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5-2014

"Beirut Speaks": New Graffiti Sub-Cultures of Beirut, Lebanon

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Anthropology

By

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Arkansas State University
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Graphic Design, 2010

May 2014
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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ABSTRACT

Modern graffiti is an ever-present part of urban space. It has become globalized and has adapted to different environments and social contexts. Today in Beirut, Lebanon a phenomenal street art movement is infiltrating public space. This particular movement questions the common understandings that have constructed Western graffiti artists and graffiti culture for so long. A new group of street artists is working to make the art form more inclusive of Beirut's many communities by writing messages that speak to the whole of Lebanon. They are making their work known in the presence of law enforcement, different sects, and generations. How does an art form that has long been considered as matter out of place get transformed into an empowering feature of the city? What does this say about how societies differ in defining art and deviance? And furthermore, what does this street art movement accomplish in the complicated and dynamic environment of Beirut, Lebanon?

ASHEKMAN, and YAZAN for taking the time to meet with me and for sharing with me their passion, hopes, and dreams for Arabic street art in their country.

I would like to thank my parents, James Holland and Karen and Scott Kagebein, who have encouraged me throughout all of my life's endeavors. Finally, my undying thanks to Kyle Prince, who so graciously supported me throughout this project and my graduate career, all my love to you.

DEDICATION

Beirut Speaks is dedicated to my informants and friends, and to the other street artists in

Beirut, Lebanon who are working to make a difference in their city and country.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I have transliterated Lebanese terms using the transliteration system *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies (IMJES)*.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Most who are knowledgeable about the Middle East are familiar with the cosmopolitan port-city Beirut, Lebanon. Beirut is located within the heart of the Middle East, along the Mediterranean. The area is rich with history of empires and conquests, along with a unique blend of eastern and western influences. This is a country known for liberalism and tolerance, focused on the enjoyable and practical aspects of life. At the same time however, Lebanon is known for exemplifying political and social disorganization, a country marked by sharp sectarian discord. There is profound diversity in the capital Beirut that divides the city along religious and ethnic lines. In the north east of the city is the Armenian suburb Bourj Hammoud, while in the east are the Christian districts Gemmayze and Achrafieh. In the south is the Shi'ite area called the Dahiyeh along with the Palestinian refugee camp Shatila. There is Hamra, one of the city's most dynamic areas, which hosts many Western chains such as Dunkin Donuts and Radio Shack. This neighborhood is particularly known for being the center of nightlife in Beirut, and also is home to the American University of Beirut.

Beirut's energy and disorganization creates an air of freedom not found in other cities; Beirut is a unique space of order and chaos. Beautiful and historical landscapes that overlook the Mediterranean such as Raouche, commonly known as the Beirut Gates, or Pigeon Rocks, exist in an environmental state of disregard. Upscale and polished architecture of the downtown Beirut Souks and Saifi gardens are adjacent to lower class shanties. From sun up until sun down the traffic is chaotic and noisy, yet the locals' patience is astounding. The citizens share a peculiar composure that is cynical and patient at the same time. While living in Beirut last summer I was having a discussion with a friend about sports in Lebanon. To which he replied, "Well, our country is pretty good at basketball, but that's not happening this year." After asking why, he casually replies, "Oh well, because we have problems." This casual acknowledgment of Lebanon's downfalls is a common theme to be found amongst citizens in spoken conversation,

but this dialogue is especially noticeable along the walls of the city, and expressed in a more impudent way.

In the early 2000s, a profound movement began to sweep its way across the dilapidated walls of the city. Lebanon was still in its post-war recovery transition, still laden with unrest. Prime Minister Rafic Hariri was assassinated in February of 2005, sparking the Cedar Revolution – a chain of political demonstrations, also called the Independence Intifada, which led to the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. Only a year later, Lebanon found itself at war with Israel.

The modern graffiti movement in Beirut found its inception in the wake of these tumultuous events. Street artists began to express their thoughts, feelings, ideologies, and anxieties along the walls of the city. Some messages took the form of tags sprayed in Latin letters, some were stencils with simple messages hastily written in Arabic, and then there was Arabic street art that spoke messages of social critique. My informants refer to this unique art, distinguished from Western and European graffiti and based on Arabic letters and Arabic calligraphy, as *calligraffiti.* A number of the artists paint portraits of influential figures, such as Fairouz or Samir Kassir, and apply calligraphic messages with graffiti. Sometimes there will be portraits of not well-liked people such as the *darakā* (Lebanese police) painted in a satirical way, with an antagonizing message sprayed in Arabic that reads, "I Love Corruption." These artists emerged to bring an awareness of the political, social, and material inefficiencies that have beset their city. They also attempt to emphasize the city's positive aspects and to express desire for unity over division. *Calligraffiti* has received remarkable support by the many communities of Beirut.

A.   PROBLEM STATEMENTS

This thesis concerns the new and provocative graffiti movement occurring in Beirut, and its many implications. It places much emphasis on the localized meanings of street art in Beirut,

and how this new style is powerfully transforming the character of public space. I contend that this new sub-culture of street artists is claiming that Beirut speaks through their graffiti movement, and I examine how this does so through the material physicality of the city, through the diverse social groups of the city, and even through commercial and mainstream contexts. "Beirut speaks" is a statement loaded with many possibilities. Three major questions surround this statement and its framework: How can Beirut speak through graffiti? How can Beirut speak when it is a city composed of very different neighborhoods with varying class and sectarian and national backgrounds? What sort of implications does this have on the perceptions and discourses that concern graffiti?

While this thesis is concerned with the localized meaning of graffiti in Lebanon, it is very much about the art form graffiti in a globalized world. To imply that the city can speak through graffiti also suggests that something or someone is able to talk back. I do not suggest that the work of my informants claim that the city in its entirety is "represented" by the work of a handful of graffiti artists, nor propose that everyone in Beirut's many communities responds with positive comments to this art. I would, however, like to argue for the plausibility of a collective action suggested by these Lebanese artists' re-appropriation of graffiti within the very different spheres of the city.

B.   WHY GRAFFITI?

Today graffiti is often viewed as a type of art, but one whose nature is contentious and provocative. Since graffiti has achieved its contemporary form it has been labeled as a reaction to the urban disciplines of the city, and in almost all contexts is a visual expression of rebellion against the norms of society. It is not only aesthetic, but also communicates an idea or a message, marks a territory or breaks a rule. Understanding the statements and concerns of the artists and also those of their audience provides new perspectives on their context and social anxieties, and

offers a look into the anthropology of the city. While the art has indeed been appropriated in many contexts and locations, artists embody the idea that it is marking public space to convey meaning. However, if we look deeper into how it has been appropriated in Beirut, Lebanon we can see disjuncture between certain discourses associated with graffiti like that of "deviance," "art," "authority," and even "commercialization," which challenges the very definition of graffiti.

C.   WHY LEBANON?

Lebanon is a unique and cosmopolitan environment highly influenced by Western, European, and Arab values. The state is multicultural and multiethnic. A Western perspective might conclude that Lebanon is progressive and open-minded, though this is not always the case. The country's parliament is composed of a confessional power-sharing system between the country's eighteen major ethnic groups. A major implication of this system was the Lebanese Civil War that took place from 1975 to 1990. Today Lebanon is currently in its post-war period, dealing with internal sectarian violence as well as external violence from neighboring Syria. The cosmopolitan environment also poses an identity crisis for most Lebanese. While this has been going on for many decades, locals would tell me, "Lebanon is a sponge, it just soaks up every other society around it."

While identity in Lebanon is fraught with ambiguities, I found the art of my informants to be a unique counter-balance to the negative talk. This group of street artists is taking a new stance towards sectarian conflict by creating messages that can speak to the whole of Lebanon, not just one particular sect. They are focusing on their collective vernacular by writing in Lebanese Arabic, which in some cases can be a combination of Arabic, French, and English

4

vocabulary, and is used on a daily basis in the public sphere. The artists are not ignoring their diverse context. On the contrary, through their language they recognize the influences of Lebanese society. However, the artists feel that the appropriation of Arabic calligraphy into graffiti provides them with an identity specific to Lebanese graffiti, and that is not borrowed from anywhere else. This style also contrasts sharply with the graffiti that was used as propaganda during the Civil War, meant to divide the city along territorial lines.

The ways in which Arabic graffiti is presented in Lebanon also differ from the way it is utilized in other parts of the Middle East. For example, Palestinian graffiti also utilizes Arabic script and traditional calligraphy, yet the messages tend to be more political and centered on spreading the slogans of the Fatah and Hamas movements (Zoghbi & STONE 2011: 57). Bahrain's calligraphic messages are more religious and emphasize scriptures, aphorisms and historical references (Jarbou 2011: 39). Graffiti in Egypt speaks a language of revolution and political turmoil. Graffiti in Beirut does speak of politics, conflict, and anxiety, yet the graffiti artists in their country's multi-sectarian context are not advocating for any specific political party. The scope of my research highlights how this particular graffiti movement also emphasizes the positive aspects of Lebanese society while acknowledging the negative aspects, and works to reclaim and embellish public space that has been destroyed by conflict and violence.

D.   METHODS & OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

In order to complete this thesis project, I conducted fieldwork in the city of Beirut for six weeks in the summer of 2013. During my stay I took courses in Urban Arabic, or Lebanese Arabic, at Saifi Center for Arabic, which proved beneficial in reading and comprehending the Arabic graffiti messages. I conducted structured interviews with four renowned Lebanese street

artists, duo ASHEKMAN, YAZAN, and ALI. I held an unstructured interview with street artist FISH at his live graffiti writing showcase at the Garten, a new and popular summer nightclub in Biel, Beirut. I got the chance to see other artists like RAMI M3ALIM in action and attended YAZAN's graffiti gallery exposés. I searched countless news articles in Beirut to better understand media and local perspectives about this art. I also took courses in the Ru'qa style calligraphy with a professional calligrapher to better conceptualize the links between calligraphy and graffiti in Beirut. Lastly, I captured countless photographic images of graffiti spread throughout Beirut. Many of these photos were taken midday during chaotic traffic. Unless specified, I took all of the photos that are presented in this thesis.

Through the evidence acquired from my fieldwork in Beirut, as well as research of other documents about Lebanon, graffiti, and anthropology, I discuss through three chapters the vision of the artists, which is that that Beirut speaks. In Chapter One I show how graffiti artists use graffiti as a means to hack contained, taken-for granted spaces in the city. I give a comparative analysis of how this was done in New York City during the 1970s and explain how this particular movement was what enabled the art's globalization. I then apply similar meanings from graffiti's origins to Beirut, while illustrating the differences. I conclude by discussing the disjuncture of negative talk between the two contexts and showing how notion of "vandalism" was appropriated to suppress the graffiti movement in New York City, and that same notion when applied to Beirut is not relevant, which helped the artists' success in Beirut. This reveals that perceptions associated with deviance are social constructions whose implications vary according to context.

Chapter Two discusses the artists' claim that Beirut speaks through its graffiti by its appropriation of traditional calligraphy and its special emphasis on Lebanese Arabic. The artists are assuming the role that they know a language to speak to Lebanon's many communities. I discuss the history of Arabic calligraphy and its relationship to Beirut's urban environment. I then discuss the similarities in this art form to that of Arabic *calligraffiti*. I especially focus on

the role of Lebanese Arabic in the artists' graffiti and how this is making a bold claim at the nature of Lebanese identity.

In Chapter Three I conduct another comparative analysis between the commodification of graffiti in the West and that of Beirut. Street art in Beirut garnered a great deal of popularity and acceptance shortly after it emerged, which allowed for it to enter into the commercial sphere much more quickly than it did in the West. This comparison questions the obscurities in defining graffiti in today's globalized world. In both contexts there is a pattern where the cohabitation of street art and marketing confuse the lines of autonomy and authority.

II.   CHAPTER ONE: HACKIN' THE SYSTEM

The graffito (Figure 1:1) which is also the title of this thesis, *"Beirut Taḥkī,"* or "Beirut Speaks," expresses a collective concern about the city's realities. It suggests that Beirut's new graffiti phenomenon is speaking from the walls and is representing the city. But how? How can Beirut speak with a unified voice when it is a city composed of very different neighborhoods with varying class and sectarian and national backgrounds? And how can a handful of graffiti artists claim that the city is able to speak through their work? I propose that Beirut's new street art scene, by re-appropriating the art form graffiti, is working to produce a collective action that can involve the whole of Lebanese society to communicate amidst the different spheres of their city. Researching this phenomenon has generated new ways of understanding graffiti art and graffiti culture.

