Murals for Hope:

Lebanese Reconciliation through Youth Graffiti Art

By

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B.A, Marquette University, 2015

Submitted to the graduate degree program in Global and International Studies and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Defended: 30 November 2017

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Date Approved: 13 December 2017

Abstract

Lebanese history contains both violence and sectarian tension which permeates Lebanese society and hinders reconciliation for the many ethnic groups in the country. Although the older generation lives with the memories of the civil war, the younger generation has instead developed memories of the war with perspectives that normalize both the social tension and lingering past stories. However, these negative perspectives are transmuted as the younger Lebanese generation reflects their hopes and dreams of the world through the public domain using graffiti as a medium. Although criminalized globally in the past, graffiti art has the potential to repaint walls of society with opinions and art, especially in the Middle East. This textual analysis paper examines the graffiti artwork of five young Lebanese artists, who did not experience the civil war, but grew up in its aftermath and whose perspective add the religious and social aspects needed to authenticate a reconciliation narrative. Using theoretical discussion of both reconciliation and of Ricœur's hermeneutic phenomenology one can interpret the Lebanese narratives of reconciliation through the images of acknowledgment and acceptance of a collective past, the image of reparation of destroyed relationships through similar cultural symbols, and a commitment to a future of coexistence and peace.

Keywords: Reconciliation, Textual Analysis, Graffiti, Arab Youth, Lebanon, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Ricoeur, Narratives

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank my thesis advisors, Associate Professor Jacquelene Brinton of Religious Studies and Assistant Professor Marike Janzen of Humanities of the University of Kansas. Both of whom were more than willing to assist me throughout the development of my thesis.

I would also like to thank the two committee members Associate Professor Erik R. Scott of History and Assistant Professor F. Michael Wuthrich of Political at the University of Kansas.

I would like to thank my family: my mother who was my editor and my father who was my motivator. I want to thank my sister, Bee, who was my comedic relief and my close friends who always supported me no matter the distance. Thank you to Stephanie Neal, Cari Weber, and 1SGT Bruce Andrews.

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Introduction

Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.

-Banksy (2005)

Artists have a incredibly powerful role in society by being responsible for breaking down the mundane, typical social structures that frame human life and then spraying their personal, if not often ambiguous messages on its very walls. Simply put an artist's role is to make the invisible visible. In "Art as Technique", Viktor Shklovsky's notes that art exists so that people can recover the sensation of life and to make people feel things (1917). In the case of this paper, the art form currently making the invisible visible is graffiti. Due to graffiti's association with destruction and vandalism of public property rather than its transformation into forms of high culture its messages are often misconstrued, even just misplaced. Nonetheless, graffiti artists, like Banksy, an anonymous graffiti artist from England, has transformed the underdog art form through his/her use of politically and socially centered stencil art, creating images whose meanings are too personally connected to those who view it. Also during the Arab Spring, a series of protests across the Middle East and North Africa that began in 2010, graffiti became a symbol of uncensored revolutionary expression, encouraging social changes. Today, graffiti art produces what artists, like Don Karl and Basma Hamdy, write is the effect of art: "art shows you your own feelings, your own thoughts and impulses, [all] articulated, transmuted, [and] given form" (2014). Graffiti is reintroduced as both art and a method to tell a story and produce a message. In Lebanon, graffiti is used to narrate a message of reconciliation from the youth to the public, and when used effectively will transform ideologies and renew previous forgotten conversations for future change.

Due to economic advancement and the vast globalization of the country, the Lebanese future is filled with beauty, hope, and unity. The people of the diverse Lebanese Arab nation have continuously struggled to create a stronger country in combining the strength of all cultures and religions. However, the Lebanese story is filled with tension as the violence from an unreconciled past permeates the narratives of today's Lebanese youth; whereas, instead the unspoken Lebanese story addresses the true persistent search for identity and strength in a globalized world encouraging peace amongst divided communities and conflicting ideals. The elements of the war and ethnic tensions left scars the youth are redressing in both non-conventional and beautiful ways. The next generation is attempting to combine scattered narratives of Lebanese communities' pasts and present into a shared collective.

To study the reconciliation between sectarian parties, I will focus on the public narratives created by the post-Civil War Lebanese graffiti artists in response to the tensions left behind by Lebanon's past. In 1975, Lebanon entered a secular civil war that lasted until the 1990s. The Lebanon Civil War was both a politically and socially destructive confrontation in both the country and surrounding region. The current generation of millennials experienced the war from stories passed down by families, religious sects, and communities producing post-memories of painful interactions and injustice. Furthermore, government and media relations have limited the reach of reconciliation through the media. Lebanon has a free press, yet media outlets are limited because of its strict ties to the sectarian leaders resulting in self-censorship and partisan editorial lines (Freedom House, 2016). Therefore, true public media messages in Lebanon come from public displays, such as graffiti. In the case of this paper, the graffiti art is transformed into a narrative of reconciliation.

During the Civil War, Muslims fought Christians, Muslims fought Muslims, and Christians fought Christians. It was truly a complicated mess that left behind stories filled with pain and sadness and make forms of personal communication difficult in the sectarian society. However, instead of forming a new narrative of reconciliation or forgiveness between sects, the communities agreed to an amnesty law that forgave crimes, during the war and ended open violence between sects; furthermore, the law contained a strain of amnesia. The Lebanese amnesty laws led to the political and social amnesia of the bloody civil war and attempted to halt any narrative of past conflict or crimes, in hope for peace. According to Hanna Hjort and Ann Frisen, the biggest obstacle for a post-conflict society is to rebuild the bridges between former enemies for peace; however, the amnesia took hold of the next generation and tension remains (2006). It is important for the past to be understood to reconcile differences and relieve pain; it is an element that makes forgiveness easier. Nonetheless, in the case of Lebanon, millennials grasp the future while facing the truth hidden in the past.

Background

Before Lebanon received independence from France in 1926, the Christian and Muslim groups were under a French mandate. The French proposed the first constitution and declared the state as independent. The Lebanese established a form of government that remains today, a parliamentary system with protection of individual rights, freedoms and rule of law. However, the Lebanese Constitution requires the direct participation of the religious communities in government and as legislators. Conflicts and diaspora in the region, such as the Six-Day War and Palestinian refugees, began influencing the population, causing inequality and resentment amongst sectarian groups. The government remained peaceful and democratic; however, an imbalance of power within the government led to the difficulties in the communities

By 1948, the establishment of the State of Israel and later the Arab-Israeli War of 1973 forced Lebanon to accept Palestinian refugees and fleeing Muslim militias. The Christian sects struggled with trying to maintain the majority and status quo as the Muslim birth rate and presence in Lebanon increased. Nonetheless, the Christians were plaguing the government with feuds and the Muslim party was pushing for legislature. The sectarian civil war broke out in April 1975 with both Christian and Palestinian casualties. By November 1975, Lebanon was partitioned in three parts, Syrians in the north, Christians in the center, and Israelis controlling the South. Over the next 15 years, over 150,000 lives would be claimed.

It was not until the early 1980s that the Reconciliation Talks began in Switzerland. The war officially ended in 1990 with the bombing of the Presidential Palace and the establishment of the Taef Accords. The Taef Accord organized a fairer power-sharing representation among the sectarian groups as before the war Christians had 54 seats to the Muslim 45, by 1992, the seat number equaled 64/64 (Shouman, 2013). The seats remain split with the President always a Maronite Christian; the Prime Minister is Sunni and the Speaker of the House a Shiite. This transition back to the confessionalism regime recreated the sectarianism within Lebanon. Nonetheless, the war ended with concessions reverting the country back to the same sectarian lines between Christians and Muslims within the government; although the number of seats for both parties increased. The need for equality across the government superseded the actual census of Lebanese sectarian since an accurate population census has not been conducted since the 1930s. The decision to maintain this confessional regime was believed to be the easiest way for the country to transition from the war. The peace is maintained as long as narratives about the crimes during the war remain silenced under the agreement; this is to allow the war to remain in the past for the sects and prevent sectarian flareups.

The amnesty laws put into place at the end of the war maintains the peace and prevents outright violence; however, the social-peace between neighbors continues to be arduous for the populations within the sectarian country. The 15 years of conflict from the Civil War resulted in over 150,000 casualties and thousands of people displaced within the country from all religious sects. Furthermore, assassinations and revolutions continue resulting in even more conflict and tension within the country. One such example is the assassination of Rafik Hariri, a previous Lebanese Prime Minister renowned for helping rebuild after the Civil War. His death, along with 20 others in a car bomb on February 14th, 2005, triggered the Cedar Revolution. The Cedar Revolution was a non-violent civic engagement to eliminate corruption and outside influence within the government; importantly, it utilized mass social media sources to connect the population. Nonetheless, the past violence between ethnic groups has remained repressed or silenced in an attempt for "national unity" (Makdisi, 1996). A large part of Lebanese history and sense of national identity is misplaced due to the aftermath of the Civil War.

Although is considered the most religiously diverse country throughout the Middle East and currently has the largest population of Christians in the Arab World, sectarianism remains the essence of Lebanon's national identity. The country's religions range from the various branches of Christianity, Sunni Muslim, and Shiite Muslims, Jews, and Druse. Peaceful relations among the groups continue to be tested by periodic violence, such as in the 2005 Assassination of Rafik Hariri, through intimidation and entrenched patronage networks often stemming from foreign government influencers. All of this continues to hinder reconciliation and peace efforts between new groups or existing groups (Freedom House. 2016). Most religious groups are governed by their own families and rules and therefore, belonging to any of these groups means a strong belief in a religious faith and a strong cultural affinity, and shared values (Volk, 2010).

Understanding the differences and the root causes behind the tensions within Lebanese society helps to understand how the evolution of cohesion amongst communities has developed for a potentially brighter future.

The failure to understand a view of both the past, and the present in a complex and unbiased fashion, is the reason behind the continued existence of contradictory versions of the same historical events (Khoury, 2007).

The future for Lebanon has remained tied to the past no matter how much time has elapsed. Youth who barely experienced the Civil War are now attempting to take on the mantle of a scattered nation with a single-minded focused on achieving an economically stable future. The past has not been concluded and the future will only evolve with the youth's foundation.

The Lebanese educational system has multifaceted issues that indirectly feeds into the cultural and religious divisions of the nation. For example, the lack of a standard school curriculum leads to many alternative narratives of history which ensures that the interpretation of past is told with bias. By law, the education system is shrouded with cultural protectionism that unwittingly, entices further sectarian tension. Article 10 in the Lebanese constitution states that each ethno-religious community in Lebanon is to "retain the right to open private schools and decide on their own curriculum in order to ensure their community's heritage and values would be transmitted to future generations" (Volk, 2010). Unwittingly, this division in education can entice further sectarian tension. As the amnesia holds, the Lebanese past is taught with many edited versions creating an unstable foundation for which the youth can make confident decisions on the future of the nation.

