



University of
Nottingham
Rights Lab

Painting towards freedom: the power of murals and street art for modern antislavery

January 2020

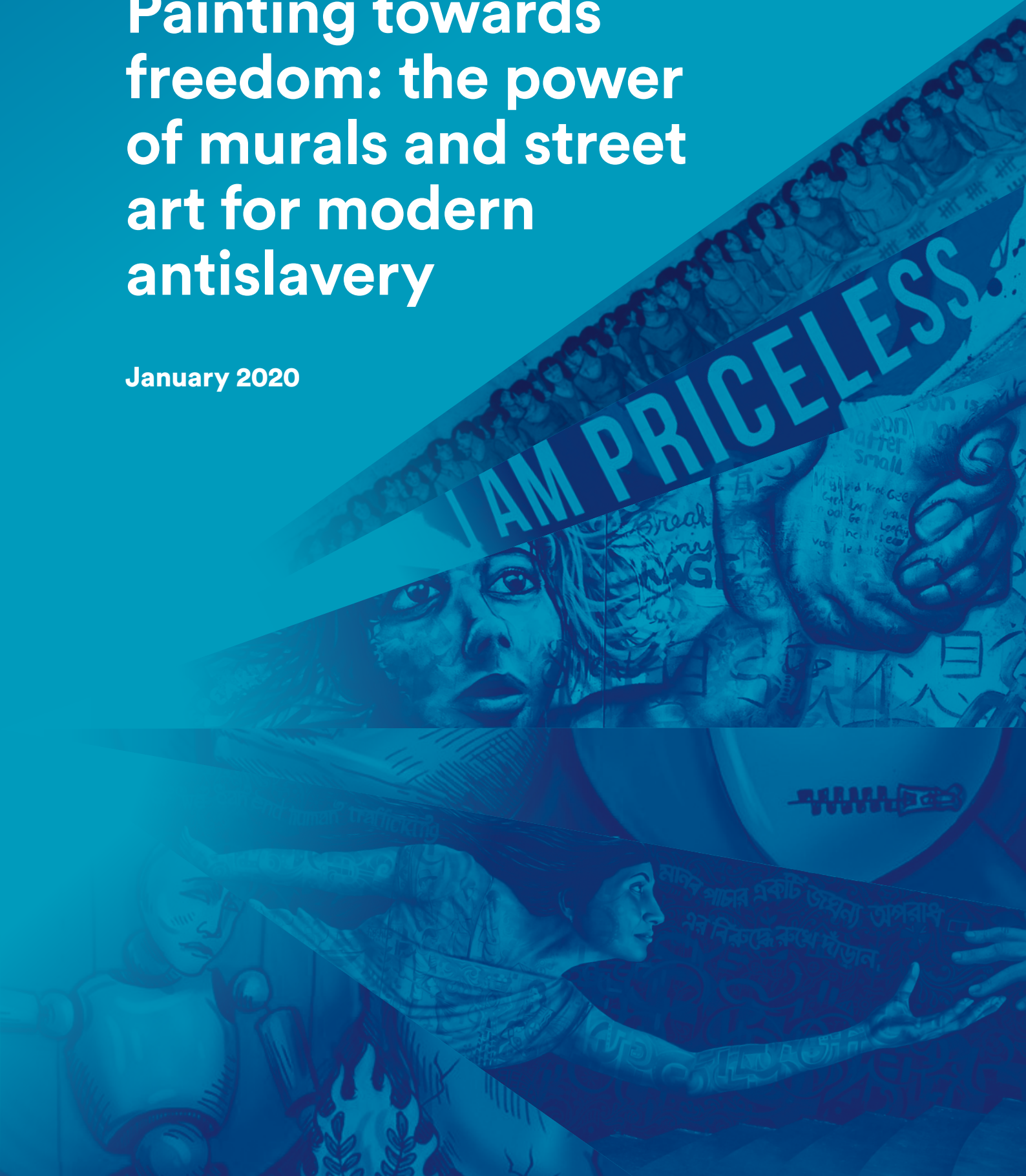




Fig. 1. Sex Trafficking Awareness, Joel Bergner, Ohio, USA, (2013).

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Cover image: Montage of murals included in this document and referenced throughout.

Acknowledgements

This report was authored by Hannah Jeffery, Rights Lab Research Associate and AHRC-funded PhD student at the University of Nottingham, with input and content from Charlotte James, Rights Lab Research Associate and AHRC/M4C-funded PhD student at the University of Nottingham, and Professor Zoe Trodd, Rights Lab Director. It was produced as part of the AHRC-GCRF Antislavery Knowledge Network project and the AHRC Antislavery Usable Past project.

Introduction

Murals are powerful protest tools. Since the 1960s, they have been visual sponsors for major peace and activist movements across the globe. They have lined the streets of cities and communities to inform, educate, protest and beautify. Today, they function as sites of activism by catalysing community action at their physical sites, creating a sense of a global antislavery culture that extends into streets and communities and helps to create a narrative of empowerment over one of victimisation within modern antislavery visual culture.

In 2004, in Freetown, Sierra Leone, a new mural by World Hope International (WHI), as part of Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAAST), signalled the emergence of a new strain of activist murals around the world: murals of the modern antislavery and anti-trafficking movement. “Do Not Be Fooled...Modern-Day SLAVERY Exists. Stop Human Trafficking,” the Freetown mural reads along an ornamenting border across the top of the artwork above four painted vignettes of modern

slavery. Three young children escorted by a man wave goodbye to their mother; a young man toils in a village; a woman wraps herself with bedsheets while a shirtless man gets dressed; and one of the children from the first vignettes stands before a man wielding a stick. The mural was part of a campaign to raise awareness during FAAST’s work with the government to train members of the judiciary. It was intended to highlight the vulnerability of migrant workers to enslavement. It was the first modern antislavery / anti-trafficking mural in the world, with many more emerging in every continent in the years that followed.

This report uncovers the spread, purpose, and functions of antislavery murals across the globe. We analyse modern slavery murals for their themes and functions, then use four case studies from the United Kingdom, the United States, India, and Africa to assess the potential role of murals in community-based antislavery work.