In order to answer such questions I begin by comparing graffiti in Beirut to the scene in New York City, where modern graffiti writing originated. In both case studies we see how the material physicality and social spheres of the city fostered a certain kind of speech. I also special attention to the notions of "vandal," "legal/illegal," and "deviance," and what these terms mean to citizens of the city. Artists in New York and Beirut have encountered very different responses towards their work, governed by differing notions regarding what was "legal" and what was "vandalism." In understanding these contextual differences and similarities provides more credence to how society shapes judgments and impressions with regard to boundaries of legality and aesthetics.

In New York City and the West more broadly, graffiti is often considered vandalism. In the 1970s a group of young people from the lower class and diverse ethnic backgrounds in New York City built a distinctive culture using inherited traditions while responding to the city around

them. Few of the city's inhabitants accepted the art form. Even today, graffiti in the West has been plagued by negative perceptions that position graffiti artists as criminals and their work as defacement. Graffiti in Beirut does not share the same difficulties and so the art form has become respected. In Beirut, although we see patterns similar to that of the foundational movement in New York City, it is the dissimilarities that have altered the meanings of this art. A small group of middle class Lebanese artists use a collective vernacular in Arabic street art and *calligraffiti* to react to a plethora of problems that beset their city, and have received a great deal of positive feedback by many of Beirut's diverse communities. Graffiti, labeled for so long as "matter out of place" (Douglas 1966), is now a ubiquitous and respected feature of Beirut's urban environment.

It is also important to distinguish between "writing" and "street art". "Writing" is a very particular style of graffiti that which emerged in New York City and Philadelphia in the late 1960s (Hegert 2013: 3). A "writer" is a graffiti artist who concentrates on letters, "tagging," the act of spraying a signature on public space, and "wildstyle," which refers to a very complex construction of entwined letters (Ganz 2004: 374). For such artists, "writing" connotes an action, a practice, and a performance, while "graffiti" denotes the after-effect, or relic (Hegert 2013: 3). The formalities of "writing" are that it is a strictly letter based art, a type of publicly performed calligraphy acted out by artists tagging their pseudonyms or "tag names" on public spaces (Hegert 2013: 3).

"Street art" on the other hand is somewhat distinct from writing because it does not follow the rules of lettering and the game of tagging. It became more prominent in the early 1990s when writers like San Francisco's TWIST and New York's COST and REVS began to work outside the parameters of traditional writing by adding postering, sculpture, murals and other media to spray paint (Gastman and Neelan 2010: 380). Unlike writing, it has not been

influenced by hip-hop, and is often used as a generic term for art in urban, public spaces (Gantz 2004: 374).

Most of the graffiti that my informants do in Beirut is what is known as *calligraffiti*, which is a hybrid of many forms that include Arabic calligraphy, writing, and street art. I will compare the work of my informants to the early writers in New York City because this writing phenomenon along with its sister movement hip-hop are what inspired them to first pursue graffiti and adapt the art form to the Lebanese scene. My informants, however, refer to themselves as street artists and have broken away from what they know as tagging.

A.   ORIGINS OF MODERN GRAFFITI

Graffiti has become a ubiquitous part of global urban culture. The name is originally derived from the Italian word *sgraffio*, meaning "scratch" (Ganz 2004:8), or a written public marking (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 20). It is a phenomenon found in nearly every era and site of human culture and civilization, from the famous walls of Pompeii to the Great Wall of China (Hegert 2013: 2). It is considered one of the first examples of human art, and in the United States it includes the monikers of hoboes from the early 1900s, the famous global graffito and World War II slogan "Kilroy Was Here," and the inscriptions of gangs of New York City and Los Angeles (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 34-42). It was in late 20th century New York City where graffiti achieved its contemporary form and fame when a young generation of artists began writing their street names like TAKI 183, LSD OM, SUPER KOOL 223, STAY HIGH 149, and PHASE 2 along the subway system in ever increasing volume and elaboration (Gastman and

Neelon 2010: 20). Through this phenomenon scratch came to be viewed by some as art, and those who wrote it as artists (Hegert 2013: 2).

While many artistic innovations occur during periods of prosperity and economic expansion, the emergence of writing graffiti as an art form in 1970s New York (and street art in early 2000s Beirut) occurred at a time of economic and political challenges. The oil embargo in 1973, the stock market decline, and malaise over the Vietnam War were among the factors that signaled the end of the American dream (Deitch 2011: 10). Sub-urbanization and white flight had New York City's economic base (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 20). The liberation movements of the late 1960s taught that anyone could be an artist, yet unfulfilled promises of '60s idealism clashed with disappointing realities of America in the mid-1970s, and led to angry and anti-authoritarian art forms such as graffiti and punk rock (Deitch 2011: 10). By writing their signatures with spray paint on public space, New York City youths created their own competitive art program based on shaping the typography of their street names to reflect their individuality and on the practice of one-upping each other's style (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 25). This generation soon realized that they could speak to the entire city by painting on the one thing that crossed every boundary of class, ethnicity, and neighborhood: the New York subway system (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 20).

The space of the subway system embodies the notion of repetition, a basic feature of the built environment of cities and generally of our economic and technical worlds (Sassen 2013: 217). There is a great deal of repetition throughout a city in the form of buses, apartments, subways, and walls which have become standardized, taken-for-granted and shared by a large number of inhabitants. Even these spaces and vehicles, however, can take on different meanings and significance by being re-marked (Sassen 2013: 217). The New York City writers were

hacking the system, setting themselves in opposition to a variety of established practices and societal norms. By visually communicating via the trains, they drew attention to the city's marginal neighborhoods and the nature of life on the streets (Miller 2002: 4). These groups of writers, many consisting of multi-ethnic groups from different classes and neighborhoods, often targeted specific trains they knew would circulate their tags throughout the city (Miller 2002: 4). This is a sub-cultural concept known as "all-city," and an all-city tagger is one who achieves high status in the graffiti sub-culture (*Style Wars* 1983). By means of the subways, the graffiti phenomenon enabled the visibility of a certain kind of marginalized speech throughout virtually the entire city. It worked through social, material, and spatial dynamics in an effort to change the visual landscape and to provoke a reaction.

It is noteworthy that despite the fact that New York City had become a very segregated environment, writers of diverse backgrounds fostered this collective endeavor. The New York public railways and its seven hundred miles of track are in a city that is segregated by ethnic group and social class (Miller, 2004: 4). Such divisions were enforced by gangs and barrios, and institutionalized by the longstanding societal prejudices (Miller 2004: 29-30). Nonetheless, New York City writers were influenced by the kaleidoscope of neighborhoods that they grew up around, such as that of Bed Stuy, Chinatown, Greenwich Village, Spanish Harlem, Little Italy, Lower East Side, and the South Bronx. Their writing movement created an interracial, ethnic, gendered youth culture at grassroots level (Miller 2004: 29). Graffiti offered a chance for young people of virtually any background to contribute and be involved as an alternative to gangs (Stewart 2009: 33). Writers were writers first, and members of ethnic, religious, and other subgroups second if at all (Snyder 2009: 2).

Tagging the subways enabled a communication system between artists from all over the city; artists from the Lower East Side became known to artists in Brooklyn and the Bronx, and vice versa (Deitch 2011: 10). The subway system became the artistic link between neighborhoods and helped foster a collective coalescence between writers. Writers like PHASE 2, who is from South Bronx and of African American and Caribbean descent, claimed that writers built their community by using the subways as a "vernacular cybernetics" (Miller 2004: 28; Eglash 1995). The subways, along with other vehicles that moved around the city, were the best targets to tag for graffiti writers seeking fame, which also set them apart from gangs who typically wrote their graffiti on non-moveable spaces such as blocks and playgrounds (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 61). As the writers rose in prominence, gangs began to recognize the signatures, and members of the larger gangs tended to tolerate them (Stewart 2010: 34).

These early writers' grasp on the logics of space is remarkable. While New York City's subway lines appeared a maze to many, graffiti writers knew the system like cab drivers know the streets (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 89). Each individual train line had its own character and audience, as well as its advantages and disadvantages. For graffiti writers, there were certain high visibility lines that increased their prestige, while others, less visible, were of lower standing (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 89). Such knowledge and practices exemplify the golden rule of graffiti – know the location (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 89). Writers also did pieces on walls, which were good places to practice during periods when the buff[1] was operating (Chalfant and Prigoff 1987: 8). The walls were a convenient alternative to the trains for the writers to keep their names up (Chalfant and Prigoff 1987: 8). Along with the aim of communicating with other writers through tagging, the main motive of these early graffiti writers involved "getting up," or having their names seen by the largest possible audience. They therefore tended to write in high

volume in areas with high concentrations of people, and so they focused in on Manhattan in particular (Snyder 2009: 50). Staten Island, New York City's only borough without a subway, had a rapid transit surface railway that was heavily guarded, and so walls and handball courts presented the only spaces in which to establish a name there (Chalfant and Prigoff 1987: 39).

By the mid-1980s, it was claimed that every single train had at one time been spray-painted from top to bottom (Ganz 2004: 9). This changed around 1986, when the New York authorities began to put up fences around station yards and to buff trains regularly (Ganz 2004:9). Nevertheless, New York City graffiti writing had introduced the art form to the rest of the world, and along with it the art's numerous innovations and appropriations.

Graffiti writing had its breakthrough in 1984. Following initial appearances in the background of early rap videos, graffiti was soon packaged as a part of the "four elements" of hip-hop alongside break dancing, rap, and DJing (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 25). Important in popularizing the movement were Charlie Ahearn's film *Wild Style* (1983), Henry Chalfant and Tony Silver's documentary *Style Wars* (1983) and the publication of Henry Chalfant and Martha Cooper's book *Subway Art* (1988) (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 25). The confluences of New York's vibrant street scene including hip-hop, punk, and new wave provided important opportunities to spread the art form. Graffiti writer LEE painted in rock group Blondie's video for "The Rapture" in 1981. FUTURA toured with punk group The Clash in England in 1981, and in France the next year. PHASE 2, DELTA 2, and other writers were invited to Vienna to paint trolleys in 1984 (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 125). When the hip-hop scene reached Europe, it carried the graffiti movement with it (Ganz 2004: 9). The majority of the graffiti was based on American style, which still remains the most popular to this day (Ganz 2004: 9). Through the

hip-hop scene, graffiti entered almost every Western and Western influenced country, and then began to reach parts of Asia and the Middle East.

The emergence of the Internet also played an influential role in the evolution of graffiti. The website *Art Crimes* (launched in 1994 by Susan Farrell) has emerged as the most important global site for bringing the talent of writers to a wide audience, as well as providing graffiti artists elsewhere with access to other cultural influences (Ganz 2004: 9). Today the website displays images from 445 cities and attracts around 30,000 views a day. Graffiti now moves across numerous boundaries.

B. GRAFFITI AND (IL)LEGALITY

New York City graffiti writers developed their work in the face of protesting adults, laws against vandalism, arrests, beatings by police and private security guards, and organized graffiti removal efforts. From its inception in the US and also as it has globalized, modern graffiti has thrived on the notion that it is matter out of place. Graffiti represented a threat to the "system of meaning by which surfaces acquire value, integrity, and significance" (Stewart 1991: 216). Criminologists have argued that graffiti subcultures subvert dominant or mainstream values of sobriety, restraint and control (Droney 2010). Despite the fact that some graffiti has migrated into the respectable art world, graffiti remains a crime. Early graffiti writers risked imprisonment and physical injury and the bulk of their work on subways has been destroyed (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 23). They did not see their work as "matter out of place" (Stewart 1991); rather, they took pride in their ability to shed light on unused, forgotten spaces such as subways,

abandoned buildings, in-between spaces (Droney 2013: 105), and to subvert the race

consciousness of the larger society (Miller 2004: 32).

Arguably, no other art movement in human history has as thoroughly confounded the

deeply held concepts of public and private property and made itself a public-policy issue

(Gastman and Neelon 2010: 23). People who protested graffiti and organized graffiti removal

efforts place writers in the same category as graffiti gangs. Gang graffiti was well known in areas

of Philadelphia, California and the Southwest long before the New York subway variety emerged

(Gastman and Neelon 2010: 28). It was used chiefly to mark off the boundaries of ghettos and

ethnically exclusive neighborhoods (Stewart 2009:16). Public sentiment considered gang graffiti

to be a harbinger of danger and crime, and so the early writers in the New York City tried hard to

differentiate their style from gang graffiti and to explain to authority figures that they were not

gang members (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 90). As Roger Gasman and Caleb Neelon note in *The

History of American Graffiti,* "the word *gang* has few peers in its ability to get the American

public to suspend reason" (2010: 42). The idea of "gang" conjured up a particularly American

blend of fear and overreaction, what anthropologist Teresa Caldeira calls "talk of crime." Such

talk moves through everyday conversations, commentaries, discussions, narratives, and jokes

that have crime and fear as their subject, and is contagious (Caldeira 2000: 19). All of this serves

to reinforce people's feelings of danger, insecurity, and turmoil, as well as mainstream views

about the maintenance of hierarchies, race, class and public space (Caldeira 2000: 32). Due to the

association of graffiti with crime and gangs, public authorities in the US have made unauthorized

graffiti a very risky activity for writers. If convicted, subway painters today face almost certain

jail time as well as substantial legal fees and fines. Graffiti on American passenger trains is

cleaned almost immediately, and a tagged train no longer ever runs in public view (Gastman and Neelon 2010: 392).

