall and possibly encouraging East Berliners to escape.²³ To remain undetected by border patrol, artists widely favored the West Side Wall as their canvas for graffiti. ²⁴Among the artists, a French artist named Thierry Noir was one of the first ones to paint murals on the Berlin Wall.²⁵ His murals were not simple graffiti; his cartoon-like depictions of multiple figures or animals with a minimal palette of colors enabled him to produce more than 5 kilometers of murals on the Berlin Wall.²⁶ Even though the figures that Noir painted were often unrelated to the context of the Berlin Wall or Cold War, his long devotion to the murals inspired other artists to use art to express their political sentiments.

Noir and other Berliners' use of street art during the Cold War inspired the Ukrainian protesters in 2013 to create street art that expressed their anger toward the government. On November 21, 2013, President Viktor Yanukovich suspended a historic trade pact between Ukraine and the European Union (EU).²⁷ The European Union-Ukraine Association Agreement committed Ukraine to economic and financial reforms to converge its policies to those of the EU. Ukraine agreed to conform to EU consumer standards in exchange for the EU providing political support and access to EU markets.²⁸ For Ukrainians, this agreement was a decisive moment in their centuries-long history of connection with Russia.²⁹ However, the President resumed close economic relations with Russia, which led to another uprising against the government called the Euromaidan from 2013 to 2014. Despite the presence of various speakers and protesters engaging with the crowd at Maidan Square, political parties began to take control of the stage to "soften the soil for upcoming election" and "defend their elite position."³⁰ Disregarding the protesters' efforts to peacefully change the political system, politicians continued their campaigns as if the rally was not occurring.

As a result, artists during Euromaidan decided to use their artwork as "weapons" for protests.³¹ For example, two Kyivan artists, Andriy Zelinsky and Oleh Tistol, stenciled the face of President Yanukovich on plywood boards to create shields and barricades for the protesters to use as protection during collision with the police.³² Immediately, the juxtaposition of the innocent Euromaidan protesters with weak hand-made shields and the police armed with deadly weapons set fire to a storm of global criticism toward the Ukrainian government's aggression.

The street art created during the Euromaidan was categorized as graffiti instead of murals because of their simple design and vagueness. For instance, artists called Zelinsky and Tistol reproduced the image of President Yanukovich using the same stencil without illustrating a specific scene or event related to the Euromaidan. Since a violent clash between the police and the protesters was ongoing, the muralists favored quick paintings using less color and details. In addition, to adhere to their non-violence ethos, the muralists did not include sensitive images or symbols that could trigger more anger from the protesters. The best example of non-violent mural was painted by muralist #Sociopath. In 2014, he painted a series of murals called "Trilogy Icons of Revolution" depicting three impactful poets in Ukrainian history: Taras Shevchenko, Lesia Ukrainka, and Ivan Franko (Fig. 1).

²³ Grither, 5.

²⁴ Grither, 6.

²⁵ "The Berlin Wall." *Thierry Noir* (2023): 1.

²⁶ Grither, 8.

²⁷ Nadia Diuk. "Euromaidan: Ukraine's Self-Organizing Revolution." *World Affairs* 176, no. 6 (2014): 2.

²⁸ Diuk, 2.

²⁹ Diuk, 3.

³⁰ Kozak, 12.

³¹ Kozak, 13.

³² Kozak, 22.



Figure 1. #Sociopath. *Trilogy Icons of Revolution*, 2014, spray paint, Hrushevskiy Street, Kyiv.

On this mural, #Sociopath combined the old portraits of these poets with the outfits of the protesters during the Euromaidan: he added a red scarf to hide their identity, a respirator to prevent them from inhaling tear gas, and a helmet to protect them from police aggression.³³ Similar to how Berlin artists resorted to simple graffiti under the eyes of strict surveillance, street artists during the Euromaidan refrained from detailed portrayals of emotions and sufferings, owing to the ongoing riots surrounding them.