Graffiti is one the few sources for public expression in society that is uncensored and contains limitless interpretation. From the big and bolder works, to the smallest designs stamped on walls, graffiti could start movements, ideologies, and influence emotions. Graffiti comes from the Italian word 'to scratch' as in the past graffiti was scratched onto a surface whether of a text or picture (Baird & Taylor, 2010). Graffiti evolved into more

Image 1: Christian Snipers left behind a cross and a Lebanese Forces Militia Symbols (Beirut Report, 2017)

elaborate styles overtime yet its effect with the public remains just as powerful. Lebanese history of graffiti began during the 1975 Civil War. During the war, sectarian lines were drawn between fighters and militia, these lines were done in symbols called "tagging". Tagging is the most basic form of graffiti where a writer (graffiti artist) signs their name or affiliation to mark territory towards other writers. The Lebanese militias, Palestinian fighters, Syrian soldiers, and other party members sprayed political messages and signed with their party icons which they used to mark territories. (Karl & Zoghbi, 2011) With rarely any wall spared from the tagging, cities remain separated into in sectarian segments. The political and social conflicts slowly transformed the segregated sectarian communities and further pushed the war into the media (Karl & Zoghbi, 2011). Within Lebanon, freedoms of expression and press are guaranteed; however, the political and religious leaders are both protected from insult through laws that have significant sway with censorship and propaganda. (Freedom House, 2016) Thus, the use of the graffiti has rapidly become a defining

source of political and social climate within Lebanon, even influencing both public/social media across the country.

The transformation of graffiti by millennials in Lebanon, as well as all over the Middle East, has influenced revolutions and communal change. For example, murals describing the violence and bigotry between Israel and Palestine consume walls in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as influencing political change in Egypt. From murals, stencils, to throw ups (which is art strewn on moving mediums), carefully crafted images have both beautified the war-torn past over walls by spreading social messages which are otherwise repressed.

Image 2: Palestinian Wall covered in graffiti art [Gaza Strip/West Bank, Israel/Palestine] (Martosko, 2017)

Today, the message of reconciliation in an Information Age can become lost in the vast amount of resources that the Internet and mass media outlets make available. The message for reconciliation in Lebanon has the same problem of being lost in social media, especially with global or foreign influencers constantly demanding something from the Arab world. The use of uncensored

Image 3: Egyptian Revolution Graffiti Art [Cairo, Egypt] (Maric, 2014)

media sources like graffiti, becomes powerful when sending personalized messages across a country regardless of people's access to media, global or domestic. The use of graffiti is free and open-sourced communication. Since insults to political or religious parties is forbidden and almost immediately removed, youth writers have sought to express feelings for a future of peace,

an acknowledgement of the present struggles amongst the population, and an increase to the value and quality of national community over diversity.

Literature Review

Reconciliation

Reconciliation involves healing interpersonal relationships between both individuals and social groups. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and social scientists study how individuals move from conflict to peace to describe the process called reconciliation. Whereas conflict resolution covers material or substantive issues, such as national resources or territory, in a dispute, reconciliation seeks to restore the devastated relationships (Kober, 2010). Reconciliation is learning how to live non-violently despite having radical differences (Portaankorva, 2015). Furthermore, reconciliation is defined as a possible change in ethos, in changing the norm from distrust to peace (Hjort & Frisen, 2006). After the Civil War in 1975, the people of Lebanon did not heal the community ties between the religious sects although communities abandoned violence both politically and economically. Since the Civil War, relationships between sectarian communities remain unresolved as memories of the war hinder the reconciliation process with social misunderstandings and modern violence. This drove the need for stronger interpersonal communications that could be derived from graffiti in hope to inspire the country to function and grow peacefully.

In reconciliation studies, scholars in the debate whether the healing process should be motivated by either cognitive or emotional reasoning. The process of reconciliation can be either very cold or very heart-warming with respect to the individuals involved. Yehudith Auerbach, a notable researcher of reconciliation studies argues on one hand, "cold" reconciliation takes on a

clean-cut public declaration involving very practical rather than ethical choices in co-existence while on the other hand, "warm" reconciliation means an honest and selfless approach of showing remorse and full responsibility (2009). An example of these two situations are evident within Lebanese history, as a "cold" reconciliation is considered the creation of the 1991 amnesty law that provided amnesia for the nation's war crimes and sectarian disagreements while the potential "warm" reconciliation could be considered with a Lebanese government a sponsored "Truth and Reconciliation Tribunal" to resolve those war crimes and lingering pain of the past. Whether the healing is performed on an emotional or cognitive level, each remains interdependent of the other (Green, 2009). The process of reconciliation is dedicated to reconnecting relationships and contributing to a "wholeness" in both mental and physical states of awareness. This is not merely just separating the cognitive and emotional aspects of reconciling; rather, through the understanding of all aspects of reconcilation (Krog, 2008). Instituting a mandated national amnesia of the past is one form of a "cold" approach to uniting the people. The "warm" form of reconciling spreads power amongst the people on a social level, but does not encompass politics and economic development. Reconciling is then placed in the hands of the next generation who will need to expand on the "cold" national peace in Lebanon with "warmer" social- cultural- aspects of reconciliation.

Whether the process of reconciliation for a community consists of reaching political goals or social cohesiveness, the list of peacebuilding elements is important to comprehend when seeking successful communication. A non-profit organization called Psychologists for Social Responsibility collaborated on a set of components involving both local and outside participants in working towards assisting recovering communities. Paula Green, the director of the Karma Center for Peacebuilding and contributor to Psychologists for Social Responsibility, lists the key

elements of the reconciliation process as safety and security, acknowledgement, genuine apology, reparations, commitments, justice and institutional change, and, finally, binding forces (2002). Foundational elements of reconciliation, further recommended by Amnesty International, take the form of four main tasks: establishing truth, hardening the durability of law in a country, building the foundation of willing participation and transparency of citizens in their community and creating a moral responsibility to compensation and reparation amongst the government (Bronkhorst, 1995). Considering the meaning of reconciliation, the concept of apology is important for peace; however, an apology can encompass other elements of reconciliation such as accepting responsibility for mistakes, recognizing regret, humility or even remorse in the language a society culture, accepts offering a commitment for restitution, and respect for forgiveness (Stamato, 2008). Reconciliation is a complex process that contains elements that affect both the cultural and political side of any international community.

Understanding the complexity involved with the elements of reconciliation will assist in establishing a solid foundation for seeking a reconciling narrative for a recovering community. While breaking down the reconciliation process, interpersonal relationships tend to reflect on the importance of forgiveness and how forgiveness affects the outcome of reconciliation between communities with differing religious and ethnic traditions.

Reconciling relations after a conflict does not require immediate forgiveness. Articles on counseling explain forgiveness as reestablishing channels of trust between the wrongdoer and the victim; however, a direct apology is rarely presented immediately. One distinction between reconciliation and forgiveness is that "to forgive" relies on an individual and/or personal process from conflict while reconciling involves reuniting multiple perspectives and ultimately achieving a peaceful future (Freedman, 1998). Forgiveness is personal to an individual because of the

emotional, cognitive, and behavioral factors involved in making the decision to uphold the different narrative of the wrongdoer rather than the pain-filled past previously accepted into memory (Peterson, 2014). However, for individual changes to be possible, societal transformation needs to occur for reassurance and trust to create opportunities to communicate disagreements and regain trust for relationships (Hjort & Frisen, 2006). Forgiveness in interpersonal communication has the potential to evolve into a greater idea of lasting reconciliation; however, both can be mutually exclusive or intertwined. Acts of forgiveness are rare occurrences in reconciliation efforts because to forgive a wrongdoer means admitting fault, although forgiveness will develop individually as society eventually pulls away from a collective memory of pain. In Lebanon, reconciliation will rely on various levels of interpersonal communication at which forgiveness could later be individualized creatively amongst religious sects and communities eventually influencing overall identity formation.

Although forgiveness is ideal for peace, forgiveness is a key objective of overall reconciliation process that will ease tensions from a horrible past to finding a peaceful identity for the future. Articles on the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC), which is an international non-governmental organization (NGO), describes how the development of reconciliation in communities destroyed by past conflicts is created by the formation and comparisons of narratives between conflicting groups. TRCs are typically established in struggling societies to help re-write the narratives of the past transcribing truths of previous crimes or paints the narratives of the unspoken. However, TRCs are not able to provide the space for people to tell their stories in their own terms and understanding (Botha, 2008). The creation of new narratives should not directly challenge the past, but rather reframe narratives of the emotional perspective which may trigger the memory of past conflict (Funk & Said, 2004).

Nonetheless, groups in conflicted/tension-filled situations are willing to share a society with others of differing beliefs if each have the shared belief in universal morals of fairness and harm; those beliefs about the other must change from stereotypes to "rehumanized and delegitimated images" (Wereschagin, 2017 & Hjort & Frisch, 2006). After reconciliation takes hold of a society, forgiveness becomes a byproduct of peaceful relations between communities. Reconciliation impacts a community by creating an opportunity for dialogue and an atmosphere for solidarity. Reconciliation is a trickle-down process, where individuals bridge differences between ideologies and pasts to introduce a chance for peace on an individualized level. Understanding the process of reconciliation and how a narrative process introduces dialogue is important to understand the conditions necessary for future peaceful interactions and change.

TRCS point out the recognizable factors that stem from reconciliation's subtle immersion into a conflicted community. The focus of reconciliation studies centers on its reliance on both dialogue and sincerity. Establishing a reconciliation narrative for identity formation means focusing first on the possibility of friendship and/or harmony between conflicting sides so that trustworthy communication is possible in any form (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004). Dialogue for a country like Lebanon, is born between the open dialogue between communities such as through sharing daily experiences and through identifying issues concerning all peoples of all ages and backgrounds. While at the same time, negative connotations of national slogans such as "No Victor, No Vanquished" become a saying counter to the notion of reconciling ideological differences (Abu-Nimer, Khoury, & Welty, 2007 & Volk, 2010). Thus, sincerity expressed among people, in either subtle or ostentatious ways, demonstrates a sense of acknowledgement without explanation and responsibility to the commitment to change (Stamato, 2008). In a country such as Lebanon, where society's conflict is immediately intertwined with politics and

the sense of solidarity is fueled by a shared, difficult past, the potential for positive change is evident. Dialogue is communication that lights the fire for larger narrative, that help establish the foundation for further dialogue and change.

