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THE VULGAR USE OF LANGUAGE IN GRAFFITI ON THE WALLS OF PRISTINA

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the harsh and vulgar language found in public graffiti in the capital of Kosovo, focusing on the linguistic analysis of slogans encountered on the walls of Pristina such as "Death to the oligarchs," "Men kill women, the state remains silent," "Fuck police," "Porno," "Adios mother fucker," "Kill hip hop." Employing a sociolinguistic and critical discourse perspective, we analyze the lexicon in use, the syntactic structures, and the semantic connotations of these phrases, as well as their stylistic and pragmatic functions within contexts of protest, rebellion, and identity expression. We discuss how Pristina's graffiti shape public discourse and the local sociolinguistic milieu. The study also incorporates references to scholarly literature on vulgar language and urban art, alongside observations concerning Kosovo's legislation on graffiti and offensive language in public spaces. Our findings indicate that the use of vulgar language in graffiti is closely tied to expressions of social and political discontent; their content is inherently protest-oriented, critical, or identity-driven, while the presence of profanities underscores a desire to shock the public and challenge the sanctioned norms of official discourse. Nevertheless, graffiti remain illegal in Kosovo and are frequently treated as property damage—evidenced by reports that "graffiti continue to be outlawed, and the police still arrest". This phenomenon highlights the tensions between urban art as a form of free expression and the legal constraints imposed on public spaces.

KEYWORDS: Public graffiti, vulgar language, linguistic analysis, sociolinguistic approach, critical discourse, protest and rebellion, identity expression, public discourse, Kosovo legislation

1. Introduction

After the 1999 war, Pristina's public spaces became a symbolic arena for re-constructing national identities and ongoing political debates. Although post-conflict legislation (e.g., Article 7 of the 2008 Constitution and the 2006 Law

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on Languages) formally recognizes Albanian and Serbian, Pristina has remained, in practice, a dominantly Albanian-language environment. The state-building process was accompanied by efforts to "forget" a painful past, creating fertile ground for latent ethnic tensions. Within this milieu, graffiti emerged as a popular form of expression: from Vetëvendosje supporters' slogans against international actors and "neocolonialism" (UNMIK/EULEX)[2] to a diversity of ethno-political voices on city walls — messages asserting Kosovo's (non) status, calls for nation-building, and interethnic hate speech. Most graffiti in Pristina have been overtly political and activist, with only a minority comprising sanctioned or purely artistic murals. Examples range from criticism of Hashim Thaçi[3] and Kadri Veseli[4], to attacks on the LGBT community, and unabashed ethnic slurs. A distinct category consists of direct insults: vulgar expressions, personal slurs, and divisive ethnic slogans deployed without any context other than self-gratification. During the 1999 conflict, Serbian extremists scrawled messages such as "Get out of here, Albanians!" and "Kosovo is Serbia," alongside ironic or aggressive jibes like "Clinton, I fuck Hillary." In turn, ethnic Albanian graffiti—still present today—reply with slogans such as "Fuck Serbia."

Socially, graffiti have functioned as a valve for public dissent. In the early post-war years (2000–2005), the absence of open political channels drove citizens to speak through the walls. Political events (e.g., the 2014–2020 protests, the 2017 elections) triggered targeted graffiti campaigns against public figures. As globalization advanced, core national issues (independence, relations with Serbia) were distilled into concise, immediate slogans. Conversely, the rise of a formal street-art scene (e.g., the NGO-supported Mural Fest since 2016) has fostered more artistically ambitious, legally commissioned works—celebratory, commemorative, or socially themed. Yet, the majority of graffiti remains illegal and anonymous, a hallmark of its rebellious ethos (Aruqaj, 2012, p. 24).

The ephemeral life of these messages impels authors, especially youth, to employ extreme language and stark color palettes to seize attention. The psychological dimension is palpable: anger, resistance, and disillusionment find release in harsh vernacular. Media watchdogs note that such abusive graffiti can act as incendiary and divisive elements within multiethnic communities. In the

[2] UNMIK (United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo), established in 1999, had a temporary administrative role, but after Kosovo's independence, its role has been reduced and now focuses mainly on security, human rights, and confidence-building. EULEX (European Union Rule of Law Mission), deployed in 2008, supports and mentors Kosovo's police, judicial, and customs authorities.

