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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**“You don’t have to say much; paint it then!”: A Thematic Analysis of Mural Arts in Iraq (Mosul and Erbil as a Case)**

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**ABSTRACT**

People find themselves in need of adding some inspiration indoors; interior designers likely let their customers immerse in the charm of some wall art decor with sweet family room wall quotes like “Love begins at home”. The art of filling walls exceeds the interior spaces for decoration, including outdoor spaces where different forms of artistic expression are used. This wall art matters among populations globally as it conveys different messages to the public and the decision-makers as well. The current article investigates Mural Arts (MAs) in Mosul and Erbil, Iraq. The researchers aim to (1) interpret the variety of themes that Mosuli Artists (MoAs) and Erbili Artists (ErAs) communicate via painting and (2) figure out the shared and distinctive theme in MoAs and ErAs’ artwork. This study employed a qualitative approach to grasp the themes of MAs in both Mosul and Erbil. The researchers gathered 60 Mixed Mural Arts MMA samples (verbal and visual); 38 in Mosul and 22 in Erbil in four months (from 8 August to 20 November 2023). They purposefully covered a broad range of sites including street walls, building facades, government institution walls, school walls, and bridge side walls in both cities. The researchers employed the Thematic Analysis Approach (TAA) by Braun and Clarke (2006) benefiting from NVivo 11(1999-2017) software to induce themes in Mosul and Erbil. This study revealed a total of 13 themes in both Mosul and Erbil in Mosul and 5 in Erbil. 2 themes, viz. ‘Environmental Sustainability’ and ‘Patriotism’ were shared. Other 6 themes viz. ‘The Transformative Power of Knowledge’, ‘The Horse as a Symbol of Nobility’, ‘Reviving the City of Mosul’, ‘Women Abuse’, ‘Unity for Iraq’, and ‘Martyrdom’ were said to be distinctive in Mosul whereas 3 other themes, viz. ‘The Role of Women in Society’, ‘Music Therapy’, and ‘Motivation in Learning’ were interpreted in Erbil.

**KEYWORDS:**

Mural Arts, Mixed Mural Arts, Thematic Analysis Approach, Iraq, Mosul City, Erbil City.

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**1. Introduction**

Instinctively, art serves as an essential sustenance for the human spirit, nourishing man’s inner self and fostering a connection with emotional, intellectual, and life experiences. Moreover, art empowers individuals to express their unique ideas and generate notions that embody beauty and novelty (Abd Muhammad et al., 2020). The significance of artwork extends beyond its aesthetic appeal, encompassing its ability to stimulate thought and impart ethical guidelines, environmental consciousness, and societal norms. More significantly, all illustrations, photographs, drawings, and the like aspire to elevate man’s consciousness towards an idealised, utopian vision. In this sense, artists are deeply embedded within their community; they are ambassadors serving their communities and their creations mirror their cultural and social prevailing issues. Their art could embody a moral stance, and via their artistic practices, they catalyze social transformation. Often, social art is interactive and encompasses topics such as environmental concerns, food production, labour, social and ethnic divides, colonialism, reconstruction, global capitalism, migration, detention, and democracy (Kocache, 2015, p. 11).

communication is crucial in people’s lives; they express themselves verbally and nonverbally. Muralism, as one of the oldest forms of wall painting, is a unique cultural phenomenon; it is a form of communication and a language in its own right.

Iraq has a very rich artistic heritage and contributed to visuals including graffiti and muralism since Sumerian and Assyrian times. Recently, Iraq has witnessed a change as far as muralism is concerned. Before 2003, the artistic landscape in Iraq was heavily regulated under Saddam Hussein’s regime. Art forms, including MAs and street art, were primarily employed to boast and glorify the state and its leaders, with almost no room for individual artistic freedom. This period was characterized by a dominance of state-sanctioned themes often depicting military victories, patriotic symbols, and idealized portraits of the ruling party. After 2003, art in Iraq was exposed to an enormous drift. Artists began to explore a far broader spectrum of themes and styles. This newfound freedom in art catalyzed the emergence of diverse artistic expressions, such as MAs and street art movements which finally could alter the landscape of Iraq’s public space. The growth of street art in Iraq was further accelerated during the Arab Spring in 2011, especially during the time of the Tahrir Square demonstrations in Baghdad (2019). Such rallies, in turn, facilitated widespread social and political opposition. This is why street art was essential in elevating the voices of the populace. Artists expressed their dissatisfaction with corruption, inequality, unemployment and women’s rights, among other issues.

Today, MAs and street art fill the streets in Iraq, particularly the two cities, namely Mosul and Erbil (located in the north), with vibrant and appealing visuals. They act as live and free forms of media in a way to broadcast the distinctive cultural, educational, environmental and patriotic aspects. More revealing, they call for action to revive and correct the heritages and social norms of the two cities, respectively.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Mural: Origin and Definition**

Muralism is a phrase commonly used in the art world the expression “hot media” is linked to MAs, indicating the requirement of a high level of attention from viewers. In contrast, the term “cool media” is employed to refer to those arts that demand less concentration for instance television (Prasiasa, 2022, p. 204). Etymologically, the word “mural” is derived from the Latin word ‘murus’ meaning “wall”. MAs have existed for centuries, with some of the earliest examples found in cave art and religious sites. Before the emergence of a writing system, ancient civilizations utilized this form of art as a tool for communication, and a means of propaganda or a medium for ongoing issues among members of societies (Wisniewska, 2020). Pogrmic (2023, p. 13) traced MAs to “Mexican Muralism”; it is a type of social realism or movement that depicts the Mexican revolution and daily life to educate people through art in public spaces. Furthermore, MAs have ornamental, narrative, commemorative, environmental, heritage and folk functions. Historically, MAs were considered to be a sign of prestige, wealth and dignity, still, they convey a variety of global messages (Neves et al., 2018). To be noted, MAs are legal, commissioned and the most significant forms of street art (Ferrell, 2016). MAs are known as meaning makers and integrate visual-verbal modes at least; that is to say, they are of two modes, they create or make meaning through text and picture but the relationship between the two is unparalleled; commonly, the focus is on picture more than words (Wisniewska, 2020). Generally, MAs are large-scale artworks used on walls, ceilings, and other flat surfaces. They are a “[s]ymbol of modernity and trendiness, enriching and gentrifying the material dimension of the city” (Mokras-Grabowska, 2014, as cited in Wisniewska, 2020, p. 433).

### **2.2 Mural Art and Thematic Analysis Approach**

TAA of Braun and Clarke (2006) was first adopted in the field of psychology but later on, it was employed in various fields beyond psychology and appeared to be useful for qualitative analysis. However, TAA was first developed for verbal data analysis but in the current study, the researchers adopted this approach to look for latent themes in MMAs. Due to the elasticity of terms referring to the field of visual art, the current section delves into the literature reviewing some studies which were conducted on graffiti, street art, MAs and linguistic landscape adopting TAA.

Abdulaziz (2015) conducted a significant study on the linguistic landscape of Tripoli streets in Libya during the Arab Spring demonstrations. The author examined and analyzed the contents of street art’s informative and symbolic functions. His study revealed that street art in Tripoli streets is multilingual combining Arabic with Berber or English in pre- and post-Ghaddafi reign. The author also pinpointed and analyzed various street art themes ranging from war, religion, identity, patriotism, and irony.