Identity

In a society where religion is a large part of daily life, dialogue between sects exists; however, there are a mix of perceptions on how such a discourse can be shared towards reconciling differences. Reconciling begins when conflicting parties establish a status quo to which both sides are accepting of the other's identity and traditions. The implementation of interfaith dialogue has implications for both Lebanon and the Middle East as it provides a major source to promoting tolerance and creating a way towards religious pluralism amongst the Abrahamic (Christian, Jewish, and Muslim) people and their traditions (Abu-Nimer, Khoury, & Welty, 2007). Conversation ignites a new way of seeing through the eyes of another to not only see visible differences but to find a relationship between things and ourselves (Rose, 2007). Interfaith dialogue is used to help re-examine and establish shared religious values and identity as a source for peace and determine a narrative of understanding between divided communities. Lebanon's people will need to develop new avenues of communication addressing differences and similarities in societal goals. Although many attempts on both the political and national levels are in place to establish peace and eliminate sectarianism, hope remains within the ability of the youth to discover new paths towards social cohesion.

The use of art as a form of expression is preferred by the younger generation especially through public space. Reconciling differences requires dialogue amongst all generations involved in society and as sociologists have noted, urban spaces are a large outlet for distributing messages that initiate conversation. A city's or town's walls reflects the mainstream political and

economic ideas and styles that at the very least acts as a communicational resource that combines symbols and signs which permit both cultural traditions and memory of the country's/people's future (Appel, 2006 & French, 2012). Researchers Hanna Hjort and Ann Frisen emphasize the importance of social space in reconciliation in the combination of both a locus and focus, meaning reconciliation's focus is on the relational aspects of conflict and solutions, while at the same time, a locus or a creation of a social space where people, ideas and stories can come alive (2006). A combination of both the focus and locus for Lebanese reconciliation can be fostered in the street art, as street art invades the walls of society changing the conceptions of reality (de Ruiter, 2015). Instead of a focus on the use of the Internet alone for social change or the immortalization of the past through public memorials, the very walls that support the structure of a city can express the same messages. In Lebanon, the past conflict is literally on the walls in the shape of bullet holes and propaganda; however, street art from young Lebanese and foreign artists has begun to foster reconciliation as a public message. As reconciliation has found a place to be articulated in Lebanese society on the walls and buildings, it is important to understand how the relational aspects are connected between the communities and their individual cultures.

Identities help form an individual's culture and later influence traditions and ideologies. Sociologists use the formation of identities to determine how a people place value in themselves and create the social narratives that influence values and norms. Identities are formed through elements of history, geography, biology, ideologies, and religions, and from collective memories (Castells, 2011). As the younger generation is confronted with a well-connected world, youth "are confronted by a bewildering, fleeting multiplicity of possible identities" used to guide their treatment of others and their development of perspectives; the very birth of how to separate the "them" behavior from the personal "us" (McGrew, Hall, & Held, 1992 & McKee, 2003).

Analysts of ethnic conflict show how one group uses contrasting positive qualities against the perceived inferior qualities of another instead of purely positive qualities believed to manifest amongst themselves (Funk & Said, 2004). In an era of post-modernity, shaped by globalization, identities are more complex in their formation and presentation.

Ethnic identity gives insight into a person or group's decision-making processes and their overall perspectives that were created previous conflicts and tensions. The diverse religions practiced by the Lebanese people play an integral part in the development of individuals' ethnic identities throughout the country. To begin, culture is not about the material world. Rather, it is a fabric of mediated stories and feelings of a purpose (Hammack, 2011). The sociologist and anthropologist Meredith McGuire write how religion functions as a way for individuals to personify human ideals; it allows for the integration of culture and legitimates social systems (2002). She elaborates on how religious groups form specific "communities of memory" that together hold firm the collective memories, the shared experiences and rituals will continually reproduce and be passed on to the next generation becoming the definition of self for the youth (2002). Ethnic identity is formulated by the membership of a certain ethnic or cultural group in addition to an individual's personal memories those of the ethnic group help to create a foundation for decisions to build. In Lebanon, religious groups separate the government and society and this sectarianism continues to manipulate the development of new memories and national narratives. Nurturing a change in perspectives requires the ability to understand both the use of culture and narratives in a conflicted society.

Narratives

As the Lebanese society remains dictated by the confusing and tension-filled narratives created by forced amnesia of the past, the use of memories and their corruption has the power to shape the success or failure of reconciliation. Research on memory and its influence on a new generation enlightens readers on how determining meaning can direct the use and creation of space. A healthy collective memory is formed through social construction when signs and symbols of the past are circulated and shared by the significant actors and/or institutions and diversified when pitted against adverse opinions or actors (French, 2012). Tradition is used as a record for both time and space where certain experiences or lessons become immortalized in the past, present and future and then repurposed through the generations; as a result, tradition equals memory as individuals turn to it for guidance and reflection as experiences are added change is compensated (Giddens, 1990 & Botha, 2008). Regardless of the larger social system of meaning, whether from a separate or combined formation of memories and ethnic identity, an individual's source of creating meaning will remain neither coherent nor consistent, but rather largely ambiguous (McGuire, 2002). The ambiguity of memory formation and identity makes the process of interpretation difficult for researchers of cultural studies; however, the same ambiguity allows for the vast amount of possibilities for diversity. Lebanese society has vastly grown since the end of the war from population and economic growth. All of these changes are rapidly developing the mind of the young generation whose memories of the past are largely different from the memories shared by the elders of their culture. The difference in memories across generations changes how reconciliation is communicated to the Lebanese people.

Memory largely produces national narratives when the memories of jilted individuals or groups remain corrupted and fester throughout generations. Political scientists study the ability

of communities to forget or reform memories in relation to pain or altered histories. Craig Larkin (2010) researched the concept of post-memory as the recollection of a narrative/story not personally experienced but felt deeply by a society's youth. Elements from the war are left behind like scars which become normalized in everyday life constantly impacting perceptions of space, society, and self (Larkin, 2009). Furthermore, Larkin describes the concept of post-memory by Lebanese students who recognize how the formal rhetoric of the war remains to proclaim a "no victor, no vanquished" slogan (*la ghalib la maglub)* that contrasts with the private sectarian memories of suffering and victimization narrated everyday within communities (2009). The past narrates the future for the Lebanese, especially in the case of the emerging youth who experienced the pain and injustices of the war only in passed down stories and social enmity. Re-addressing past narratives is the essence to refreshing a community's identity and bringing peace to conflict, as continued isolation of the past can only hinder reconciliation efforts and corrupt more memories.

The memories of the past filtered through family and communities nurture the narratives passed through society. Narratives are used to create a sense of self. "If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or 'narrative of the self' about ourselves" (McGrew, Hall, & Held, 1992). The breakdown of stories for a community for an overall transition of history into memories are the combination of two narratives, one of exclusion and another of opposition; narratives of exclusions selectively remember the stories of unity versus the narratives of opposition that find a shared enemy and thus sentiments of solidarity among diversity (Volk, 2010) Narratives play a significant role in reconciliation studies as the foundation to understanding the core values tied to a conflict. The most prominent religious sects in Lebanon are ethnically and physically segregated from each other through use

of their personal narratives of the war further preventing any peaceful reconciliation amongst the generations. Restructuring narratives is an imperative part to the process of moving away from the past and establishing a united and prosperous future across all cultural and religious sects.

The establishment of identities, cultures and histories is expressed though the telling of stories. Researchers of reconciliation studies use narratives to breakdown and reform dialogue in communities. Studying narratives is not about discovering one solid truth or proving an objective world. Instead narratives represent a world of possible perspectives and dimensions of truth (Webster & Mertova, 2007). To unearth the potential of narratives, each basic narratives (metanarratives) held by each conflicting side must be melded into a more abstract, but combined national narratives (Auerbach, 2009). Narrative anchors culture to a society and connects individuals and groups irrefutably to the psychology of their society (Hammack, 2011). While narratives are perceived differently by everyone within a society by creating distinctions in history between communities, a few are more prominent in the overall formation of a society's identities such as national narratives or the lack of one. As ethnic communities remain segregated by narratives within Lebanese society, the absence of nationally, united narratives hinder reconciliation efforts.

The study of narratives is essential for national and individual reconciliation efforts. Reconciliation studies break down the process to understand the motivations and histories needed for peace to be established. Reconciliation challenges all parties to interpret the cognitive and emotional worlds of one another in hope either will accept new narratives of the past; creating a shared identity and a new sense of legitimacy amongst themselves (Fisher, 2001). The mediator finds convergence between narratives and attempts to uncover the untold experiences of cooperation order to help antagonists to shift perspectives from conflict to stories that permit

new relationships (Winslade and Monk, 2000/ Funk & Said, 2004). By focusing on the affirmed national narratives each side has assembled over time, communities, through narrative deconstruction, can begin to isolate what is factual and weed the contestable components of these stories out to move forward. (Auerbach, 2009). For example, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was more than a presentation of narratives, but a reconciliation understood by South Africans listening to diverse voices and comparing them to their own (Botha, 2008). Narratives will further inspire memories to become part of the solidified history meant to be passed down. Broken communities in Lebanon can find solidarity in the conflict of their past as stories are actualized without the mandatory amnesia preventing an uncensored and unbiased source of communication. Having a selective memory of the past and creating contaminated narratives only hinders the process of reconciling the future.

Narratives face challenges in fostering reconciliation from an extended conflict. There is no one truth to be found as narratives tend to be co-constructed and the infinite possibilities open for interpretation from an outsider or next generation (Hunter, 2010 & Botha, 2008). Truth is neither singular nor exact in narrative research as it reflects reality's "verisimilitude" or appearance of being real (Webster and Mertova, 2007). Narratives encode the memory of that which needs to be remembered regardless of whether the social problems remembered are ignominious or painful (Botha, 2008). Furthermore, the process of researching narratives has a moral dimension to it as ethical bearings of the researcher and readers influences the interpretation (Hunter, 2010). In recent years within Lebanon, talks about peace and sectarianism closure have become more popular, and as a result, there has been an increase in the literature and street art promoting new narratives of social cohesion. The strength behind narrative formation is provided by the next generation.

Youth

Youth in the Arab world is considered a large and growing community vulnerable to influence by both factors of modernity and traditionalism; youth have access to the Information Age and globalization, which creates more opportunities for expression and knowledge. Lebanese researchers, Samir Khalaf and Roseanne Saad Khalaf explain how the Arab region is undergoing a "youthful demographic bulge" and considered a risky community for study as the youth are caught between the traditional vectors of loyalty to family and state and the growing modern sources of influences being education, seeking employment, security, and changing public opinion (2012). The youth are given a unique opportunity to experience the advances of foreign and global influences while at the same time maintaining traditional roots (2012). Additionally, youth place a high emphasis on the values of security and family while maintaining concern for stable social relations and conditions (Harb, 2010). Lebanese youth are living in an Arab country renowned for unity in diversity yet are personally influenced by an incomplete reconciliation between religious sects. The younger generation within Lebanon has a special ability to influence future change as people in different sects have grown up in relative social concord between sects. Besides maintaining the essence of pluralism, the youth have the chance to break down barriers between communities.