[3] Hashim Thaçi is a Kosovo Albanian politician. He was the first prime minister of Kosovo (2008 - 2014) and the Foreign minister and deputy prime minister (2014 - 2016) in the cabinet led by Isa Mustafa. He served as president of Kosovo from 2016 until his resignation in 2020.

[4] Kadri Veseli was the Speaker of the Assembly of Kosovo. He was the head of the Kosovo Intelligence Service.

mixed Serb-Albanian settlement of Lower Bernica near Pristina, recent inscriptions like “Serbia and one heart in the middle of Kosovo” have elicited rapid, polarized responses from both sides.

Overall, Pristina’s graffiti (1999–2025) vividly mirror Kosovo’s post-war historical, political, and sociolinguistic dynamics. They are predominantly expressions of revolt and political commentary from patriotic poetry and partisan slogans to outright insults and ethnic provocations. The language employed ranges from ironic and patriotic to heavy-handed and offensive. Academic research confirms that the Pristina linguistic landscape is overwhelmingly Albanian, with scant Serbian representations (Aruqaj, 2012). Consequently, graffiti content frequently embodies an ethno-nationalist narrative intertwined with the complexities of pre- and post-war ethnic conflict. Far from mere mindless vandalism, these urban markings act as living documents of unresolved debates from feelings of betrayal and the impossibility of forgetting the past to ongoing demands for freedom and dignity; thus, reflecting the multifaceted realities of post-war Kosovo. Despite the easing of overt nationalist tensions over the last decade, offensive and insulting language continues to dominate graffiti in Pristina. The persistence of vulgar and hateful expressions suggests that, even amid a relative broadening of social freedoms, street-level discourse remains charged with the extremes of collective memory and socio-political grievance. Graffiti represents a multifaceted form of street art in which the visual dimension serves as a vehicle for potent discursive messages. In this context, the language employed in graffiti is often marked by stark lexical and pragmatic elements, exhibiting an unrefined, frequently vulgar vocabulary intended to provoke and challenge the conventional codes of public communication. In Pristina, urban wall murals have become sites of social and political critique, especially during the waves of protests that have garnered both national and international attention in recent years.

According to the literature on visual linguistics, graffiti is often defined as “writing outside the official channel, an act that utilizes spontaneous lettering tools such as spray paint or markers to give voice to public opinion beyond traditional media. This “form of rebellion” seeks to contest authority, push the boundaries of legal and regulatory frameworks, and often carries subversive overtones. In Kosovo, legal definitions categorize graffiti as an illicit act, while civic culture simultaneously embraces it as an artistic medium and a means of raising social awareness.

This study aims to analyze a selection of striking slogans found on various murals throughout Pristina ranging from “Death to the oligarchs” to “Adios mother fucker.” Our focus is on unpacking the linguistic composition of these messages at three levels:

1. **Lexical**: Assessing word choice, the presence of borrowings and taboo terms, and the emotional impact of the selected vocabulary.

2. **Syntactic**: Examining phrasal structures, the use of simple versus complex sentences, and the ways in which word order reinforces the force of the message.

3. **Semantic and Pragmatic**: Interpreting denotative and connotative meanings, the function of performative speech acts (e.g., declarations that enact revolt), and the role of the protest context in shaping or amplifying the communicative intent (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 36).

We will also explore the legal repercussions of deploying coarse language in Kosovo's public spaces. Reports indicate that feminist activists have been fined for using "offensive" words during demonstrations, accused of "disturbing public order and peace" (Republika e Kosovës, 2019). This tension between freedom of expression and legal constraints highlights a fundamental paradox in the study of language in urban environments.

In the following chapter, we will present a theoretical framework that addresses various dimensions of visual and urban linguistics, thereby situating our analysis within an interdisciplinary perspective. Subsequently, we will offer a detailed examination of selected graffiti excerpts, using illustrative examples to reveal how Pristina's graffiti mobilize language as an instrument of protest and identity.

Language in graffiti constitutes the principal vehicle conveying the author's message, identity, and emotional stance. The choice of words, expressive style, and register whether formal, vernacular, dialectal, or slang directly shape how the audience perceives the work: a carefully chosen phrase can capture attention, spark social debate, or reinforce a sense of belonging within a community. Contextual factors such as the local setting, the composition of the audience (neighborhood residents, tourists, passers-by), and the legal status of the wall on which the graffiti appears determine linguistic choices. In areas endowed with cultural heritage, the use of provocative terminology risks misappropriation; in regions characterized by a history of conflict, inappropriate language may foment division. Accordingly, every graffiti artist must consider the cultural, political, and social repercussions of the language they deploy.

