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Revista de Cercetare si Interventie Sociala

ISSN: 1583-3410 (print), ISSN: 1584-5397 (electronic)

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Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială, 2019, vol. 64, pp. 300-322

<https://doi.org/10.33788/rcis.64.23>

Published by:
Expert Projects Publishing House



On behalf of:
„Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University,
Department of Sociology and Social Work
and
HoltIS Association

REVISTA DE CERCETARE SI INTERVENTIE SOCIALA
is indexed by Clarivate Analytics (Web of Science) -
Social Sciences Citation Index
(Sociology and Social Work Domains)

Redefining the Boundaries: Studies on the LGBTI-Themed Graffiti in the Streets of Nicosia

Eser KECECI¹, Gokce KECECI², Izlem KANLI³

Abstract

Since prehistoric eras, people have expressed their emotions and ideas on the walls. With the invention of writing and fast development of technology, murals also have evolved and gained new dimensions. Graffiti, which is a type of mural, has its place among street arts with its oldest historical background. It is scribbled, scratched or painted on the city walls; hence, they become a protest communication tool with implicit messages. This study discusses the graffiti in the streets of Nicosia regarding the protection of fundamental universal rights and freedoms of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersexual (LGBTI) individuals and communities that conduct activities towards the raising awareness about such matters. The LGBTI-themed graffiti, which are analyzed in the current research, have been collected from the North Nicosia streets during the last five years. The semiotic analysis of all the LGBTI-themed graffiti indicates that these graffiti provide the marginalized communities and individuals with a tool to express their suppressed feelings, to protest the negative reaction toward them, and also to redefine their presence in the society and occupy the urban area. This study offers the first analysis and investigation into the LGBTI-themed graffiti in the North Nicosia.

Keywords: LGBTI, protest communication, Nicosia streets, subculture, graffiti, social inequities, social culture.

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Introduction

“Graffiti is one of the few tools you have if you have almost nothing. And even if you don’t come up with a picture to cure world poverty you can make someone smile while they’re having a piss” (Banksy, 2003, p. 20). The street features that individuals encounter every day contribute to the formation of a collective memory (Kelly, 2012). Cities have been one of the most significant indicators of the level of civilization in a society. “The first appearance of cities marks a revolutionary change: the beginnings of civilization. Within this perspective cities remain the symbols and carriers of civilization wherever they appear.” (Redfield & Singer, 1954: 53) The developing and changing economy as well as the new political and class transformations have been effective on the formation of cities. Streets are also a vital reflection of the urban culture (Berman, 2012). For instance, the freedom-themed statues and images can be observed in the big squares where everyone can meet and organize events in the modern and democratic cities.

Streets, as small-scale cities, comprise thousands of diverse people with various characteristics. They connect people who are separated due to the borders of ethical identity, nationality, gender, class and race, and create the feeling of unity through living in the same space (Berman, 2012). This is true about the current situation in Nicosia as a city, which has been divided since 1974. Individuals do not only settle with the idea of being an object on the streets but also look for the way to become a subject. While doing this, city dwellers or inhabitants of streets turn into one of the various creators or designers changing and developing the living spaces based on their own “infrapolitical reactions” (Scott, 1990).

People are tending to follow certain types of behavior within urban areas. Drawing on Foucault, Lamb (2014: 109) suggests insightfully, “when using city space people tend to err on the side of conformity. Late modern societies are imbued with disciplinary and panoptic modalities of power that are bound up with the organization of space”. One of the ways by which these inhabitants of the cities and streets are transformed from conformed object into active creators and subjects is through different forms of street arts. No matter how the street art is conducted, “most street artists seriously working in the genre begin with a deep identification and empathy with the city: they are compelled to state something *in* and *with* the city, whether as forms of protest, critique, irony, humor, beauty, subversion, clever prank or all the above.” (Irvine, 2012: 3) Therefore, this research suggests that LGBTI-themed graffiti, as a form of street art, are infrapolitical reactions of the marginalized group, which has the potential to alter the streets’ panoptical modality of power.

History of Graffiti

According to Oxford Dictionary, graffiti are “writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface in a public place” (Bowen, 1999). Graffiti have different functions and purposes from a mere tool for personal expression to a form of integral art. What all different definitions of graffiti have in common is an emphasis on the “unauthorized” aspect of this writing and drawing (White, 2014) which makes it a proper tool for marginalized groups for the purpose of protest communication. This is the approach, which the current research employed about graffiti, which will be discussed later. Transforming from a gang’s territory marker to “a rich medium for unrestricted expression of ideas and statements” (Friedman, 2008), graffiti has a lengthy and controversial history addressing its origin, its medium, and its functions.