Education studies help to define how a younger generation are influence, develop their own narratives derived from their parents', and how those new narratives could mix with their society. Reconciliation studies show that the process requires both open communication and open-minds to work and for a younger generation who has access to a global audience and its influence. Children cannot internalize any group's meaning system without a sense of attachment to the group in which that meaning system is taught, like within a nation's education system

(McGuire, 2002). Thus, creating a new narrative for such a young audience is by establishing a problem-solving atmosphere where dialogue is to help foster new beginnings (Fisher, 2001 & Botha, 2008). The strongest support youth have in reconciling relationships is in the long term as children create the future. As a result, the more positive life experiences available to replace the prejudices previously ingrained in the youth takes precedence as new technology makes voicing opinions easier (DeVisser, n,d.). Pre-existing narratives of the other are filled with both pain and unfulfilled justice; however, Lebanese youth graffiti writers have begun exploring the idea of removing the arduous tension created by past public narratives with narratives of a culturally combined future.

The Lebanese youth's sense of identity to both the nation and traditional values is created, not only in familial environments, but also within their educational systems. Social scientists have studied education in Lebanon to establish the social divide influencing the remaining tensions from the war. The histories being taught in the various sectarian-divided schools across Lebanon only contribute to the conflicting narratives between religious sects. A traumatic event like war can have a devastating effect on education in a community as all hope for peace education is impossible (Tidwell, 2004). Furthermore, schools, like memorials, are places of rhetorical and physical meaning with the ability to teach children and the public both knowledge and discipline (Volk, 2010). Since Lebanon does not have a collective unifying memory and is forced to endure a national amnesia of the past, the histories being taught in schools differ from each other resulting in inconsistencies in common understandings and the development of separate identities, since children attend schools based off their sectarian differences (Abu-Nimer, Khoury & Welty, 2007). Education is at the core of how the youth perceive the world and how post-memory of the war is developed. Thus, instead of reconciliation

beginning in the classroom, the Lebanese youth have taken to creating a shared collective narrative of peace and community into the public domain rather than in a segregated education system.

While the older generation is open to the same audience and technology as their younger generation, it is the younger generation that has turned to the streets to communicate regardless of technology or social background. Social scientists study how social media and space are used by a younger generation. The power ingrained in the younger generation's images available to the public, in this case graffiti, is limitless in its ability to reach the unsuspecting audience, as well as provide a new visual expression of a city's landscape being of hope or beauty. The use of media-generated images construct meanings about political and social issues; however, the view of these images is not a neutral or unbiased point of view of the political and economic elites who dominate it. (Garnson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992). Although, while not completely distinctive, the audience is targeted by street art touches upon a social aspect mostly unhindered by political or economic gain because public street art is understood as personal expression. Social media offers a space for the expression of opinions and to connect with people from all walks of life providing the same chance for collective action, however the use of urban wall art provides communities with an "artistically-expressed embodiment of the collective action that exists within the community-at-large, reflecting the social norms, mores, and cultural expectations of the members within that community" (de Ruiter, 2015, & Esposito, 2005). The use of street art has evolved over time and is now considered higher art because of graffiti's unquie style in expressing personal and public opinion, especially as more and more people have taken an interest in it. Artists use their art to promote either themselves or a cause. The use of

street art by a new generation in Lebanon beautifies the city's walls and has become beloved to the very people who live and walk the streets.

Graffiti

"A wall throws down a challenge. Protecting property, defending order, it is a target for protest, insult, demands, and for every political, sexual, or social passion." Gilberte Brassaim (1993).

In its very basic form, graffiti is used as a source of visual communication. In communication studies, researchers of visual art determine the connection between the message being presented by the artists and the message being read by the audience. Graffiti has an ancient history although in recent society disenfranchised youth in New York City in the 1970s introduced street art which was perceived by most New Yorkers as a form of vandalism. Although in some forms and societies, graffiti is considered and prosecuted as destruction of property and a low form of art, graffiti writer's worldwide have developed street art into an art for economic advertisement and forms of social media marketing, cultural identity and social use. As communities transform into sanitized urban environments, graffiti art is now one of few remaining ways to respond to the surroundings in an expressive, public way (Cathcart-Keays, 2015). To understand how to view graffiti as something substantial requires a viewer to first remove the stereotypical social systems applied habitually to their discussion (the criminal/vandalism) and expose the source behind the corresponding influence and anxiety that graffiti and street art so commonly integrates (Ross, 2016). Finally, understanding graffiti subculture is a combination of examining the facets of the dominant culture and its ability to allow an alternative voice. (Appel, 2006). Determining the meaning behind any form of communication is ambiguous to anyone but the author/writer, although they do not have the sole

say in interpretation; however, as the public and author share the same symbolic ties the art maintains a strong impact with its message. Lebanese artists come from the forefront of the vast communities that all have the same shared background of tension and would share the same future. Furthermore, graffiti maintains the power of transformation socially as the messages become more potent in the eyes of the public.

One form of creating narrative through the public domain is the use of art. Graffiti art in Lebanon's capital city, Beirut, has become a cultural phenomenon around the world, drawing the attention of sociologists to the social impact and narrative expressed through the art. Art makes the unimaginable visible, thereby changing what can be thought, words and actions (de Ruiter, 2015). Graffiti art is an act of citizens to reclaim public space, a path to raise awareness and build a community of solidarity to a narrative/story expressed in the artwork (Elansary, 2014). The use of mural and street art can help express sentiments that cannot be voiced but still need to be expressed (Khatib, 2012). This form of art can be censored; however, it can also be replaced if removed and a new presentation put into place. For the country of Lebanon, the street art represents a way for the emerging voice of the youth to speak.

Graffiti is unique in that it is an attempt by various individuals to come to terms with their environment through a symbolism that is played out on the environment itself. The writer and his/her environment are locked in a cyclical symbiotic relationship in which both feed off each other. This notion is better understood when one considers the writer, or for that matter any human being, as a part of their environment rather than as a separate entity. Hence, the medium can be seen to function as an active agent of mutation as well as a tool of existential comprehension (Spigelmann, 2005). Graffiti art's transformation provokes changes in the relationships and perceptions among the inhabitants of a space; therefore, changes occur in both

relationships and perceptions resulting in an urban revolution as communities internalize the graffiti redefining districts or communities (Appel, 2006). Lebanon's government and society does not openly support reconciliation of the Civil War through museums or memorials. As a result, the public have begun to find solace in the graffiti of young artists who dare to address the stalled reconciliation process among communities. Graffiti art's transformation from vandalism means that the utilization of urban space is an important impact on the message too.

Urban space provides the foundation for graffiti art as the impact of the message presented is given access to a specific audience and frame of mind, such as a museum sets the stage for a masterpiece to be observed. Both archeologists and sociologists view the formation and significant changes in a society by the structures shaping perceptions and how art on a city's structure can manipulate a society's perceptions. Urban spaces shape perceptions as the public has constant direct contact and are built by the influence of people's interactions, and if studied, reflects mainstream ideas (Appel, 2006). Graffiti has the power to reclaimed public space throughout a city (de Ruiter, 2015). Over time, graffiti becomes a natural part of everyday life, a reminder of community, accepted as a cultural practice and further legitimized through permanency (Cathcart-Keays, 2015). Lebanese people walk by the war torn and politically tagged walls finding relief or reflection in murals drawn in bright colors or familiar faces. Graffiti personalizes the environment and allows the communities to lay claim in a way that is not political or religious but cultural in a sense of nationalism and shared symbolism. The potential of graffiti as a source of public expression is paramount to youth and people appreciating the effect art has on cities' walls.

Theory: Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Combining with the visual narratives provided by graffiti art, hermeneutic phenomenology theories help with the initial approach to examining unorthodox methods of expressing narratives. Simply, hermeneutic phenomenology is a theory of human understanding through an interpretive aspect. In Lebanon, the production of narratives for reconciliation have been limited by government and society and availability of technology and deriving cultural and social reflections are lost. Yet public narratives emerge through a group of graffiti writers' use of limited expression. The interpretation of Lebanese millennial's artwork is a long and complex process that Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology theory breaks down into segments and faces the challenges of determining truth through stereotypes and perspectives and the absence of the author in clear meaning-finding.

The theory of hermeneutic phenomenology that is utilized in this textual analysis is from the French Philosopher, Jean Paul Gustave Ricoeur (1913- 2005). Ricoeur studied the original phenomenologists such as Edmund Husserl and Hans-Georg Gadamer, although his own research was recognized for its use in combining interpretation of narrative theory with that of metaphor and mythology. Foremost in Ricoeur's theory was his objectification of the text in question, as all authorial intent [such as the author] is removed, removing the belief that the author holds full control of the only meaning of the text (Geanellos, 2000). This objectification gives a certain amount of permission to the researchers undertaking a textual analysis to look for more than one understanding that is either meaningful or correct which is apart from that of the text itself. As a result, the next unique aspect of Ricoeur's theory is his faith in a researcher to guess. Guessing is the beginning to finding meaning in textual analysis, especially since it is

impossible to find out exactly what the author wishes to convey (Geanellos, 1999). Thus, to gain a true interpretation is through the research of preunderstandings from the researcher, the source of tradition and values from society.

Utilizing Ricoeur's interpretative theory begins with explanation and understanding. Simplified, the process is figuring out what the text presents and then discovering what the description represents. The relationship required is between the explanation being presented in a text's initial display and the understanding of both the parts and the whole (Tan, Wilson & Olver, 2010). Meaning discovered in the interrelationships are made possible in the analysis. A native relationship between the text and interpreter evolves over time as the parts of a text become more meaningful in understanding the larger picture taking place. Native understanding is a formulated guess and is created by the constructed schema, or expectation of meaning, from the interpreter. In the case of graffiti, two native understandings are possible for interpretation according to Ricoeur's theory; the first is that graffiti is merely a disrespectful way to communication disagreement furthering strive and discord in a community, while secondly, graffiti is uncensored expression of freedom and thought to promote a changing opinion in a new generation. Both are native understandings used initially in the beginning of an interpretation to later be proven valuable to the process or a hindrance to overcome to discover the mistaken truth.