How Murals Appeared in The Frontline

The Case of Berlin

Despite the messages on the wall asking for peace, violence from East Berlin continued to escalate. Not only did the East border guards install guard towers, searchlights, and electric fences along the wall, but they also made increased use of violence.³⁴ Following the order from the East Germany Ministry of Defense in 1961, border patrol was permitted to shoot the escapees if they ignored the guards' orders or continued to run after a warning shot was fired.³⁵ As the violence escalated, the number of migrants failing to cross the border increased. By 1988, more than 600 East Berliners or Germans were shot and killed by the border guards.³⁶ The Berlin Wall became a symbol of "violence, hopelessness and disunity" in Germany for 30 years.³⁷ Infuriated by East Berlin's use of violence against its citizens, muralists began to paint murals emphasizing the immediate need of reunifying and escaping communism. In 1985, Keith Haring painted murals that became "testament[s] to the power of art to change the world."³⁸ The Checkpoint Charlie Museum invited Keith Haring to paint murals on Checkpoint Charlie, a crossing point that led to the most clashes between the border guards and the escapees.³⁹

³³ Kozak, 13.

³⁴ Grither, 2.

³⁵ "Victims of the Wall." *Berlin.de Startseite* (2020): 2.

³⁶ Berlin.de, 4.

³⁷ Howie, 3.

³⁸ Howie, 1.

³⁹ Howie, 2.

Across the wall, Haring depicted “a chain of interlinking figures” in which the figures’ legs were infinitely connected to the arms of other figures next to them (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Haring, Keith. *Berlin Wall Mural*, 1986, Spray paint, Berlin, Germany.

Haring painted the figures with the colors of the flag of Germany (red, yellow, and black) to depict Germany as a unified nation, regardless of the division created by the wall.⁴⁰ His mural thus became a powerful statement of unity, helping to pave the way towards Germany’s reunification.

Even after reunification, West and East Berlin continued to clash due to the tension created by “two opposing systems of governance and culture.”⁴¹ As a result, Berlin felt an urgency to “change the physical face of Berlin” to overcome the traumatic history of the Berlin Wall.⁴² Berlin opened a site of commemoration called the East Side Gallery that turned the negative image of the Berlin Wall into a meaningful symbol of “a dark heritage that should be remembered but not repeated.”⁴³ Murals at the East Side Gallery reflected the “freedom and liberation that East Germans felt” after the Berlin Wall was demolished.⁴⁴ For instance, in 1989, Gabriel Heimler painted a mural called “The Wall Jumper” that portrays a man “jumping over the Berlin Wall” to run away from East Berlin (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Heimler, Gabriel. *The Wall Jumper*, 1989, Acrylic on wall, East Side Gallery, Berlin.

The background of the East Wall in red, a symbol of communism, demonstrates that the man wanted to escape the communist oppression of the Soviet-controlled government. Furthermore, a mural called “Test the Best”

⁴⁰ Grither, 12.

⁴¹ Grither, 9.

⁴² Yan, Xu, Sun, and Xu, 78.

⁴³ Yan, Xu, Sun, and Xu, 78.

⁴⁴ Grither, 15.

was painted by Birgit Kindler in 1989.⁴⁵ He depicted a popular car produced in East Germany called Trabant penetrating the Berlin Wall (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. Kindler, Birgit. *Test the Best*, 1989, Oil on wall, East Side Gallery, Berlin.

By writing *Nov 9 89* on the number plate, Kindler commemorated the day East Berliners were finally able to break through the Berlin Wall that blocked their way to freedom and democracy for nearly 30 years. Thus, the murals at East Side Gallery successfully fostered a sense of unity and patriotism among Berliners, inspiring them to collaborate towards ending the division and liberating East Berliners from oppression.