Graffiti is not a new artistic form of 20th century as claimed in the modern art history books (Farthing, 2011: 552). There is also a discussion that the history of street artistic expression goes back to the Early Medieval (Between 10th century to 12th century), and some of the works of arts are under protection as a cultural heritage (Elias, 2009: 110). However, as Tansug (1988) discusses graffiti dates back to prehistorical time. Even before the invention of writing, people draw their lives, feelings and ideas on the walls of the oldest Paleolithic caves in order “[to make their] presence known through images” (McDonald, 2013: 10) (*Figure 1*). Therefore, it is not founded to claim, “Graffiti is as old as human civilization” (Lannert, 2015). The usage of visual imagery and writing in the form of graffiti continued to exist during ancient time. For example, in Ancient Egypt, there are evident of Christian-inspired graffiti on the entrance of the Palace of Merneptah, which is a palace to celebrate Pharaohs, the kings and sons of the god, Ra (*Figure 2*)(White, 2014: 3). Also Romans wrote their poems on the walls and the Pompeii (see Ohlson, 2010) community had left us information we have today about them on their walls (Tulum, 2012).



Figure 1: National Museum and Research Center of Altamira



Figure 2: Image of a fish (a symbol of Jesus Christ) is carved at the palace of Merneptah

The history of modern graffiti is a very controversial issue. It was during World War II when “Kilroy”, a long-nosed little character (*Figure 3*) became a symbol of patriotism and was widely proliferated (Bates, 2014). In addition, during the World War II, graffiti were used as a means of protest. Protestors between the 1960s and the 1980s painted the West side of the Berlin wall (Ivanova, 2013). These graffiti gain “enormous popularity because of their efficiency as transgressive symbols. Later, they were re-conceptualized as predictors of the fall of the Wall” (Ivanova, 2013: 146).

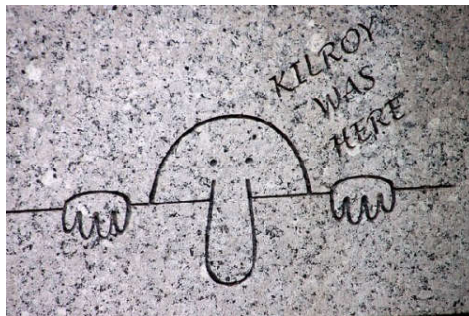


Figure 3: Engraving of Kilroy on the World War II Memorial in Washington D.C.
Luis Rubio, Credit: nps.gov (Whipps, 2008)

It was during 1960s when the modern form of graffiti which is associated with inner-city subculture, originated in New York as an aspect of hip hopculture (Lannert, 2015) and was known as “New York Style”. Hip-hop is a culture and lifestyle created by the African living in America under bad conditions as a minority at the end of 1970s in order to distance themselves from the daily life and entertain themselves. This culture is comprised of rap music, graffiti art, breakdance and DJ. Blues, Funk, Soul and Jazz music(Price, 2000). As White mentions “when hip-hop clashed with the urban art scene in the late 1970s and

early 1980s, Modern graffiti, which had been as revolutionary, revivalist, and bold as hip-hop, became the official visual art form for the genre” (Jirova, 2012). In the United States, esp. in New York, graffiti have been used to border the gangs’ territories. Young people started using graffiti as protest tool to express themselves and carve their place in the world around them which was dominated by dominant groups and cultures (Bal, 2012).

While the origin of ‘Tagging’ as the first tradition of modern graffiti is unknown, the name Cornbread and the way he improved his signature and started tagging city walls to get the attention of a girl was a great inspiration for the graffiti movement in 1960s. He is considered as “the first modern graffiti writer” (PBS News Hour, 2011). Cornbread used graffiti to protest social inequities and police brutality in minority communities through targeting “specific buildings and institutions, spray-painting police cars and paddy wagons in protest” (White, 2014: 4).

Another outstanding name during the same time is ‘Taki 183’. As a foot messenger in New York City, ‘Taki 183’ tagged his name all around the city of New York. ‘Taki’ refers to a short form of his Greek name ‘Dimitraki’ and ‘183’ stands for his address on 183rd Street. His tagging was imitated by hundreds of youth (Taki 183’, 1971) and in 1971;The New York Timespublished an article about him titled‘Taki 183’ Spawns Pen Pals”. During 1990s hip-hop and graffiti as its visual language moved to the mainstream, from popular videos to magazines (White, 2014). This is when controversy over the issue of vandalism as art form and its mainstream legitimization has been provoked and subsequently, works of graffiti artists such as Banksy find their ways to the art galleries (Friedman, 2008).