The Broken Windows Theory, advanced by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in the early 1980s, also had a significant impact on the perceptions of graffiti and graffiti culture (Snyder 2009: 48). This theory has been influential on contemporary policing in New York City and much of the urban US (Snyder 2009: 48). Wilson and Kelling argue that signs of disorder such as broken windows are a signal to criminals that "no one cares" about maintaining order in that area/neighborhood, and that therefore it is a convenient space to commit crime (Snyder 2009: 48). In New York City, police and politicians have applied this theory to graffiti, arguing that although tagging might be a minor crime, it acts as an invitation for major crimes to occur (Synder 2009: 48). In his ethnography of graffiti culture in New York City, Gregory Snyder argues that if the broken windows theory held true then the highest concentrations of graffiti would occur in the areas with the highest crime rates where in fact the reality was the opposite. He compares statistics regarding rapes, murders, robberies, and felonious assault from First Precinct in Manhattan, (which includes neighborhoods such as SoHo and Tribeca), with the statistics the Seventy-first Precinct in Brooklyn, which includes Prospect Heights. His study revealed that Prospect Heights was a much more dangerous neighborhood in terms of violent crime than SoHo, which had much more graffiti (Snyder 2009:51).

Presently, critics focus not on graffiti sub-cultures, but on the association between graffiti and gang violence. The NYPD has reminded citizens that graffiti is harmful and illegal through a campaign flyer (circa 2006) that advertises a $500 reward for turning in one who defaces public property and includes the tag line "Remember, Graffiti Vandalism is a Crime" (Snyder 2009: 7). The continued criminalization of graffiti and the ongoing efforts to associate it with gangs and

violent crime thus still makes tagging difficult for artists in New York, as well as other US cities. In addition, systems of spatial segregation and control that work to keep upscale areas of the city respectable and clean regulate more marginal areas (Caldeira 2013).

C.   GRAFFITI COMES TO BEIRUT

Like many other parts of the world, graffiti reached Beirut through the influence of hip-hop culture. The Lebanese hip-hop scene was born towards the end of the 1990s, and featured artists rapping in Arabic (SISKA 2011: 93). At the time graffiti in Beirut consisted chiefly of political posters and stencils, or the writing of a lover's name (SISKA 2011:93). As had been the case with most other Lebanese design styles and trends, the first Lebanese graffiti was heavily influenced by Western graffiti, particularly New York City writers and movies like *Style Wars*. The first tags and drawings were written in English and French, not Arabic (Zoghbi 2011: 81). As the Lebanese hip-hop scene matured, artists like FISH and REK began graffiti writing in the style of New York City (SISKA 2011: 93). Meanwhile, visits to Beirut by European graffiti artists like PRIME and FABU from France and SENS from Germany also influenced the Lebanese graffiti scene (Zoghbi 2011: 81). At the same time, Lebanese artists practiced doing Arabic graffiti underground, on hidden walls and neglected factories. As they became more confident in their abilities and found that they were unrestricted by the police, they began to paint along the walls of the main highways in Beirut like Qarantina (Zoghbi 2011:81). And so in the early 2000s the Arabic graffiti and calligraffiti movement began to emerge and develop.

Beirut's Arabic graffiti arrived on the scene at a difficult time for Lebanon. The 2006 war with Israel was the trigger for the Beirut Arabic graffiti scene. Graffiti artists emerged with the

aim of bringing awareness of the war and the violence that was again plaguing their country, in a kind of repetition of their parent's experiences during the Civil War (1975-1990)[2]. The conflict was triggered on July 12, 2006,when Hezbollah attacked an Israeli border patrol on disputed Israeli territory, and in turn Israel launched a thirty-four day military operation against Lebanon – what Israel called its "Second Lebanon War" (Volk 2011: 175). This was the costliest Arab-Israeli war in Lebanon's history (Salem 2006: 18). It is estimated that Lebanon's economic losses totaled $7 billion, and it occurred at a time when the country was already $36 billion in debt due to post-civil war reconstruction loans and limited economic growth (Volk 2011: 176; Salem 2006: 18). While many of Beirut's youth, including some of my informants, have a vague memory of the Lebanese Civil War or, were born after its end, they are quite familiar with history of internal sectarian conflict and conflict with Israeli.

In the view of the new generation of artists, street art was a form of public expression designed to show citizens how Beirut was both an inspirational and oppressive city. Until today, Beirut's inefficiencies and complexities play a key role in the development of the street art and calligraffiti. Beirut's street art provides insight into the functions and practices of Beirut's political and social communities (Saleh 2011: 73). In her book *Marking Beirut,* Tala Saleh, a Saudi graphic designer based in Beirut, describes local graffiti culture as a "spray it, don't say it" type. That is, Beirut street artists spray messages of social critique on the walls, which are typically not openly spoken about so that the Lebanese public can see it, read it, and comment on it (Saleh 2011: 73).

Although the artists are small in number, they are very diverse and work in an array of neighborhoods. The earliest of these is the REK crew, which was originally founded by FISH and early members RAT and SISKA. ASHEKMAN was started by twin brothers Omar and

Mohamed Kabbani, and is both a hip-hop act and a street art team. ASHEKMAN are considered the pioneers of Lebanese Arabic graffiti, and their work engages with the problems of the Lebanese people, and their writing uses Lebanese vernacular and simplified Arabic typography (Zoghbi 2011: 82). Some of their powerful graffiti messages are *"al-Shāriʿa il-nā,"* "The Street Is Ours," and *"al-ʿayūn ʿa Beirut,"* "All Eyes on Beirut," (Figure 1:2). Katiba Khamsa, a Palestinian graffiti and hip-hop outfit living in a Beirut refugee camp, express their frustration with the humanitarian and political situation in the camps, their loyalty to Palestine, and their solidarity with ongoing Palestinian struggle (Zoghbi 2011: 82). Parekour + Graffiti (the P+G crew) was founded by graphic designer ORAS OPAC and friends from the Armenian community and its work tries to reach other areas of Lebanon.

During the last thirty years, prior to the emergence of calligraffiti, most urban graffiti was political and sectarian and the city's walls were covered with political posters and slogans (Zoghbi 2011: 81). For many in Beirut, such sectarian graffiti and political posters dating from the Civil War and its aftermath are connected to gruesome memories of desecration of sacred sites, abduction, rape, murder, and checkpoints (Traboulsi 2009). When the new street art emerged, artists were perceived as liberating the walls from the talk of "sectarian politics". Along with messages of awareness and social critique, often sprayed after tumultuous events, artists also wrote messages of hope and resilience.

It is in this manner Lebanese street artist SISKA first appeared on the public sphere. According to SISKA (2011: 93), "In the summer of 2006 during the last Israeli war on Lebanon, Beirut was empty and desperate. The citizens were sad, there was a strong will to express what they saw but they felt stuck." SISKA began to write graffiti in Arabic letters while collaborating with French graffiti artist PRIME, a resident of Beirut at the time. Together they wrote a series of

messages using patterns similar to those of earlier political messages. As SISKA explained, "Usually, political messages and signs were meant to divide the city into different territories. Our idea was to unify the message and the territory – one message for all, one city for all" (2011: 93). SISKA and PRIME focused their messages on the word "Beirut" with the aim of provoking an immediate reaction from citizens and in order to propose the notion that Beirut is a tough and resilient city (SISKA 2011: 93). Violent acts such as car bombings targeting politicians, security officials, and journalists, pushed SISKA and others like him to react. He notes (2011: 94), "Even though the messages did not speak about specific incidents, it was a way to not slip into the mode where you stay home, don't move and switch your brain off, which happened to most of the city whenever a bomb exploded." He wrote messages in Lebanese dialect such as, *"Li Beirut,"* "For Beirut", and *"Beirut in ḥakat,"* "If Beirut Could Speak." The latter was a collaboration with prominent Lebanese graffiti artist FISH, and was influenced by the title of well-known Lebanese author Said Akl's book *If Lebanon Could Speak* (Zoghbi 2011: 82). A book filled with short stories and poetry that was composed in an Arabic style, heavily imbued with vernacular Lebanese dialect (Salameh 2010: 195). The book was groundbreaking, and promoted a "Lebanese language" based on the Arabic lexicon and syntax (Salameh 2010: 195).

My informants ASHEKMAN, a prominent Lebanese hip-hop and graffiti duo, share sentiments similar to SISKA's. One of the twins explained that their main goals are to create a message that is void of specific political party politics and also emphasize the positive aspects of the city.

> When I do music or graffiti I never deal with any sectarian or political side. I try to keep the religion and politics inside my house, but my messages are also very blunt. When there was the invasion of Gaza in 2007 we did a big graffiti that said "*Gaza fī qalbī*" which means "Gaza In My Heart." But Gaza also means stab, so it can also mean "Stab In My Heart." In 2006 when Israel invaded Beirut we did the piece "All Eyes on Beirut" on the Qarantina highway. I guess we consider

ourselves the 8:00 evening news on the walls. If you shot me, I would go and spray "Jaime Shot Me." So we try to be clever, and know what to write and how to write it and when to put it.[3]

The street artists declare that their work does not advocate for any specific political party, however their graffiti is deeply political by nature. At the same time ideas of using street art to embellish public space while at the same time pointing out the country's faults became a shared notion amongst the other street artists in Beirut. YAZAN, one of the younger Beirut street artists, is a computer-engineering student at the American University of Beirut. Like most Beirut graffiti artists, YAZAN was inspired to get involved in graffiti when he was exposed the French hip-hop scene. In 2007, at age fourteen, YAZAN began to paint some of the largest graffiti murals on the walls of Beirut, and he is now one of the best-known graffiti artists in the Middle East. YAZAN promotes himself through Facebook[4] and other social media, and circulates his art locally by producing original pieces for homes of individuals, TV shows and shops, in addition to creating street art.

> I try to be constructive in my work. I find a big wall and I remove political posters that show off the political parties, which have destroyed our country for so long and I paint an elaborate piece over the stencils and statements for every cause that you can imagine. I paint in a nice way so that the people can enjoy the work and appreciate the aesthetic. I also paint blunt messages that I feel will have an impact, and can push Lebanese to improve things in their city and country. Sometimes people will ask me, "Are you from the municipality? Is someone paying you to do this?" I tell them no, that it is Sunday and that I like to paint on Sundays. They ask me who pays for this and I explain to them that I pay for it with my own money; one wall costs around two hundred to three hundred dollars. They will say, "Why are you doing this? It's Sunday, use this money to order food and stay home!" It is because people think this way that Lebanon is not improving, so I try to create messages that compel people to think deeper. The messages may not be directly beneficial, but they might be able to help improve things.[5]

If the early graffiti writers of New York City used the material and contained space of the subway system to shake the larger system of prejudice and institutionalized racial, gender, and

class boundaries (Miller 2004: 32), the graffiti artists of Beirut use the city's dilapidated walls to try to shake the corrupt sectarian system that their country is known for. This, for instance, is the intention of my informant ALI. ALI is a street artist from the city of Tripoli who is known for his work in Beirut, and who has done a few collaborative pieces with YAZAN. ALI tries to use the walls of the city as his canvas on which to fight against social and political pressures that mandate people to act in corrupt or narrowly sectarian ways[6]. In his view people in Beirut need art on the streets because they are tired of the talk of politics and sectarian discord.