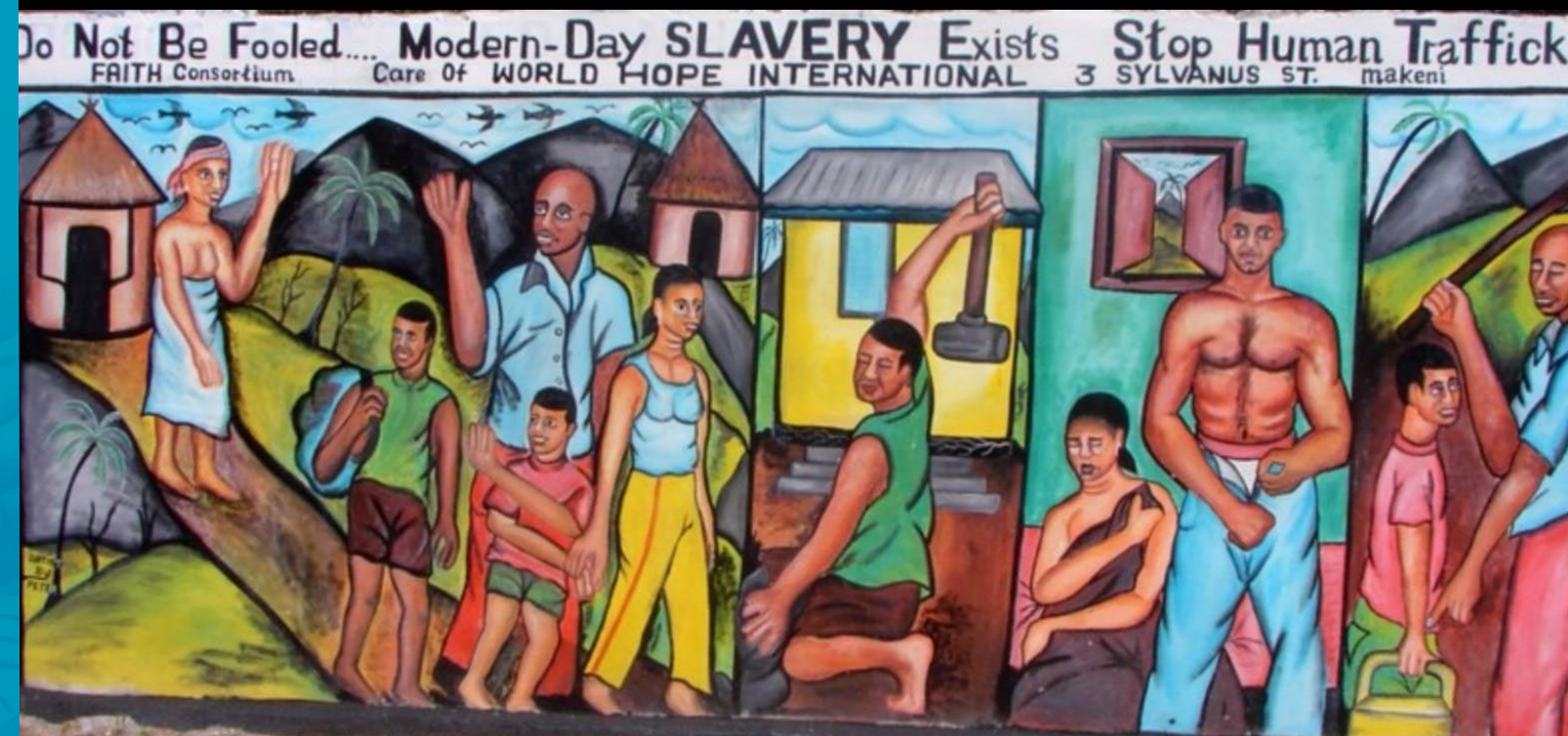


Fig. 2. Modern-Day Slavery Exists, World Hope International (WHI), as part of Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAAST), Sierra Leone, 2004.

Modern slavery murals: the facts

Since 2004, 128 known modern slavery murals have been painted around the world. Tracked down and archived by the Rights Lab, they exist in a digital archive titled *Imagining Freedom* (rightsandjustice.nottingham.ac.uk/murals). Of the 130 murals, the United States (39), the United Kingdom (9) and India (19) are home to the most concentrated population of modern slavery murals (fig. 3).