In the Iraqi context, Zadin (2021) adopted a descriptive-analytical approach to study the social and artistic implications of the mural paintings depicting women in the popular protest movement in Iraq. A Content Analysis Method was adopted to analyze the paintings of the popular protesting movement, with a focus on the MAs created by the protesters on both sides of Tahrir Square. The researcher found that the use of women’s images in the protests had a social connotation mixed with artistic painting expressing Iraqi families’ and societies’ suffering.

Concerning themes of verbal graffiti, Farnia (2014) explored university students’ classroom wall inscriptions in Esfahan, Iran. The study documented and classified more than 200 graffiti samples adopting TAA to investigate the prevalent themes. The investigation revealed many themes such as “love and hatred, politics, religion, important dates in a person’s life, signature, drawings, poetry, self-expression, and complaint/despair” (Farnia, 2014, p. 51). The most common theme, according to this study,

appeared to be "Love". Iran pretends to be a religious society and illegal love affairs are against Islamic rules; thus, students try to pour their feelings on the walls of their classes.

Similarly, Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2017) examined graffiti in the Hashemite University classroom in Jordan. The researcher adopted TAA (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995) to investigate the themes and interpret graffiti linguistically. The result of the data analysis showed that graffiti served different linguistic functions related to the themes of "...personal, social, national, religious, political, and taboo matters" (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2017, p. 29). In brief, the study affirmed the simplicity of graffiti language and digested graffiti as a silent mode of communication. In a similar vein, Ta'amneh (2021) examined secondary school graffiti, adopting identical models as of Al-Khawaldeh et al. (2017). Ta'amneh's data analysis revealed that the discussion of emotion was the most prominent theme.

Gul et al. (2023) examined the visual-verbal graffiti category in Lahore, Pakistan. The researchers approached graffiti in the field of sociolinguistics and adopted the Hymes model of SPEAKING (1974) to analyze and interpret graffiti content and focus on subjects that are difficult to express freely.

Grffiti themes vary from symbols of disturbance to expressions of love, patriotism, and religion. Love affairs, feelings, and emotions are prevalent and more prominent in graffiti writing or painting. Lakh et al. (2021) adopted TAA, too, as an empirical and phenomenological approach to the themes of 102 photos of art made by women during Israel's first lockdown in April 2020, at the time of COVID-19. After applying the six phases of the TAA, the researcher focused on four major themes, namely art-making as self-regulation, mental states and emotional expression, enabling creativity, imagination, experimentation, play, and time. This study showed the reliability of this approach for finding themes in mixed data as well.

Focusing on Mural studies, Kamaruddin and Ishak (2022) explored Malaysian public awareness of street art murals as a means of communication. Worth noting, due to the elasticity of terms, the researchers coined the term "street art murals" to refer to their corpus which might confuse readers regarding whether the corpus was created legally or illegally. Nevertheless, the study contributed well to the existing literature regarding awareness of MAs as a medium of communication. The study adopted a descriptive research design. It was separated into two sections: The first section consisted of a visual investigation of street art murals using photographic documentation, with a sample chosen randomly in Kuala Lumpur. The researchers listed the surface themes of the MAs according to content analysis. The second section entailed collecting information on public knowledge and understanding of street art murals via an online survey questionnaire. The study derived heritage, local symbols and togetherness as the main themes of the corpus. Also, it was found that around half of 360 respondents had low knowledge, and they were unacquainted, at least with visuals perceiving MAs to be closer to vandals. The other half of the respondents seemed to have basic knowledge about visuals and believed that MAs add aspects of safety and peace to the city. Finally, the study upheld the significance of MAs and their impact on the public.

Pop (2012) examined the public discourse in two MAs in Philadelphia from a social constructionist perspective. His study drew on the collaborative mural-making process that involved over 100 persons including prisoners, victims of crime, victim advocates, and community members, to construct the two murals in the Badlands area, Philadelphia. The researcher adopted a social constructionist framework, integrating Conquergood's theory of boundaries and borderlands with Berger and Luckmann's social constructionism to evaluate the MAs and their influence on disenfranchised folks. The analysis of the two visual large-scale murals highlighted the vital role of art in giving voice to downgraded or marginalized individuals in society and further maintaining their identity as those who exist in the society and potentially act for change.

In a case study, Sahabuddin and Hildayanti (2024) explored mural creation, reception, and its impact within the real-life context of Makassar, Indonesia. The two researchers adopted qualitative research methodology to comprehend and interpret people's experiences, behaviours, and social phenomena. Techniques for gathering data included observations, document analysis, photography, and interviews. The gathered information was subjected to a descriptive analysis to comprehend the function and significance of visual communication in MAs, and their effects on the local community and urban environment as well. Eventually, the findings demonstrated that Makassar City's MAs are an effective visual communication tool. It interacted with the community by conveying stories, messages, or artistic experiences. In addition, the MAs honour regional customs, traditions, and heritage by fusing cultural themes, symbols, and imageries that represent the community's diversity and identity.

Murals are very effective for delivering a message. They force viewers' attention due to their vivid colour and large scale. Government and policymakers have to support and encourage such art, certainly in the legal context, to raise educational, social and political awareness. New generations need to be exposed to such art in public spaces to uplift their souls and inspire patriotism and love for the country. Bin Ahmad et al. (2020) examined the theme of patriotism in MAs in Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia. The study adopted qualitative and quantitative designs. To learn more about Malaysian patriotism, qualitative research was employed, and the data was validated by quantitative research. The study collected visual and textual data from a selected research area, defined elements of patriotism through expert interviews, further collected data through questionnaires disseminated in the study and the researcher analyzed the questionnaire data using software to derive findings. Overall, the study report shed light on how patriotism is portrayed visually in MAs and the way it influences public opinion in Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.

Depending on the community, the graffiti themes vary significantly i.e., they are intermingled with the beliefs, ideologies, and norms of the masses including the environment, safety, and security atmosphere of the state. As an illustration, Sechrest and Floresin (1969) as cited in Stocker et al. (1972, Paragraph: literature on social attitude) chose graffiti as a covert measure of attitudes

towards homosexuality in the United States and the Philippines. They examined homosexual-themed graffiti in the restroom and found that it was non-existent in the Philippines due to the fact that the community tolerates such practices. In contrast, a high number of homosexual graffiti was found in the United States for the society’s social condemnation of such acts. Unlike Western societies, graffiti themes in Arab society mostly reflect the masses’ desire for change, fighting corruption, unemployment, resistance, war, and patriotism, particularly after the Arab Spring in 2011. It is worth mentioning that after the researchers reviewed the literature, they observed the virginity of themes of the legal and commissioned MMAs. Furthermore, the literature revealed that TAA was often adopted for the investigation of surface themes of MAs. Therefore, the current study strives to go beyond the artists’ canvas and find latent and prevalent themes in the legal MMAs category in Mosul and Erbil.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Approach**

In academic research, it is imperative to avoid skimming the surface when addressing research inquiries. Qualitative research involves “digging deep” into the subject matter by gathering diverse data types and examining them from multiple perspectives (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). A qualitative approach is necessary to understand the phenomenon under investigation comprehensively (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Additionally, qualitative research is the study that pertains to understanding social processes in their natural surrounding i.e., it tackles the nature of phenomena, including their quality, various manifestations, the context in which they exist, or the viewpoints from which they might be observed (Ugwu & Eze, 2023). Thus, this study employed a qualitative approach to understand the themes of MAs in both Mosul and Erbil expansively.