Exercising linguistic caution entails acknowledging one's responsibility for the potential impact of the message: by eschewing hate speech, stereotypes, and insults, artists contribute to a richer, more inclusive form of public art, wherein visual and verbal communication collaborate to foster reflection, dialogue, and positive change.

Graffiti in Pristina emerged as the voice of protest during periods of intense political and economic upheaval. After 2010—especially following demonstrations against government corruption and nepotism—the prevalence of graffiti bearing forceful messages increased markedly across the city's urban spaces (notably Mother Teresa Square, student housing districts, and public building peripheries).

2. Theoretical Framework

Graffiti is examined in interdisciplinary literature as an urban phenomenon and a mode of visual communication in public spaces, where text and image intertwine to articulate sociopolitical messages. (Ferrell & Sanders, 1995, p. 46) conceptualizes graffiti as "writing outside official channels," through which marginalized actors challenge social and legal norms by employing spontaneous tools like spray paint and markers to translate public dissent into urban landscapes. According to (Mabie, 2008, p. 13), "graffiti functions as a form of rebellion," generating a discursive practice that aligns with tactics of civil disobedience. In post-conflict and transitional contexts such as Kosovo, city walls from state-building facades to informal street murals—serve as canvases for tensions unacknowledged by institutional authorities. Pavoni et al. (2021) argue that street art operates as an "urban political instrument," equipped with discursive strategies that encompass irony, sarcasm, and a critical-subversive worldview. This approach enables the decoding of messages that convey tactics of existence, confrontation with authority, and identity construction in urban space. Focusing on vulgar language reveals specific dimensions of verbal revolt. Sociolinguistic studies document that the use of taboo terms summons emotional shock and disrupts the conventions of official art. Slogans such as "Fuck police" manifest the performativity of language as a rebellious act, mobilizing the semantic and pragmatic power of profanity to directly offend authority. Research on unmediated language in academic settings shows that the deployment of harsh language in murals reflects ideologies of violence, hatred, and social fragmentation (Halliday, 1978, p. 25).

From a legal standpoint, graffiti are classified as property damage, and Kosovar authorities treat them as illicit acts, despite their limited recognition as tools of civic awareness. For instance, cases in which feminist activists were fined for using "offensive" language during demonstrations illustrate the tension between freedom of expression and legal regulations aimed at preserving public order. To deepen the linguistic perspective, this study combines a lexico-syntactic approach—analyzing vocabulary choice and phrasal structure—with pragmatic discourse analysis, which evaluates communicative function within protest contexts. In doing so, we aim to elucidate why obscene terms are selected as both aesthetic and political devices in Pristina's murals, thereby contributing to the scholarship on urban linguistics and rebellious art (Fairclough, 1992, p. 66).

3. Linguistic Analysis of Graffiti Slogans in Pristina

The graffiti examples under examination—such as *Vdekje oligarkëve* ("Death to the oligarchs"), *Burrat vrasin gratë, shteti hesht* ("Men kill women, the state remains silent"), "Fuck police," "Porno," "Adios mother fucker," "Kill hip Hop," and "Oliver penis" employ a deliberately simple, often taboo vocabulary presented in concise slogan form. These slogans feature potent, expressive lexis: the noun *vdekje* ("death") in *Vdekje oligarkëve* and the verbs *vrasin* ("kill") connote overt violence, while expletives such as "fuck" and

pejoratives like "mother fucker" communicate anger and contempt. Such vulgar lexemes are commonplace in protest graffiti, serving to convey intense indignation. (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 33) Additionally, code-mixing is frequent: some slogans appear in English ("Fuck police," "Adios mother fucker," "Kill hip Hop"), others in Albanian ("*Vdekje oligarkëve*," "*Burrat vrasin gratë, shteti hesht*"- *Men kill. Women, the state is silent*), and "*Oliver penisi*" (Oliver penis) likely functions as an Albanian personal name. The adoption of English—and the Spanish loan "Adios"—aligns with the use of English as an international protest idiom in Kosovo (cf. the NEWBORN monument's English slogans aimed at a global audience). The isolated tag "Porno" can be read either as a critique of pervasive pornographic culture or simply as a transgressive provocation. Overall, the graffiti's lexis is dominated by concrete nouns ("oligarch," "men," "state," "police," "hip-hop") and taboo verbs that amplify their rhetorical impact. Graffiti function as a form of "infrapolitical" urban resistance: not merely vandalism, but every day and provocative messages that challenge power. The use of English and borrowings such as "Adios" signal an orientation toward an international audience and an effort at legitimacy/viralization (as exemplified by the NEWBORN monument). The tag "Porno" is polysemous — it can be read as a critique of pornographic culture, a straightforward provocation, or an intertextual reference — and context (location, proximity to other images, date) determines its reading.