> My messages are political and social, the two are really interrelated here in Lebanon, but they do not represent a specific political party. My messages are intended to represent the people who objectively criticize the problems in the country. I guess I belong to these people. One of my pieces was intended to criticize the corruption amongst police in Lebanon (Figure 1:3). I painted a stencil of the *darakā* (police officer), and on his shirt is the design similar to "I love New York," or "I love Beirut," except it says "I love Corruption" in Arabic. This piece does not signify any political party; it just criticizes the politics and the corruption without necessarily offering a solution. It makes the people aware so there are more chances for change. I do think this way.[7]

It is worth noting that while the artists in Beirut assert that what they are doing is a means to embellish the city and flip the dominant order of sectarianism, it would be incorrect to assume that these artists are wholly concerned with making Lebanon secular through their street art. As YAZAN explained,

> I do not want to pose myself as a secular freedom activist who will remove sectarianism from Lebanon. I do not do a piece specifically to be secular, but I specifically do a piece to be not sectarian, which is secular in itself. But in reality to remove sectarianism out of Lebanon you need money and proper infrastructure such as schools, social welfare to help the people, and I don't have that. This is how sectarian parties have a grip on us. The people need to live and they are with these politicians because they give them their basic needs. But really, the politicians use the government's money for the basic needs in the districts that are of his own sect or religion, as if it was his own money. This is why we are in debt.[8]

While graffiti artists in Beirut may not openly proclaim a specific political stance, what is notable about Beirut street artists like YAZAN is that his notion of what his graffiti might achieve is rather modest:

> What I try to do is to promote a way of thinking. For example, under the graffiti portrait I did of Fairouz[9] in Gemmayze (Figure 1:4) I wrote in calligraffiti a quote by the Palestinian rapper Tamer Nafar[10] that reads, "our grandfathers invented the zero and our grandchildren became zeroes". This quote implies a decline in the Arab world, and the decline is purely political. From this, I want to present to the people who are aware of this reality to understand that the politicians do not control them because they are merely employees of the government. But I cannot say that my graffiti and my graffiti only will make this country better, because that cannot happen. It will never happen. It is such a tremendous task and I cannot do it.[11]

Beirut's street artists also understand the golden rule of graffiti concerning the importance of location and visibility. When they first began spraying graffiti in open areas, the Qarantina district was chosen because it is an industrial area full of concrete bridges that provides a lot of empty space and high visibility from the highway. The area is located next the port of Beirut, hosted an Armenian refugee camp established in the 1920s, and later a Palestinian refugee camp (SISKA 2011:94). A notorious massacre of Palestinians occurred there during the civil war (1976), and the area is now mostly filled with slaughterhouses and factories that had been present before the war (SISKA 2011: 94). Soon, graffiti spread rapidly throughout the area and many of the youth from nearby areas began writing messages focusing on the word Beirut and using Arabic in their writing like the street artists before them, including my informants. Lebanese street artists and my informants now more often than not choose spaces inside the city for the purpose of being seen by the local community, and write on walls that are heavily loaded with bullet holes, weathered political posters, or a long and complicated history.

Whereas some of the earliest artists worked in Qarantina, SISKA's first Arabic graffiti pieces were written in areas laden with memory of the Civil War. He placed *"Beirut mā bitmūt,"*

"Beirut Never Dies," on a wall in the city center in Monot, because the area was a notorious

fighting zone during the Civil War and close to the Green Line, the front that divided "Muslim"

West from "Christian" East Beirut (SISKA 2011: 93). Today that area is a popular party space

full of bars, restaurants and cafes. SISKA sprayed this graffiti during the Israeli night shift

bombings of Beirut's southern suburbs in July 2006 (SISKA 2011: 93).

Although Beirut's neighborhoods vary along class, ethnic, and religious lines, the

majority of the street artists feel that in their messages they can express meanings relevant to all

Lebanese people, and not just one specific group of them. As FISH notes, "The thing about the

words we use is that they are meant to touch everyone, not just one specific group of Lebanese

people. Everyone reads it, everyone knows Beirut and everyone loves Beirut[12]." ASHEKMAN

expressed similar attitudes:

> Unfortunately Beirut was and still is a check-board for "divide and rule" strategy.
> As for us, we believe that Beirut is Beirut, we choose graffiti according to the
> event and wall for availability and visibility. But the message is what's most
> important. We are trying to convey positive messages and to stay away from
> political games. We are creating are own rules, which for us implies that graffiti
> are for all Lebanese. We choose Beirut as our graffiti playground since we were
> born and raised in this city, and we are making it a better looking place.[13]

Although most Lebanese street artists intend for their graffiti to be for all the Lebanese,

and in fact for the most part it generates positives reactions, on occasion it is not met with

enthusiasm. YAZAN explains:

> I was painting in Achrafieh, which a Christian area. A person very high up in the
> municipality came and saw me doing graffiti with my friend who had a
> Palestinian flag on his shirt. He was kind of a racist and when he saw the
> Palestinian flag he got ticked, he thought we were Palestinian and he told us, "this
> is Achrafieh it is a Christian area so you can't be doing that!" He wanted to arrest
> me and I talked him out of arresting me by showing him that I lived in Achrafieh
> by speaking French. I actually wasn't living in Achrafieh, but my school was
> there. He calmed down and told me to paint the wall black and leave, and that is
> what I did.[14]

While there is some misunderstanding of and negative comment towards the artists'

works, Beirut graffiti has risen rapidly in popularity. This is mostly due to the fact that the

messages have generated positive reactions from the city's communities, but is also due to the

fact that Beirut graffiti has emerged within a different legal context than the places where

modern graffiti originated.

D.   GRAFFITI AND (IL)LEGALITY IN BEIRUT

Spatial hierarchies based on class as well as systems of legality and illegality function

differently in Beirut than in New York City, and thus the graffiti culture operates differently as

well. Although the street artists themselves were inspired by the concepts that structured graffiti

culture in the West such as visual rebellion against the city and the game of tagging, they, as well

as the majority of Beirut society, do not associate their art with vandalism. Attitudes towards

public space are also very different than that of the West, as my informant ALI explains:

> It is the idea of public property. In Western countries, or well, more developed
> countries, public property is linked to the idea of the law. So if you draw
> something on any wall, you basically do not have the right to express yourself that
> way because of the law. Here public property is just public property, and the law
> is always broken. Also street art here is kind of new, there were writers before
> that but it was more of political logos from political parties. Then Lebanese artists
> began to look at the work of artists in the US and in Europe and began imitating
> then innovating their own style.[15]

The second important factor is the size of Beirut. My informants who understand the

graffiti term "all-city" see that such a concept is not as relevant in Beirut as it is in New York. As

YAZAN explained to me, an artist could fill a bag with spray paint, ride their bike around the

city and tag their name in all neighborhoods within a day or two[16]. Furthermore, the response

time for the police to apprehend the Beirut tagger is far greater than that of New York City. And

even if the police caught an artist he/she, as we've seen with YAZAN, is usually able to talk

his/her way out of being charged with a crime. Also the police do not really consider such forms

of street art to entail vandalism. The only form of graffiti considered defacement is the

political/sectarian graffiti of the sort that was popular during the Civil War and made illegal in

2008 (Saleh 2011: 77).

Both the street artists that I interviewed as well as Pascal Zoghbi, author of *Arabic*

Graffiti, assert that graffiti is technically illegal, and is considered by Lebanese law to be an

infringement of public property. But, they state, because law enforcement in Lebanon is corrupt

and at the same time it sees no compelling reason to fight against street art, the art therefore is

tolerated. It should be noted, however, that Lebanon being a weak state has very blurred

boundaries between public and private property. Furthermore, the artists share a moral

imperative to not mark upscale and polished architecture, such as the downtown Souks. They

only mark the dirty and dilapidated spaces.

Street artists in Beirut have been afforded a great deal of leeway to develop what is

officially an extra-legal art form. They have much more time to write their messages and spray

their pictures than typically do taggers in the West. This has given them more opportunity to

promote themselves as artists and to generate a greater response from the city's residents. Many

of my informants' stories give credence to this phenomenon. YAZAN explained that while

working on a graffiti piece of the Lebanese journalist Samir Kassir (Figure 1:5), he was caught

by the *mʿalūmāt* or Lebanese Internal Security.

> They assumed I was doing a political portrait, but the thing is that they had no
> idea it was Samir Kassir's face because it is pixelated. Up close all you would be
> able to see are squares, but far away you can see Samir Kassir's face. They began
> interrogating me and this lasted for two hours. Then while one policeman was on
> the phone the other one started asking me questions like, "So you can paint faces?
> Can you paint my face?" I told him, "Of course! After I paint this face here I will

paint yours and we can be friends." I began to show him my sketches and then the officers switched places and the one that was on the phone began to interrogate me and search my bag. Then he started asking me artistic questions like "Can you paint my motocross?" [YAZAN is referring to a motorcycle] He started me showing pictures of it and I told him "Of course I can!" I have never painted a motocross in my life. At the end they told their superior that they could not bring me in because I was their friend now. This is the nice thing about getting caught doing graffiti in Beirut is that you can always get out of it by talking.[17]

One should not assume, however, that graffiti in Beirut is entirely free from intervention. The municipality censored ALI's "I Love Corruption" stencil shortly after it was completed. ALI gave me another example of a similar circumstance, which suggests that there is more policing of Beirut's street art.

> The political graffiti I do is more critical than anything. Once I did this stencil that criticizes the Ministry of Lebanese Tourism. Lebanon in the Middle East, especially in the Arab world, is taken as the penthouse of the Middle East. So lots of people come here from the gulf because they are sexually frustrated. So they come here with their families and they stay at expensive hotels, then they leave their families and go to a prostitution area. So I did a stencil that criticizes this, I drew some open legs and in the female vagina I did the logo for the Ministry of Tourism, and it looked a lot like a vagina. And it was censored, because most of the critical stuff I've done has been painted over.[18]

This story shows that the street artists in Beirut are somewhat limited in the graffiti that they create. It may not be considered vandalism, but people can and do interfere. However, Police in Beirut do not typically enforce laws against graffiti; the importance of being a street artist in Lebanon therefore is not in the thrill of being illegal but in the ability to share messages in the hopes that all Lebanese can relate to them. ALI makes a similar claim, explaining that the tolerance for street art in Beirut could be attributed to the attitudes of the public. If a street artist paints a wall and the owner of the wall likes it, then he is not going to call the police. But in the United States and Europe, it does not matter what your message or portrait is, or how cool it is, the street artist is simply breaking the law. One day when ALI saw a wall covered in posters of politicians that had dried out from the sun, he asked the owner of the wall if he could paint over

it. The carpenter allowed him to do so as long as he did not do anything political. Once ALI

began painting the owner began to help him by providing a ladder and food:

> This kind of changed the whole graffiti scene. The owner of the wall was very
> friendly, but not just him, people from all over the neighborhood began to walk by
> and admire the piece. I can feel it in the people that they need this. It gives them
> enjoyment, hope, and inspiration. You have the message in your mind but it could
> be different from their interpretation, but they like it.[19]

ALI's anecdote is a good example of how graffiti tolerance in Beirut provides a space for

artists to work and also allows passersby to interact more deeply with street art. This

phenomenon makes a large claim to how such a seemingly exclusive art form like graffiti is not

necessarily limited to a select group or context, but that it can develop in environments where

rules flexible enough enable such action, rather than restrict it (Calhoun 2013: 197). The majority

of Beirut's street artists share the sentiment that street art is not just a rebellious act against the

system and the law because the political system is corrupted, the graffiti thus a reaction to the

problems of Lebanon. The fact that the government and infrastructure is ineffective allows artists

to express their critical views in such a way that tries to speak to Beirut's communities and

neighborhoods, in part simply because the art can be relatively permanent.

The street art movement in Beirut has become a catalyst for the formation of local

collectives and non-profits. White Wall Beirut[20] works to effectively publicize the work of street

artists and give new impetus to the scene. Alwanfejar[21] is a fairly new collective inspired by the

graffiti scene that works to embellish the urban landscape in the Dahiyeh by painting the plating

of sandbags in front of shops and public spaces, and huge concrete blast protections that are used

as protection from car-bombings. The Dihzahyners[22] are a similar group that paints a series of

urban stairways, sharing a general mentality that through paint and color and street art, they can

help rejuvenate the city.

I would like to conclude this chapter by proposing that if we look comparatively at the different contexts in which graffiti is produced, we can see that graffiti is a collective action that dismantles standardized spaces and reveals the complexities of the city.

A comparative analysis of the New York City and Beirut graffiti environments reveals that the nature of vandalism is culturally determined. Author of *Aerosol Kingdom* Ivor Miller claims that there is in fact no crime called "vandalism," and that the term was propagated by elites to define the activities of the lower classes (Miller 2004: 18). In 1982, New York City lawyer Christopher Stone argued that the law condemns malicious mischief, malicious damage, littering and destruction of property: "When the word vandalism came to describe these crimes, it did so first in the press and then in the popular imagination…The politicians and journalist know that the evocative power of the word is more important than its meaning. For them vandalism is simply a term that excites the middle class fear of uncontrolled space, the native's distrust of the immigrant, or the adult's impatience with children" (1982: 13, 14, 15, 31).