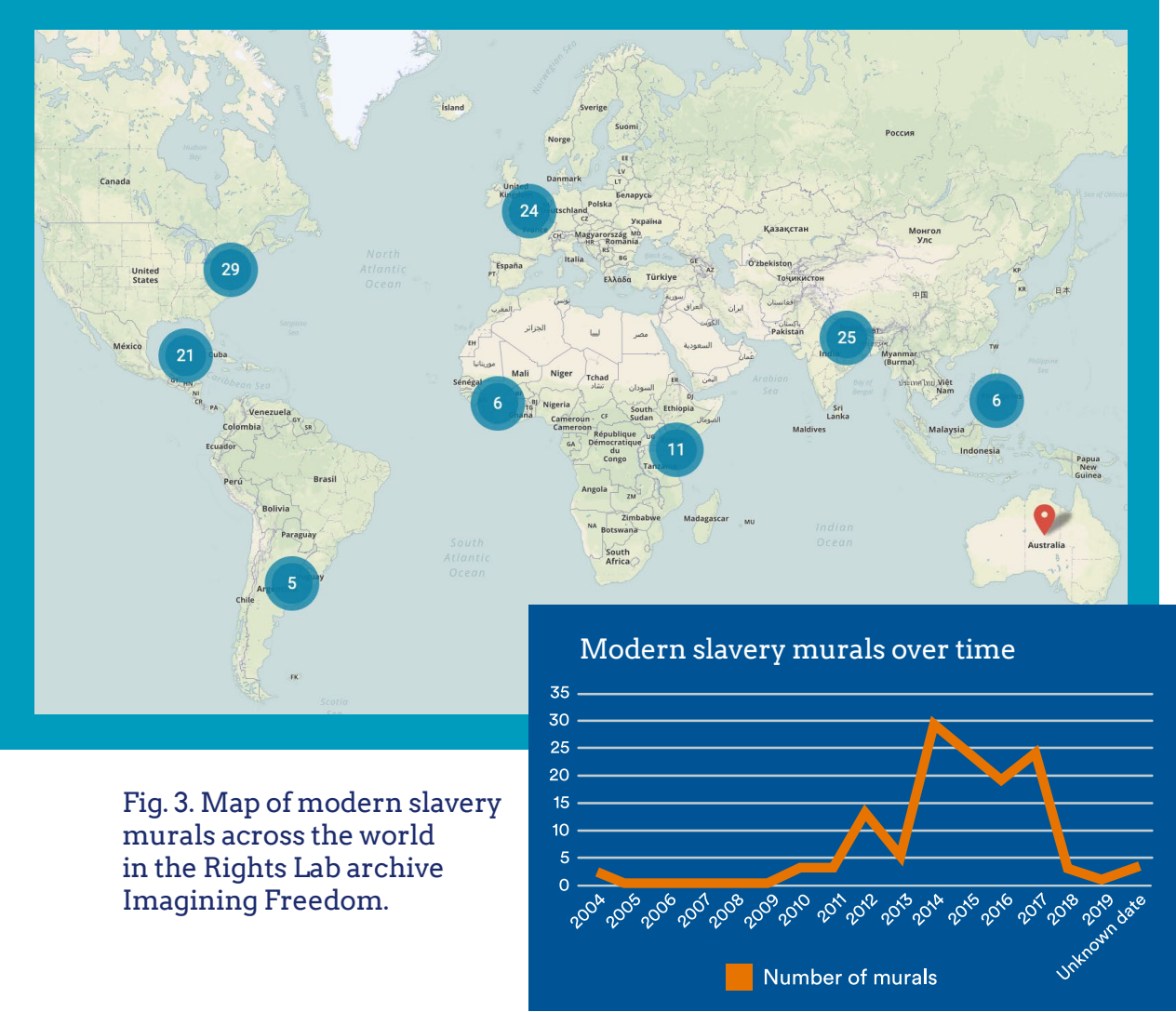


Fig. 3. Map of modern slavery murals across the world in the Rights Lab archive *Imagining Freedom*.

The murals we recovered range from 2004 to 2019, with peaks in particular years.

denigrating women children

After the 2004 mural in Freetown, the next major modern slavery mural was in 2010, when the artist Shepherd Fairy created a mural in Covington, Kentucky (United States), protesting against the use of child soldiers. The piece drew parallels between the Vietnam War and the invasion of Iraq. It drew criticism and was painted over soon after its completion. The following year, students from T.C. Williams High School in Virginia (United States) completed a more positively-received mural in their school. It aimed to raise awareness of sex trafficking and raised money for the charity Courtney's House by charging students \$3 to have their handprint on the mural. Two other murals were created in 2011, both in America, and in 2012 three murals were created in the UK, two in Ireland and eight in Colombia.

But it was not until 2014 that murals on modern slavery increased and became more globalised, with 19 in the United States, four in Yemen, and one in Nicaragua, Argentina, the Philippines and the UK.

In 2015 the creation of murals maintained, with 24 murals across North America, Europe, Africa, South America and Asia. The year 2015 also marked a high watermark for UK murals with 18 across the country, unsurprisingly in the wake of the UK's 2015 Modern Slavery Act.

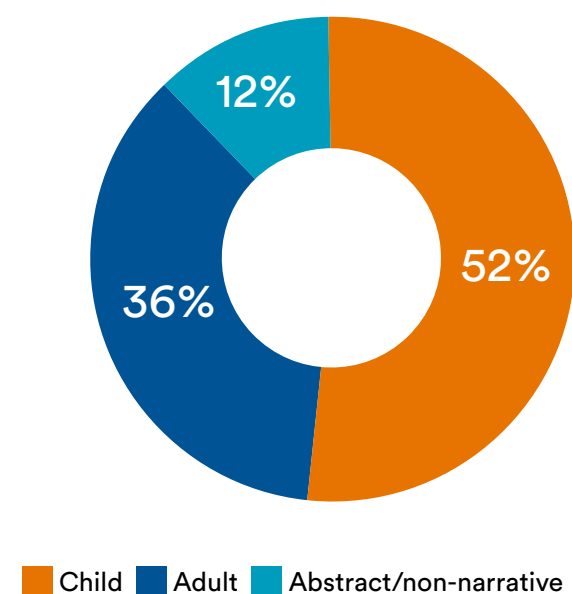
The trend of globalised murals continued in 2017 with murals in Kenya, the United States, Nepal, Canada, Australia and two separate but large campaigns in India resulting in the creation of 15 murals against child slavery. The Jan Sahas Foundation partnered with Delhi Street Art and survivors of modern slavery to draw attention to the issue of child trafficking and child slavery. Six murals highlighted the different types of slavery that traps children, including forced marriage, sexual exploitation and forced labour. The organisation MISSING created the Missing Mural Walk 'The Hunt for the Lost Durga' in Kolkata to raise awareness of the sex trafficking of girls. Eight murals tell the story of a girl who has been kidnapped into sex trafficking. People can interact with the mural through the Missing Mural Walk Facebook Messenger bot.

2018 and 2019 saw a significant drop-off in the creation and globalisation of murals.

2014		2015		2016		2017	
USA	19	Mexico	1	India	2	Kenya	1
Nicaragua	1	USA	3	Tanzania	1	USA	3
Argentina	1	UK	13	South Africa	1	Philippines	1
Philippines	1	Philippines	1	Mali	1	Zimbabwe	1
Yemen	4	Mozambique	1	Senegal	1	Kenya	1
UK	1	Italy	1	Nigeria	1	USA	4
Total	27	India	1	Ghana	1	Philippines	1
		Argentina	3	Zimbabwe	1	Zambia	1
		Total	24	Afghanistan	2	Afghanistan	2
				UK	1	India	16
				Total	19	Canada	1
						Australia	1
						Total	24