#### **3.2 Corpus Collection**

For this study, the researchers gathered 60 MMAs, 38 samples in Mosul and 22 samples in Erbil, in four months (From 8 August to 20 November 2023). The researchers employed an extensive approach of random wandering across both cities to capture the most representative murals. They purposefully covered a broad range of sites including street walls, building facades, government institution walls, school walls, and bridge side walls to ensure that they captured a diverse sample of MAs that represented the distinct creative expressions noticed in both cities. The researchers photographed only the MAs that are legal, unbiased, and fruitful to community members i.e., the MAs have been selected by the researchers purposefully. Moreover, recording MA’s demography and other pertinent contextual information is utilised to better understand the artwork’s significance. Permission was only required for sample collection in sensitive locations such as police stations and other governmental institutions due to safety concerns. In contrast, corpus collection in the rest of the public spaces in both Mosul and Erbil did not require permission. As a result, the corpus was collected in specific locations and timelines as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Locations and Timelines of MMAs in Mosul and Erbil*

<i>No. of Figure</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Timeline</i>
1	Mosul, Right Coast, Yarmouk Bridge	Aug. 18, 2023
2	Mosul, Right Coast, Yarmouk Bridge	Aug. 18, 2023
3	Erbil, 40m Str., Wall of RT bank and Kurdistan University	Aug. 8, 2023
4	Erbil, Runaki Str., Wall of Qandil Basic School for Boys	Aug. 21, 2023
5	Erbil, Runaki Str., Wall of Qandil Basic School for Boys	Aug. 21, 2023
6	Mosul, Right Coast, Yarmouk Bridge	Aug. 18, 2023
7	Erbil, Runaki Str., Wall of Qandil Basic School for Boys	Aug. 21, 2023
8	Erbil, 60m Str. Wall of Parliament Building	Aug. 8, 2023
9	Erbil, Kirkuk Road, Wall of Zahra Preparatory School for Girls	Aug. 11, 2023
10	Erbil, Tarbia Str, Wall of Salcuk Primary Turkmen School	Aug. 11, 2023
11	Erbil, Runaki Str., Wall of Qandil Basic School for Boys	Aug. 21, 2023
12	Erbil, Runaki Str., Wall of Qandil Basic School for Boys	Aug. 21, 2023
13	Erbil, Runaki Str., Wall of Qandil Basic School for Boys	Aug. 21, 2023
14	Erbil, Runaki Str., Wall of Qandil Basic School for Boys	Aug. 21, 2023
15	Erbil, Runaki Str., Wall of Qandil Basic School for Boys	Aug. 21, 2023
16	Erbil, Runaki Str., Wall of Qandil Basic School for Boys	Aug. 21, 2023
17	Erbil, Runaki Str., Wall of Qandil Basic School for Boys	Aug. 21, 2023
18	Erbil, Runaki Str., Wall of Qandil Basic School for Boys	Aug. 21, 2023
19	Mosul, Right Coast, Al-Ghazlani area, public wall	Aug. 18, 2024
20	Mosul, Left Coast, University Bridge	Aug. 18, 2024
21	Mosul, Right Coast, Yarmouk Bridge	Aug. 18, 2024
22	Mosul, Left Coast, Wall of Al-thaqafa Police Station	Aug. 10, 2023

23	Erbil, Wall of Ankawa Park	Aug. 8,2024
24	Mosul, Left Coast, University Bridge	Aug. 18, 2024
25	Erbil, Wall of Ankawa Park	Aug. 8,2024
26	Mosul, Right Coast, Al-Ghazlani area, public wall	Aug.18,2024
27	Mosul, Right Coast, Hammam, Al-Manqoosha	Aug. 18, 2024
28	Mosul, Left Coast, Cornish Al-Ghabat(the woods)	Aug. 18, 2024
29	Mosul, Right Coast, Yarmouk Bridge	Aug. 18, 2024
30	Mosul, Right Coast, Yarmouk Bridge	Aug. 18, 2024
31	Mosul, Left Coast, Cornish Al-Ghabat(the woods)	Aug. 18, 2024
32	Mosul, Left Coast, Al-alba, Al-Siddiq School Wal	Nov. 5, 2024
33	Mosul, Right Coast, Yarmouk Bridge	Aug. 18, 2024
34	Mosul, Left Coast, Al-adba, Al-Siddiq School Wal	Nov. 5, 2024
35	Mosul, Right Coast, Yarmouk Bridge	Aug. 18, 2024
36	Mosul, Left Coast, Al-adba,al-Siddiq School Wal	Nov. 5, 2024
37	Mosul, Left Coast, Al-adba, Al-Siddiq School Wal	Nov. 5, 2024
38	Mosul, Right Coast, Al-talafer Taxi Garage	Aug. 18, 2024
39	Mosul, Right Coast, Al-Ghazlani area, public wall	Aug. 18, 2024
40	Mosul, Right Coast, Al-lislah Al- zira'a	Aug. 10, 2023
41	Mosul, Right Coast, Yarmouk Bridge	Aug. 18, 2024
42	Mosul, Right Coast, Yarmouk Bridge	Aug. 18, 2024
43	Mosul, Left Coast, University Bridge	Aug. 18, 2024
44	Mosul, Left Coast, Cornish Al-Ghabat(the woods)	Aug. 18, 2024
45	Mosul, Left Coast, Cornish Al-Ghabat(the woods)	Aug. 18, 2024
46	Mosul, Right Coast, Hammam, AL-Manqoosha	Aug. 18, 2024
47	Mosul, Left Coast, Cornish Al-Ghabat(the woods)	Aug. 18, 2024
48	Mosul, Left Coast, Cornish Al-Ghabat(the woods)	Aug. 18, 2024
49	Mosul, Right Coast, Danadan Crossroad, Wall of Directorate of Water	Aug. 18, 2024
50	Mosul, Right Coast, Yarmouk Bridge	Aug. 18, 2024
51	Mosul, Right Coast, Al-talafer Taxi Garage	Aug. 18, 2024
52	Mosul, Left Coast, University Bridge	Aug. 18, 2024
53	Mosul, Right Coast, Yarmouk Bridge	Aug. 18, 2024
54	Mosul, Left Coast, Cornish Al-Ghabat(the woods)	Aug. 18, 2024
55	Mosul, Left Coast, Cornish Al-Ghabat(the woods)	Aug. 18, 2024
56	Erbil,60M St., Shoresh Bridge	Nov. 10, 2023
57	Erbil,40M, Maternity Hospital	Nov. 10, 2023
58	Erbil, College of Fine Arts, Building Wall	Aug. 11, 2023
59	Erbil, Tarbia St., Wall of Salcuk school	Aug. 11, 2023
60	Erbil, Runaki, Wall of Qandil School	Aug. 21, 2023

### 3.3 Corpus Classification Procedure

For the MMAs in Mosul, the researchers extracted 38 verbal texts:34 Arabic and 4 English. Arabic texts were translated into English. Similarly, for the MMAs in Erbil, the researchers extracted 22: verbal texts,14 Kurdish,2 Assyrians, and 6 English. The Kurdish and Assyrian texts were translated into English to provide broader access to Nvivo software for reading the texts. After extracting and translating non-English verbal texts, the researchers conducted a separate thematic analysis for each city's MMAs to induce the corresponding themes.