Street artists in Beirut are activists contributing to the development of visual communication in their city and community, and in creating a visual street identity of Beirut. The street artists' desire is a collective action through graffiti in their urban environment, which is a collective endeavor between space and people. Questions arise though as to how the use of Arabic vernacular and traditional calligraphy plays such a vital role in societal perceptions of the graffiti, which the next chapter seeks to address.

E.   LIST OF IMAGES

FIGURE 1:1 *"Beirut Taḥkī,"* "Beirut Speaks," by FISH and PRIME. Qarantina, Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland, June 2013.

FIGURE 1:2 *"al-ʿayūn ʿa Beirut,"* "All Eyes on Beirut," by ASHEKMAN. Qarantina, Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland, June 2013.

FIGURE 1:3 *"(I Heart) al-fasād,"* "I Love Corruption," by ALI. Hamra, Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by ALI, June 2012. Used with the permission of ALI.

FIGURE 1:4, "Our Grandfathers Invented the Zero, and Their Grandchildren Became Zeroes," by YAZAN. Gemmayze, Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland, June 2013.

FIGURE 1:5, "Desperation is Not Fate: A Tribute to Samir Kassir," by YAZAN. Qarantina, Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland June 2013.

III.   CHAPTER TWO: TRADITIONS & COSMOPOLITAN NATURE

Why do street artists in Beirut write in Lebanese Arabic vernacular and why do they appropriate traditional Arabic calligraphy? How do these two factors account for the apparent success of graffiti in Beirut? What is calligraffiti's significance as an effort of cultural survival, a response to the perceived decline of Arabic in Lebanon in favor of English and French, which has been going on for many decades?

The Lebanese street artists use Arabic in his or her graffiti for the purpose of it being read by potentially everyone. This is very different from the original New York City graffiti writers, whose tags were legible only to those involved in the graffiti sub-culture. It is important to understand graffiti's value in Beirut as it reflects the traditional elements of Arabic calligraphy, which has been a ubiquitous part of their culture for many generations.

The calligraffiti style is not unique to Lebanon. The first modern graffiti writers of New York City were influenced by the structure and forms of calligraphy and even used the term "calligraffiti" to describe their style (Miller 2004). Amsterdam-based graffiti artist and visual designer Niels "SHOE" Meulmani first called attention to the term "calligraffiti" in 2007 and defined it as "traditional handwriting with a metropolitan attitude." This notion influenced Beirut's street artists and also reflects the importance with which they regard incorporating the Arab tradition into their modern work.

A.   ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY & ARABIC GRAFFITI

Arabic belongs to the group of Semitic languages; the written language can be traced back to the Nabataean script dating from the third century CE. Arabic calligraphy began to be

developed around the seventh century, heavily influenced by Islamic culture (Boutros 2007). It established as an art form towards the end of the ninth century (Rajput 2013: 10). The transcribing of Arabic script came to be seen as an emblem of the Islamic tradition, its reproduction a matter of religious piety. This in turn allowed the Arabic language and its visual representation to be a unifying cultural force (AbiFares 2011: 15).

One of the main contributing factors to the rise of Arabic calligraphy was the ban on figural representation in Islamic art (Chahine 2012: 24). Accordingly, the sacred characters of the Arabic script were elevated in status and came to be regarded as an art form, developing into the calligraphic arts (Rajput 2013: 9). Calligraphy became pervasive as an object of patronage, first in its function as a transmitter of the holy texts and then in the form of ornamentation for public architecture, such as mosques or shrines (Zarkar 2013). Some scholars suggest that the art form was stimulated by non-Arab artistic impulses, which encouraged the use of calligraphy as a decorative element in architecture in places such as Persia, Central Asia, and the Indian sub-continent (Rajput 2013: 10).

As Islamic civilization expanded, covering large areas from Africa, Asia, and Europe, each of the new cultures that came into contact with Islamic civilization contributed to the development of Arabic calligraphy (Elmansy 2014). New scripts were invented to meet new secular functions, and the increasing demand of administrative and commercial correspondence (Alhabeeb 2005). The scripts developed and flourished when Arab/Islamic civilizations were at their cultural and economic peak (AbiFares 2013: 16).

In Baghdad Ibn Muqlah (886-940) designed and developed many of the calligraphic styles that are known today as the Six Pens Style: the *Thuluth, Naskhi, Muhaqqaq, Rayhani, Tauqi, and Ruq'a* (Rajput 2013: 18; Al Rajab 2011:23). Ibn Muqlah was the first to formulate the

idea that the proportions of Arabic letters and their relationship to one another are based on geometric principles (Rajput 2013: 18). Amendments to Arabic calligraphy since then have been enhancements of Ibn Muqlah's original work, and so the tradition of teaching and learning Arabic calligraphy has remained basically the same over subsequent centuries (Al-Rajab 2011: 23).

Calligraphy in Beirut was once pervasive in public space. Until the 1980s, the city's shop owners regularly commissioned calligraphers to write the name and descriptions of their establishments' newly painted, white walls, and the calligraphy became an important element in the identity of the shop (Zoghbi 2011: 43). Today, however, Beirut's current reconstruction period along with new materials and technologies have taken the place of the unique urban experience that the calligraphic shop signs once provided (Taan 2004: 192). Few calligraphic shop signs are now present in the city (Figure 2:1).

Calligraphy is also found on trucks and can still be seen to this day (Figure 2:2). During the 1950s when American truck models began to be imported, a tradition emerged of calligraphers writing on their backs and sides (Kassatly 2011: 49). Most of this work was on farmers' cargo trucks, but it was also found on passenger busses and vans. The writing was typically for the sake of protecting the truck and its driver from accidents, street hazards or jealous glances, and involved slogans such as "Snip and melt" or "May the evil be thwarted", and symbols like the hand of Fatima or a blue eye to ward off evil (Kassatly 2011: 49). Some messages revealed the anxieties, fears, and social/political ideas of the truck driver, such as "Speed up, don't worry, the ambulance will collect you, but only your mother will cry about you," and "Girls are beautiful, but they are all liars" (Kassatly 2011: 50). Other messages functioned in dialogue with other drivers during a traffic jam such as, "Have mercy on yourself

and other, don't drive while using your cell phone," and "Don't go fast, death will go faster" (Kassatly 2011: 53). These messages were written in Lebanese dialect, exemplifying how this medium was used for speech and showing a relationship between space and aesthetic, public life and social relations.

Using similar logics, the street artists use Arabic calligraphy in most of their graffiti. ASHEKMAN recently completed a calligraffiti piece in Sodeco that reads *"mā tishrab wa tsūq,"* "Don't drink and drive," (Figure 2:3). Anyone traveling north of Beirut from Gemmayze would not be able to miss the large mural of Arabic calligraffiti by Ali, YAZAN, and ZEPHA consisting of Sufi poems and a large headline from the negative space that reads, *"al-thawra ʿala al-nifs,"* "Revolution over the self" (Figure 2:4).

There are marked similarities between graffiti and calligraphy; graffiti is often described as a type of urban calligraphy, with a similar set of geometric and ornamental rules (Nicoarea 2013). For Arab calligraffiti artists, calligraphy and graffiti art are "two daughters of the same parents" (Massoudy 2011: 31). Gestures of both are written with the whole body and in sync with breathing (Massoudy 2011: 31). Graffiti artists do not just walk up to a wall and aimlessly spray paint; rather, they follow specific methods, sketching the letters first, then writing the structure of a letter with spray paint. When one spray paints the strokes of a letter on a surface, one does not breath so that the line can be smooth and straight. The physical gestures of the Arabic calligraphic tradition are also based on breathing techniques, which prescribe that when one is directing the brush he/she does not breathe (Massoudy 2011: 31).

I learned something about these movements when I took classes in Arabic calligraphy in Beirut and studied the Ruq'a style. The very first lesson involved learning how to write three points, the basic structures of the letters, and matching these movements with breathing. My

teacher, who called himself the dictator, had me copying these movements a hundred or so times, until I internalized the movements in my mind. This is how traditional calligraphy has been taught for centuries (Al-Rajab 2011).

Calligraffiti is a visual manifestation that links old traditions, urban space, and art. Street artists see calligraffiti as essential to their objective of embellishing public space and making particular spaces unique, just as the calligraphy had done in the past with shop signs and trucks. Their appropriation of Arabic graffiti also reflects an interest in promoting Lebanese identity and heritage, and a desire to innovate old traditions. For example, after practicing with throw-ups and wild styles with Latin Letters, YAZAN felt that he should develop graffiti in ways that could pertain to his country:

> I feel that Lebanon needs an identity, even in graffiti, because first of all we are very influenced by the West, and the graffiti that started here in Beirut was one more thing [that was Western influenced]. I would see tagging and would think about making it more Oriental, something that takes more energy. So I began to work with Arabic calligraphy, because if you know it is a bit level up from the West. You have strict schools and fonts and weights and measures. Western calligraphy does not have all of these rules, and Arabic calligraphy has too many rules. I would look at the pure Kufic letters and its intricate shapes and I thought "Oh my god this is wildstyle in Arabic!" So I began to develop my own style, I do not write Arabic calligraphy, or calligraphy graffiti, but I do a mixture of both[1].

ASHEKMAN shares a similar view. Both hope is that calligraffiti will become new "style" of graffiti for Lebanon. For them, calligraffiti makes Lebanon special because it can capture different audiences and different generations.

> I am proud of my heritage, proud of my language, and my identity. I think that Arabic is a rich language and it provides something unique for us here in Lebanon. Usually we do this concept called "Old School Meets New School." Once, when we did our piece "Don't drink and drive," we used the old school Kufic font and we applied it with the new school graffiti. The Fairouz piece that we did at Forum de Beyrouth (Figure 2:5) is also "old school meets new school," we used the Diwani Arabic calligraphy with our graffiti. People appreciate it and they can relate to it better than the Latin graffiti, like, my parents are in their seventies and they can read it and appreciate the traditional aspects. Also the

younger generation that are wanting to be graffiti artists are inspired from this because they see calligraphy as a bit old fashioned, but the see the *calligraffiti* and they're like "wow." You know Henry Chalfant[2] the photographer and writer of *Style Wars*? He came to AUB in 2010 to give a talk and they called us to do an interview. He featured us on his website and said, "you guys are so unique, I go to Berlin and to Tokyo, and all over the world and I never see the people do graffiti in their language."[3]

Through this hybrid of calligraphy and graffiti, both are becoming more accessible to different strata of society. Graffiti in Beirut is also shifting towards the proverbial traditions associated with calligraphy, where the name fades but the message remains. The style is not met without some criticism, mostly on the part of professional calligraphers. Considering that the tradition of learning calligraphy has kept the practice alive for many centuries, it has been difficult for some master calligraphers to accept the changes brought to the tradition by modern calligraffitists (Al-Rajab 2011: 24), as YAZAN explains:

> My work could be considered a more contemporary form of calligraphy and calligraphers don't like me because my work lacks a strict set of rules that do not make room for innovation. I think this is a negative connotation for Arabic calligraphy. My work is a trade off, I make the script more legible so people can read it and it makes the audience more familiar with calligraphy. I try to promote the idea that we should not copy, but we should innovate our styles and maybe if it becomes popular enough it will become one of those six major styles. The development of calligraphy was not only to spread the Quran, but it was also to spread the glory of each designer. For example, the Kufic font developed in Iraq, then someone innovated from it and created Kufic Maghrebi. My take on this is that each country has been developing its own style to make itself known and to glorify itself, and this is what I try to do for Lebanon. I want to develop a style that is for Lebanon and that can glorify this city.[4]

YAZAN wants to see calligraffiti develop, as opposed to being an art of copying forms and rules as one is taught with traditional calligraphy. Even if it is not without rules, graffiti does involve more freedom from tradition than calligraphy, which is evident in the fact that aerosol art uses a spray can rather than a brush and is not bound to the same weights and measures as traditional calligraphy. Both art forms play an important social and political role in society, yet

graffiti does so in a more aggressive way (Massoudy 2011: 31). Calligraphers and street artists both have accepted roles in Beirut society, but because the latter are innovating and are operating in the public streets, their message is probably more powerful, and more accessible, and they feel this is good for their society.

B.   THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LEBANESE ARABIC

As ASHEKMAN and YAZAN explain, their use of Arabic language and elements of calligraphy in Beirut's street art is done to emphasize connections to what they see as the collective identity and heritage, but these are complicated issues in Lebanon. Language is a significant marker of identity, and the acquisition of foreign languages and literacy in native languages shape an individual's sense of self and community (Womack 2012: 5). The artists choose Arabic as their graffiti language not just because this makes a claim to their Arab identity, but it also makes them somewhat unique in the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic context of Lebanon. It is important to stress as well that they use Arabic script and calligraphy to write in Lebanese dialect, rather than in classical Arabic. So, when the artists declare that writing their graffiti in Arabic is a part of their identity and heritage, what they seem to be saying is that being Lebanese is a part of their identity and heritage. Why is Arabic significant in this regard?