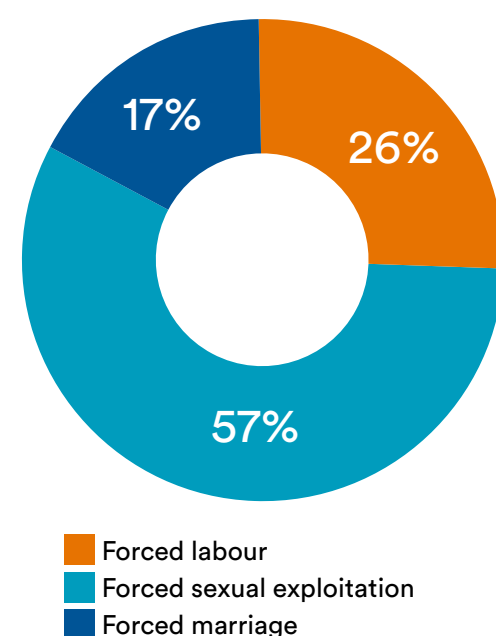
Conducting data-analysis on the 128 murals to decipher the subjects of slavery, we categorised them as depicting 1) child slavery, 2) adult slavery, or 3) abstract, non-narrative content. Of the 128 murals that we found, 67 murals conveyed child slavery, 46 portrayed adult slavery, and 15 were abstract or non-narrative in content.

Subjects of slavery



Of the 36% of adult slavery murals, they naturally fit into the categories of forced labour, forced sexual exploitation and forced marriage, of which 26 depicted sexual exploitation, 8 for forced marriage, and 12 for forced labour.

Breakdown of adult slavery murals



Across the murals, there is tendency towards depicting women and girls. 67% of figures in modern slavery murals are female and only 13% are men or boys (12% contain both females and males, and 7% show genderless figures). This focus corresponds with the statistics on modern slavery, where the 2017 Global Estimates by the ILO and Walk Free estimate that 71% of people enslaved globally.

We analysed the themes and messages of these modern slavery murals. Many aim to elicit emotion

and raise a general awareness. For example, in a 2013 mural painted in Formia in Italy titled 'Elimination of Violence Against Women,' lines of women hold banners aloft marked with a tally for each day that sexual exploitation continues in society (fig. 4). They count down the days until forced sexual exploitation is eradicated. Another example from the category is 'Anti-Human Trafficking Mural' in the Philippines from 2014, which shows a young, crying girl with price tags attached to her skirt.

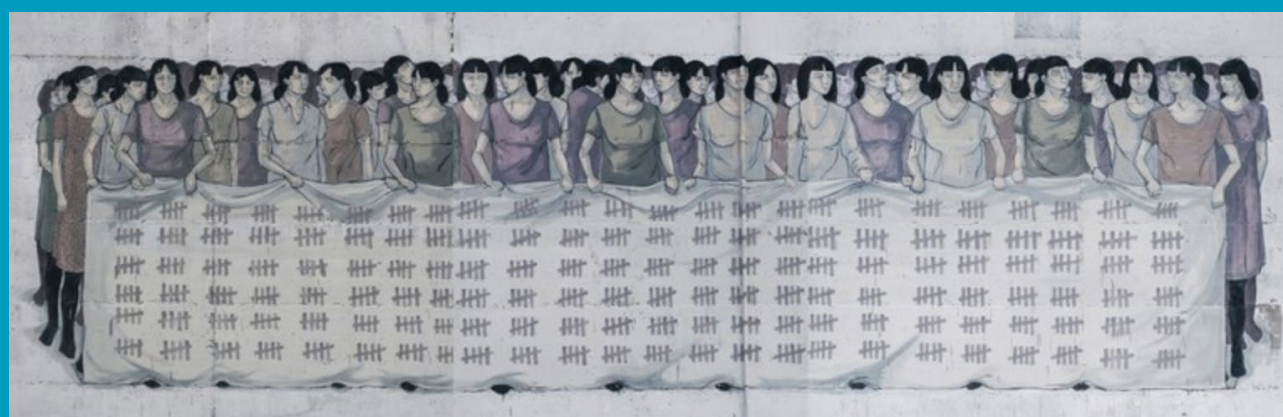


Fig. 4. Elimination of Violence Against Women, Hyuro, Formia, Italy (2013).

Others aim to provide key antislavery and antitrafficking information. They offer the viewer facts, figures and helpline numbers. For example, in the 2014 mural series 'What You See is Not Who I am' by Art Works for Freedom, painted in the United States, the artists highlight how the average price of a person is \$90, that slaves can be people who "clean your neighbor's home," and that forced labourers are paid "2 pennies per pound" (fig. 5).



Fig. 5. What You See is Not Who You Think I Am, Nicole Shulman and Edwin Vazquez, various locations, 2014.

Three other murals from this same 2014 series provide the public and/or survivors with helpline numbers that they can call or text to report suspected slavery. Another example of this kind of informational mural is I Am Not For Sale. I Am Priceless by Leone Bedore, which is on the side of the Greyhound Bus Station in Tampa (United States) from 2017. It displays a national helpline number for the public or victims to use (fig. 6).



Fig. 6. I AM NOT FOR SALE. I AM PRICELESS, Leone Bedore, Tampa, Florida (2017).

Examining the explicit messaging in murals reveals that they have messaging tendencies depending on what form of slavery the mural is addressing. Murals focused on providing information that could lead to direct help (for example hotline numbers) tend to be about child slavery. Murals about forced sexual exploitation or forced marriage tend to provide no information on how to recognise or help and focus instead on general awareness-raising.

We also noted that a focus on the emotive is dominant in the murals about child slavery and forced sexual exploitation. For example, Shilo Shiv Suleman's 'From Your Strength, I Weave Your Beauty,' created in 2017, highlights the issue of sex trafficking

(fig. 7). Suleman worked with 'Sewing New Futures' as part of the Fearless Collective and Street Art India to create a mural of hope. The mural shows a young woman pulling her older mother from the fog that surrounds her, using this to weave threads of gold and create a new life for both of them away from forced sexual exploitation.

After drawing out some key patterns for the 128 murals, we then analysed particular murals and their impact in detail, to better understand the role of modern slavery murals in community activism. We focus in the remainder of this report on activist murals in order to understand how they are used in community-based antislavery work.