Banksy is one of the most prominent graffiti artists whose works focus on topics such as politics, culture, and ethics. He is described as “anti-globalization activist” and “Guerrilla artist” (Meric, 2017) whose “illegal work on the streets draws attention to political repression, and the authority that puts pressure on global companies and society” (Meric, 2017: 142).Today, with the fast spread and availability of new digital media, the graffiti works are disseminated and documented fast through blogs and websites and more than these, through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. (Bates, 2014).

Graffiti’s as Cultural Heritages

While providing a fixed and comprehensive definition for “cultural heritage” seems to be almost impossible, it is still useful to put forward more agreeable attributions of this expression in order to launch our discussion. In general, cultural heritage includes all those tangible and intangible cultural properties, which are created by previous generations and believed to have universal values to be preserved and bestowed on the next generations. Vecco argues that since mid-1970s, there have been attempts “to define the general criteria, with the aim of codifying in all the documents, tangible or intangible expressions of human action which, having acquired a value, need to be protected” (Vecco, 2010: 323).

These attempts lead into formation of a more inclusive approach to what cultural heritages are and to consider their different contexts they are born in. In this regard, cultural heritage includes but not limited to different artifacts, built and natural environments, and intangible traditions and customs.

From this point, it is believed that artistic expressive graffiti's created on the wall in public spaces are also cultural heritage. From prehistoric cave drawings to graffiti in the public spaces, all these works have important indications of the cultures of societies. These indicators are quite important not only as the world heritage but also as the social culture. Today graffiti's are not only a very important tool of communication but also important cultural milestones that show the cultural history of societies. As McDowall mentions, "cultural heritage recognizes both an intrinsic aesthetic or historical value and the value of local attachments that build up around specific instances of graffiti" (MacDowall, 2006: 474). Cave paintings are the preliminary cultural treasures that inform us about the social and psychological lives of our ancestors. The wall writings and murals, which are located in ancient cities, are as important as the buildings belonging to that period. Looking at the later centuries, it can be argued that the artists take a missionary attitude and put all their social and political views through the graffiti in public spaces, and these works are now regarded as cultural heritage.

Today in our modern environment graffiti's convey socio-political problems in national or international scale. Through modern communication tools and globalization, artists are not limited to the boundaries of their own culture; an American artist may create graffiti about famine in Africa, and an Asian artist may focus on capitalist system.

While in the 1980's graffiti artists were arrested when they got caught, today graffiti's as one of the fastest growing artistic movements has become not only a respectable form of art in the past several years, but also a hot commodity among art collectors and connoisseurs (Elias, 2009). Graffiti creators are being referred to as artists and some of their works are being covered by Plexiglas, sold in auctions and regarded as cultural heritage to be preserved and protected. McDowall introduces some examples of graffiti in Australia, which are preserved and protected as cultural heritage: "The first reads 'Keon Traitor to ALP' and can be dated to the late 1950s, when Labour parliamentarian Stan Keon defected to the Democratic Labour Party. By 2005, the factory on which the graffiti were inscribed had been converted to apartments and a section of the wall replaced, deleting the inscription. The second two examples are public murals by recognized artists: a piece by local artist Mike Brown titled 'Angela II', painted in 1990 on the side of a house in North Fitzroy and a commissioned wall painted by US artist Keith Haring on the site of the Collingwood Technical School in Fitzroy on a visit to Australia in 1984. These two works have been offered heritage protection by a variety of mechanisms" (MacDowall, 2006: 475). While in different countries around the world, graffiti's are widely recognized, as valuable form of art in need

of protection and preservation, this modern art have not still found the place it deserve in Cyprus.

The Center of the Quiet Resistance: Nicosia Urban Identity

The Ottomans conquered Cyprus, which has been home to many civilizations and cultures from prehistoric times to the present day, in 1572, Nicosia became a Muslim city, and the settlement of the Turks in the island began. The island was colonized by Britain in 1877 (Yüksel, 2009: 163). British sovereignty affected the Turkish Cypriots and caused great immigrations. The population of the Turkish Cypriot decreased considerably and the ratio of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot in the islands declined to one in five. It was in 1960 when the island declared its independence and the Republic of Cyprus was established. Then, due to increasing political and social conflicts between Greek and Turkish communities, and after the intervention of Turkey in 1974, the island was divided into a Turkish northern part and Greek southern part of Cyprus (Hakeri, 1993: 134). The capital city, Nicosia, divided into two by the border called 'Green Line' and this line, which is also referred to as the intermediate zone, is under the control of the United Nations Peace Force (Atun, 2007: 204).