The graffiti lexicon is dominated by concrete nouns such as "oligarch," "police," "state," which name actors and make the accusation direct; taboo verbs operate as rhetorical intensifiers that amplify emotional intensity and transgress public norms. These linguistic choices work well for photography and dissemination on social media, targeting both local and international audiences.

4. Syntactic Aspect

Graffiti slogans are typically extremely brief and syntactically irregular, relying on nominal phrases or simple imperatives. "Vdekje *oligarkëve*" is a head-noun phrase without an overt verb, implicitly meaning "Order the death of the oligarchs." "Kill hip Hop" and "Fuck police" are imperative verb phrases with an unexpressed second-person subject, a common feature of sloganic language that directs action toward "hip-hop" or the police. "Adios mother fucker" pairs a farewell formula with an insult, functioning as a dismissive imperative. By contrast, "Burrat vrasin gratë, shteti hesht" is a biclausal structure: the first clause (subject *burrat* "men," verb *vrasin* "kill," object *gratë* "women") and the second (subject *shteti* "the state," verb *hesht* "is silent") create a stark parallelism contrasting violent action with institutional passivity.

From a Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective, these slogans instantiate transitivity processes: material processes ("vrasin," "kill") with actors ("burrat," implied "you") and social circumstances ("shteti"). Archakis et al. (2014 demonstrate that protest slogans routinely foreground an action and its agent to construct a collective identity. Moreover, their syntax often reinforces an in-group vs. out-group binary, as elaborated below.

Semantically, each slogan carries both a literal message and an ideological subtext. “Vdekje oligarkëve” invokes the symbolism of death to express hatred toward oligarchs and their entrenched privileges; though violent in phrasing, it functions metaphorically as a demand for the eradication of economic corruption. “Burrat vrasin gratë, shteti hesht” asserts a universal claim of men as perpetrators, women as victims, and the state as complicit through inaction and employs denunciative semantics that fault patriarchal actors and institutions for gendered violence. By contrast, “Fuck police” and “Adios motherfucker” offer direct insults whose semantics convey straightforward disdain for the police and a dismissive farewell, respectively. “Kill hip hop” is ambiguous: it may be a literal call to eradicate hip-hop culture or an ironic critique of its commercialization, while the solitary tag “Porno” evokes moral shock and the possibility of censuring public pornography. Crucially, however, without understanding the situational or cultural context in which a slogan appears its location, authorship, proximate imagery, and temporal frame interpretations risk remaining superficial; identical lexical items can perform very different rhetorical work depending on those contextual factors. For this reason, semantic analysis of graffiti should be complemented with contextual methods (time-stamped photographic corpora, spatial mapping, and interviews) to reveal how literal phrasing, metaphorical intent, and ideological subtext interact in situ. (Sijarina, 2022).

This level of analysis resonates with Critical Discourse Theory: protest slogans discursively construct an oppositional identity. Archakis et al. (2014) observe that such slogans polarize discourse into negatively depicted “others” (authorities, elites) and positively valorized “us” (protesters), a bipolarization evident in the present corpus.

5. Pragmatic Aspect

Pragmatically, these slogans operate as provocative, politicized speech acts in public space, addressing broad audiences—passersby, neighbors, state agents—without a specific addressee. According to Speech Act Theory imperative slogans like “Kill hip Hop” and “Fuck police” perform direct illocutionary acts: they do not merely convey information but enact a call to action. Neil Hughes (2023) characterizes protest slogans as “utterances with strong illocutionary force and far-reaching perlocutionary effects,” intended to provoke social change. Taboo expressions (“fuck,” “mother fucker”) serve a rhetorical function by seizing attention, channeling extreme anger, and subverting normative discourse to legitimize rebellion. Research indicates that such violent language in protest can foster collective identities and undermine authority (Foucault, 1986, p. 56).