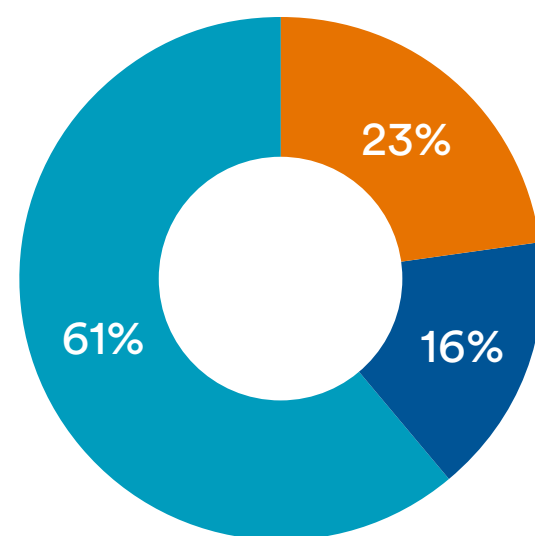


Fig. 7. From Your Strength, I Weave Your Beauty, Shilo Shiv Suleman, New Delhi, (2017).

Activism, engagement and antislavery murals

When analysing the 128 murals, not only can they be broken down geographically and chronologically, but they can also be grouped thematically as: 'depicting slavery', 'promoting antislavery activism,' or 'portraying life beyond enslavement.' 22 murals portray life after enslavement, visually representing freedom, life in education, and positive imagery free from constraint. 31 murals visually depict acts of slavery, and 84 murals portray 'antislavery activism' in the form of slogans, breaking chains, or taking physical acts to overcome enslavement.¹ It is by categorising the murals around their theme and purpose, that we can start to see the potential of murals for community-based activism—beyond the simpler motives for mural art of general awareness-raising or giving information about helpline numbers.

Antislavery mural narratives



Depicting slavery Life beyond slavery Antislavery activism

When employed for community activism, murals are engaged with differently depending on their location, sponsorship and the community's relationship with modern slavery. Many are site-specific. For example, in 2013, a Seattle-based street artist by the pseudonym of No Touching Ground created a lifelike portrait of Susana Trimarco in the downtown area of the city. Trimarco is a human trafficking lobbyist who has a personal experience with the sex trafficking industry. Her 23-year-old daughter was kidnapped by a human trafficking ring in Tucumán in 2002 and forced into prostitution in the city of La Rioja. Suspecting that the police and government officials were thwarting her investigation, Trimarco took matters into her own hands. She disguised herself as a madam and frequented bars in La Rioja that doubled as brothels. Trimarco networked and got phone numbers of suspicious individuals. Over the years, she became a guardian to 129 formerly enslaved sex workers, helping return them to their families. The mural lining the streets of Buenos Aires at over 10-feet is a location-specific mural that celebrates her human rights work.

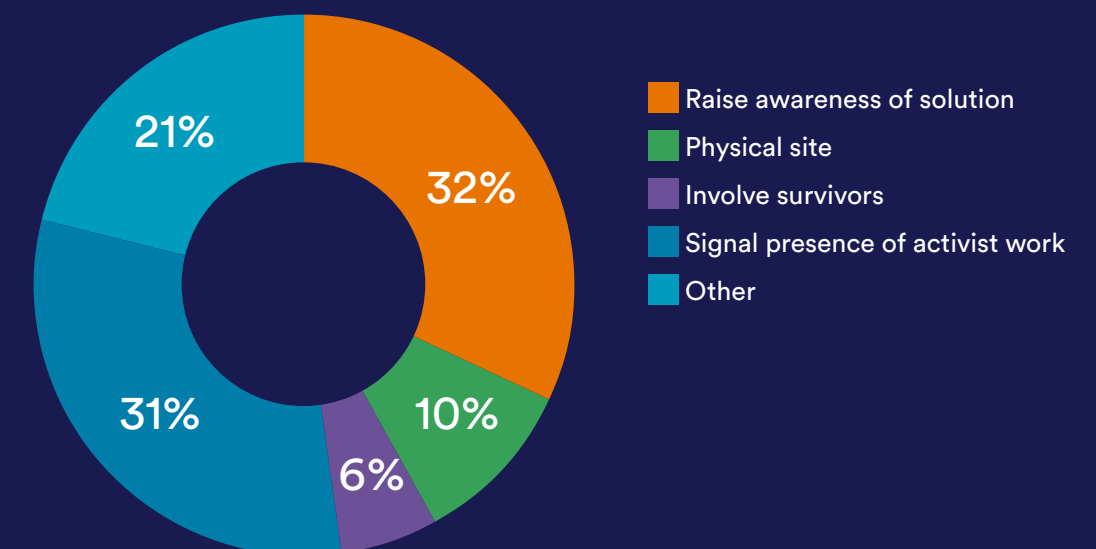
Given that modern slavery murals are often site-specific in this way—rooted in real-life narratives for their locations—they perform a multitude of activist functions. We have identified four of these activist functions as:

The sum of these three numbers is 137 because 7 murals fall under the category of both 'depicting slavery' and 'antislavery activism.'

1. **Raise awareness for a specific solution**
2. **Offer a physical site for activist groups conducting events and rallies**
3. **Involve survivors of modern slavery**
4. **Signal the presence of activist organisations and antislavery work in the area**

¹ The sum of these three numbers is 137 because 7 murals fall under the category of both 'depicting slavery' and 'antislavery activism.'

Breakdown of adult slavery murals



Raise awareness of solution
Physical site
Involve survivors
Signal presence of activist work
Other

Awareness-raising for a specific solution: WallsCANBloom campaign, Africa

In June 2016, Canadian Embassies and High Commissions across nine African countries committed \$80 million to tackle early and forced marriage across the continent. As part of their campaign, they partnered with local artists in Ghana, Tanzania, South Africa, Mali, Senegal, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Zambia to create a series of murals on the walls of their Canadian Embassies. Titled 'Blooming Walls' and given the 'WallsCANBloom' hashtag on Twitter, the activist murals across the nine countries transformed the walls outside embassies and high commissions into "colourful, powerful stories capturing the importance of protecting all children's rights and how access to quality education allows African girls to reach their full potential and become agents of change in their own families and communities."² These murals were created to raise awareness the issue of early and forced marriage affecting vast numbers of young girls across the continent. But more importantly in an activist context, they advocated for a specific solution: education for young women.