It is important to reflect upon the intricacies in defining Lebanon on the bases of identity, heritage, and language. Lebanon, ruled by the French from 1922 to 1943, is now integrated into the Arab world (Kaufman 2004: 22). However, as Asher Kaufmann (2004: 22) notes, the constitution's focus on the Arabness of Lebanon does not really resonate with most Lebanese, who conceptualize their identity in such a cosmopolitan, multi-cultured, and multi-sectarian

environment. Indeed, Lebanon is a country with a "mosaic of cultures, a linguistic kaleidoscope, and a vivacious population" (Akl 2007: 92). As Linda Akl (2007: 94) discusses in her analysis of cultural and language complexities in Lebanese education, the way that multiculturalism is defined in the United States implies hegemonic and individualistic notions. The normative populations are white Anglo-Saxon and English is the main language. Multiculturalism then refers to minority groups, racial differences, and foreigners who are put under pressure to integrate (Akl 2007: 94). On the contrary, Lebanon characterizes its culture by the absence of a single dominant culture. The mélange of sub-cultures that typify Lebanon are expressed through their ethnic, religious, and political characteristics (Akl 2007: 95). These factors intersect in such a way that ethnic identification is associated with linguistic identity and political and religious affiliations (Akl 2007: 95).

Lebanon's constitution divides up representation according to multiple identities, not only in relation to sect but also to language and ethnicity (Deeb and Harb 2013: 128). The issue of the national language of Lebanon has been at the center of public debate ever since Greater Lebanon was established in 1920 (Kauffman 2004: 17). Today Lebanese youth culture struggles to understand an identity that for some is lost between English as the language of globalization, the "Frenchised," the "Phoenicians," and the Arabic cultures (Taan 2004: 193). They're often conflated or absent of their identity. As Laura Deeb and Mona Harb note (2013: 128) the Arabic-English-French patois used by many Lebanese across class lines is one of the major markers of Lebanese multicultural identity, and today many Lebanese are able to switch between the country's three main languages, English, Arabic, and French with ease. Lebanese proficiency in multilingual code switching has also increased with education. Even Lebanon's worst public

schools teach English or French along with classical Arabic, beginning at the elementary level (Deeb and Harb 2013: 113).

If language is one of the most distinct markers of localized identity, then each faction of Lebanese culture conveys its individuality and its distinctiveness by the language it has adopted (Akl 2007: 99). In many cases, especially on the streets, this could be a mix of all three major spoken languages including colloquial Arabic, and it follows no rules or grammar and if written is usually done in English script (Akl 2007: 99). A good example of the complexity is a common phrase used by the Lebanese that combines English, Arabic and French: *"Hi, kifak, ca va?"* or "Hi, how are you, fine?" Today however, a number of conferences[5] and campaigns[6] are being launched by Lebanese teachers for the purpose of "saving the Arabic language." The people leading these efforts claim that the five-decade decline of Arabic is a part of the "failure of politics" and they hope that workshops organized in schools and universities can help raise awareness among youth about the importance of their mother tongue.

Beirut's street artists are well aware of this Arabic "decline" and hope that through their work they can influence a younger generation to regard Arabic as "cool." When artists like YAZAN see young artists copy his style, he considers it a small victory.

> I would like to see more development with Arabic calligraphy in graffiti. I see this sometimes, people will see my work on my Facebook page and then they will copy my style. I think this is nice, it means I've had some kind of influence. Because the thing is that the graffiti mentality of the West is centered on getting up and becoming famous, and kids here find that to be really cool, and they all want to be gangsters. So when I do my graffiti and I see kids mimicking it, I consider it a small victory. I influence them to adopt their own culture and not the culture of the West[7].

ASHEKMAN agrees that in an environment where Arabic has been on the demise for many decades, Arabic graffiti is making a provocative statements while also influencing pop-culture.

> We have this mission, all over the region and especially with the younger generation. Arabic language is becoming less cool, people speak more English and French and then I will wear my street-wear with the t-shirts I've designed and people are like "Wow! You have a cool t-shirt, it has Arabic." We have a mission to make Arabic cool again.[8]

It is significant therefore that these street artists are innovating with an art form

originating in the West, and in a context that is already highly influenced by the West, but are

using the art in such a way as to remind their audience of a major shared interdependency

Lebanese citizenship, which is the Arabic language. Colloquial Arabic is very rarely written in

Lebanon, with the exception of its occasional appearance in novels, poems, songs, theatrical

pieces, and zajal.[9] Classical Arabic is the language of the media and formal publications, and

Lebanese Arabic is very different from the classical in many respects – especially in vowels and

pronunciation. Nonetheless, Lebanese Arabic is the language spoken by most of the population.

For street artists, writing messages in Arabic proclaims their identity as Arabs and their hopes for

more recognition of the language over French and English. At the same time, writing in

Lebanese Arabic reveals their underlying reason for the graffiti, which is to offer something for

all Lebanese to understand and relate to. As the artists lay claim to their Arab identity and

heritage, they also try to posit a unified Lebanon through the common use of colloquial Arabic,

as YAZAN says:

> I was painting my Fairouz piece in Gemmayze using calligraphy in my graffiti and the *mʿalūmāt* (Lebanese Secret Police) came and were upset because they thought it was Koran. I was able to talk my way out of the situation by simply explaining that it was just abstract calligraphy with Fairouz. One time I was painting in a Muslim area with this Oriental Arabesque motif and it had an orange cross beside it. The thing is an orange cross signifies a political Christian party. Then this guy came and said to me, "why are you painting this orange cross in this area, we don't like that!" I told him, "You know, this cross is actually very famous. It was actually sculpted into the architecture of a Mosque in Morocco. So you should know that this cross is not Christian, and even if it was it should not be a problem because we are all living here together." He did not like what I said, but eventually he left.[10]

FISH is noted saying, "The words we use are meant to touch everyone, not just one specific group of Lebanese people," and ASHEKMAN claims, "For us, Beirut is Beirut." Though these artists feel that knowledge of other languages is highly prestigious and valuable in many discourse communities, they assuredly perceive Arabic as a symbol of their Lebanese identity. Even ASHEKMAN's name is a Lebanese street slang word that comes from the French word *echappement*, which means the exhaust pipe of a car. They understand that English is still the forefront of higher education, business, science and technology (Bahous et. al. 2011). French is often the language for cultural activities such as the fine arts, music, dance, and literature. Standard Arabic is the country's official language and is taught in schools (Bahous et. al. 2011), yet colloquial Arabic is used in the home and in daily conversation.

This chapter has illustrated the ways in which Beirut's street artists are using two formerly exclusive forms of media, graffiti and calligraphy, and attempting to make them accessible to their society. The artists' use of calligraphy to glorify the city is manifested in their juxtapositioning of the two forms, with a hope that Beirut's calligraffiti can be *the* graffiti style for Lebanon, as opposed to Latin letters. Through their messages they show how Arabic letters can be used as forms of great beauty, and also to communicate meaning. Secondly, the artists hope that with their work they can provide a more nuanced understanding of the role that Lebanese Arabic plays in their society. While there are ongoing controversies about the nature of Lebanese identity, heritage, and language, and while many Lebanese are divided by religious doctrines and political ideologies, the artists are attempting to remind Lebanese society of something that they all share on a daily basis. The artists acknowledge Lebanese multiculturalism in their work but at the same time place Arabic at the forefront. While the artists

are heavily influenced by Western pop-culture and modernity, they also value the traditional aspects of their society.

Beirut's Arabic graffiti scene has been widely accepted by a large audience of Lebanese and has infiltrated into popular culture. Efforts by groups like ASHEKMAN to make Arabic "cool" have been brandished in forms of new media, and commodities. Now that the graffiti has achieved widespread popularity in the country, its infiltration into popular culture must be scrutinized.

C. LIST OF IMAGES

FIGURE 2:1, Calligraphic shop sign. Gemmayze, Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland, July 2013.

FIGURE 2:2 Calligraphy on a truck. Qarantina, Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland, June 2013.

FIGURE 2:3, *"ma tashrab wa tsūq,"* "Don't Drink and Drive," by ASHEKMAN. Sodeco, Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland, August 2013.

FIGURE 2:4 *"al-thawra ʿala al-nifs,"* "Revolution Over the Self," by ALI, YAZAN, AND ZEPHA. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland, July 2013.

FIGURE 2:5 *"Li Beirut,"* "For Beirut" by ASHEKMAN. Forum de Beyrouth, Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland, June 2013. A picture of famous Lebanese singer Fairouz, who has a song by the same title.

IV.   CHAPTER THREE: GETTING UP' COMMERCIAL

Street art in Beirut has become extensively popular and highly commercialized. This ascent occurred rapidly, roughly six years after it emerged in the public sphere in 2006, and has now taken on the characteristics of being a ubiquitous part of popular culture. As explained in Chapter One, non-profit organizations such as White Wall Beirut, The Dizhayners, and Alwanefjar have formed to give new impetus to the graffiti scene and share hopes that Beirut can benefit from this kind of embellishment of public space. There are even Arabic graffiti writing workshops held that involve street art showcases, live music, and lessons in urban Arabic lettering and type design. The artists' backgrounds have naturally played a role in this popularization; most are from the middle class and obtained college educations from universities like American University Beirut and Lebanese American University, and use this experience to market themselves effectively.

The relatively small size of Beirut also increases the speed at which an artist can gain renown. As YAZAN explained, common graffiti aspirations such as "getting-up" and going "all-city" are not a much of a challenge in Beirut, because it would take around a day to do so. ALI explained that when one is doing something as explicit as graffiti in public space, people can easily figure out who artist is and what their family name is.

As I concluded in Chapter One, the graffiti movement in Beirut has dismantled common Western perceptions associated with "vandalism" and has shown that the term is culturally constructed according to context. Because graffiti in Beirut is so young and does not carry the negative connotations of vandalism, the artists have been given a gateway into the commercial sphere. Artists are able to move freely with their expression and not be hounded by the law, which allows them more opportunity to promote themselves as artists. Unlike taggers in the

West, they nonchalantly use their real names when they do their graffiti and market themselves as street artists. Similar to calligraphers, Lebanese graffiti artists are an accepted element of society, not marginalized as vandals. Street artists promote themselves openly through social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In addition, they frequently receive commissions from shopping centers such as the Beirut City Center and the downtown Souks, or from local bars and restaurants like The Garten, Urbanista, and T-Marbouta to create graphics and promotional designs. Many street artists in Beirut have established a brand for themselves, established relations with businesses, and even shown their work in galleries.

While the success of street artists may seem remarkable, such graffiti commercialization is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, some of the first graffiti writers in 1980s New York City displayed their work in galleries, sparking immense controversy in the graffiti sub-culture regarding whether graffiti was an illegal art form or a commodity (Hegert 2013). As graffiti became more globalized, so too did the rhetoric of "graffiti as art" and "graffiti as vandalism." Even in Beirut where the context of street art is very different from that of the West, perceptions and opinions of graffiti differ greatly among artists who write in Arabic.

Also provocative in Beirut are some of the industries that sponsor the street art projects. Many of the street artists are involved in Arabic graffiti writing workshops and gallery exhibitions that are sponsored by companies with long and controversial histories like Solidère and retail centers like Saifi Village. It would appear that many of Beirut's street artists are successful and embedded in the commercial part of graffiti, as well as in the so-called underground. However, the commercialization of graffiti in Beirut needs to be examined carefully. If graffiti is commonly associated with ideas of reclaiming public space, some of which is monopolized by the politically powerful, how do we make sense of the fact that some of

those who are "hacking the system" also work with those in power? To help better explain this I will discuss specific contexts and the history of street art and writing in the US in relation to Beirut and its graffiti scene.

Graffiti in Beirut today has ascended in popularity and artists are much in demand from businesses looking for novel and creative means to advertise. The artists believe that their work is embellishing the city, not defacing public property, and that asking for permission to do graffiti on public space is unnecessary and might label them as working for the municipality.[11] It is now very common for street artists in Beirut to support themselves by working on commercial projects and to use the earnings to fund their personal projects.[12] Arabic street artist Rami M3alim (Mouallem), for instance, has done ads for Coca-Cola, Stolichnaya, Nokia, Adidas, Quiksilver, Porsche, Vespa, Heineken, and Nescafe, among others.[13] Rami claims that such companies are becoming more interested in graffiti as advertisements because it is eye-catching and still a fairly young and new art form in Beirut.[14] I ran into Rami doing Arabic graffiti at a gas station in Beirut's Mar Mikhael district that was completely covered in murals (Figure 3:1). He explained to me what he was doing with his art and that he was asked by the owner of the station to do this project (Figure 3:2).