Continuation in Ukraine

Like the situation in Berlin, street art created during the Euromaidan failed to stop the government's connection with Russia. In fact, intervention of the Russian government and conflicts with the separatists got even more intense after the Euromaidan. Not only did Russia attempt to promote Ukrainophobia among the separatists through propaganda and disinformation campaigns, but they also threatened Ukraine with military attacks. The physical consequences of Russia's cyber warfare tactics were first verified during the annexation of Crimea in February 2014 and developed into a major military conflict called the War in Donbas. As the Kremlin influence intensified in eastern Ukraine, the separatists' sentiment increased.⁴⁶ As a result, the Donetsk and Luhansk regions declared independence from the Ukrainian government in August 2014 after months of fighting against the government with secret military aid from the Kremlin. This ongoing crisis with Russia and the separatists threatening Ukraine's sovereignty is known as the Russo-Ukrainian War. In February of 2022, Russia's deployment in the frontline turned into a full invasion of Ukraine. While the War in Donbas had already led to 10,000 deaths and 1.6 million refugees, the number significantly increased following the invasion, reaching 16.9 million displacements in just the first six months.⁴⁷ These statistics suggested that the decades-long suffering from socio-political instability would cause long-term "physical and psychological harm" to Ukrainians.⁴⁸

After witnessing the eruption of violent war, artists in Ukraine realized that they need to make changes to their art. Inspired by Berliners who overcame the threats from communism through murals, artists decided to paint murals promoting resilience and hope. For instance, murals featuring agrarian industry in eastern Ukraine gave a hopeful message of recovery. Paulina Sosinka's mural at Jasien Railway Station featured a

⁴⁵ Grither, 18.

⁴⁶ Perzycka-Borowska, Gliniecka, Kukielko, and Parchimowicz, 5.

⁴⁷ Vitalii Poberezhets, "Healthcare crisis in Ukraine – worrying consequences of the Russian Ukrainian War." *Croatian Medical Journal* 63, no. 4 (2022), 1.

⁴⁸ Celina Chaaya, Vimala Devi Tambi, and Ozge Sabuncu, "Ukraine–Russia crisis and its impacts on the mental health of Ukrainian young people during the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Annals of Medicine & Surgery* (2022), 1.

sunflower field “stand[ing] undeterred”, a symbol of resilience and vivacity, even while facing bomb attacks from the sky (Fig. 5).⁴⁹



Figure 5. Sosinka, Paulina, 2022, Oil on wall, Jasien Railway Station, Gdansk.

By emphasizing the large size of the blossoms, Sosinska highlighted the importance of maintaining determination during difficult times.⁵⁰ Another muralist named Denis Chyzawski painted an image of wheat ears in the shape of a rifle (Fig. 6).



Figure 6. Chyzawski, Denis. 2022, Oil on wall, Jasien Railway Station, Gdansk.

Given wheat's historical role in ensuring the survival of Ukrainians, portraying it as a firearm symbolizes its power to combat adversity and withstand hardship.⁵¹ Though the process is slow, farms in eastern Ukraine are gradually recovering from Russian attacks. Some farmers in Lyman have resumed their work despite the potential danger caused by mines: “they inspect their fields themselves, find mines, and mark them” so that they could begin their cultivation faster.⁵² Thus, muralists showcased Ukrainian resilience by depicting farmers who independently revitalized their agriculture industry.

While most of the economic losses occurred in agricultural areas, civilian casualties and deaths were concentrated in cities with large populations. Following continuous clashes between the Russian and Ukrainian troops in eastern Ukraine, muralists began to illustrate how civilians in frontline cities are battling against Russia's military campaigns. Muralists specifically focused on portraying vulnerable groups like children. In 2017, Japanese artist Miyazaki Kenske was moved to paint a mural in Mariupol entitled “Rukavychka” (A Glove), drawing inspiration from a harrowing incident in 2015 in which a school attack by Russia resulted in the

⁴⁹ Perzycka-Borowska, Gliniecka, Kukielko, and Parchimowicz, 7.

⁵⁰ Perzycka-Borowska, Gliniecka, Kukielko, and Parchimowicz, 8.

⁵¹ Perzycka-Borowska, Gliniecka, Kukielko, and Parchimowicz, 9.

⁵² Volk and Tymchenko, 19.

deaths of multiple children.⁵³ In the center, there is a mitten holding Easter eggs, the sacred amulet of Ukraine. In the background, Kenske emphasizes images of peace using symbols of brightness, like the sun, rainbow, and laughing children (Fig. 7).



Figure 7. Kenske, Miyazaki. *Rukavychka*, 2017. Oil on wall, Mariupol.