In Ghana, various artists from the local community joined together to create an extensive mural on the side of the Canadian Embassy in Accra "to encourage a conversation about the issue of child protection and youth empowerment."³ To the left-hand-side of the mural, an activist statement reads: "A child is not a bride or a labourer – she is Ghana's future. Empower her!" (fig. 8). Extending from the geometric shapes and colours surrounding the statement are multiple scenes of both forced marriage and empowerment. A multicoloured tree grows from the earth and as it emerges, two books with branches supporting a large key rest upon the trunk, giving visual form to a metaphor about education as a key to growth. Beyond the tree, a young girl has taken a book from the trunk and makes notes as the cogs in her brain turn.

In Ghana, 21% of girls are married before the age of 18 and 5% before the age of 15. Through art, the #CanadaWallGH campaign sought to advocate for education, child protection and youth empowerment. "We're here to underline the issue of child and early forced marriage," High Commissioner of Canada to Ghana, Christopher Thornley suggested, and the mural does just this.⁴ "With the help of the Canadian High Commission we are able to bring out our idea, press our view and to use this opportunity using our creative ability to address this issue," mural artist Rufai Zakari explained.⁵



Fig. 8. WallsCANBloom, various artists, Accra, Ghana, 2016

Similarly, on the side of the Canadian Embassy in Dakar stands the Senegalese 'Blooming Wall' by local artist Docta (fig. 9). Much like its Ghanaian counterpart, the mural advocates for the importance of young girls staying in school to get an education, and warns about the dangers of early and child marriage. Painted as if the wall has been cracked open and torn away, behind the top façade are stories forcing their way out of obscurity and into acknowledgement. To the left-hand-side, a young girl reads her way through an extensive pile of books absorbing as much knowledge as she can. In another, smaller narrative scene, a family of women resists a man's offer of marriage.

The blooming wall stands as a touchstone of protest for the local residents and activists of Dakar who, a year after its creation, used it for a campaign in 2017 on the International Day of the Girl. On this day in 2017, the Canadian Embassy, in collaboration with Plan Canada, organised a video competition "to empower girls to advocate for social change regarding gender inequalities in Africa" which, in turn, helped "promote girl's educational rights and encourage young girls in the region to stay in school." The six winners of the competition were invited by

Ambassador Lise Filiatrault for a photoshoot in front of the Senegalese 'Blooming Wall.' The six young girls standing proudly before the mural became a physical example of what the mural seeks to promote: "possibilities that come when young African girls have access to education."

The nine murals in this series adorned the walls of Canadian Embassies across the continent in Ghana, Tanzania, South Africa, Mali, Senegal, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya and Zambia. They had a global social media presence under the hashtag 'WallsCanBloom', and 'DAC2016' (meaning Day of African Child), which flooded Twitter. The 'Blooming Walls' series remains one of the most visible and accessible forms of antislavery mural activism focused on awareness-raising for a specific solution (education of girls).

² CanadaWallGH, "#CanadaWallGH / #MurCanadaGH," YouTube video, Feb 16, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDjj_SjamXQ

³ Ibid.

⁴ Government of Canada, "Canada in Senegal," https://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/ci-ci/eyes_abroad-coupdoeil/gafig-fmpdf.aspx?lang=eng

⁵ Ibid.



Fig. 9. WallsCANBloom, Docta, Dakar, Senegal, 2017.

Physical sites for events and rallies: You Are Loved, Burlington, Vermont

In June 2017 in Burlington, Vermont, a mural painted by Boston-based artist Alex Cook gave new meaning to the city's landscape. The antislavery mural appeared on the side of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Vermont on Cherry Street (fig. 10). The words 'You Are Loved' in swirling blue, green and purple writing flanked a wall on the side of the building. The idea for an empowering mural came from Aimee Sterns, a victim witness coordinator at the U.S. Attorney's Office, who was aware of Cook's You Are Loved mural series across the country. Upon hearing about Cook's work from her niece who gifted her a set of blocks bearing the words 'You Are Loved,' Sterns "started thinking about the people [she] work[s] with—the human trafficking victims."⁸ She continued, "I [wanted] to do this [mural] as an education outreach for the community, so we can not only say to human trafficking victims, 'You are loved' but really bring [this sentiment] to their attention."⁹



Fig. 10. You Are Loved, Alex Cooks, Burlington, Vermont, 2017.

During the mural's creation, sponsored by the U.S. Attorney's Office, Cook invited the Burlington community to assist in painting the mural, filling in the outlines of the large letters, and in doing so, creating a communal act of activism. "Over 40 people put a brush to the wall," Cook said, with "hundreds of people" stopping by to thank Cook for the work he did.¹⁰ "In terms of people stopping by, it's been insane," he said.¹¹

Whilst the mural stood in the centre of Burlington for two years, it was not until June 2019, on the two-year anniversary of the mural, that it became more than an awareness-raising tool in the streets. On June 7, the mural was catalyst for community events on human trafficking held by the U.S. Attorney's Office. This was less than a month after the conviction of Brian Folks for sex and drug trafficking in the state of Vermont. With Folks' case fresh in the city's memory—it was the first sex trafficking trial to go before a jury in Vermont—the presence of the mural provided a platform for community activism against human trafficking and modern slavery. The U.S. Attorney's Office wanted to celebrate the two-year anniversary of the mural. It organised an event where the U.S. Attorney, Christina Nolan, could address the general public of Vermont to highlight the presence of human trafficking in the state. Between the hours of 2pm and 4pm, the event ran at the mural site, commencing when local residents gathered for an "update on human trafficking in Vermont, and to remember its victims by marking the second anniversary of the You Are Loved mural." Nolan told the audience, "what I'm hoping to do by having this commemorative event is to remind people that this crime is real, it's happening, it involves forcing people to engage in commercial sex acts, and the perpetrators are making money."

Not only did attendees learn about the presence of human trafficking in their state, but on arrival to the event, free t-shirts with the mural printed across the chest were gifted to the first 70 people, giving them a personal slice of the mural and an individual token of community activism. With free support from Ben and Jerry's, the event also gave out free ice cream to those partaking in festivities.

The mural stands as a protest tool to raise awareness of modern slavery in the state of Vermont. But it also operates in the city of Burlington as a facilitator of events. It provides a physical space, and a backdrop, for meetings, rallies and public speeches. Like several other modern slavery murals, it stands as a touchstone for community activism, generating action from the local community and inspiring action at its physical site.