Ricoeur's theory of interpretation is based on imagination and critical reflection. Furthermore, Ricoeur's theory requires both appropriation and distanciation of text during analysis. Appropriation and distanciation is providing any interpretation by combining both the familiar and unfamiliar. As appropriation means "making one's own what was initially alien"; thus, interpreting what was intended as much as possible from the text (Geanellos, 2000). This is to gain the primary understanding in both the artist's and audience's eyes. For the use in

analyzing graffiti, appropriation is discovered through reliable news articles and interviews conducted with graffiti artists and the public or with the use of previous research. Distanciation is the objectification of the text from any intentions and giving the new text a chance at a deeper meaning to emerge. After establishing the preunderstanding required for appropriation, distanciation attempts to situate the interpreter with a learned, but unbiased opportunity for a clear interpretation.

Objectification allows an interpreter to start anew with a focus on the aesthetic parts of the text. In the analysis of graffiti art, the audience views the murals and artwork on the walls of a city or town without the direct interaction or knowledge of the author or writer. The public must rely on their own interpretations of the graffiti artwork based from what is presented and observed by their community. An outsider has neither the background knowledge of the city or its culture to immediately understand the graffiti art's complexity. Ricoeur's theory notes that by having an outside perspective as someone who is not indoctrinated into the society and its social parameters provides for a chance they could reveal aspects that have usually been taken for granted by, or hidden, from the intended audience (Kogler, 1996). Graffiti is a significant text that has the potential to reveal an unheeded part of a society's make up; however, the meanings produced can be numerous and can change over time, thus providing an objective position to an analysis could discover a deeper value or change taking place in a society.

The theory of hermeneutic phenomenology is centered on the system of interpretation through subjective meanings. A brief understanding of this theory begins with establishing the basic themes of hermeneutic phenomenology which are interpretation, textual meaning, the use of dialogue, preunderstanding and tradition. The process of interpretation is a lengthy process because of the ambiguous nature of meanings and meanings of any type of text, such as from a

street advertisement to a political slogan, are not directly specified to anyone and many different meanings can thus be derived. As meaning is determined it cycles back around as dialogue amongst people and further creates self-identity as more narratives are consumed. The theory encourages a constant process of interpretation as to understand parts of a text for interpretation requires a preunderstanding of the whole text in general.

As mentioned above there is a cycle to hermeneutic phenomenology, as to understand the parts of the interpretive, one must understand the whole, and vice versa. To elaborate closer on this process, critical hermeneutics researcher Hans Herbert Kogler breaks down the cycle as a human being who must comprehend how the parts of a symbolic context are effective as the significance of the whole [such as culture/society] is understood, where the whole is only recognized by the very significance of its parts [such as religion, tradition, etc.] too (1996). Overall, this theory and its cycle is focused on discovering the relational aspects between subjects and how they are connected to the actual values individuals use in forming an understanding.

Data and Methods

Data necessary for the study on how the millennial generation of writers has fostered a reconciling narrative throughout Lebanon with a powerful organization of graffiti murals. In the beginning, Lebanese graffiti took on the form of political propaganda and over time the youth took hold of the images needed to reflect each version of society from ethnic unity, nationalism and even reconciliation. I will use various graffiti art images from the millennial era Lebanese graffiti writers: Yazan Halwani, Ali Rafei, the duo Ashekman (brothers Kabbani), Phat2, and Hayat Chaaban, and Karim Tamerji. Individuals who author graffiti are considered as writers.

Lebanese writers use street art to address the country's turmoil by using popular cultural figures, Arab images, and personal reflections through poems and their imagination. These seven writers are few of the major contenders for Arab graffiti taking hold of the Middle East North African region; furthermore, these young artists are from a post-Lebanese Civil generation. Within their art, each writer either utilizes prominent Arab figures and/or a form of graffiti called *Calligraffiti.* Calligraffiti is defined as any combination of calligraphy and graffiti displayed in many different forms, in this case, the use of Arabic pictorial scripts. Graffiti murals are a voice of a society's subculture and the way identity can take shape. Graffiti reveals patterns and attitudes expressed in a community or a larger society with images or texts written on the walls of a society ranging from complex imaginings or direct messages.

I collected the graffiti murals from credited news articles, street art media sites, and each of the artist's social media sites. The artists have a presence in social media on Lebanese street art revolution from prominent global news websites such as Al Jazeera and Forbes to various private magazines and graffiti websites the Guardian, Middle East Eye, Mass Appeal. Availability of images of the graffiti murals presented in the analysis are obtained using Google Search Engine. Also, street art blogs focused on international collaboration of street art and graffiti recording called Fatcap.com. The biggest source for the artists' work would be social media websites like Facebook that display past and present artwork social. The murals have labels of each of the artist and do not change based off the media sources I obtained the images. As traveling to the country of Lebanon is currently unfeasible, the use of the internet and online sources for the images and information concerning both the writers and their art will provide my analysis with data.

The collection of the data was chosen based from three elements of reconciliation: acceptance and acknowledgement of a collective past, the reparation of destroyed relationships through similar cultural symbols, and the commitment to a future of coexistence and peace [nationalism]. I researched both the writers and arts in articles and social media sites such as Facebook and graffiti blogs to analyze differing factors of ten graffiti murals. Each mural has specific ties to Lebanese communities and I separated them into sections according to a reconciliation element listed above. The images provided will show how reconciliation is a narrative prominent throughout a younger generation.

In my research, I will use a textual analysis to interpret narratives within the graffiti art. The graffiti art in question was chosen in regard to each image's ability to address both Lebanese problems and possible reconciliation through nationalism, acknowledgment of a forgotten/shared past, and possible reparation to destroyed communal relationships. Textual analysis is important because discovering narratives needs "real world measures" provided by a validation of the audience who determine its merits in expressing individual experience and accurate interpretation of the public's needs (Hunter, 2010). The more narratives provided in the analysis increase the authenticity of truth attempting to be produced. The work will provide an approach to the limited narratives of post-Lebanon Civil War. From a critical perspective, using a textual analysis might show how when certain texts and their representations are continuously exposed to an audience, over time the audience also become like-minded in author's intentions (Koller, 2012). The Lebanese people have been prevented from debating and expression through the lack of independent media in Lebanon, and thus must find other ways to express frame of mind from the violence and hurt being experienced. Analysis will help me obtain the meanings beneath the surface of the texts and art involved, for example the connotative social meanings.

Lebanese Graffiti Artists

Within this textual analysis, I introduce seven different Lebanese graffiti artists who provide artworks that are distinctive in Lebanese society. Each of their artwork is considered a mural by both size and complexity. Each artist is native to Lebanon and has strong cultural ties to their communities and Arab culture. Unfortunately, I was unable to contact any artist directly and instead relied on news articles and social media sites to obtain information on their personal information and ideologies. Nonetheless, I chose each example according to the following criteria: artists were raised after the Civil War and their art was available to all members of the Lebanese communities and addressing social cohesion.

To begin, Yazan Halwani is highly published throughout Western and Arab media on his distinct style involving cultural symbols and calligraffiti within his artwork. He is from Beirut, yet has displayed his work in France, Germany, and various art exhibitions around the world. It is unclear of his religious distinction; however, in an interview in The Guardian news, Halwani comments on his "murals of revered Lebanese and Arab figures on prominent walls in a bid to help overcome sectarianism" (Bramley, 2015). Symbols of unity and peace in his collection include renowned music artists, Sabah and Fairuz and community figures such as Ali Abdullah (Images 10 & 11). Ali Rafei and Hayat Chaahan are two artists from Tripoli, Lebanon. Ali Rafei's art is a combination of stencil and paint, and like Yazan Halwani, he uses calligraphy in his expression. Hayat Chaaban is the only female artist within this analysis displaying murals who uses Arab poems within her art and distinctly places her murals based on locations within war-torn Tripoli.

As graffiti artists are renowned for their ambiguity in personal information in regard to their artwork, Karim Tamerji, Phat2 and the duo Ashekman take the trait to heart in various ways. Karim Tamerji, from Beirut, has a long history of joining with other artists and companies for mural projects and has the Guinness World Record for the "World's Largest Glowing Graffiti". His artwork is distinctive for the use of psychological aspects combined with political or social concerns (Bankzy, 2017). Phat2 does not display his name, yet maintains a strong Facebook presence. Phat2 art has strong influences with Western Hip Hop, but uses Arab figures also. Finally, the Ashekman duo, or the Kabbani twins, who own a brand and have taken on a campaign for peace within Lebanon and use of cultural figures from Fairuz and Grendizer (Image 12).

Analysis

Reconciliation is a complex process consisting of healing the relational aspects of groups at odds. A few of the peace building elements important to the reconciling process are achieving the conditions for trust, nonaggressive opportunities to voice disagreements, and providing circumstances for development over time. The interpretations of graffiti done by young Lebanese writers is divided into three elements of reconciliation within the analysis: 1) Acceptance and Acknowledgement of a Collective Past, 2) Reparation of Destroyed Relationships through Similar Cultural Symbols and 3) Commitment to a Future of Coexistence and Peace. All three elements of reconciliation cover the timeline of pain and distrust that need to be addressed since the end of the Civil War in Lebanon. The younger generation has headed the non-governmental grassroots progression towards national reconciliation through messages in public street art and increasing awareness of divided communities through social media. Elements of reconciliation are displayed heavily within the street art of the young Lebanese artists.

Acknowledgement and Acceptance of a Collective Past

The first issue concerning the cultivation of reconciliation in graffiti art is about the past. Acknowledgment of the conflict in any reconciliation between opposing individuals, or groups, helps address the unspoken while setting the foundation of trust for open communication and acceptance of the source of conflict is understood amongst all. According to Pope John Paul II, the path towards achieving peace requires the purification of memory which requires both national and social groups to be freed from both past resentment and join in reciprocal loyalty; never the forgetting but the resolving of disputes (Stamato, 2008). Peace for Lebanese

communities requires acknowledgement of the missing prisoners, social inequality that

supported the past conflicts, as well as finding hope in overcoming the past.

Image 4: "Neither Dead Nor Alive " Yazan Halwani [Beirut, Leb.] (Halwani, 2012)

The first mural in this analysis is Yazan Halwani's "Neither Dead Nor Alive" completed

in 2010. This artwork is presented on a barbed wire concrete wall within Beirut, Lebanon. Halwani

is known for his extensive use of Arabic calligraphy with US/European inspired design called

Calligraffiti. Calligraffiti becomes more accessible to everyone as well as makes Arabic culture an

open expression throughout the streets. The text of the mural "Neither Alive Nor Dead" literally

translates to "neither dead nor alive," and refers to the thoughts of the public on disappeared loved

ones. The disappeared refers to the prisoners and kidnapped victims from the Civil War and the

following skirmishes. The majority of the disappeared are civilians who came from across all

communities and those missing civilians' families continue to have no news about what happened

to their loved ones (actforthedisappeared.com). Organizations such as Act for the Disappeared, are

some of the few that try to discover the missing as the Lebanese government has provided

minimum effort in protecting mass graves or memorials. As memorials are used to help people remember, the mural is a memorial for both the families and their missing.