This image exhibited that the unity of people in Donbas would protect the children from further adversity and ensure that their lives would be full of “happiness, light, and peace.”⁵⁴

The inclusion of mittens indicates one of the major difficulties during the war in Ukraine: harsh winter conditions. Winter in Ukraine is characterized by its heavy snowfall and severe cold, with temperature dropping to -20°C . Multiple aerial attacks destroyed essential infrastructure and energy facilities, forcing refugees to live without heating and electricity. At least 126 Russian strikes on energy and fuel sites were reported, including the second largest energy site called the Vuhlehirska Power Plant.⁵⁵ Even power plants that were not destroyed had failed to provide adequate heating. The coal that power plants and heating system rely on were inaccessible, as most mines are located close to active conflict zones or even beyond enemy lines.⁵⁶ As a result, in July 2022, the Ukrainian government ordered the mandatory evacuation of people living in eastern Ukraine, hoping to relocate them to regions better suited for winter.⁵⁷ However, some vulnerable groups like as elderly people or children were unable to leave Donbas. People residing in Donbas thus ‘united’ to collect firewood for wood-burning stoves to protect themselves from the cold.⁵⁸ By portraying this image of unity among people in front-line cities, muralists conveyed a powerful message that Ukrainians can overcome the challenges of war through mutual support and solidarity.

Furthermore, muralists depicted the heroes who helped the civilians at Donetsk Oblast. In 2022, muralist Konstantin Kachanovsky painted a mural called “Brave People of a Brave Country” in Rivne, Ukraine.⁵⁹ Kachanovsky portrayed a man who brought more than a ton of flour to restore the bakery in Bucha, Ukraine, a doctor who helped women in labor in the de-occupied territories, a boy with the colors of the Ukrainian flag

⁵³ Chervonyk, 123.

⁵⁴ Chervonyk, 118.

⁵⁵ Jeff Stein and Michael Birnbaum, “The War in Ukraine Is a Human Tragedy. It’s Also an Environmental

Disaster.” *The Washington Post* (2023), 1.

⁵⁶ Jason Beaubien, 5.

⁵⁷ Keterina Sergatskova, “How Does Russia’s War against Ukraine Affect Civilians Living near Front

Lines?” *Wilson Center* (2022), 12.

⁵⁸ Sergatskova, 14.

⁵⁹ Chervonyk, 125.

on his palms, a sapper dog called Patron, and a group of soldiers; he also wrote “the brave people of a brave country” at the bottom, which is part of Ukraine’s war-time slogan (Fig. 8).⁶⁰



Figure 8. Kachanovsky, Konstantin. *Brave People of a Brave Country*, 2022, Oil on wall, Rivne.

Many volunteers and armies collaborated to help eastern Ukraine recover. When the Donetsk people faced a shortage of fresh water and food due to river contamination and gas scarcity, the local Red Cross in Mykolaiv poured a total 120,000 liters of fresh water at eleven locations each day and provided food for elderly people unable to evacuate.⁶¹ Meanwhile, Patron, the mascot of the State Emergency Service of Ukraine, along with soldiers, played a crucial role in detecting mines in heavily mined areas. Although Russian troops retreated from major cities by June 2023, the land mines they had deployed during combat remained, posing ongoing risks.⁶² Tymur Pistriuha, head of the Ukrainian Sapper Association argued that land mines are “especially dangerous” for the civilians because they often mistake mines as harmless objects due to their odd shape and small size: “it is like a leaf... it is green. In grass it is difficult to identify this.”⁶³ Despite the potential risk of injury or death, the sapper dogs and soldiers in Ukraine constantly went out in mine-contaminated areas to protect civilians. Thus, by depicting figures who sacrificed themselves to help civilians, muralists showed the unity and patriotism of Ukrainians.