### 3.4 Corpus Analysis Procedure

#### 3.4.1 Thematic Corpus Analysis Procedure

The researchers employed the six phases of the TAA by Braun and Clarke (2006) to induce themes across MMAs in Mosul and Erbil as follows:

##### Phase One: Familiarization with the Corpus

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the first phase is the bedrock for the analysis of themes.

- The researchers collected the corpus in the two cities, namely Mosul and Erbil, which are located in the north of Iraq. This helped the researchers come up with prior knowledge regarding analyzing and identifying themes.
- Self-immersion in the entire corpus to scrutinize patterns and meaning in the corpus. The researchers considered texts and images together during the familiarization process, even in the subsequent phases of coding, because the data is a mixed category

that contains texts and images. In this way, one reinforces the other. Then, the (Kurdish, Arabic, and Assyrian) texts which were found on murals were translated into English before the coding process started.

**Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes**

The researchers generated initial coding benefiting from NVivo 11(1999-2017) software. Coding can also be done manually but the researchers preferred using Qualitative Data Analysis software. The software saves time and works efficiently so that no significant information is missed during the researchers back and forth movements across the corpus. This enhances the study’s credibility and further avoids bias as much as possible. To pave the way for reaching latent themes, the researchers first began coding the semantic content of murals; they followed a descriptive-based coding process. It is worth noting that they investigated themes which were linked to the corpus i.e., “data-driven” themes and not “researcher-driven” ones. In other words, themes that arise from the corpus without preconditioning them by the researcher. As such, MMAs translation along with the original MMAs were imported into NVivo software for coding. Using the software, the authors created containers for codes, identified significant information, highlighted it, and dragged and dropped it into code containers. Similar or related codes were embraced under the same existing code containers and collated in later phases. Besides, the researchers created new containers for dissimilar codes. In such a way, all the MMAs in Mosul and Erbil were coded successfully.

**Phase Three: Searching for Themes**

As codes are the building blocks of themes(Dawadi, 2021), this phase undertakes codes to a broader level. It attempts to create patterns and connections among the codes to reach an overarching theme. A theme grasps something important about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers obtained a long list of codes:61 codes from Mosul’s MMAs and 31 codes from Erbil’s MMAs. Next, the repeated codes were collated into one. The result was 42 codes obtained from Mosul and 23 codes from Erbil. Then, the codes were clustered by coding similarity using NVivo software to identify connections and patterns among the codes. This phase ended with the emergence of a collection of candidate themes of MMAs: 10 for Mosul and 9 for Erbil.

**Phase Four: Reviewing Themes**

The six phases of TAA are iterative and nonlinear(Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers coded the corpus multiple times till they devised a satisfactory thematic map. This phase consisted of two levels. At level one, the researchers exported all codes from NVivo software to an Excel sheet. Later on, the codes were grouped into topic piles using a table in a Microsoft Word sheet. The researchers reread and collated similar and related extracts and clustered all the themes and subthemes to check whether they could establish meaningful, coherent patterns(Dawadi, 2021). At the second level, “...similar procedure undertook but this time in relation to the entire data set. The validity of individual themes in relation to the data set was considered”(Dawadi, 2021, p. 68).

Again, the researchers reread the extracts and recoded the corpus but did not find anything substantial thus they stopped recording. It is worth mentioning that in the reviewing phase, many sub-themes were either merged with other major themes or discarded. For instance, ‘respect and love for teachers and professors’ in Mosul’s MMAs and ‘Historical sites’ in Erbil’s MMAs were discarded as they did not seem to belong to any potential themes, and they had little corpus to emerge as separate themes. The outcome of the two levels of the reviewing phase revealed 8 major themes in Mosul’s MMAs and 6 major themes in Erbil’s MMAs.

**Phase Five: Defining and Naming Themes**

After further refinement, the researchers made sure that the themes did not overlap and were coherent. They further highlighted the focus of each theme so that the themes are not too broad and complex. Finally, the researchers established a thematic map to demonstrate the connections and patterns of codes with themes.

TAA is a very flexible method(Braun & Clarke, 2006).In other words, the researchers can make changes in each stage of the TAA. After devising a thematic map, the researchers realized that the theme of ‘*Water Preservation*’ in Erbil’s MMAs could be merged with the theme of ‘*Environmental Sustainability*’. Sticking to the phases of the TAA, the researchers induced a total of 13 themes: 8 in Mosul and 5 in Erbil. Out of 13 themes, it is found that only 2 of them, namely ‘*Environmental Sustainability*’ and ‘*Patriotism*’ sounded shared while the rest were distinct. As a final step, the themes were named and presented for producing a report (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Shared and Different Themes of MMAs in Mosul and Erbil*

No.	Mosul and Erbil’s Shared MMAs Themes	No.	Mosul-MMAs (Distinctive Themes)	No.	Erbil-MMAs (Distinctive Themes)
1	Environmental Sustainability	3	The Horse is a Symbol of Nobility	9	Music Therapy
2	Patriotism	4	The Revival of the City of Mosul	10	Motivation in Learning
		5	The Transformative Power of Knowledge	11	The Role of Women in the Society
		6	Women Abuse		
		7	Unity for Iraq		
		8	Martyrdom		

## Phase Six: Producing the Report

The final stage of TAA involves making a report about the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) essentially making a report refers to the interpretation of the themes.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Thematic Analysis of MMAs in Mosul and Erbil

#### 4.1.1 Thematic Analysis of MMAs in Mosul and Erbil (Shared Themes)

##### 4.1.1.1 The Theme of Environmental Sustainability

Environmental Sustainability is a broad concept, it should be defined simply so that all public and private bodies comprehend and act accordingly. It refers to the human capabilities "...to maintain things and qualities that are valued in the physical environment" (Sutton, 2004, p. 1). What Sutton means by "physical environment" is to preserve the resources that surround us such as water, land, roads, buildings and other physical elements that contribute to making up the urban environment. Sutton's definition offers a plain view of one area of environmental sustainability, viz. the physical environment. However, it is crucial to recognize that environmental sustainability is made up of three interconnected components: the physical environment, the economic aspect, and the social aspect; they are interconnected and have a considerable impact on one another. Still, the distinction between them is not always evident. Thus, Environmental Sustainability could be defined as man's endeavour to preserve the environment, enhance the quality of life, and educate society to act accordingly.

In Mosul, the extract in Figure (1) highlights the theme of water preservation. Water is not just essential for life; it is a lifeblood for all living entities. The Arabic expression "قطرتنا" (Lit.: Our drop) is a potent symbol of the shared nature of water resources in Mosul. In this way, the Mosuli Artists (MoAs) call Mosuli residents to be responsible and take action to preserve water and further, the expression indicates that water is "امانة" (Lit.: be not excessive or extravagant) advocating Mosuli citizens to use water economically.