Following the division of the island, a new era has begun in which the economic, political and social life of the northern part of Cyprus is negatively affected because of the embargoes applied by the western world. Although the peace negotiation between two sides is going for a long time, still no actual step toward reunification is taken. However, there are number of developments such as the opening of the border gates in 23 April 2003. The borders, which had not been open to free crossing, were opened and the communication between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots was facilitated (Yilmaz, 2014: 375). In 2004, the Greek Cypriot state became a single-federated European Union country and has been closely intertwined with other European countries, particularly in the economy, education, social activities and the right to free movement. On the other hand, if the Turkish Cypriots declare that they are Cypriots they are entitled to gain the citizenship of the Republic of Cyprus, and therefore European Union citizenship and passport. Thus, Turkish Cypriots also enjoy many important rights under EU law. Some of these are the right to freedom of movement, work, education and even retirement all over the Europe (Demir, 2005: 365).

Since Nicosia has been always a multicultural city during history, it generally has a moderate and all-inclusive societal attitude towards different ethnic, cultural and sexual groups. In addition, because of the right of free movement with having the citizenship of the European Union, the Northern Cypriots have a chance to examine closely the cultural structure of European countries. The socio-political and economic changes transform cultural structures in many different ways including but not limited to urban architecture. While Nicosia is a divided city by the Green Line, there is also an inner division within the Northern part of it based

on which former Nicosia or the walled city is separated from the new Nicosia (the city outside the old walls); “There are narrow roads and dead-end streets in the old Nicosia. In the new Nicosia, a wider field of vertical and horizontal development is more, and crossroads and roads are wider” (Mor & Dursun , 2007: 229).

Generally, those with higher income and educational status live in the new Nicosia while most of immigrants from Turkey with lower income are settled inside the walls in the old Nicosia. The streets of new Nicosia are very safe and quiet while in the streets of old Nicosia the crime rate and judicial incidents are high and the region are not safe especially during certain hours of night (Ministry of Turkish Republic of Cyprus, 2008). As it was mentioned above, most of the population living in the walled city are immigrants. However, in the last 5 years, it has been more common for marginalized young people to open cafes, associations, bars and boutiques in this area. Therefore, it can be said that marginalized groups are more likely to spend time in the area where they can feel themselves at home. Based on the above-mentioned discussion, Graffiti in Nicosia are mostly conducted in the walled old city. The narrow and dead-end streets are more secluded and it is not common for graffiti artists to make “illegal” graffiti in areas with higher rate of crime and crime tolerance. Only one third of the whole graffiti in Nicosia are carried out on the walls of the new Nicosia.

LGBTI in Nicosia

Before 2014, LGBTI individuals in Northern Cyprus were facing many social and legal problems. The first legislation about homosexual relationships in the history of Cyprus is found in the legislation of the British era. According to the previous penal code 154, articles 171 and 173 the relationship to male man was regarded as a contrary relationship to nature and was sentenced to up to 5 years imprisonment. Following the British rule, the Republic of Cyprus, which was established in 1960, continued to apply the same criminal codes about homosexual relationships (Constantinou, 2017). Although Northern Cyprus is considered a Muslim country, its legislation does not comply with the Islamic law. Therefore, in 7 February 2014 Same-sex sexual activity became legally accepted in Northern Cyprus with the purpose of improving human rights condition, in line with the modernization of the country. According to the new criminal codes of 154, articles 171-73, any form of discrimination against people based on their sexual orientation is considered as a crime. This included physical, verbal, and psychological pressure in public or depriving them from job appraising and promotion (Criminal Code 154, 2014: 60-61).

The new legislation paved the way for the public presence and activities of the LGBTI individuals and communities. However, it is important to consider the role of LGBTI community and individual in changing the law because LGBTI individuals started their activities long before the actual change of law. The initial societal awareness about LGBTI manifest its influence in the way LGBTI

individuals started to get together in gay-friendly café and bars in early 2000s (Barclay, Bernstein, & Marshall, 2009). Although being under the surveillance of police officers, gay individual rarely faced any actual incident of arrestment or imprisonment (Ethem, 2014). In 2008, *Homophobia Association* was established as the first association of LGBTI in Northern Cyprus. Later, in 2012, the name was changed to *Kuir Cyprus* (Queer Cyprus) for the purpose of inclusiveness of all LGBTI individuals (Nalbantoglu, 2013). Activities of *Kuir Cyprus* included but not limited to organizing conferences such as ‘Unspoken’ (‘Unspoken: Creating Dialogue on LGBTI Rights in the Turkish Cypriot Community’ (2014-18) was one of the most recent projects organized by *Kuir Cyprus* with the support of European Union Commission Grants), seminars, panel discussions, workshops, and yearly LGBTI Pride Walks. Walking by a unifying approach to freedom and fundamental rights of human being, support comes from associations in Turkey and Greek Cyprus and members of all the communities join the walk. Social problems still exist with the actions and attitudes of more homophobic, biphobic and transphobic individuals, but positive developments have been also recorded in North Cyprus (Itaborahy & Zhu, 2013).