My informant ALI was commissioned by the Hamra restaurant T-Marbouta in 2012 to do a calligraffiti piece of the Arabic letter *tā marbūta*. Also a graduate student in advertising at the University of Leeds in the UK, ALI explained to me how to two fields of advertising and street art could work well together:

> In advertising you do not always have to advertise products, but you can also advertise ideas and concepts, like prostitution or any kind of human subject. It is almost the same kind of brainstorming, yet instead of creating a poster, social media campaign, billboard, or a TV ad, the medium is the wall. On the wall you're not selling projects, but several companies have contacted me and other street artists to advertise their products or they will want the street artist to bring a concept and they will sponsor it.[15]

ALI justifies working for business because it helps promote his street art and personal styles. YAZAN makes a similar argument. I had the opportunity to attend his opening night exhibition

"Banana Republic" at 392Rmeil939 Gallery in Gemmayze (Figure 3:3) where he offered many

of his well-known street art works on canvas to sell to collectors. YAZAN argues that selling

one's art does not necessarily compromise one's original positions and aims regarding street art:

> What I am trying to exemplify in my show "Banana Republic" is that we think
> that political parties control our country, which is not true. Most political posters
> have pictures of a guy wearing a suit and tie, with his name and slogan written in
> on the poster. So I used this same idea with the big piece in the gallery, the picture
> of the big monkey wearing the suit, and the slogan "Banana Republic" written in
> Arabic. Lebanon is known for its high rate of political corruption, so I am saying
> that the country is run by a bunch of monkeys.[16]

"Banana Republic," the exhibition was not a reference to colonial structure, but is in all

honesty a satirical statement against the political parties of Lebanon. It is evident that YAZAN

does not let the enclosed gallery setting stop him from being as explicit as possible in his street

art messages. He uses the gallery environment to express his messages to a different audience

and to garner more publicity. It would seem, therefore, that such artists are embedded both in the

commercial as well as the underground sectors of street art. But what does this current

commercialization and acceptance of street art in Beirut say about the perceptions of graffiti

throughout its history?

A.   WESTERN GRAFFITI COMMODIFICATION

The commercialization of graffiti is a mostly misunderstood area of art history. New

York graffiti writers' first forays into the commercial art world in the '70s and '80s provide the

standpoint from which to discuss commercialized graffiti (Hergert 2013:2). In 1971, the *New

York Times* ran an article[17] about TAKI 183, one of New York's prolific writers at the time, who

also was one of the first to go "all city".[18] The article "'TAKI 183' Spawns Pen Pals" was the

first major media attention devoted to one graffiti writer, showing the possibility for gaining

fame and publicity outside of the limited graffiti subculture (Hegert 2013: 5). Subsequently

writing gained an entrance into the commercial art gallery, lauded as the hottest new thing since

pop (Hegert 2013: 6). There were some attempts with commercialized graffiti, such as the UGA

(United Graffiti Artists) movement, to reform young vandals and shift their energies to a more

lucrative and less precarious spaces, yet it was not uncommon for such writers to continue to do

both illegal graffiti alongside sanitized graffiti art (Hegert 2013: 6). Similar to my informants

today, these US artists did not consider their actions to involve any conflict of interest. Indeed,

these writers would create colorful spray paint signatures for wealthy collectors by day, while

continuing to paint their masterpieces on subway cars by night (Hegert 2013: 6).

It was in December 1972 that the very first exhibition of graffiti as art was held at the

City College of New York, organized by sociology student Hugo Martinez (Hegert 2013: 13). He

was convinced that writing had the potential to communicate to a new audience that was

alienated from the art form, and he yearned to provide the environment that could protect graffiti

writing's energies and develop an ideology (Martinez 1975). Martinez formally organized the

United Graffiti Artists (UGA) whose membership was restricted to an elite group of style

masters, writers who had achieved superior aesthetic ability and reached "king" status in their

subculture (Hegert 2013: 13). One of the stipulations of group membership, however, was the

giving up of "illegal" graffiti writing. Only a couple of UGA members actually quit writing on

trains, while the others even continued or even increased their illegal work (Hegert 2013: 13).

Ever since the exhibition that Martinez organized, outside mediators with varying

agendas have attempted to define graffiti, and have altered the public view of graffiti as well as

the graffiti culture itself (Hegert 2013: 29). When graffiti first appeared in the gallery context,

spectators and art critics drew negative comparisons between the canvas works and the works on the streets and subways in terms of aesthetics and especially authenticity (Hegert 2013: 31). These spectators referred to graffiti on canvas as simply another style of painting and, after graffiti appeared in the UGA art show, art critics began to find more excitement and pleasure in the writers' illegal embellishments of their urban environment (Hegert 2013: 15). This movement to commercialize graffiti also garnered many complaints from spectators in regards to authenticity, myth conceptions and re-constructions of the art form on the part the galleries, museums, dealers, collectors, and art historians (Hegert 2013: 2). Even after the UGA exhibition and the many that followed, many spectators still preferred the raw, untamed, illegal and spontaneous graffiti. In the midst of all of this discussion and debate over what constituted authentic graffiti, the writers themselves had very little to say about what defined their art. Prolific writer FUTURA noted "there was no question of the difference between the two: 'bombing' and 'getting paid', but writers did have a desire to go beyond and achieve something greater than just the raw work in public spaces" (FUTURA 2000).

      Graffiti's fame spread nationally and globally through the influence of movies such as *Style Wars* and books like *Subway Art*, rather than the gallery setting. However, discourses about graffiti's authenticity in relation to commercialized art were also globalized. In many cases, street artists attempted to subvert the perceived power of corporate marketing, while simultaneously engaging in brand-name marketing (Droney 2010: 98).

      Shepard Fairey is a prime example; his widely successful OBEY campaign used themes that question the nature of advertising by creating propaganda for something that does not exist (Droney 2010: 103). Yet, Shepherd Fairey's moniker accumulated so much popularity that it is now a brand name displayed on shirts, hats, belts, and other forms of apparel that can be

purchased in stores like Urban Outfitters (Droney 2010: 105). The caption of his campaign reads "manufacturing quality dissent since 1989" (Fairey 1989). Fairey's goal was to see how people would react to a meaningless image, which he is his complete acting out of his "experiment in Phenomenology" (Fairey 1989). Fairey himself is now a cultural icon, the face of street art in America. In 2008, he created the Barack Obama "HOPE" poster, his most well known project which has become one of the most iconic images of popular culture, a lasting symbol of the presidential campaign.

How can such obvious contradictions like that of Shepard Fairey exist and be accepted into popular culture? Thomas Frank argues that this is the "'counter-cultural idea,' which has become 'capitalist orthodoxy', its hunger for transgression upon transgression now perfectly suited an economic-cultural regime that runs on ever-faster cyclings of the new; its taste for self-fulfillment and its intolerance for the confines of tradition" (1998:34). Frank argues that the sixties counterculture was not just a grass-roots movement, but was equally generated through changes in mainstream advertising and marketing, which in turn co-shaped the counterculture (Frank 1997). To be "hip" for street artists like Shepard Fairey was perceived to be against the capitalist system, which runs counter to reality in that contemporary consumerism now thrives on perceptions of dissent (Frank 1997: 32-33).

B.   COMMERCIALIZED GRAFFITI IN BEIRUT

A similar pattern is observable in Beirut, where the cohabitation of street art and marketing confuse lines of resistance and authority. Since the public does not consider the art as vandalism, and also considering that the messages are intended for a Lebanese audience, street

art has become a widespread feature of Beirut's urban environment and a unique and cool

product to cash in on. Hip-hop duo and street art crew ASHEKMAN is probably the most well

known example of graffiti gone commercial. ASHEKMAN's popularity as hip-hop artists helped

them to gain recognition as street artists and they are now considered the most famous street art

crew in Beirut. After studying graphic design at Lebanese American University and working in

advertising for eight years, the twins left their employer and are now work as ASHEKMAN full-

time, promoting their name in as many ways as possible. They consider themselves self-made

entrepreneurs whose third rap album is about to be released and who own an urban wear shop in

Hamra. ASHEKMAN also work with various non-profits that have been influenced by the street

art scene and hold many graffiti writing workshops. They receive large commissions to do

graffiti at the downtown Souks, the Beirut City Center, and local cafes such as Urbanista for

promotions (Figure 3:4, 3:5, and 3:6). While it was studying graphic design that taught them how

to write and structure the letters in graffiti, the fact that their main art form is graffiti makes their

business unique and lends it "street" credibility.[19]

> ASHEKMAN is a multidisciplinary group, and we wanted to promote our name
> through our t-shirts, through our music, and our graffiti. After a while we began
> performing concerts and on TV and that is how our name became bigger. People
> would say to us, "ASHEKMAN, you're so underground but the way that you
> promote your name is so commercial." There is always this commercial and
> underground clash. I am from the middle class, I studied at the university, and I
> am not from the ghetto. But the good thing about graffiti in Lebanon is that it is so
> young, which has allowed me to have this graffiti commercial part, and of course
> any artist wants to be commissioned to fund his work.[20]

One of the twins explained to me that part of doing graffiti with this commercial/underground

clash is to think of it as "guerrilla marketing".[21]

> Two years ago we were commissioned by Calvin Klein to do a commercial for
> them in Dubai. Anyone can put his or her name in an advertisement or billboard,
> but we wanted to do something unique and different. So for this commercial we
> put this big truck that said Calvin Klein in the middle of the street, and they

filmed us tagging messages on the side, and people did not know what was happening because it was in the middle of rush hour. Of course it was staged, but we like to do graffiti in many forms.[22]

For ASHEKMAN, entrepreneurship is all about handling different projects with different styles, whether they are personal or commercial.[23] However, if the commercial part of their street art is marketing, can it really be considered "guerilla?" While their work and street images reflect tactics of dissent and critiques of power and simultaneously have been commodified as commercial products and fashion in their urban wear designs, it is unlikely that commissioned street art for the downtown Souks and Beirut City Center and a commercial for Calvin Klein in Dubai actively works to reclaim public space and address social concerns such as privatization of culture and unequal access to cultural resources.

While ASHEKMAN and other artists claim to keep their personal opinion of politics out of their artwork, certain political dynamics seem to infiltrate into the commerce part of their street art. For example, a collaborative effort was recently organized entitled "Graff Me Lebanon: The Exhibition" in the elegant neighborhood Saifi Village at the Quartier des Arts, where ASHEKMAN and many other local and international graffiti artists displayed their work on canvas while promoting the idea that this effort was to "bring back the forgotten walls of our cities into canvases."[24] What prompts controversy is the headline that reads in English "Solidère Invites You." Solidère is a private Lebanese company, founded by millionaire politician, and the prime minister of Lebanon, from 1992 to 1998, Rafik Hariri. It was exclusively entrusted with, and ended up monopolizing, the reconstruction and development of Beirut's central district (Larkin 2009:5). The downtown Souks are a product of the company's 30 year "Master Plan" (1994-2024) which envisions a global, tourist friendly, cosmopolitan Beirut and draws on the Lebanese traditions of commerce, pluralism and innovation (Larkin 2009: 6).

Solidère's post-Civil War reconstruction of Beirut has generated considerable public debate, academic criticism, and civic activism. One of the critiques aimed at Solidère's reconstruction project is that it worked towards structurally cleansing all memory of the violence of the Civil War, and creating Beirut as the "Ancient City of the Future" (Larkin 2009). Solidère's motto proposed creating an old way of life, an urban morphology where streets, souks, etc. are projected into contemporary life (el-Dahdah 1998: 70). Yet, how can such an idea emphasize a city's past being a part of its future when it glosses over memories of violence and warfare in the form of posh architecture? Secondly, how can a graffiti exhibition that the company sponsors emphasize the "forgotten walls" of the city when it is placed in the limited space of Saifi Village?

Another example of the street/commerce dynamic prompting controversy street artists SISKA, REK and PRIME'S piece *Beirut mā Bitmūt* (Beirut Never Dies, written in Lebanese Arabic) that generated a great deal of publicity shortly after it was completed in 2006. SISKA notes that the graffito became somewhat of a "hero" at the time due to all the exposure (SISKA 2011: 94), and that it appeared in many newspaper articles, TV and online reports. A series of postcards appeared emblazoned with the slogan, and respected Lebanese fashion designer Sarah Beydoun used it as a motif on one of her handbags for her company Sarah's Bags (SISKA 2011: 95). The bag costs around $200 for purchase.[25] But while messages like *Beirut mā Bitmūt* encourage integration and unity, when commodified they do not really expose social discriminations. The slogan itself was copied many times, documentaries were named after it,[26] and it was transformed into propaganda for the 2007 parliamentary bi-elections and went on big billboards all over the city under the signature of one specific political party (SISKA 2011: 95).