Figure 1



Figure (2) pinpoints the rationalization of the consumption of electric power. The MoAs via the Extract (معا لترشيد استهلاك الكهرباء) (Lit.: Let's rationalize the consumption of electric power) urging their citizens to be more mindful and economical in their use of electricity; that is, to avoid unnecessary consumption. It is a call to discover ways to minimize Mosul's waste and maximize its energy efficiency.

Figure 2



Between 2003 and 2017, Mosul suffered extensive environmental degradation, resulting in substantial damage to its urban landscape, water sources, and infrastructure. Residents of Mosul endured more than three years without access to power during the occupation of Mosul by ISIS. In response to these challenges, artists in Mosul have underscored the critical importance of power and water sources in preserving a sustainable environment in the city.

Figure 3



Emphasizing different elements of environmental sustainability, Erbil Artists (ErAs) in Figure (3) shed light on the word, namely "ENVIRONMENT" which is surrounded by a set of keywords related to environmental sustainability. These keywords can be grouped and analyzed accordingly. The three action verbs which are "Recycle" "Reuse" and "Save" are known as the three Rs of waste management highlighting recycling the materials that individuals cannot avoid using and reusing items for different purposes to save the mother planet. The nouns, viz. "Tree", "Energy", and "Nature" emphasize natural resources and their value. Trees are essential for the environment as they provide oxygen for humans and contribute to the planet's beautification and greening. Using energy efficiently is essential for

conserving the durability of resources and maintaining a healthy nature. The last two i.e., "Ecology" and "Earth" are broader than the rest of the terms. Ecology refers to the interaction of organisms and their environment and how the earth integrates all living things and the natural world. It is significant to observe that Figure (3) targets the well-educated individuals in the community since the MMA is in English; further it is displayed on a shared wall (the University of Kurdistan and RT bank's wall in Erbil).

Figure 4



Iraq is blessed with abundant sunlight throughout most of the seasons, especially during summer and spring when the sunlight is particularly intense. Figure (4), which reads in Kurdish: "سود له رونای سروش و هه‌ریگره" (Lit., Get health benefits from sunlight.), underscores the vital role of sunlight as a clean and sustainable energy source. Sunlight is renewable; it offers a continuous emission-free energy source unlike fossil fuels that require hundreds of years to form. Harnessing sunlight for energy production does not produce harmful greenhouse gases or air pollution. Additionally, sunlight's benefits extend beyond material uses; it is a vital source of vitamin D which is essential for muscle function, bone strength, and a healthy immune system.

Figure (5) addresses another crucial aspect of environmental sustainability; it conveys the message of educating, promoting, and empowering individuals in society to take proactive measures to preserve valuable resources. This message is reflected in the symbol of a pile of books and the Kurdish extract which reads: "هانی کهسانی تر بده سه‌بارهت به پارێزگاری کردنی سروشت" (Lit.:You (Erbili residents) should support and encourage other individuals to preserve nature). Over the past fifty years, Erbil has experienced a rapid increase in population leading to urbanization and the decline of green spaces. ErAs have made efforts to raise awareness about environmental sustainability and the demand to create a balance between urban development and nature's sustenance. In a word, MoAs and ErAs advocate for environmental action to ensure maintaining the healthy and green environment of their two cities (see also, Figures 6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17, and 18).

**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**



**Figure 9**



**Figure 12**



**Figure 15**



**Figure 7**



**Figure 10**



**Figure 13**



**Figure 16**



**Figure 8**



**Figure 11**



**Figure 14**



**Figure 17**



**Figure 18**



4.1.1.2 The Theme of Patriotism

Figure (19) conveys a deep theme of patriotism and national pride. The MoAs employed the singular pronoun " أنا " (Lit.: I am) to capture Iraqi citizens' attention and to encourage them to share sentiments. They strongly identified themselves with their country and felt a deep emotional connection to Iraq. The statement, "أنا العراق", (Lit.: I am Iraq) shows the artists' enshrinement as part of a larger whole and informs all Iraqis that Iraqi inhabitants are a good representative of their homeland. In sum, the MoAs emphatically promote patriotism by urging Iraqis to respect and cherish the Iraqi land and laws wholeheartedly and to deeply connect with Iraq.

Figure 19



Patriotism entails a profound love and dedication to one's country. Noteworthy, in the current modern era, the meaning of patriotism has been broadened and true patriotism is not exclusively characterized by combat service; rather, patriotism may suggest little but meaningful practices and attitudes aimed at conserving a clean safe and secure environment for the nation's sake. Thus, the core of patriotism lies in devotion and a sense of responsibility for the home's welfare where one resides, be it a village, a town, a city, or the whole mother country.

In Figure (20), the MoAs convey their emotions and affections for Nineveh by intertextualizing a couplet from a well-known poem titled (أنا والنوى) (Lit.: Alienation and I) in their artwork which states:

Figure 20



"يا أهلَ موصلَ ما قطعْتُ مدامعي عنكم وما زالَ الهيامُ بنينوي"

(Lit.: Oh, Mosulian! Oh, pity! I pray for you, feeling fear! Miss you, my hearty, everywhere! God save you, my dear city!), (Jameel Ali,1911, Line No:5-6). Historically, Mosul has suffered from numerous tragedies, resulting in significant damage. Therefore, the artists zealously expressed their love and grief for the different stages of challenges Mosul faced. During the ISIS occupation of Mosul, Mosuli residents experienced tremendous fear for their lives, they were insecure about what was going on in the city and were obliged to seek shelter. Consequently, a great number of inhabitants were displaced and abandoned their homes and properties.

Figure 21



Another straightforward instance of the theme of patriotism is interpreted in Figure (21). Its significance lies in the fact that it is painted on Yarmouk Bridge's side wall, close to the area where the ISIS terrorist group initially invaded Mosul and took control in 2014—the statement "أنا عراقي", (Lit.: I am an Iraqi) suggests that the artists emphasize Mosuli people's resilience and their commitment to their country, even in facing adversity.

The patriotic statement in Figure (22) addresses Mosuli citizens. The statement which reads: "إن لم تكن تحمل هم الوطن فأنت هم عليه", (Lit.: You have to be a reliable citizen; otherwise, you are just a neglectable burden on this country), carries a profound message about patriotism and national responsibility. It stresses the vitality and cruciality of Mosuli individuals taking ownership of their country's well-being and contributing to its progress. Conversely, failing to fulfil one's patriotic duties can harm the nation. The other part of the statement which reads: "الوطن هو القلب والنبض والشريان", (Lit.: Homeland is as dear as our hearts and breaths), highlights the nation's crucial role in shaping the individual's identity and well-being. Comparable to the way the heart pumps blood through the body, the homeland fosters a profound sense of belonging, purpose, and shared identity.