In the left-hand corner of the mural is a woman either in a stance for prayer or grief. This darkened out figure could represent the missing and the families searching for loved ones. Black birds fly above the calligraffiti. As the public walks by the praying woman is a mother, a sister, a friend, etc. who is someone they can place a face on. Birds have a symbolism in multiple cultures referring to both death and life; nonetheless, like their unspecific details, their place within the mural is ambiguous. According to some researchers on the afterlife, birds, or animals in general, have the "uncanny recognition of the familiar in the Other" which shows more about what is being perceived, then what is perceived (Moreman, 2014). Thus, birds can be life or death for any passerby and the woman can represent multiple subject positions, overall no sense of death is represented, but an acknowledgement of their loss and the effect of loss is present to all communities and individuals who view the mural. Reconciliation places no blame; however, the mural addresses the pain and the emotion with respect to all participants. The mural "Neither Dead Nor Alive" builds on the foundation of reconciliation; although other murals do not have the same effect as the missing remain missing and no information is provided.

Image 5: "The Rich Eat the Poor." Karim Tamerji Collaboration. [Beirut, Leb.] (*Elena, 2016)*

Graffiti has a strong history of breaking societal molds in expressive artwork and messages. Using graffiti to express a message of peace can be performed by causing distress as the mural above. Writer Karim Tamerji collaborates with other writers to promote a music album "Revolt" in Image 5 and the mural painted on the streets of Beirut is "The Rich Feed on the Poor". Memorials or advertisements can produce a narrative and by using national myths or explanations inadvertently keeping individuals in a society as merely consumers instead of becoming members for change. In a unique way to promoting change, the mural bleeds revolution from the pain of Lebanon's historical inequality.

The man in the mural above is in a suit seated at a table with a pile of human parts on his plate. The message appears clear; a representation of the rich devouring the poor and the poor helping them get away with their violations. The mural gives a three-dimensional appearance as if the man and waiter are in the street, especially so as the 'rich' man stares directly out; as a result, the message becomes more personal to the viewers. The waiter carries a blood-stained towel and is not distracted by reality as the rich man, but only the potentially cannibalistic guest at the table

has his attention. The waiter serves the man and represents the fear and servile character of the poor to the rich. As the mural screams in the corner to "REVOLT," the music album promotion is recreated into a message to continue to fight to prevent further atrocities. Whether or not the message is true to each passerby or an excuse meant to placate the neighbor or a musical generation, the graffiti art does not reconcile with a past but acknowledges a present and continuing issue.

Image 6: "Human Cat" Ali Rafei [Hamra, Beirut, Leb.] (*Ali Rafei [AliRafei], 2015*)

Although not obvious to all, animals have the tendency to juxtapose human life or actions. The writer, Ali Rafei, grew up in Tripoli, a city constantly victimized by violence. He is renowned for his calligraffiti and street art promoting peace and helping to beautify Lebanon's cities. The mural above is named "Human Cat" and was created with inspiration of how animals and human share character and shape (Varzi, 2015). The cat is inspired by the many street cats that roam and fight along the cities of Lebanon as the arms and body were taken by a native

Lebanese man to whom Ali Rafei photographed. All the artists pulled from the environment around them to connect with their audience.

From the perspective of a passerby, the cat bears the scars across his eye and stares without fear, maintaining a strong stance towards all. On the chest in Arabic calligraphy are the words "Every February." The quote is painted above the heart indicating importance, while at the same time referring to events important to Lebanese groups or individuals. On February 14th, 2005, the assassination of Rafic Hariri, the former Prime Minister of Lebanon whose death sparked the Cedar Revolution became another point in history that increased separation in the community and a need to be remembered instead of forgotten. Instead of remembering the past in a fashion of hate or reminder of present pain, the cat remains in a strong stance, in a somber color of dull pink and blue; but the fierce soul reflected only in the eyes. Furthermore, the acceptance of the past is presented on the chest by remembering February and through Arabic calligraphy on the arm. The quote, "I am you and you am I", reflects a collective identity amongst Lebanese with a strong figure.

However, the collective identity acknowledging the past for reconciliation is more common with submissive murals among street art than one of strength. Above is a mural of strength among all Lebanese despite the past, the same writer, Ali Rafei created the mural in Image 5 representing a demonstration in 2015 where police were involved. Written on the wall "One of you, for you, against you", marks the separation between the government and communities. Communities have direct confrontation surrounding them instead of an atmosphere of reconciliation. The police figure is in mid-flight to beat a fallen man who appears faceless and has hands behind his back. Passersby will either feel the expectant pain about to happen upon his

nameless, faceless man, a pain familiar from the past of a police figure's actions effect today or empathy for the police officer.

Graffiti causes discussion and separates itself from the rest of society while at the same time attempting to redesign the world by revealing the hidden or unspoken aspects that cause connections and create relationships. The "Police Brutality" mural represents the same inter-connectedness of the community and the shared possibility every 'faceless, nameless' person has in the eyes of their government.

Image 7: "Police Brutality" Ali Rafei [Beirut, Leb.]

(Ali Rafei [AliRafei], 2016)

The Arabic words, "Against you" is not directed at anyone specific but any person who is on the street. Although graffiti is meant to create discourse within society, there is a possibility that acknowledging this brutality could create a collectivity among victims in a pain-fill society.

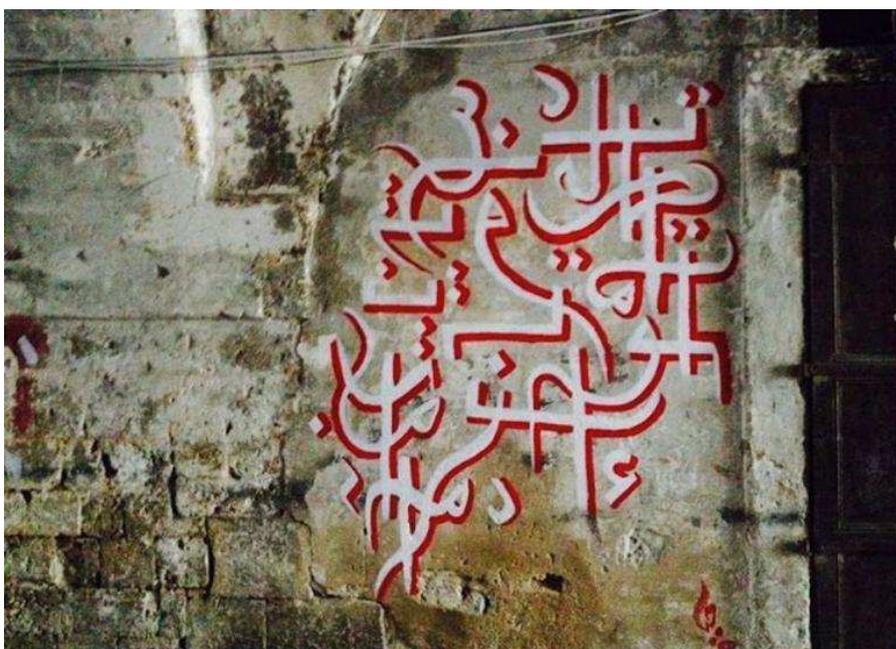*Image 8: "I Faced Death and Rose from the Ashes " Hayat Chaaban [Tripoli, Leb.*
(*Women on Walls, n.d.)*

Although difficult to understand, the use of calligraffiti attempts to draw depth to the message as the words are reshaped just as Hayat Chaaban has painted in her mural, "I Faced Death and Rose from the Ashes." The past is reborn like a phoenix just as the Saeh Library in Tripoli, Lebanon. The beautiful calligraffiti is only meters from the ancient Saeh Library renown for being a "symbol of [Lebanese] coexistence" (Asmar, 2014). The narrative of reconciliation for acceptance of a collective past and acknowledging it is further established in the quote to have faced death and to rise again.

Reparation of Destroyed Relationships Through Similar Cultural Symbols

Image 9: "1st Fairuz Mural" Yazan Halwani [Beirut, Leb.] (*Dalal, 2013*)

The second interpretation of the reconciliation narrative produced by the Lebanese graffiti is through prominent figures of the past or present. Each figure redefines relationships destroyed by the previous war and the resulting corruption. Relationships are no longer defined

by pain of a Civil War, the disappeared, or sectarianism. Instead the relationships between individuals and communities are repaired using the connections of a shared culture. This reparation becomes easier for a generation shaped in the hope of peace, globalization and technology. Graffiti has created the ability to combine two age-old practices, the first is decorating the walls and the second is combining culture with awesome aesthetics (Spigelmann, 2004). The use of prominent figures draws the eye while at the same time expanding on the message promoted by the artists to a select audience.

Cultural symbols expand from consumer-produced characters to public figures like Fairuz (Image 7) or Ali Abdullah (Image 8). The man surrounded by the incredible

Image 10: "Ali Abdullah " Yazan Halwani [Hamra, Beirut, Leb.] (*Hospitality Services, 2017*) form of calligraffiti is named Ali Abdullah. According to Yazan Halwani's Facebook page, he describes the background surrounding the man to whom the Beirut community is now endeared. Centered as the main symbol within this artwork, Ali Abdullah was a homeless man who died from

exposure on the streets and whose death triggered actions towards helping the homeless. The purpose of this mural is to remind the public to rally around the people that make up the city no matter their relationship to the community; furthermore, to acknowledge the hypocrisies of complaining about wrong of society and not taking personal action. The calligraffiti surrounding the painting of Ali Abdullah are the lyrics "Tomorrow is a better day," a phrase that is both tragic and encouraging possibilities for the future. The image of Ali Abdullah represents a new perspective for communities' members to see their neighborhoods are combined and filled with problems able to be solved through united community efforts.

Image 11: Vandalized "Ali Abdallah"[Hamra, Beirut, Leb.] (Dalal, 2014)

While graffiti is respected by most community members, used to improve the atmosphere of the neighborhood, and understood by the government, there are individuals or groups who find fault in the murals. Vandalized murals in Lebanon are either a response from the community of a message being misunderstood as an insult, a message in return to deny the potential change the mural could invoke, or, as the paint is clearly on the face of Ali Abdullah alone, a personalized message. The interpretation could be anything; however, the vandalism to graffiti, a

historical act of vandalism itself, is proof the graffiti is already a relationship of the neighborhood, as weeks later Halwani was asked to return and repair the neighborhood mural in Hamra.