Stimulating Global Attention and Empathy Through Murals

Furthermore, the murals on the Berlin Wall served a crucial communicative role, evoking emotional empathy for the victims of the past. One tourist at the East Side Gallery stated that the murals capturing the raw anger, pain, and despair of the depicted Berliners enabled them to understand how it would have “felt during the period the wall stood, as well as when it was torn down.”⁶⁴ The idea of combining murals and political themes fascinated the tourists. According to research conducted by Yan on the East Side Gallery reviews, most tourists praised the murals, describing them as an “integral part” of the Berlin Wall. They noted that these artworks foster a deeper understanding of history without the need for reading a book or listening to explanations. One reviewer of the East Side Gallery claimed that the wall itself is a storytelling history book depicting collective memories of Berliners that remind the tourists to “try harder not to repeat the mistakes.”⁶⁵ Therefore, the murals

⁶⁰ Chernovyk, 125.

⁶¹ Sergatskova, 6.

⁶² Gerry Doyle, Han Huang, and Jackie Gu, “In Ukraine, Land Mines Left by Russian Forces Pose a Deadly Threat.” *Reuters* (2023): 14.

⁶³ Gerry Doyle, Han Huang, and Jackie Gu, 16.

⁶⁴ Yan, Xu, Sun, and Xu, 83.

⁶⁵ Yan, Xu, Sun, and Xu, 82.

at the East Side Gallery also played a key role in educating a global audience about the specific historical events that rendered the Berlin Wall a significant, yet traumatic, chapter in Germany's history.

Inspired by the success of the murals at the East Side Gallery in garnering global attention, Ukrainian muralists began painting murals to depict the consequences of Russian invasion. Located as close as 13 km from the frontline, farms and facilities in eastern Ukraine were exposed to heavy shelling and missile attacks from Russia.⁶⁶ Russia intentionally struck oil tanks, power plants, and farmland to cause environmental damage—water pollution, oil contamination, and land destruction—that make life possible for Ukrainians.⁶⁷ Ukrainian farmers suffered the severest economic losses as their farmlands, equipment, and crops were destroyed in the frontline. The muralists recognized the farmers' struggle as a significant consequence of the war, choosing to highlight this theme in their artwork.

The juxtaposition of nature with violence commonly appeared in Ukrainian war murals.⁶⁸ Resembling the current situation of crop fields in "conflict-ravaged territories," Sosinka used the image of falling bombs to convey "how swiftly the serenity and splendor of the natural world can shatter" from indiscriminate military attacks (Fig. 5).⁶⁹ Sosinka specifically wanted to elucidate that Russia destroyed the production and exportation system of crops in eastern Ukraine. Before the war, Ukraine had supplied 10 percent of wheat in the world.⁷⁰ However, environmentalist Oleksiy Burkovskyi claimed that most farms in the Donetsk Oblast would be impossible to recover from mine and chemical contamination.⁷¹

Russia's attempt to destroy Ukraine's water network became evident when Russia conducted missile attacks on energy facilities in Mykolaiv in order to contaminate the Buh River.⁷² Since agriculture is a prominent part of Ukraine's economy, protecting the water reservoirs for irrigation and fertile soil is extremely important for Ukrainian farmers. However, water supply in Ukraine was exposed to chemical and oil spills from bombed facilities, leading to a surge in soil metal levels by up to 25 times.⁷³ As a result, more than 40,000 square miles of farmland in Ukraine degraded,⁷⁴ leading to an estimated agricultural loss of UAH 2.87 billion in Donetsk Oblast.⁷⁵

The story of Oleksandr Kvitnytskyi, a farmer from a small town called Lyman in Donetsk Oblast, demonstrates how the Russian invasion threatened farmers near the frontline both physically and economically. Even though Kvitnytskyi and his family managed to escape their town before it fell under Russian occupation in April 2022, he left behind his equipment, livestock, and 800 hectares of land.⁷⁶ Most of his equipment, even the stockpiled grain, was either broken or stolen by the Russian troops, which forced Kvitnytskyi to take out a UAH 2 million loan for new equipment.⁷⁷ Demand for crops from Donetsk Oblast declined gradually as evacuations increased and gas shortages limited cooking options.

Although farmers could buy new equipment, their fields could not recover from mines left in the soil. Eastern Ukraine has become the most mine-contaminated area in the world, with one third of rural areas needing

⁶⁶ Volk and Tymchenko, 4.

⁶⁷ Stein and Birnbaum, 1.

⁶⁸ Perzycka-Borowska, Gliniecka, Kukielko, and Parchimowicz, 7.