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⁸ Sadie Williams, "Boston Artist Alex Cook Lends Love to Burlington," Seven Days, June 13, 2017, <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/LiveCulture/archives/2017/06/13/boston-artist-alex-cook-lends-love-to-burlington>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Michael Bielawski, "Two-year anniversary of 'You Are Loved' mural helps raise awareness of human trafficking," True North Reports, June 10, 2019, <http://truenorthreports.com/two-year-anniversary-of-you-are-loved-mural-helps-raise-awareness-of-human-trafficking>

¹³ Ibid.

The inclusion of survivors: Together We Can End Human Trafficking, Kolkata, India

Activist murals raise awareness around specific solutions (e.g. education for girls) and offer sites for community activism, yet they also advocate for the inclusion of survivors and survivor voices. For example, in 2016, the American artist Joel Bergner journeyed to West Bengal, India to create an activist mural in collaboration with survivors of modern slavery.

Behind the veil of natural beauty in West Bengal lies the epicentre for human trafficking in South Asia. Tens of thousands of people a year are taken from their communities and trafficked through Siliguri en route to various destinations. Such trafficking work takes many forms: women and underage girls are sold into sexual slavery, others are forced to marry older men, and both men and women are sold into forced labour—for example as agricultural labourers and domestic servants respectively. “Combatting this crisis requires the tireless dedication and coordination of many societal actors, including NGOs, law enforcement, the Indian government and the international community, many of whom came together in Siliguri in February of 2016 for the International Anti-Human Trafficking Conclave,” Bergner wrote of his time in India.¹⁴

Bergner set out to paint a large-scale mural in partnership with survivors, to tell their stories, raise awareness of the issues, and provide a totem of activism in a highly visible location in West Bengal. Working with the Indian NGO Shakti Vahini, Bergner and a group of local artists created a mural that depicts the likeness of a formerly trafficked woman named Sangeeta. Her beautifully dressed figure extends across the mural, gliding from left to right (fig. 11). Painted in a glowing palette of yellows, reds and burnt oranges in stark contrast to the purple background, she extends her left hand towards an unseen figure and raises her head to the meet their gaze. Looking up with hope, determination and strength in her face, her left ankle is grasped by a red hand that tries to pull her back into slavery. She continues forward with stoicism and power.



Fig. 11. Together We Can End Human Trafficking, Joel Bergner and community partners, West Bengal, India, 2016.

To create the elegant likeness of Sangeeta, Bergner worked with a photographer from the organisation Kolata Sanved—an organisation that uses dance as a form of therapy for survivors of trafficking. As part of this organisational work, photographer Brooke Shaden works with women of all ages to create a series of self-portraits that represent each woman’s individual story. Selecting the pose herself, Sangeeta chose an outstretched stance with the threatening hand of her trafficker gripping her ankle and an extended arm towards freedom and a helping hand. Bergner was moved by the photograph of Sangeeta and was granted her permission to use her likeness, and by extension, her story, in his visual act of community activism.

The general public need to “have compassion for returning survivors of trafficking, rather than rejecting them,” Bergner pointed out, underscoring one of the main purposes of his mural and highlighting the pivotal role played by both artists and survivors in antislavery activist work. Community antislavery activism needs the voices of survivors at its centre, and Bergner ensures that survivor perspectives are a central vein running through the creation of his mural.

The mural was a success for the community, providing, much like Alex Cook’s ‘You Are Loved’ mural in Burlington, a backdrop for community events. On the opening day of the International Anti-Human Trafficking Conclave, dozens of people gathered in front of the mural to watch dancers who had also experienced trafficking perform against the backdrop of the mural. “It was an inspiring moment to witness the power of people who had gone through so much, yet were determined to be part of the solution and support others who had suffered,” Bergner said.¹⁵ The example demonstrates a positive step towards murals that are collaborations with survivors and also sites of community activism.

¹⁴ Joel Bergner, “Combatting Human Trafficking Through the Arts,” 2016, <https://joelartista.com/2016/03/18/combatting-human-trafficking-through-the-arts/>
¹⁵ Ibid.

Signalling the presence of activist organisations: Spot the Signs, Southend, Essex, UK

Antislavery murals are sometimes painted in towns and cities where new community activist work is taking place on modern slavery. These murals function to raise awareness of the issues around trafficking and slavery, but also to mark the presence of community-based work in the area. For example, on July 30, 2019, a mural was painted in South End, Essex in the UK to signal the presence of an organisation, South End Against Modern Slavery (SAMS) (fig. 12).

SAMS is “a partnership between 25 local organisations including charities, faith groups, law enforcement and statutory services,” founded by Reverend Dan Pratt in May 2018, that “works to create a ‘slavery free Southend.’”¹⁶ The partnership was set up, Pratt suggested, following his role at the 57 West and Clarence Road Baptist Church, “[w]hen I was working within that role, we encountered people rough sleeping who had been exploited for labour and weren’t paid for it, maybe offered accommodation and food with no pay, or who had to work crazy hours and then the accommodation was deducted from their ‘pay’ meaning they were left with something like £10 a week.”¹⁷

As a grassroots-based organisation, SAMS holds quarterly Partnership meetings to “join together in learning about Modern Slavery and to learn from out Antislavery Action Groups” that meet with the intention of “Partnering Together, Raising Awareness within our community, Safeguarding the most vulnerable within our Community, and Acting by taking part in community actions against Modern Slavery.”¹⁸

On the World Day Against Trafficking in Person (July 30), stalls, workshops, film screenings and the unveiling of the new mural in Southend raised awareness of the presence and work being done by SAMS to make Southend a slavery-free city. The day “went really well and turnout was good,” Pratt told The Big Issue, “a lot of people were stopping to talk with us and to take photos of the mural – it definitely stopped people in their tracks,” he continued.¹⁹

Created by artist Nik Vaughn, the mural, painted on a black background, displays the words ‘Spot the Signs’ in bold white lettering, held up in marionette-fashion by a pair of hands. Inside the block white lettering are visual depictions of modern slavery signs, and to the left-hand side of the mural is a large SAMS logo with the words ‘SOUTHEND AGAINST MODERN SLAVERY.’