Image 12: "Grendizer - 'People's Champ'" Ashekman [Beirut, Leb.] (Ashekman Creative Studio, 2015)

More data supporting the reconciliation narratives is the popularly produced anime character, Grendizer, by the Ashekman duo, or the Kabbani twins. Image 10 is one of many murals that display Grendizer's face with corresponding messages addressing social issues not only in Lebanon, but throughout the Arab nations. Grendizer is described as, like the mural above, the "People's Champ," for the younger generation he was a "unifying figure for an entire generation of Lebanese" as the war went on around them watching cartoons become the only distraction (LATimes, 2009). According to the writers Ashekman, "We are living at a time where villains are rock stars. Who will save us from them?" (Ashekman.com). The answer

would be in finding the same relief within seeing the Grendizer on the walls of Lebanon. Grendizer is an important symbol in connecting relationships across generations.

The relationship reparation is transcribed in the mural's bright colors intending to yield strength from a childhood hero that portrays a unique cultural connection. Graffiti has the unique ability to make certain elements seemingly inconspicuous to society, even though they are familiar, and represent them in a novel manner to change perception of social reality (de Ruiter, 2015). Although Grendizer is an anime character from the 1970s to bring hope and resurrect old memories of peace from a difficult past, the image brings about connection to a social reality. One result of a giant robot, a cultural icon, instead of political symbols in graffiti is its ability to positively alter current community relationships which have been morphed into stagnation by governmental corruption. The Ashekman duo use the image of Grendizer to mock the pure obedience people have to religion and political factions (Kimball, 2014). The potential idea that hope is found more in a cartoon, than in the leaders of reality.

Image 13: "To Be Free or Not to Be" Ashekman [Beirut, Leb.] (*Ashekman Creative Studio, 2015)*

Apart from the use of cartoon characters to redefine social relationships, cultural symbols can be redefined in Lebanese graffiti in a negative connotation. The above mural is of a suited hand using a puppet of a beloved cartoon leader, Kermit the Frog. Kermit is smiling, yet the words are written in red, "To be Free or Not to Be." The history associated with this artwork is

centered on censorship in society by the government and social leaders (Ashekman.com). An interpretation that could be drawn from this artwork is the thin relationship between leaders or the wealthy community members against the public or poor community. This art draws the attention to the Kermit, but disrupts the uplifting feeling the character is supposed to create as the arm reminds everyone Kermit is merely a character with someone else's voice. Manipulation is the message exuded from this artwork.

The mural, "To Be Free or Not to Be" brings relationships into question by determining if anyone is truly free from corruption or manipulation within their society. This graffiti utilizes a cartoon figure that the younger and older generation understand and are able to discover the connection through that knowledge; however, reconciliation is not addressed. From the mural's history of government intervention and censorship by removing the prior graffiti art on the wall has resulted in both a larger audience and discussion, as a public legal debate addresses the message of manipulation and control that might only be a façade for the public. Thus, as the analysis continues, the graffiti exposes narratives; but, determining which narrative is being supported, one of peace or one of revolution, is dependent on the observer and personal interpretation. Regardless of this paper and the author's intentions, art maintains an ambiguous nature as each interpretation is created differently by each observer; furthermore, each observer influences the meaning by individual social and cultural factors, as well as their personal beliefs and preferences creating a powerful cycle of analytical meaning.

Perhaps one of the more difficult interpretations as far is the graffiti art by the writer, Phat 2 and his work dedicated to Said Aki. Said Aki, as shown in Image 12, is a renown Lebanese Poet and Intellectual. As cultural symbols for the Lebanese, Said Aki exuded

Image 14: "Said Akl ~Renowned Lebanese Poet and Intellectual" Phat2 [Beirut, Leb.] (*Parenthou,2015*)

nationalism and Arab pride, symbolizing and nurturing the belief in a solid relationship amongst the separated community members and nations throughout the region. Relationships are a basis for connection in reconciliation as when positively acquired can build foundations to success and courage for an individual, group, or even institutions.

Although an incredible cultural symbol, this work of graffiti art has been vandalized multiple times by unknown individuals. The writing beside the poet's image elucidates the greatness of poets as poets hold a strong role in communities not only in Lebanon, but throughout all Arab nations. This is the Middle East "that…[poets]… have labored to exhume, rehabilitate and reveal to itself, a diverse, multiform, polyglot, bastardized cocktail of cultures, peoples and languages" (Salameh, 2010). Graffiti expresses reality in ways that either creates relations and discussion or confusion and discourse, so when artists endeavor to create elaborate, sometimes intricate art upon city walls, the creation of images or signs of harmony or peace are formed.

Commitment to a Future of Coexistence, Peace, and Nationalism

Image 15: "Salam - Peace" Hayat Chaaban [Tripoli, Leb.] (*Hayat [hayatchaaban], 2013*)

The final interpretation I have in the textual analysis is the commitment to a future of peace, of coexistence among injured peoples and bringing comfort to communities. The shape that peace comes in is juxtaposed with the use of graffiti. Graffiti historically causes disorder in Western societies as messages are meant to deface the property and create social disfunction; alas now a product of chaos can create peace and order. Peace can be straightforward but employing peace into actions becomes difficult than merely through words. "Salam" above in Image 13 translates to "peace," an expression of trust. Salam is used as greeting and used in leaving, a gentle expression compared to Western "Hellos". This mural, "Salam" is created by a single hand despite being held down by barbed wire, representing the strength and power behind an individual ability to create peace. Coexistence is a tall order, yet the exposure of hope through an individual's cry for peace helps

the cause of reconciling a dispute, achieve inner, personal peace, and transform a city's narrative by merely beautifying empty city walls.

This artwork expresses an advertisement, a hope or dream to see the walls clear white like the writing's back drop and a deep blue and strong black lines holding everyone together. Salam is written in Arabic using the international symbol of peace in the middle of the calligraphy. Around the lower part of the hand's arm is barbed wire twisted around the arm. There is no sign of blood or distress in the arm; thus, it might be determined the peace is constricted but not forbidden or violence has marked this individual's actions.
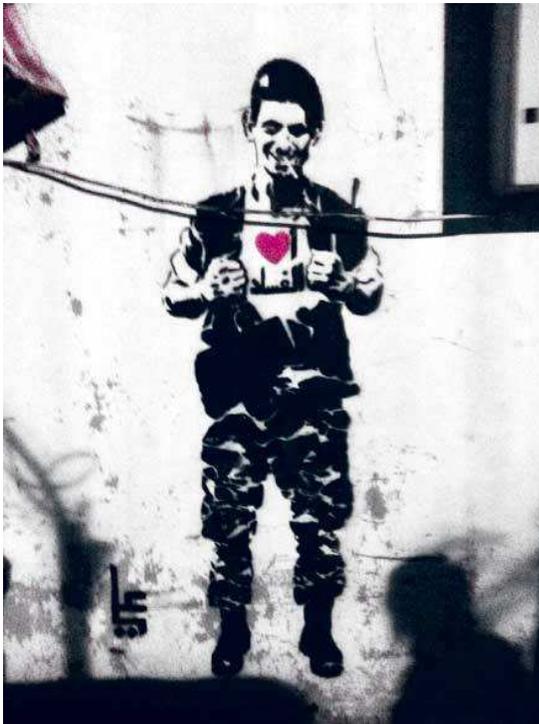

Image 16: "I Love Corruption" Ali Rafei [Beirut,Leb] (*Crazy Little Thing Called Art, 2013)*

The familiarity of a work of graffiti art draws the eye of a passerby and immediately that familiarity produces a pre-determined understanding of expectations. Graffiti is difficult in some styles to even read; however, people continue to notice and either appreciate their inability to understand or create their own meaning. In an artwork like Image 14, is a smiling soldier and the words on his t-shirt "I love corruption". Whether the male soldier is smiling for a photo or merely showing off his shirt, the corruption reference is intended to prove a point to viewers corruption is accepted except, when in reality, corruption is not accepted and angers both society and members. In an earlier image, peace (Image 15) is presented in a decorative matter meant to attract, the soldier appears in black

with red only by the heart emphasizing the message that corruption is not only acceptable but attractive. Although not directly about peace, Image 16 possibly shows a view into the reality individuals live today with the threat of corruption and a friendly face.

Image 17: "Always be Positive" Ashekman {Beirut, Leb.] (Maleszka, 2016)

Another aspect of a coexistence narrative supported in Lebanese graffiti is the mural "Always be Positive" (Image 17). Coexistence is attempted to bring about a sense of nationalism, of stabilizing the future and uplifting perspectives. The narrative is supported by a sense of positivity produced by the colors and art able to cover past propaganda, city wall destruction, and/or just improve the landscape. While artwork in Image 17 is large and directly in the path of daily traffic, graffiti could transform outlooks no matter the size, style, or location. The significance of "Always be Positive" is because of the vibrant message outlined in both the symbolism of the smiley face the words form.

The mural above (Image 17) has a straight forward appearance yet the meaning has a lasting effect on people then the more complex styled graffiti murals previously analyzed. The red is along the edges of the mural, distinctly apart from the smiley face, as the yellow appears to

radiate from the smile. The yellow and white take over the red, the more distressing color to the eye. Red increases the heartrate and raises blood pressure. The yellow and white represent the positivity trying to be expressed. Ashekman's own description of the mural, they articulate their motivation to have a message that is able to spread positivity, providing the mural to all "go getters and hustlers who wake up in the morning and plan to conquer the world"; furthermore, they advise that "no matter… the difficulties, they just look at the bright side and always see the cup half full" (Ashekman.com). As for the calligraffiti in the image, the designs make up the background of the mural. The writing is indecipherable; however, the Arabic script shows a direct relation to the Arab culture important for the Lebanese people.

Discussion

This paper explores how Lebanese youth through graffiti murals have sought to produce a reconciliation narrative among long-term social tensions between the Lebanese ethnic groups. The theoretical understanding of reconciliation and hermeneutic phenomenology are the lens to the analysis of data on how society's reality can be reconstructed. As reconciliation establishes the foundation to relational peace between estranged communities, hermeneutic phenomenology delves into how individuals might interpret and internalize texts from unknown authors, like graffiti artists, from a personal sense of reality. In this case, the Lebanese public finds meaning through the graffiti art to heal the more personal elements of the war and between the communities involved. The significance of this paper represents how the foundation of reconciliation is fostered from youth activism in an unorthodox graffiti art to influence a society's future.