⁶⁹ Perzycka-Borowska, Gliniecka, Kukielko, and Parchimowicz, 8.

⁷⁰ Stein and Birnbaum, 3.

⁷¹ Volk and Tymchenko, 6.

⁷² "Ukraine Conflict Environmental Briefing: The Coastal and Marine Environment." *CEOBS* (2023), 2.

⁷³ Volk and Tymchenko, 32

⁷⁴ Stein and Birnbaum, 2.

⁷⁵ Volk and Tymchenko, 25.

⁷⁶ Volk and Tymchenko, 8.

⁷⁷ Volk and Tymchenko, 9.

mine clearance for at least the next decade.⁷⁸ Since farmers must work on crop fields that are difficult to inspect, they are left extremely vulnerable to mine explosions. In fact, one farmer at Dovhenke stepped on a mine while looking for a missing cow,⁷⁹ and another explosion at Kramatorsk burned 60 percent of his body when his machine hit two mines.⁸⁰

Russia also shelled cities indiscriminately. A mural by Vasyl Netsko depicts a crosshair, a symbol of targeted violence, aiming at innocent children; while the children are depicted standing in a brightly lit field of grass and flowers, they are illustrated as gradually moving towards dark, sharp blades where the sunlight fails to reach. (Fig. 9).



Figure 9. Netsko, Vasyl. 2022, Oil on wall, Jasien Railway Station, Gdansk.

By arranging the scene so that the children face forward, oblivious to the crosshair aimed at them, Netsko highlights the “ruthless nature of warfare” where victims are subjected to sudden attacks.⁸¹ Frontline cities, where many military bases had been established, were at “increased risk of attack” from Russia, who aimed at populated areas regardless of whether civilians lived there or not.⁸² For example, on March 16, 2022, Russia sent bombs to the drama theater in Mariupol which had been serving as a temporary shelter for hundreds of refugees.⁸³ Even though the refugees had been evacuated from their homes and moved further away from the battlefield, they were left vulnerable to sudden missile attacks because Russia often mistook their camps for military bases. Netsko’s decision to depict children in a mural thus features the theme of war stealing childhood.⁸⁴ Although children should be getting adequate education and enjoying normal days with friends, their educational environment was instead destroyed.⁸⁵ Over 2,700 educational institutions in eastern Ukraine were bombed because Russian and Ukrainian troops frequently utilized schools as military facilities, making them prime targets for opposing forces.⁸⁶ The destruction of schools has had a lasting impact on students, as they may struggle to resume their studies once the war ends. By portraying the stories of vulnerable groups like farmers, civilians, and children in frontline cities, muralists have drawn global attention to the violence perpetrated by Russian forces.

⁷⁸ Gerry Doyle, Han Huang, and Jackie Gu, 6.

⁷⁹ Stein and Birnbaum, 18.

⁸⁰ Spike, 7.

⁸¹ Perzycka-Borowska, Gliniecka, Kukielko, and Parchimowicz, 17.

⁸² Sergatskova, 9.

⁸³ Sergatskova, 8.

⁸⁴ Perzycka-Borowska, Gliniecka, Kukielko, and Parchimowicz, 17.

⁸⁵ Perzycka-Borowska, Gliniecka, Kukielko, and Parchimowicz, 17.

⁸⁶ Yulia Gorbunova, “Attacks on Schools Military Use of Schools during the Armed Conflict in Eastern Ukraine.” *UNICEF Global Development Commons* (2016): 1.

Conclusion

By portraying the resilience of eastern Ukrainians in the face of violence, Ukrainian murals offer a promising means to bolster Ukrainians' confidence, much like how the Berlin Wall murals united Berliners. The Berlin Wall had at first been a place for Berliners to express their anger through acts of vandalism. However, it soon became a center for muralists to expose East Berlin's violence and speak out about the importance of reunification using art. Therefore, the Berlin Wall murals played a pivotal role in aiding Berliners as they navigated the challenging process of integrating two distinct systems from the East and the West. Similarly, graffiti in Ukraine appeared during the Euromaidan as a quick avenue to criticize police aggression and government oppression. However, the graffiti soon developed into murals encouraging global support and giving hope to Ukrainians by depicting frontline cities' hard efforts to recover from Russian attacks. By carrying on the Berlin tradition of using murals to foster national unity, Ukraine has the opportunity to strengthen itself by showcasing murals that expose Russian aggression and highlight Ukrainian resilience.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor for the valuable insight provided to me on this topic.