It would appear that it is common for graffiti artists in Beirut, Los Angeles, New York, and all across the globe to seek both sub-cultural capital and social capital (Droney 2010: 211). While artists in Beirut and elsewhere may not have intended to become famous for their work, they are certainly using the publicity to their advantage. It is as if "getting-up," the term that was once specific to the boundaries of graffiti sub-culture, now also means social standings in the public sphere as well. Even FISH and PHAT2, Beirut street artists who wrote *"Beirut Taḥkī,"* "Beirut Speaks," and who argue publicly against graffiti commercialization, participated in the Solidère-sponsored Graff Me Lebanon Exhibit. When interviewed doing a performance commission of his graffiti at the Garten, Beirut's new summer nightclub in Biel, FISH proudly explained to me how he considers himself of the "vandal" category of graffiti artists.

In conclusion, it is worth asking what do these contradictions regarding the infiltration of graffiti into the gallery setting and commercialized world mean? Considering that these two processes have been going on for many decades, it would seem that graffiti in both contexts cannot escape capitalist politics. While the counterculture idea remains the most evocative of graffiti movements, the business boom from graffiti has not gone unnoticed. In New York City this popularity emerged from a counter-culture, but in Beirut it is worthy to ask if there is a counter-culture? Also, what does this evidence suggest for graffiti and defining graffiti?

I suggest that graffiti takes on new aesthetic meanings when it takes a role in the gallery setting and the commercialized sphere, yet can still by definition be called graffiti. The shared understanding of illicitly marking public space through graffiti is an art form in and of itself. Natalia Hegert (2013: 33) claims that graffiti as it is known in the streets is remarkably resilient. She notes, "The critics predicted as early as 1973 that the 'gallery-ization of graffiti' would be its downfall; that it would be destroyed by commercialization; that it would go the way of all fads;

that it would lose its subversive nature when co-opted by the hegemony. Yet the sheer number of writers could never all have their energies 'rechanneled' onto legitimate surfaces" (2013: 33). Graffiti was never dependent on its commercialization or its gallery-ization to be a recognized art form (Hegert 2013: 33). Both graffiti sub-cultures of Beirut and NYC continue to do their art in their way regardless of legality, showing a lack of recognition of any kind of authority in regards to graffiti. Also, looking into both contexts has shown that graffiti must be approached on its own terms. Beirut street artists do understand the aesthetic difference between graffiti as commodity and graffiti as street art, however they do not take sides in the graffiti rhetoric of what's authentic and what's selling-out, utilizing whatever media can share their name and messages to as many Lebanese as possible.

C.   LIST OF IMAGES

FIGURE 3:1 Graffiti murals at a Mar Mikhael gas station. Mar Mikhael, Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland, June 2013.

FIGURE 3:2 street artist RAMI M3ALIM spraying "Beirut" at a Mar Mikhael gas station. Mar Mikhael, Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland, June 2013.

FIGURE 3:3 *"Jumhaurīat al-Mauz,"* "Banana Republic Beirut," by YAZAN. From YAZAN's gallery exhibition at 329RMEIL329 Gallery in Gemmayze, Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland, June 2013.

FIGURE 3:4 *"Beirut Sit al-Duniyā,"* "Beirut Six Minimum" by ASHEKMAN. A commercial piece and part of a graffiti workshop in the Downtown Souks, Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland, June 2013.

FIGURE 3:5 a commercial piece by ASHEKMAN for the VOX Cinema at the Beirut City Center. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland, June 2013.

FIGURE 3:6 "Beirut," a commercial piece by ASHEKMAN for Urbanista café in Gemmayze, Beirut, Lebanon. Photo by Jaime Alyss Holland, July 2013.

V.   CONCLUSION

This thesis has worked to illustrate a new street art movement in Beirut, Lebanon, as well as the street artists' ideas and desires for their city. In the minds of this new graffiti sub-culture, Beirut speaks to their Lebanese audience. The street artists are assuming the role that they know a language to speak for the communities of Beirut. Their messages are meant to convince themselves as well as their audience that Beirut is a tough and resilient city that will never die. As I bring this thesis to a close I would like to provide future directions to this project, while questioning the artists' idea "Beirut speaks."

Street art in Beirut is an extra-legal art form that is not hounded by discourses and societal pressures associated with vandalism, which has enabled the form to develop a speech in the material physicality of the city. Comparing this context to that of modern graffiti's origins in New York City shows that terms "vandalism," and "deviance" are social constructs that are particular to area and history. This research can be taken further to provide a more nuanced understanding to Lebanon's geographical framework and societal circumstances. There could also be spatial analyses conducted to understand the significance of placement of certain kinds of graffiti in regards to the geography of Beirut and the relations of its inhabitants.

The artists propose that Beirut speaks about the nature of Lebanese identity by the street art's focus of traditional Arabic calligraphy and Lebanese Arabic dialect. Beirut street artists are ascribing their own unique Lebanese alphabet to graffiti and hope to reveal an understanding of their society. This offers a new perspective of the cosmopolitan aspects of Lebanese society because it shows a relationship with Western and European pop-culture trends, but also with local traditions. Personally, I find this interesting in regards to Lebanese language politics because before I went to Lebanon I was told numerous times that I would not be speaking Arabic

very much. However, I found myself conversing in more colloquial Lebanese Arabic that any other language. I also took Arabic at Saifi Institute for Arabic Learning, a school that specializes in Lebanese Arabic dialect, which they refer to as "Urban Arabic." I feel that a future direction for this research could be an anthropological understanding of Lebanon's language politics, which could provide better understanding of these intricacies about the language of Beirut's street art.

Lastly, the street artists' work in Beirut speaks about comprehension of difference and agreement of different ways in which graffiti is manifested. The labeling of graffiti as art is more about rhetoric than of actual aesthetics, and Beirut street artists want to use their work in the streets and in the gallery setting for the purpose reaching a large audience. However, there is and should be some distinction between graffiti as it is on the streets and graffiti as it is in advertisements and galleries. Graffiti in the streets supposes understanding sub-cultural identities and societies' imaginary, whereas graffiti in advertisements and galleries supposes the understanding of mainstream media and corporate agendas. While the artist would like to push their messages in the mainstream and on the streets, to proclaim that Beirut speaks, it is difficult to determine if Beirut speaks in this case when controversial power players like Solidère sometimes control where the street art is in the corporate and gallery context. I cannot propose that the entirety of Beirut is represented by a handful of graffiti artists; to do so would overplay the importance of what they do and propose that their meanings are true for all residents. But we can take these conceptualizations of what they do further by conducting a local ethnography to better understand the reactions of what the citizens of Beirut think about this art that has infiltrated their city.

VI.   NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

[1]Buff/to buff: The chemical cleaning process undertaken by local authorities to rid trains or walls of graffiti (Ganz 2004: 374).

[2]A video made for MOCATV based out of Los Angeles. See Youtube, "Global Street –Lebanon – Art In The Streets - MOCATV." Last modified April 11, 2013, http://youtu.be/94cPZogkXB8.

[3] From my interview with Omar from ASHEKMAN in Beirut, Lebanon. August 2, 2013.

[4] "YAZAN's Graffiti Art." Last modified December 1, 2013, https://www.facebook.com/YazanOne.

[5] Interview with street artist YAZAN in Beirut, Lebanon. July 29, 2013.

[6] Interview with street artist ALI in Beirut, Lebanon. July 12, 2013.

[7] Interview with street artist ALI in Beirut, Lebanon. July 12, 2013.

[8] Interview with street artist YAZAN in Beirut, Lebanon. July 29, 2013.

[9] Fairouz is a popular Lebanese singer and cultural icon, and in some cases is considered as a symbol of the nation.

[10] Tamer Nafar is a Palestinian rapper who along with his brother and friend began composing rap music and lyrics in Arabic in the late '90s. They are considered the first Arab Palestinian rap group.

[11] Interview with street artist YAZAN in Beirut, Lebanon. July 29, 2013.

[12] Nichole Sobecki, "The Writing on the Wall Says 'Beirut Never Dies.'" *The Daily Star,* March 14, 2007 (http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Art/2007/Mar-14/113405-the-writing-on-the-wall-says-beirut-never-dies.ashx#axzz2vTru8Jtf).

[13] Online interview with ASHEKMAN via Facebook. March 8, 2014.

[14] Interview with street artist YAZAN in Beirut, Lebanon. July 29, 2013.

[15] Interview with street artist ALI in Beirut, Lebanon. July 12, 2013.

[16] Interview with street artist YAZAN in Beirut, Lebanon. July 29, 2013.

[17] Interview with street artist YAZAN in Beirut, Lebanon. July 29, 2013.

[18] Interview with street artist ALI in Beirut, Lebanon. July 12, 2013.

[19] Interview with street artist ALI in Beirut, Lebanon. July 12, 2013.

[20] White Wall Beirut. (http://whitewallbeirut.com/).

[21] Alwanfejar. (https://www.facebook.com/alwanfejar).

[22] The Dihzahyners.'Paint Up', Beirut, Lebanon. (https://www.facebook.com/Dihzahyners).

VII.   NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

[1] Interview with YAZAN in Beirut, Lebanon. July 29, 2013.

[2] For more on Henry Chalfant in Beirut see (http://henrychalfant.com/in-beirut-december-2010/).

[3] Interview with Omar from ASHEKMAN in Beirut, Lebanon. August 2, 2013.

[4] Interview with YAZAN in Beirut, Lebanon. July 29, 2013.

[5] Rasha Fattouh, "Decline of Arabic 'failure of politics,'" *The Daily Star*, January 30, 2014, (http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Jan-30/245742-decline-of-arabic-failure-of-politics.ashx#axzz2xa0xeq7W).

[6] Hesham Shawish, "Campaign to save the Arabic language in Lebanon," *BBC News Beirut*, June 24, 2010, (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10316914).

[7] From my interview with YAZAN in Beirut, Lebanon. July 29, 2013.

[8] From my interview with Omar from ASHEKMAN in Beirut, Lebanon. August 2, 2013.

[9] Zajal: A form of pre-Islamic oral poetry that is spoken in colloquial dialect, and today more notably in the many Arabic dialects.

[10] Interview with street artist YAZAN in Beirut, Lebanon. July 29, 2013.

[11] Interview with Omar from ASHEKMAN, August 2, 2013.

VIII.   NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

[12] Deborah L. Jacobs, "The Booming Business Of Beirut Street Art," *Forbes,* May 3, 2013 (http:// http://www.forbes.com/sites/deborahljacobs/2013/05/03/the-booming-business-of-beirut-street-art-2/).

[13] Sulome Anderson, "Artists or Vandals?" *The Daily Star,* November 29, 2011 (http:// http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Article.aspx?id=155471#axzz2vTru8Jtf).

[14] Sulome Anderson, "Artists or Vandals?" *The Daily Star,* November 29, 2011 (http:// http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Article.aspx?id=155471#axzz2vTru8Jtf).

[15] From my interview with Ali, July 12, 2013.

[16] From my interview with Yazan, July 29, 2013.

[17] "'Taki 183' Spawns Pen Pals," *New York Times*, July 21, 1971, 37.

[18] "All City": a term referring to a graffiti artists being known throughout an entire city, usually by implementing their throw-ups or tags. Originally this term meant to have your tags in the five boroughs of New York City's subway cars (see *Style Wars*).

[19] From my interview with ASHEKMAN, August 2, 2013

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Deborah L. Jacobs, "The Booming Business Of Beirut Street Art," *Forbes,* May 3, 2013 (http:// http://www.forbes.com/sites/deborahljacobs/2013/05/03/the-booming-business-of-beirut-street-art-2/).

[24] Graff Me Lebanon, 'The Invitation Card,' November 21, 2013 (https://www.facebook.com/Graffmelebanon/photos/gm.630559470323133/383695845095667/?type=1&theater).

[25] See http://shop.sarahsbag.com/products.php?product=CLUTCH-ME-GRAFFITI-BEIRUT.

[26] See Arab News (http://www.arabnews.com/node/289845).

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X.   APPENDIX: IRB APPROVAL

May 1, 2013

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jaime Alyss Holland
                         Ted Swedenburg

FROM: Ro Windwalker
                         IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #:   13-04-661

Protocol Title: *Tagging Beirut: Graffiti, Local Media, and Cultural Production in
                         Lebanon*

Review Type: ☒ EXEMPT   ☐ EXPEDITED   ☐ FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 05/01/2013 Expiration Date: 04/30/2014

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (http://vpred.uark.edu/210.php). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 25 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes.   All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

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80