Mosuli citizens. The statement which

Figure 22



Figure 23



Similarly, the ErAs via the extract in Figure (23) express a sense of patriotism in the Assyrian language. As well known, Iraq is a multi-cultural and multi-religious country. The Assyrians, with a profound heritage, have demonstrated unwavering fortitude in the face of challenges in Iraq. Ankawa is a sub-district in Erbil and a safe home for Assyrians. Thus, in Figure (24), the ErAs demonstrated their unwavering love and devotion to the safe Iraqi zone (Ankawa). The extract, viz. "حسبنا أن كل من يحبنا في الدنيا يحبنا في الآخرة", (Lit.: As much as the light exists in the universe, we shall be Ankawa's true lovers), represents Assyrians' undying love for their homeland. Additionally, the other part of the extract which reads: "كل من يحبنا في الدنيا يحبنا في الآخرة",

”لعمري حتى لو غلبنا ظميرنا، سنضيء كشمس”، (Lit.: Even if shadow overcomes us (Assyrians), we shall light like shiny candles), effectively captures resilience, loyalty, and determination of the Assyrian community in Iraq, particularly in Ankawa.

Summing up, MOAs and ErAs show a deep connection to their homeland, communities, and nation. However, their varying artistic expressions are influenced by their different challenges. MoAs dealing with the aftermath of conflict express their emotions through passionate displays of love for their city and country. Whilst ErAs faced relatively fewer challenges in their environment than MoAs. As a result, they conveyed similar sentiments more subtly. However, their shared fondness for their respective cities highlights the significance of valuing one’s city as representing one’s nation (see, also, Figures 24,25,26,27,28,29,30,31, and 32).

**Figure 24**



**Figure 25**



**Figure 26**



**Figure 27**



**Figure 28**



**Figure 29**



**Figure 30**



**Figure 31**



**Figure 32**



**4.1.2 Thematic Analysis of MMAs in Mosul and Erbil (Distinctive Themes)**

**4.1.2.1 Thematic Analysis of MMAs in Mosul (Distinctive Themes)**

**4.1.2.1.1 The Theme of Transformative Power of Knowledge**

Knowledge is powerful and its spectrum is diverse. The most genuine knowledge is the one that enlightens the mind, purifies the soul, and motivates individuals to do virtuous deeds. In Figure (33), MoAs articulate a well-known Arabic wisdom credited to Ibn Hibban (a Muslim polymath), emphasizing the value of knowledge and its impact on human life. The beneficial knowledge one obtains through learning, studying, and experience is considered light in the expression “العلم نور”, (Lit.: Knowledge is light), in the sense that it empowers humans to understand the world, solve problems, and finally illuminates the paths of progress and prosperity in various aspects of life. On the contrary, the expression “والجهل ظلام”, (Lit.: and

**Figure 33**



ignorance is darkness), fuels the reliance on superstition and unreliable belief leading to wasting time and resources. Furthermore, ignorance leads to obscurity and uncertainty in decision-making, raising the chance of making mistakes and increasing the risk of exploitation and loss since uninformed individuals are more susceptible to manipulation by manipulators.

On a wall of a school, MoAs encourage students to continue pursuing knowledge. Figure (34) which includes the extract which reads: "قارئ اليوم قائد الغد", (Lit.: Today, you are a reader and tomorrow you will be a leader), informs students that reading is beneficial in a way that it marks their destiny in life. Today's students are tomorrow's leaders. Knowledge seekers will be equipped to inspire and guide their communities towards success and prosperity through reading.

Figure 34



Figure 35



In the same way, the MoAs, in Figure (35), reinforce the centrality of knowledge. This time, artists incorporated a verse from the Qur'an: "نون والقلم وما يسطرون", (Lit.: By the pen and what they inscribe), into their art to forcefully attract the attention of Mosuli individuals on the cruciality of knowledge. The Quranic verse is an oath that emphasizes the significance of reading and writing. The word "pen" symbolizes knowledge and education. The artists intertextualize this Quranic verse to encourage and urge Mosuli people to engage in reading, writing, and learning.

Briefly, after the liberation of Mosul in 2017, MoAs emerged, as powerful ambassadors, highlighting the critical role knowledge plays in rebuilding and recreating, not just the physical structures of Mosul, but also the city's spirit. ISIS's relentless devastation targeted Mosul's spectacular historical buildings, libraries, and educational institutions as well. They aim at extinguishing the city's long-standing flame of knowledge. In response, MoAs have begun a mission to reignite that flame, assertively promoting awareness of the cruciality of education as the cornerstone of a healthy future for Mosul (see Figures 36 and 37).

Figure 36



Figure 37



#### 4.1.2.1.2 The Theme of Horse as a Symbol of Nobility

The Prophet Muhammed's (PBUH) Hadith, in Figure (38), states: "الخير معقود في نواصيها الخير" (Lit.: Goodness is tied to the forelocks of horses). In numerous societies, particularly in Arabic culture, horses hold great value for transportation and warfare symbolising nobility, originality, and strength. From an Islamic standpoint, the horse is revered as a divine creature that offers tangible benefits and enriches human lives. The word "الخير", (Lit.: Goodness) is associated with "نواصيها", (Lit.: horse's forelocks), indicating a focus on the positive and admirable qualities of horses.

Figure (38) found on the wall of Talafer Taxi Garage takes on a more significant interpretation in the context of Mosul. Factually, Mosuli citizens are grappling with the emotional aftermath of ISIS oppression, which has led to a partial erosion of their long-standing traditions. Thus, the extract in Figure (38) could be viewed as a symbolic nod to the value of preserving Arabic traditions and norms of the society. As horses are considered a good resource, Figure (38) could also serve as a reminder and a plea for wise and ethical management of resources in Mosul.

Figure38



### 4.1.2.1.3 The Theme of Reviving the City of Mosul

The occupation of Mosul by the ISIS terrorist group from 2014 to 2017 deeply affected the city and its dwellers leaving a lasting impact. The theme of reviving the spirit of Mosul is expressed in various MMAs of Mosul portraying the revival of different aspects of life in Mosul.

The MoAs, via an extract in Figure (39), urge Mosuli citizens to carefully choose their leaders. The expression "اختار صح", (Lit.: Be selective) is a call for Mosuli residents to vote for the most appropriate individuals to fill leadership positions. Besides, the statement which reads: "علمود نجيبها من الجديد", (Lit.:to repeat Mosul's glory), emphasizes the significance of residents voting in the election. By voting for the right candidates, the citizens can bring forth capable and responsible leaders. The artists in the current extract focus on the critical issue of the city's management and leadership, highlighting the need for devoted individuals who will work tirelessly for Mosul's well-being which helps revive its former glory.

**Figure 39**



**Figure 40**



**Figure 41**



Focusing on the resilience of Mosuli residents, the extract in Figure (40) honours the unwavering spirit of Mosuli citizens. Despite ISIS's brutal and oppressive rule, Mosul and Mosuli citizens have demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of adversity. Their unwavering pursuit of freedom is a testament to their strength and determination. Now is the time for Mosul to reconstruct and rejuvenate their city. The extract which reads: "اهل الموصل كدها", (Lit.: Mosul citizens are up to the task) amplifies Mosul's capability to rebuild and revive various aspects of life in Mosul such as heritage and religious sites, environment, buildings, and institutions.

Figure (41) is another testament to Mosul's ongoing process of revival and rejuvenation. The extract, namely "اغشع الموصل-عترسم", (Lit.: Mosul is making life!) indicates that Mosul (Mosuli people) are actively working to create a brighter future for their city. Moreover, the extract reinforces that Mosul has triumphed over adversity and risen above all challenges.