Theoretical Background

Subculture and Graffiti as Resistance Tools

The city culture is created through the common subjective actions of all the individuals and groups, from the smallest to the largest one who all move with the sense of ‘togetherness’. The concept of subculture as an important pillar of urban culture is relevant to the current research as the LGBTI-themed graffiti on the streets of Nicosia deals with studying of an urban area’s subculture, and as the modern form of graffiti is associated with inner-city subcultures (Lannert, 2015).

Subculture is “the shared system of values, norms, beliefs and life styles of a substantial minority within a wider host culture: for instance, youth culture, gang culture, ethnic groups...” (Cahndler & Munday, 2011: 411) and LGBTI groups. Subculture cannot be fully understood without understanding the power relations between dominant and subordinate/marginalized groups in a society. On the one hand, subcultures share some similarities with the dominant culture. However, there are anarchist tendencies in subcultures, which threaten the sovereignty of the dominant group and culture. The dominant culture utilizes different strategies to control the threatening dimensions of the subcultures by oppressing them, or assimilating and domesticating them. According to Hebdige (1979): “Subcultures represent ‘noise’ (as opposed to sound)... We should therefore not underestimate the signifying power of the spectacular subculture not only as a metaphor for potential anarchy ‘out there’ but as an actual mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation” (1979: 90). Hebdige’s

concept of ‘noise’ is similar to Scott’s conceptualization of ‘infrapolitics’. In refer to “an unobtrusive realm of political struggle”, James Scott coins the term “infrapolitics” according to which in compare to the more outstanding and loud protests and struggles, “the circumspect struggle waged daily by subordinate groups is, like infrared rays, beyond the visible end of the spectrum” (Scott, 1990: 183). Graffiti, therefore, are tools to reclaim and occupy the urban area by those who are marginalized and deprived from being heard by the dominant culture. One example is the way by which New York youth react recently to the economic and social context of recession and subsequent unemployment and racism in 1970s; “Graffiti was an expression of this resentment, an act of protest against the mainstream, often referred to in terms of war. In fact, the act of going out to write graffiti is known as ‘bombing.’” (Stanchfield, 2006). Based on the above-mentioned argument, it can be claimed that graffiti, as one of the creative outlets of hip-hop culture, have developed as an ‘infrapolitical reaction’ used by other subcultures. Graffiti have functioned as a decisive driver in the way they communicate alternatively with the society. In this regard, graffiti are not a mere communication tool for self-expression but more than that, they are transformed into a kind of self-realizing tool with the purpose of resisting the dominants.

Method and Analysis

A qualitative method of semiotic analysis is employed in this research. Three analyzed LGBTI-themed graffiti were collected during the last five years in Nicosia. In this research, Roland Barthes’s semiotics is employed for analyzing graffiti. One of the reasons for choosing Barthes’s semiotic is his constant systematization and categorization, which is needed for this research. According to Barthes “a sign... refers to something which conveys meaning - for example, a written or spoken word, a symbol or a myth” (Robinson, 2011). The same as Saussurean analysis in studies of the sign system, Barthes distinguished between signifier and signified. A sign consists of a material signifier (sound or written mark) and a signified (concept) (Allen, 2003). In addition, he developed the previously introduced concepts of denotation and connotation as two levels in the process of signification. While denotation refers to the first-order meaning (manifest and explicit meaning) of a sign, Connotation draws on the second-order meaning (hidden and implicit meaning). In this section, three graffiti are analyzed. First, a detailed information about each graffiti is provided. Later, the signification process of graffiti as signs are analyzed in the two levels of denotation and connotation. Finally, paradigm and syntagm analysis of graffiti offers a reading on contrast and oppositions in the signification process, which strengthen the message of the graffiti.

Graffiti 1: If you can't bear, don't look

Graffiti 1 was photographed in Kizilbas Roundabout, a very crowded area in New Nicosia (*Figure 4*). It was applied on the wall of an old church, which is recently used as a cultural center. All the three parts of the graffiti 1 are in black, which make it outstanding with the contrast it creates with its beige background.