Reconciliation is not limited to a specific region, people, or conflict as it is open to change based on perspectives used in its formation. While reconciling is a primary focus in peace studies, reconciling can be applied on the international level as well, inspiring perspectives within global and international studies. Reconciliation is the transformation of communication to address sensitive relational issues made convoluted by cultural, tradition and historical differences. At the very least, reconciling needs a tolerance and mutual consideration for abstract thoughts and opinions that, on an international level becomes complicated in the presence global organizations responsible for helping post-conflict societies. According to Rodney L. Peterson, reconciliation is a universal mandate where civilizations of brothers and sisters locked in fratricidal or sororal conflicts must overcome their own histories to work through the traumas of division in the interests of co-existence, cooperation, and even modernism (2014). By further understanding the plural duality of both reconciliation and communication's fluidity inhibits any process's ability to produce unimaginable solutions to the most convoluted problems. Communication is the gas to the reconciliation process's engine; thus, finding the medium best suited to send messages across cultural, traditional and historical obstacles is essential to reaching a diverse solution.

As societies become more and more interconnected with globalization and media, communication is formed in the most extraordinary ways. The global interconnectedness has given birth to cross-cultural means of communication, forming mediums that are evolving through the next generation. Whether by social media or art, the news generation are influencing global messages that are inadvertently affecting societies and peoples around the world. Thus, by focusing on the methods of public communication and its effect globally would benefit international studies and further cultural understanding between diverse communities. In regard

to the formulation of this textual analysis on reconciliation narratives, the interpretations of graffiti murals required an in-depth understanding of both the cultural and social dimensions of Lebanon. As a result, an incredible comprehension of both a nation's and region's people and their situations were established, as well as an anticipation on how forms of individual expression impact social foundations around the world and manipulate current and future intentions. The graffiti murals became a form of activism communicating peace and reconciliation amongst socially divided communities, and in an inspiring way directly produced and motivated by a country's youth.

Youth activism is an essential element to any society's advancement. Although researchers have found that today's youth are seemingly apathetic to effecting social change, youth are considered as the long-term solution to the future (Bermudez, 2012). Evidence of youth participation has manifested in many different, sometimes misplaced, forms in the past and has continued today in most popularly social media forums and the city streets. International youth activism is a powerful force slowly gaining strength in the wake of public communication that gives an uncensored and undictated voice to the next generations. In Lebanon, the post-Civil War generation of graffiti artists attempt to reach out to their communities by creating public awareness through messages in street art and murals, as young students during the Arab Spring attempted social change through internet blogs and mass protests at popular social sites. The younger generations across the world continue the effort to fix social problems and affecting social change on both regional and international levels by manipulating and evolving modes of communication to make voices heard and change social narratives.

Graffiti's gradual change from negative perceptions of vandalism to instances of being considered as protected social sites and world-renowned art all open venues filled with potential power. Graffiti is a form of public communication able to appear in any form and on any structure, only censored by removal, yet removal itself becomes another message to the public on a social prerogative to the freedom of expression, even on urban structures. Like Hip Hop graffiti in the 1970s that influenced a subculture, graffiti has now

Image 18: "The Inevitability of Leaving Things Behind" Yazan Halwani [Mannheim, Germany] (Krziwanie,2017)

become a global phenomenon of social expression with images from one culture having a

powerful effect in another. An example from the Lebanese writers of this paper includes Yazan

Halwani's art in Europe one of which is represented in Image 18 above. Yazan Halwani titled

this mural "The Inevitability of Leaving Things Behind", drawing attention to foreign nationals

leaving their world to enter a new one by packing a suitcase (MontanaCansBlog, 2017). This

image attempts to create a sense of familiarity between one culture and another. Halwani uses

graffiti as a mode of communication to reconcile between two international communities. Image

18 is only one example of how graffiti is being used as a medium of expression internationally when there are many murals being used to express global social change, as graffiti can transcribe culture as well as change perceptions.

Furthermore, graffiti's impact on community relations affects interpersonal relations and can improve environments without containing social messages. Street art's presence can transform both the value and atmosphere of a community. Today, media sources are producing stories of the increase use of street art appearing in significant social spaces, like Paris and London, as well as graffiti artists being commissioned for massive murals within smaller communities. In Lebanon, the neighborhood of Ouzai is another example of graffiti's ability to transform both the value of an environment and positively influence a social atmosphere. Sponsored by a past resident, the town was advertised to Lebanese and international graffiti writers to beautify the streets once torn apart by the Civil War and the turnout was immediate and continues to this day. Image 19 is an example from the Ouzai neighborhood of how striking the change appears. The graffiti revitalized the Lebanese community and the same effect can appear throughout the world.

Image 19: "Ouzai Neighborhood" Ashekman [Ouzai, Beirut, Leb.] (*Gino's Blog, n.d.*)

Although graffiti can be used for social improvement, there are many aspects to graffiti art which make social interpretation difficult. The difficulties in interpretation are from its

ambiguous characteristics in the creators, the method and location of its creation and in determining the meaning behind possible messages, such as determining who was the intended audience. With so many unknowns in graffiti interpretation, the use of the interpretive theory of Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology assists in creating clarity for all the ambiguity. Hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of how a phenomenon, defined as any situation whose explanation is put into question, presents "itself in [an] lived experience in the world" (Tan, H, Wilson, A, & Olver, I, 2009). Graffiti is the phenomenon whose existence and meaning is always brought under question within a society, as graffiti art is not usually considered an orthodox method of communication as the interpretation is obstructed. However, graffiti art is a text that will not easily disappear over time as the original meaning from the writer could, therefore understanding how to interpret meaning from such a text is important. In accord with Ricoeur's hermeneutic phenomenology both objectification and distanciation graffiti's ambiguity is removed and the art itself can be seen by a critical eye. In this case, this theory provides a foundation where a interpreter can set aside all previous habits of thought from the stereotypical and native and truly discover meaning unhindered by judgement.

Another aspect of significance in this study is in its focus on social pluralism. This analysis attempts to find unity in diversity, whether it is in the contradiction graffiti maintains in producing credible communication or attempting to maintain social peace in sectarian communities divided by more than just religion. In a basic definition, pluralism is the ability to retain or consider multiple ideas at once, or to maintain an open-minded attitude. Although the country of Lebanon is plagued with difficulties, there is potential for more research to be conducted on the results of pluralism verses forms of secularization. The theory of secularization in the Western World holds the argument of a secular society being the correct form of social

behavior where any expression of religion is a private affair and both development and institutionalization should keep what is private and public separate realms of life within social and cultural spaces (Little & Appleby, 2000). However, pluralism maintains the greatest argument for diversity contrary to secularism where individuals find respect and learn from others and still hold fast to individual convictions (Goodman, 2012). Lebanon maintains the largest combination of religions in the Middle East living peacefully both socially and politically. The development of reconciliation in Lebanon is possible to reflect on the interactions between global communities divided by ethnic divisions today and in the future.

While doing research on the reconciliation process, the process turns out be very long for the individuals or groups involved in obtaining peace or justice and especially in the case of Lebanon. The process is not set into stone, but instead reconciliation is ambiguous and ends when incorporation and forgiveness of narratives are reached. By breaching acceptance and acquaintance of conflicting narratives individuals can move on to expressing empathy and understanding responsibility for the unspoken past and injustices. As the Lebanese society becomes more and more globalized and accepting of Western society, a longer process of reconciliation would leave ethnic communities more hesitant in fully trusting and understanding each other. Instead social problems are becoming more aware and people are becoming accustomed to a shared collective where similarities could out number ethnic differences allowing for sectarian communities to peacefully integrate Lebanon.

Conclusion

Art reflects the feelings and passion of individuals and communities. Graffiti art is endowed with the ability to capture unsuspecting audiences in a community by affecting perspectives, such as instilling hope, inciting revolution, or just creating awareness of a problem or propose a solution. The linguistic scholar, Lisa Lau, believed that public murals can empower people and legitimize their lives despite the world imposed around them by others (Elansary, 2014). Murals and art are more than a message for a future away from violence, but also a restructuring of the very fabric of society by addressing individuals directly. Neighborhoods in Lebanon no longer appear run down rather they have developed into vibrant neighborhoods reflective of its history and culture. Artists and their murals broadcast more than just a narrative of reconciliation, but hope for a better quality of life for the next generation. Reconciliation efforts should be both warm and cold by reaching out warmly across communities to resolve pain on an interpersonal level while addressing a cold solution to past violence by seeking justice on a more structured level. This can be accomplished by diverting focus away from religious and political differences and concentrate on economic and social improvements.

With the rise of globalization and the implication of the internet, the use of more non-conventional forms of media are becoming more important and continues to evolve. Graffiti and social media outlets has gained increasing attention as sources for political revolution and social change. Graffiti may appear as vandalism and social media as superficial and fickle discourse; however, understanding the ways people communicate can give a closer insight into a society's subcultures and potential future. Texts, like the graffiti art in Lebanon, has the power to create change in society beliefs and values while shifting the power to the individuals of a society. As

the popularity of graffiti increases across the globe, more instances of graffiti murals and public communication will become important to understand in social development.

The three elements of reconciliation used in distinguishing the graffiti art within this paper covered the power of Lebanese graffiti on changing perspectives of the past, present and future between sectarian communities. The acceptance and acknowledgement of a collective past brings the forgotten, unspoken Lebanese past into question such as the graffiti murals of hope presented in this paper showed how attention is being focused on messages about the disappeared loved ones during the Civil War (Image 4). The messages compare the Lebanese fight to maintain a tough appearance despite being branded with a painful past (Image 6) while holding close the symbolism of a phenix who rises from the ashes (Image 8). The second element of reconciliation is the reparation of destroyed relationships through cultural symbols, a symbolic way of presenting unity despite sectarian diversity. Such unity was created through a sense Arab nationalism Lebanon prides itself on, from the depictions of infamous musical artists (Image 9 & 10), Arab poets (Image 14), and childhood characters (Image 12). Lastly, the element of reconciliation for peoples under conflict is to look towards a future of social peace and cohesion. A commitment to a future of coexistence and peace is displayed in graffiti images that presents a positive view of the present that will hopefully affect the sectarian groups entrance into their future (Images 15 & 17). The graffiti murals within this paper were creating to change social perspectives by reaching across the boundaries created by a violent past and segregated communities.

Addressing shared aspects of identity in a nation is difficult for the Lebanese people who remain separated by religious sects; however, dialogue is finding ground through the popularity of graffiti murals on the walls and the social impact of their messages. As graffiti in the past

created lines between the sectarian groups, the youth have transformed the tradition into a way to break down lines between groups. Not only for Lebanon, graffiti has begun to be used to address social problems all over the world and studying this phenomenon would impact the graffiti subculture and forms of international communication. Hope remains in the ability of the youth to discover new paths towards social cohesion. For the country of Lebanon, the street art represents not just a chance for a country to transform itself from a war-torn era into the true "Paris of the Middle East", but a way for the emerging voice of the youth to speak and to continue reform.

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