Mosul, known as the city of prophets, holds great values locally and globally. The city has been home to various civilizations, resulting in numerous heritage sites. Moreover, Mosul's strategic demography has facilitated trade connections between the northern and southern cities of Iraq. Lastly, its pleasant climate and fertile lands contrast favourably with those of other southern Iraqi cities, benefiting agricultural activities. Sadly, Mosul from 2003 to 2017, experienced various safety and security challenges, most notably, ISIS's oppressive occupation (2014-2017), leading to extensive human and environmental destruction including spoiling the spirit of brotherhood and unity in Mosul.

**Figure 42**



MoAs in Figure (42) focus on maintaining unity and brotherhood within the city for the sake of reviving. Mosul is home to a diverse population of people from various religious, social, and cultural backgrounds. The extract, viz. "الموصل تبني بسواعد اهله" (Lit.: Mosul citizens reconstruct Mosul) figures out the collective efforts of the entire community to be engaged in the process of reconstruction and reviving. To effectively rebuild and revive Mosul, MoAs aim to promote unity in the city and urge all residents from different religious and social backgrounds in Mosul to work hand in hand and collaborate in the rejuvenation of Mosul (see Figures 43,44,45,46,47,48,49, and 50).

Mosul citizens reconstruct Mosul

Figure 43



Figure 44



Figure 45



Figure 46



Figure 47



Figure 48



Figure 49



Figure 50



#### 4.1.2.1.4 The Theme of Woman's Abuse

Abuse against women takes many forms including physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, financial, and instances of child marriage as well.

The extract in Figure (51) is a critique that highlights child marriage; it is a distressing social issue where parents arrange forced marriages for underaged girls. The extract appears in MMA in mosul reads: "زواج القاصرات", (Lit.: Say No to child marriage). It directs society to stand against the practice of child marriage and take urgent action to eradicate this harmful tradition away from girls. Child marriage often has terrible consequences on the overall process of marriage, particularly on the psychological aspects of girls. It limits girls' access to education, restricts their options in life, and exposes them to health risks. Taking the specific location of MMA into account further reveals the MoAs' intention and the addressees to whom they convey their message.

Figure (51) is posted on a wall in Talafer Taxi Garage on the Right Coast of Mosul, which is mostly populated by Arab tribes, who relocated from the suburbs of Mosul to the city. In many Arabic cultures, the practice

Figure 51



Figure 52



of child marriage is a common norm. Thanks to technological advancements, played a crucial role in raising awareness about the risks associated with this practice, consequently leading to partial minimisation of its prevalence. Despite this fact, some traditional stereotypical segments of society still engage in child marriage. Thus, the artists, by painting such an MMA, advocate for parents to care about their children and be mindful, ensuring the girls are not coerced into marriage and have the chance to receive education and access opportunities that contribute to girls' well-being and the city's future (see Figure 52).

**4.1.2.1.5 The Theme of Unity for Iraq**

A well-known Kurdish proverb which states: “هێز له په کگرتندایه”, (Lit.: Strength lies in Unity), magnifies the concept that unity or togetherness is vital for strength. This proverb exemplifies the fundamental notion that unity comes before strength, implying that a collective force is more powerful than individuals operating alone.

Extract in Figure (53) “وطن واحد لايتجزه”, (Lit.: Unity of Iraq is the key we lack!) echoes the destabilization in Iraq. Iraq has experienced severe internal splits and turmoil in recent decades. The 2003 invasion led to sectarian violence that severely harmed Iraqi society, and the establishment of the ISIS terrorist group encapsulated and deepened these tensions. Despite these challenges, the MoAs boldly in the extract given in (Figure53) stress the notion that Iraq’s strength lies in its people. Thus, by embracing unity alone, Iraq can overcome all obstacles paving the way to create a brighter future for the nation.

**Figure 53**



**4.1.2.1.6 The Theme of Martyrdom**

Allah (Glory to Him, the exalted) in the Qur’an has given good tidings to the martyrs saying: “[a]nd do not say about those who are killed in the way of Allah, “They are dead.” Rather, they are alive, but you perceive [it] not” (Qur’an, [2:154], Trans.: Saheeh International). The verse underlines the eternal life of martyrs and their revered place in the sight of Allah, the Almighty.

Mosul has experienced a substantial loss of life over the past two decades due to various conflicts such as sectarianism, terrorism, and, most notably ISIS occupation of Mosul. As a result, numerous citizens of Mosul were paid their lives and martyred for their bold stance against tyranny and corruption, asking for their freedom, defending their homeland, and property, and upholding their dignity and honour. Abdullah bin Amr bin Al-As narrated Prophet Muhammed’s(PBUH) Hadith and said: I heard the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) saying: “[w]hoever is killed while protecting his property then he is a martyr”(Saheeh Bukhari, Volume 3, Book 43, Number 660, Trans: Khan,1986). The prophet’s Hadith confirms the martyrdom of those citizens who paid their lives defending their homeland.

**Figure 54**



MoAs passionately honoured Mosuli martyrs via the extract presented in Figure (54) which reads: “شهداننا عزنا وفخرنا لولاكم لما كنا هنا”, (Lit.: we are proud of our martyrs; without whom, we wouldn’t be safe and sound!). The statement commemorates the brave Mosuli martyrs who sacrificed their lives and fought for the sake of Mosul’s freedom, safety, and security. Mosuli residents proudly remember Mosuli martyr’s dedication and sacrifice for the city. MoAs in the aforementioned extract acknowledge martyrs’ blood saying: “لولاكم لما كنا هنا”, (Lit.: without whom(martyrs), we wouldn’t be safe and sound). In a sense, they reinforce that martyr’s blood has not been shed in vain; it has played a vital role in the resurrection of Mosul as a city where people can thrive in peace (see Figure 55).

**Figure 55**



#### 4.1.2.2 Thematic Analysis of MMAs in Erbil (Distinctive Themes)

##### 4.1.2.2.1 The Theme of the Role of Women in Society

Figure (56) included the extract, viz. “ نهوهكان دهپارێزین تاكو خهونهكه ” دیتته دی (Lit.: We(mothers) shape future generations and are responsible for realizing their dreams) which sheds light on the critical role that women play in fostering a healthy society.

In every society, women play numerous vital roles being mothers, wives, educators, nurturers, supporters, and caregivers. The diverse roles empower women to have the ability “...either to make or mar the lives of men”(Larson,1998 as cited in, Ezzy, 2017, p. 3). Indisputably, women possess the power to shape a prosperous society or undermine the moral fibre of an entire nation. They employ a substantial amount of influence in social, economic, physical and, most importantly educational aspects of society.

In sum, the extract in Figure (56) reminds women about their crucial role in society: to take responsibility and commit to providing a healthy and safe education for the future generation of society (see, also Figure 57).

**Figure 57**



##### 4.1.2.2.2 The Theme of Music Therapy

Primarily, music is a symbol of joy and amusement, delighting listeners with captivating melodies and enchanting symphony. On top of that, it is a global language that resonates with listeners. It has the therapeutic impact of eliciting a wide spectrum of emotions such as transporting listeners through time, and invoking fond recollections from the past while also awakening numbness in the feelings of the audience.