Obviously SAMS would operate as an organisation throughout the city regardless of the presence of its mural. But the public work of art stands in the city’s landscape to reaffirm the presence of the antislavery work being down in Southend. It underscores the community’s work to become slavery-free—the moment when, in the UK, Southend activists joined the towns and cities of Nottingham, Birmingham and Sandwell in the explicit intention of becoming a slavery-free city.

¹⁶ Kelly Buckley, “Southend Against Modern Slavery hold event to combat human trafficking,” Southend Standard, August 1, 2019, <https://www.southendstandard.co.uk/news/17807544.southend-modern-slavery-hold-event-combat-human-trafficking/>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ SAMS, “About Us,” Southend Against Modern Slavery Partnership, <https://www.samspartnership.org.uk>

¹⁹ The Big Issue, ‘Modern Slavery mural stops town in its tracks,’ The Big Issue, August 5-11, 2019, p.9.

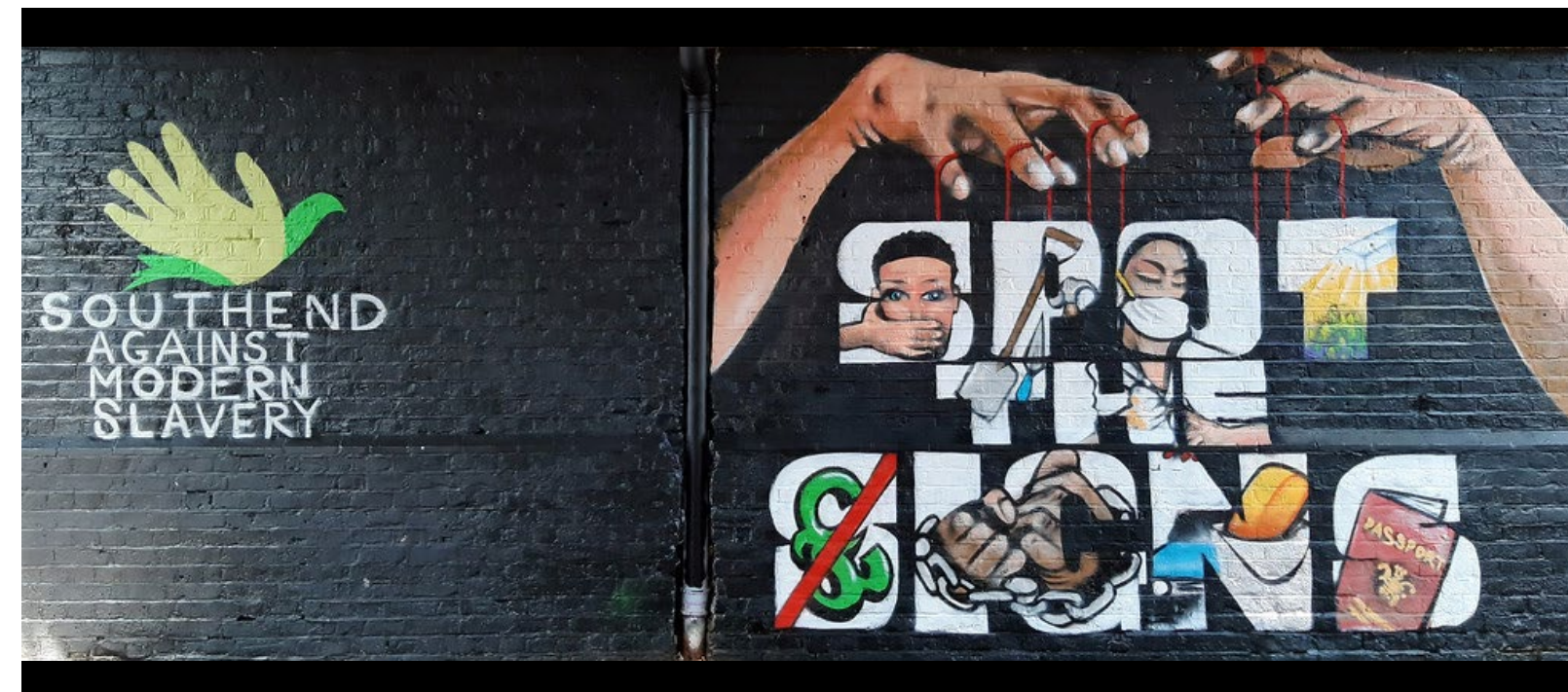


Fig. 12. Spot the Signs, Nik Vaughn, Southend-on-Sea, Essex (2019).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Modern slavery murals have the capacity to play an important role in the fight to end modern slavery. As works of art in the streets, they live on the walls of communities 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Their visual language can overcome issues of language barriers and illiteracy and be accessible to all. Going beyond simple awareness-raising and the communication of information like hotline numbers, they can also be part of community-based and survivor-informed efforts to create slavery-free cities.

The majority of the murals in our Imagining Freedom archive (84) depict and aim to galvanise antislavery activism. Many have become focal points for community activism in local antislavery work, by advocating for specific solutions (Case Study 1), providing a physical space for community engagement (Case Study 2), engaging local survivor testimony and perspectives (Case Study 3), and functioning as signposts for a community's intention to organise for a slavery-free city (Case Study 4).

The increase in the numbers of modern slavery murals since 2013 suggests that the phenomenon will continue. We recommend that as artists, NGOs, local community partnerships, city councils, schools and other mural sponsors continue to embrace this form of antislavery visual culture, they:

- 1. Focus on the potential of local murals to communicate context-specific solutions and information, rather than general awareness-raising and emotional appeal;**
- 2. Choose sites that have the potential to become spaces for community meetings and events;**
- 3. Work to engage survivors of slavery in the creation of murals, so that this expert input forms the message and aesthetic of the final output;**
- 4. Connect the creation of their mural with existing and planned community-based antislavery work, including by engaging modern slavery city/country partnerships and taskforces in the UK and the US, or NGO networks in other countries, so that each new mural can help to cement a city's identity as one working to become slavery-free.**

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rightslab@nottingham.ac.uk



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+44 (0)115 951 5559