Graffiti 1



1-a



1-b



1-c

Figure 4: Graffiti 1

Although this graffiti was photographed in New Nicosia, as it was a stenciled graffiti, there were similar graffiti all around old and new city of Nicosia. It consists of three different parts which are each analyzed separately; two kissing women (1-a), a writing on the left which represents '*göremezsang bakma*', means "if you can't bear, don't look" (1-b), and a map of Cyprus with a writing indicating "Queer" (1-c).

Graffiti 1 does not have compositional integrity. However, it succeeds to clearly convey its message and raise awareness about the existence of different gender orientations. In graffiti 1-a, two women are depicted kissing each other from the lips. Connotatively, the act of 'kissing' is a sign of love, togetherness and passion, which is more common to be seen within heterosexual relationships. However, this graffiti resists the dominant comfort of the society by depicting two lesbian women kissing each other passionately. It also indicates that there are lesbian

couples living in the society, which is a way that they reclaim their share of the urban area and culture.

Graffiti 1-b, the writing of ‘*göremezsang bakma*’ was written with the dialect of Turkish Cypriots and it literally, means ‘if you can’t bear, don’t look’. Using a well-known Turkish Cypriot saying and writing it in Turkish Cypriot, dialect connotes the unification and inclusion of different sexual minorities as citizens of the same community who must have the same right as other Turkish Cypriot citizens. It connotes that “all of us are Turkish Cypriots, we breathe the same air and talk the same language”.

While the suggested solution of ‘turning look in case of lacking tolerance’ might not seem to be able to overcome the deep problem of homophobia and transphobia, the way it is presented, with the unifying borderless map of Cyprus and the informal familiar Cypriot dialect, has a potential to raise sympathy and awareness.

In graffiti 1-c, the borders between northern and southern Cyprus is blurred. This elimination highlights that besides the outer border between us, there is still another boarder among us, which separate us according to our sexual orientation and identity. Writing Queer on a borderless Cyprus connotes that this inner boarder can be lifted up and unify Cyprus by recognition of the right of the queer individuals and community in both sides of Cyprus. At the same time, drawing the Cyprus map as a whole without dividing it to North and South parts with the writing of ‘Queer’ inside it indicates that the association supports not only the rights of homosexuals but also the whole peace-building process in the island.

Table 1: Details of graffiti 1

Target group	People living in Nicosia (The Capital)
Objective	To raise awareness
Graffiti Creator	LGBTI Activists
Product	Protest Communication tool
Technique	Graffiti, Stencil
Place	Kizilbaş Roundabout
Date	2016

Table 2: Analysis of Graffiti 1

		Sign	Signifier	Signified (Denotation/Connotation)
Graffiti 1	1-a	Two kissing woman	Visual of two kissing lesbian women	Denotation: Lesbian relationship. Connotation: Existence of lesbian couple living in the society.
	1-b	Message of 'Göremezsang Bakma' (if you cannot bear, do not look).	Writing of 'Göremezsang Bakma'	Denotation: A slogan written with the Cyprus accent. Connotation: The message is to the homophobic or transphobic to turn their look if they cannot tolerate to see two kissing women. It was written in the Cypriot dialect with an emphasis that both parties are Cypriots.
	1-c	Tag of 'Queer' inside of a Cyprus map.	Writing and visual of 'Queer' inside the Cyprus map.	Denotation: a written sign of "Queer" is written inside of a Cyprus map to show that the Queer Cyprus Association makes the graffiti. Connotation: It suggest elimination of inner and outer borders in Cyprus.

Paradigm and Syntagm Analysis of graffiti 1

The most important opposition and contrasts are the usage of intra-linguistic sign along with extra-linguistic sign. While “if you can’t bear, don’t look” is written in informal Turkish Cypriot dialect, the writing of ‘Queer’ is written in English. In addition, visual imageries of kissing women and the map of Cyprus are used which offers a universally recognizable sign.

Table 3: Paradigm and Syntagm Analysis of graffiti 1

Writings in Cypriot dialect	Writings in English
Intra- linguistic Sign	Extra-linguistic Sign

Graffiti 2: Love cannot be prevented in Cyprus

Graffiti 2 was photographed in the old city of Nicosia, on the walls of Selimiye Street, which is one of the most crowded main roads in which both cars and pedestrians pass. Similar to graffiti 1, stencil technique is used for both intra and extra-linguistic signs of graffiti 2. Graffiti 2 consists of two different parts: two kissing policemen (2-a), and a writing on the bottom which represents 'Kibrista Ask Engellememez', means 'Love Cannot Be Prevented in Cyprus' (2-b).