References

- Beaubien, Jason. "Russia's War in Ukraine Pushes Ukrainian Steel Production to the Brink." *NPR*, August 12, 2022. [https://www.npr.org/2022/08/12/1116312634/russia-ukraine-war-steel-iron-industry#:~:text=Hourly%20News-,Ukraine%27s%20iron%20and%20steel%20industry%20is%20in%20rough%20shape%20because,and%20steel%20products%20to%20customers.\(Accessed Aug 31, 2023\).](https://www.npr.org/2022/08/12/1116312634/russia-ukraine-war-steel-iron-industry#:~:text=Hourly%20News-,Ukraine%27s%20iron%20and%20steel%20industry%20is%20in%20rough%20shape%20because,and%20steel%20products%20to%20customers.(Accessed%20Aug%2031,%202023).)
- Chaaya, Celine et al. "Ukraine – Russia Crisis and Its Impacts on the Mental Health of Ukrainian Young People during the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Annals of Medicine & Surgery* 79 (2022): 104033. doi.10.1016/j.amsu.2022.104033.
- Chervonyk, Elena. "Light Image of Ukraine Against the Background of War: Extragraphite Implementation." *The Culturology Ideas* 22 no. 2 (2022): 112-130. doi.10.37627/2311-9489-22-2022-2.112-130.
- Daouphars, D. Raphaelle. "East Side Gallery in Berlin: The 10 most famous murals!" *Berlin Poche*. <https://berlinpoche.de/en/east-side-gallery-berlin>. (Accessed Sep 1, 2023).
- De-Miguel-Molina, Maria. "Visiting Dark Murals: An Ethnographic Approach to the Sustainability of Heritage." *Sustainability* 12 (2020): 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12020677>.
- Diuk, Nadia. "Euromaidan: Ukraine's Self-Organizing Revolution." *World Affairs* 176, no. 6 (April 2014): 9-16. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43555086>.
- Doyle, Gerry et al. "In Ukraine, Land Mines Left by Russian Forces Pose a Deadly Threat." *Reuters*, July 28, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/UKRAINE-CRISIS/LANDMINES/myvymgnqbavr/>. (Accessed Sep 1, 2023).
- Dundon, Rian. "This Photographer's Collection of Berlin Wall Graffiti Photos Show the Politic of Paint." *Timeline*, November 2, 2017. <https://medium.com/timeline/berlin-wall-photos-graffiti-bc62b7ccccf62>. (Accessed Sep 1, 2023).
- Farkic, Jelena and Kennell, James. "Consuming dark sites via street art: Murals at Chernobyl." *Annals of Tourism Research* 90 (2021): 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103256>.
- Grither, Daniel. "The Art on the Berlin Wall: Sentiments of East and West Berlin." *The Collector*, February 7, 2021. <https://www.thecollector.com/art-on-the-berlin-wall/>. (Accessed Aug 31, 2023).