The word, “**Music**”, which ErAs painted on the College of Fine Arts’ wall in Erbil to illuminate that music belongs to Fine Arts. It is expressed in English to reinforce its universality. In short, the extract is used to represent the power and impact of Music and most significantly to demonstrate the identity of the College of Fine Arts, Figure (58).

##### 4.1.2.2.3 The Theme of Motivation in Learning

Motivating students to learn is a vital pedagogical method that benefits pupils' psychological well-being and inspires them to work hard to attain their academic goals. Raising motivation in an academic context entails more than simply teaching methods; it also entails basic institutional tasks such as providing meals to students, exposing them to interesting activities, and keeping the school environment lively and healthy.

**Figure 56**



**Figure 58**



Via an extract in Figure (59) which is painted on a school’s wall; ErAs enticingly inform the pupils that the new academic semester has started. Accordingly, they need to be prepared for the exciting possibilities and new academic achievements that await them. The English expression “BAck to SCHool” sets goals for children and psychologically prepares their mentality to join and continue their academic journey.

Activation and preparedness of children's mental and psychological well-being is another way that motivates children to learn. Parents and teachers should cooperate to ensure that the children are prepared psychologically and physically for learning, thereby motivating them to achieve more.

**Figure 59**



Figure (60) shows an MMA on Qandil primary school’s wall, Runaki Street in Erbil, which addresses parents, teachers, and society emphasising the pros of early sleeping for children. The artists have pinpointed some of the benefits of early sleeping namely better sleep quality, more energy, no psychological pressure, feeling happier and getting a healthier heart. In sum, the extract in Figure (60) is encapsulated in the very well-known Latin wisdom “Mens sana in corpore sano”, in English (Lit.: a healthy mind in a healthy body) and in Arabic (Lit.:العقل السليم فى الجسم السليم) insisting on the significance of children's well-being in education for paving the way to achieve their dreams successfully.

**Figure 60**



## **5. Conclusion**

This study induced, analysed, and compared MMA themes in Mosul and Erbil. The adoption of TAA for the identification of MMA themes contributed to literature, reinforcing several themes explored in literature and further contributed to the finding of newer context-specific themes. Consequently, the thematic investigation of MMAs of Mosul and Erbil highlighted 13 inductive themes: 8 in Mosul and 5 in Erbil. In this study, 2 themes emerged to be shared between Mosul and Erbil while the rest were found to be distinctive. The study comes up with the following.

1. This study revealed the themes of ‘*Environmental Sustainability*’ and ‘*Patriotism*’ as shared between MoAs and ErAs. Both groups of artists demonstrated the theme of “Environmental Sustainability” in multiple public spaces in Mosul and Erbil. The environment of Mosul during the years (2014–2017) under ISIS occupation was destroyed severely. Thus, after a long period of hardship and conflict, Mosul is recovering back to its former glory. The artists showcased different environmental-related issues such as water preservation, electricity consumption and cleanliness of the city and urged Mosuli citizens to care and love for their environment, reminding Mosuli citizens about the harsh time of occupation when they didn’t have access to clean water and electricity. In contrast, Erbil has undergone rapid development in recent years, transforming into a cosmopolitan hub. However, this progress has an undeniable impact on the local environment. For instance, urbanisation has significantly reduced green spaces and led to a depletion of water sources particularly evident during the summer months, ultimately contributing to the water crisis. The different environmental backgrounds help readers to realize that undoubtedly war and conflict markedly affect the environment. Similarly, rapid progress possibly has a similar effect on the environment if it is not managed systematically. For the aforementioned reason, the elements of the theme of environmental sustainability such as water preservation, recycling, solar energy, education for the environment, plantation and waste management are found in Erbil’s MMAs. The second shared theme “*Patriotism*” is reflected widely in Mosuli public spaces. MoAs interconnected patriotism as a religious duty. During ISIS’s occupation of

Mosul, the citizens of Mosul experienced a real nightmare causing fear of losing their homeland forever. Thus, the MoAs have felt the urgency to raise awareness, increasing the sense of love and devotion in citizens for the homeland via deep and rich patriotic expressions in public spaces. The patriotic expressions in Mosul targeted public spaces such as streets, schools and police stations. Similarly, ErAs also expressed their love for their city and country via MMAs confirming loyalty and devotion to their land. The style of Erbil's patriotic expression is subtle, artists emphasized education to be the driving force for instilling a sense of patriotism. For this reason, patriotic visuals and expressions in Erbil are merely targeted school walls.

2. a. This study summarized distinctive themes in Mosul and Erbil. The themes of *'The Transformative Power of Knowledge'*, *'The Horse as a Symbol of Nobility'*, *'Reviving the City of Mosul'*, *'Women Abuse'*, *'Unity for Iraq, and Martyrdom'* were revealed to be distinctive MMA themes in Mosul. MoAs started their mission in 2017 depicting various critical issues in the community. During the ISIS occupation, children could not attend school, libraries were destroyed and schools and universities were shut. People had forgotten about the norms of society and the originality of Arabs; all they could think of was what to eat. Furthermore, women were traded, abused and exchanged among members of ISIS for cheap. Consequently, thousands of Innocent residents of Mosul paid their lives and were martyred for their freedom. MoAs via various MMAs call for unity for Iraq and particularly for Mosul. Finally, they showed numerous instances of revival, encouraging authority to work for reviving Mosul.
- b. Similarly, the TA of MMAs in Erbil presented the themes of *'The Role of Women in Society'*, *'Music Therapy'*, and *'Motivation in Learning'* as distinctive themes. Erbil unlike Mosul enjoys relative peace for the last two decades. Therefore, ErAs in their MMAs prioritized environmental issues. Besides, the appreciated and motivated women in society to work to foster a healthy generation. Furthermore, they emphasized the role of Music as the source of joy and entertainment. Finally, they reminded society of the cruciality of motivation in academic context for children.

## 6. Study Limitations and Future Research

### 6.1 Study Limitations

This study acknowledges a few limitations such as:

1. NVivo which is a qualitative data analysis software was utilized in this study for coding the MMAs during the coding process of TAA. The software was too expensive, inaccessible for free, and time-consuming to manage its application. Furthermore, the researchers had to translate non-English texts into English since NVivo did not access languages such as Arabic, Kurdish, and Assyrian at the time of applying it in the current study.
2. The researchers could not get a chance to interview artists in Mosul and Erbil cities due to the limited time frame. Otherwise, Interviews with artists would have greatly contributed to this research for the transparent interpretation of MAs.
3. Moreover, the researchers struggled to find pertinent literature adopting TAA and other approaches in analyzing MMAs. This forced them to refer to previous studies that had similar artistic corpus (street art, linguistic landscape, graffiti and the like).

### 6.2 Future Research

1. Mosul and Erbil are two historical cities in Iraq; they share numerous similarities while also embodying distinct contextual characteristics. Hence, studying the social identity of artists in both cities significantly contributes to the field of sociolinguistics. Such a study would enrich an understanding of these two culturally rich cities of Iraq and reveal the clashes of identity between the two groups of artists.
2. Additional future work would target a mixed-method study to investigate MAs in more than two cities in Iraq and compare the themes that might be interpreted in the MAs of each single city.

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