Graffiti 2



Graffiti 2-a



Graffiti 2-b

Figure 5: Graffiti 2

The two kissing male figures are inspired from "Kissing Coppers", a graffiti work by Banksy in 2005 (*Figure 6*). With his, work on the wall of Prince Albert

Pup in Brighton, Banksy “underscores that love must be free, whatever it is, and accepted by society” (Esmer, 2016).



Figure 6: “Kissing Coppers”, a graffiti by Banksy, 2005

Graffiti 2-a features two male police officers kissing in the exact similar to Banksy’s graffiti. The only difference is that they are portrayed in a medium long shot. Connotatively, this graffiti depicts a gay couple whose responsibility is to keep order, security and peace in the society. Their uniform is not the uniform of Cyprus police but resembles the British police uniform. However, it is still a universally recognizable sign of police uniform and as Cyprus was once a colony of Britain, this uniform connotes a familiar cultural reference. Another universal indicator of love and passion is kissing between two male police officers. Therefore, it is emphasized here that all kinds of love should be experienced freely, regardless of social status, position, gender, language, and religion. The following intra-linguistic sign ‘love cannot be prevented in Cyprus’ reinforce this implication.

The ‘love’ is written in bigger font size, which emphasizes the importance of it through allocating more visual space to it. While *Graffiti 2-a* is depicted in mere black color as a sign of sadness, lament and seriousness, the written part is all in Green. Green color is mostly used as a sign of nature, freshness, and energy. Also green is a “sacred color in Islam, it is the color of the heaven and desire” (Color Symbolism, 2004). Insightfully, this graffiti applies green as a gender-neutral color. Considering all those various meaning, this usage of color green connotes the desire of LGBTI individuals to be recognized and accepted by the society

and to be included based on their different nature and desire. This is in line with the desire of the intra-linguistic part, ‘Love Cannot Be Prevented in Cyprus’, to have all kinds of transcendental love included in a democratic and free country of Cyprus. In addition, by emphasizing the universal concept of ‘LOVE’, the graffiti connotes that love has no boundaries and regardless of sexual orientation, the feeling is the same.

Table 4: Detailed Analysis of graffiti 2

Target group	People living in Nicosia Capital
Objective	To raise awareness on society
Graffiti Creator	LGBTI Activists
Product	Protest Communication tool
Technique	Graphic, Stencil.
Place	Selimiye Street
Date	2015

Table 5: Analysis of graffiti 2

		Sign	Signifier	Signified (Denotation/ Connotation)
Graffiti 2	2-b	Two kissing policemen	Two gay male policemen kissing	Denotation: Gay relationship between two police officers Connotation: The possibility that two male police officers who are responsible to keep order and protect the rights of citizens in the society can become gay.
	2-a	LOVE CANNOT BE PREVENTED IN CYPRUS	Any kind of love cannot be prevented in Cyprus	Denotation: LOVE CANNOT BE PREVENTED IN CYPRUS Connotation: love has no boundaries and regardless of sexual orientation, the feeling is the same.

Paradigm and Syntagm Analysis of graffiti

Similar to *Graffiti 1*, there are both intra-linguistic sign and extra-linguistic sign in *Graffiti 2*. *Graffiti 2-a* uses extra-linguistic sign of kissing police officers that is universally recognizable. However, the writing is a cultural-bound intra-linguistic sign in Turkish language, which strengthen the national identity and message of the graffiti creators. While “LOVE” is written in, big size, other words are written in small. This opposition is to emphasize the importance of the concept of ‘love’. In addition, as it was mentioned before, the intra and extra-linguistic signs are depicted in different colors of black and green.

Table 6: Paradigm and Syntagm Analysis of graffiti 2

Intra-linguistic sign	Extra-linguistic sign
Word written in big size	Word written in small size
Black color	Green color

Graffiti 3: Love is Love

Graffiti 3 was photographed in the same place as graffiti 1, on the wall of the old church, which is currently used as a cultural center. There were similar graffiti all around old and new city of Nicosia. Similar to graffiti 1 and 2, stencil technique is used for both intra and extra-linguistic signs of graffiti 3. It consists of two different parts: pictograms and symbols (3-a), and writing on the right, which represents ‘AŞK AŞKTIR’, means ‘LOVE IS LOVE’ (3-b).