- Gorbunova, Yulia. "Attacks on Schools Military Use of Schools during the Armed Conflict in Eastern Ukraine." *UNICEF Global Development Commons*, 2016.
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/02/11/studying-under-fire/attacks-schools-military-use-schools-during-armed-conflict>. (Accessed Aug 31, 2023).
- Howie, Lucy. "Keith Haring and the Berlin Wall." *MyArtBroker*. <https://www.myartbroker.com/artist-keith-haring/articles/keith-haring-and-the-berlin-wall> (Accessed Aug 31, 2023).
- Kirby, Paul. "Donbas: Why Russia Is Trying to Capture Eastern Ukraine." *BBC*, May 26, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-60938544#> (Accessed Aug 31, 2023).
- Kozak, Nazar. "Art Embedded Into Protest: Staging the Ukrainian Maidan." *Art 76*, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 9-27. doi.10.1080/00043249.2017.1332873.
- Perzycka-Borowska et al. "Socio-Educational Impact of Ukraine War Murals: Jasień Railway Station Gallery." *Arts* 12, no. 3 (2023): 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts12030112>.
- Pugh, Emily. "Graffiti and the Critical Power of Urban Space: Gordon Matta-Clark's Made in America and Keith Haring's Berlin Wall Mural." *Space and Culture* 18, no. 4 (2015): 421-435. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331215616094>.
- Sergatskova, Keterina. "How Does Russia's War against Ukraine Affect Civilians Living near Front Lines?" *Wilson Center*, August 10, 2022. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/how-does-russias-war-against-ukraine-affect-civilians-living-near-front-lines>. (Accessed Sep 1, 2023).
- Smilianets, Vladyslav. "Russian Missiles Kill Nine, Destroy Hotel in Eastern Donetsk, Ukraine Says." *Reuters*, August 8, 2023. [https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-says-russian-missile-strikes-apartment-buildings-kill-five-east-2023-08-07/#:~:text=Russian%20missiles%20kill%20nine%2C%20destroy%20hotel%20in%20eastern%20Donetsk%2C%20Ukraine%20says,-By%20Vladyslav%20Smilianets&text=POKROVSK%2C%20Ukraine%2C%20Aug%207%20\(a%20popular%20hotel%2C%20officials%20said](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-says-russian-missile-strikes-apartment-buildings-kill-five-east-2023-08-07/#:~:text=Russian%20missiles%20kill%20nine%2C%20destroy%20hotel%20in%20eastern%20Donetsk%2C%20Ukraine%20says,-By%20Vladyslav%20Smilianets&text=POKROVSK%2C%20Ukraine%2C%20Aug%207%20(a%20popular%20hotel%2C%20officials%20said). (Accessed Sep 1, 2023).
- Spike, Justin. "Dairy Farm in Ukraine's Donbas Region Struggles to Survive." *AP News*, August 12, 2022. [https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-donetsk-government-and-politics-29530ecc423137255620de2add61f8e2#:~:text=DMYTRIVKA%2C%20Ukraine%20\(AP\)%20—,safe%20from%20Russia%27s%20devastating%20war](https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-donetsk-government-and-politics-29530ecc423137255620de2add61f8e2#:~:text=DMYTRIVKA%2C%20Ukraine%20(AP)%20—,safe%20from%20Russia%27s%20devastating%20war). (Accessed Sep 1, 2023).
- Stein, Jeff, and Michael Birnbaum. "The War in Ukraine Is a Human Tragedy. It's Also An Environmental Disaster." *The Washington Post*, March 14, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/03/13/ukraine-war-environment-impact-disaster/> (Accessed Aug 31, 2023).
- "The Berlin Wall." *Thierry Noir*, July 8, 2023. <https://thierrynoir.com/biography/essays/berlin-wall/>. (Accessed Aug 31, 2023).
- Poberezhets, Vitalii. "Healthcare Crisis in Ukraine – Worrying Consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian War." *Croatian Medical Journal* 63, no. 4 (August 2022): 315–16. doi.10.3325/cmj.2022.63.315.
- "Ukraine Conflict Environmental Briefing: The Coastal and Marine Environment." *CEOBS*, February 2023. <https://ceobs.org/ukraine-conflict-environmental-briefing-the-coastal-and-marine-environment/>. (Accessed Aug 31, 2023).
- "Victims of the Wall." *Berlin.de Startseite*, August 19, 2020. <https://www.berlin.de/mauer/en/history/victims-of-the-wall/>. (Accessed Aug 31, 2023).
- Vovk, Yevheniya, and Mykola Tymchenko. "Battlefield: When Will the Farmers of Donetsk Oblast Be Able to Use Their Land Again?" *Ukraine World*, June 1, 2023. <https://ukraineworld.org/en/articles/analysis/battlefield-farmers-donetsk-oblast> (Accessed Aug 31, 2023).

Yan, Libo et al. "Street art as alternative attractions: A case of the East Side Gallery." *Elsevier* 29, (November 2019): 76-85. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2018.11.001>.