Disregard of language and culture, the used pictograms and symbols are universal signs. Therefore, the pictograms of LGBTI couples are comprehensible signs. Assigning color to gender and differentiating gender through color-coding practice (pink for girls, blue for boys) is a twentieth century trait (Frassanito & Pettorini, 2008). Graffiti 3, however, breaks this stereotypical convention through utilizing color blue for both male and female figures. The intra-linguistic sign of “LOVE IS LOVE”, similarly, breaks another stereotype about love according to which it is tried to confine love to specific characteristic such as gender and sexual identity. As it was mentioned in analysis of graffiti 2, color green symbolizes holiness, nature and energy which connotes that love is a natural instinct and must not be limited to gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, etc.



Graffiti 3



Graffiti 3-a



Graffiti 2-b

Figure 7: Graffiti 3

Table 7: Details of graffiti 1

Target group	People living in Nicosia (The Capital)
Objective	To raise awareness
Graffiti Creator	LGBTI Activists
Product	Protest Communication tool
Technique	Graffiti, Stencil
Place	Kizilbaş Roundabout
Date	2016

Table 8: Sign analysis of Graffiti No3

		Sign	Signifier	Signified (Denotation/ Connotation)
Graffiti 3	3-a	A visual composed of pictograms	Two female symbols of image and sex. Two male images and a symbol of gender.	Denotation: Separately, a pair of hand-held women couple's pictograms and two men side-by-side two female symbols Connotation: Out of the ordinary, love, that two women or two men live.
	3-b	Message of love is love	Text of love is love.	Denotation: The fact that there is no discrimination in love, the passionate love that everyone has experienced is regarded as love Connotation: The fact that an individual can live with his / her fathers and that this relationship is considered love.

Paradigm and Syntagm Analysis of graffiti

Similar to *Graffiti 1 and 2*, there are both intra-linguistic sign and extra-linguistic sign in graffiti 3. *Graffiti 3-a* uses extra-linguistic sign of pictogram and symbols, which are universally recognizable. However, the writing in *Graffiti 3-b* is a cultural-bound intra-linguistic sign in Turkish language which strengthen the national identity and message of the graffiti creators. In addition, the opposition of blue and green color is employed which each offers different symbolic meaning, as discussed earlier.

Table 9: Paradigm and Syntagm Analysis of graffiti 3

Intra-linguistic sign	Extra-linguistic sign
Blue color	Green color

Conclusion

This study discusses the graffiti in the streets of Nicosia, which were conducted by LGBTI activists regarding the protection of fundamental universal rights and freedoms of LGBTI individuals and communities. This is the first analysis and investigation into the LGBTI-themed graffiti in the North Nicosia. The semiotic analysis of all the LGBTI-themed graffiti indicates that these graffiti provide the marginalized communities and individuals with a tool to express their suppressed feelings, to protest the negative reaction toward them, and also to redefine their presence in the society and occupy the urban area. Graffiti 2 and 3 address the issue of ‘LOVE’ with the purpose of expressing their inner feelings. Unlike these two graffiti, graffiti 1 directly addresses homophobic, biphobic and transphobic people and react to their rejection though suggesting them to avert their look. Although graffiti 1 does not offer a reconciling and inclusive solution, it is reach in offering an infrapolitical reaction and opposition. Several references to national attributions contribute to the construction of LGBTI identity. Through emphasizing their national identity, LGBTI activists reclaim their rights as citizens of Cyprus who breathe the same air, share the same space, and must not be deprived from their rights or encounter discrimination, hostility and rejection. Another way through which they reclaim their right is by questioning and blurring the external boundaries in graffiti. This deletion of external boundaries suggests the redefinition of internal boundaries, which separate queer individual from the rest of the society and consequently, marginalized them.

Therefore, the activists find the way to become a subject in their urban area. LGBTI activists peacefully occupy the city and communicate to people through graffiti. They reached to large number of people through conducting graffiti in the most crowded urban areas and on the walls of places in which large number of youth were frequenting. The LGBTI-themed graffiti turn into infrapolitical reactions of the marginalized group, which has the potential to alter the streets’ panoptical modality of power. Despite the fact, the Same-sex sexual activity became legally accepted in Northern Cyprus, and there are many new positive improvements in this issue, there are still cases in which LGBTI people encounter humiliation, discrimination and rejection by individuals. Still, different sexual orientations are regarded as sickness and deviation. Therefore, Society lacks awareness and relevant education about queer issue. Graffiti are useful tool for the purpose of raising awareness and educating locals.

In order to find out to what extent the qualitative findings and analysis of the current research are accurate, it is recommend that a survey needs to be conducted to investigate the community perception toward LGBTI-themed graffiti.

This survey might contribute to evaluation of the level of awareness among local people concerning relevant issues including but not limited to homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and the role of graffiti in raising awareness as an alternative communication tool.

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