At a broader level, graffiti operate as a mode of subcultural communication. Drawing on Halliday’s concept of the “anti-language” (Halliday, 1978, p. 20), they instantiate a parallel discursive reality in which dissent is routinized and made legible through alternative linguistic practices. From a grammatical and pragmatic perspective, graffiti frequently mobilize inclusive deixis—the pronoun “we,” collective imperatives, and other forms of address—to invite passersby to identify

with a putative community of resistance. Conversely, actors portrayed as antagonists (the ruling party, elites, international institutions) are discursively labeled as "others," thereby generating an us-versus-them structure that both simplifies political relations and fosters solidarity.

In the context of Kosovo, this dynamic is particularly evident: slogans invoking "the people" or "the youth" function as performative acts that construct a collective, subversive political identity directed against perceived injustices of the state, the police, or the oligarchs. From a discourse-analytic perspective, these effects are achieved through relatively simple yet powerful linguistic devices—such as pronoun choice, nominalization, and denunciatory predicates—that transform diffuse discontent into a clear and mobilizing subject. Thus, understanding graffiti requires attention not only to isolated lexical elements, but also to how pronouns, forms of address, and evaluative language generate communal belonging and political meaning in situ.

6. Rhetorical and Ideological Dimensions

Rhetorically, the combination of vulgar and figurative language aims to awaken public consciousness and mobilize outrage. "Burrat vrasin gratë, shteti hesht" raises critical questions about gender violence and institutional failure; "Vdekje oligarkëve" denounces economic inequality and corruption; "Fuck police" articulates discontent with policing and state authority. (Fairclough ,1992, p. 76) argues that such discourse reflects broader social practices—in this case, rebellion against established power and patriarchal norms. Empirical analyses, such as those of Gezi Park in Istanbul, have shown that humorous or offensive graffiti help protesters withstand repression and broaden movement support (Fairclough,1992, p. 79). Likewise, Pristina's graffiti generate an "anti-reality" in which authorities are subjected to the political imaginations of graffiti writers. In sum, Pristina's graffiti slogans employ forceful lexis, imperative syntax, and violent metaphor to express political and social revolt. While their vocabulary and grammar remain simple and direct, their semantics and pragmatics are deeply rooted in protest contexts and struggles for justice. Drawing on linguistic and critical discourse theories, we see that these slogans construct a collective political identity of "us" united against "them" institutions. Thus, graffiti authors create a subversive, mobilizing language: vulgar expression becomes an effective and ideological tool to challenge power and articulate urban dissent.

The graffiti inscribed with vulgar language in Pristina operate as highly charged social and political mechanisms. They are not vacuous utterances but carry clear rhetorical intentions. Compared to ordinary discourse, this coarse register fulfills several distinct pragmatic functions: Many of the slogans analyzed (e.g., "Vdekje oligarkëve," "Burrat vrasin gratë," "Fuck police") primarily serve an accusatory and mobilizing role. Addressing the public sphere, the graffiti author seeks to jolt the average citizen into awareness and highlight specific social grievances. For instance, the slogan "Fuck police" conveys an anti-police revolt—informal in form, yet a direct indictment of police brutality or systemic injustice.

The use of vulgarity infuses these messages with intensity and urgency, rendering the author's anger unmistakable. Graffiti employing harsh language leverage vulgarity as a tool of critique, denouncing injustices and social ills. For example, "Burrat vrasin gratë, shteti hesht" accuses patriarchal violence and institutional silence. Such slogans serve as political advocacy, effectively calling for changes in institutional behavior. Feminist activists in Kosovo, for instance, have employed wall-slogans to foreground violence against women; here, vulgarity becomes the "voice of protest," emphasizing the movement's demand for justice even at the risk of being labeled "offensive" by authorities (Archakis et al., 2014).

Pristina's graffiti often articulate identities positioned in opposition to institutional norms. Expressions like "Fuck police" or "Kill hip Hop" reveal the affiliations of their authors with urban subcultures—hip-hop communities or radical political groups whose core values reject police authority and economic elites. Each graffiti piece targets an intended audience: either fellow citizens or likeminded social groups. A tag such as "Oliver Kari" may function as an authorial signature, proclaiming the writer's identity in public space. Unfiltered language and coded ingroup references in graffiti function as performative markers of solidarity and resistance. As Gumperz (1982) argues, contextualization cues allow speakers to signal shared membership to insiders while excluding outsiders, and in this case taboo epithets such as "mother fucker" become more than insults: they enact a fearless stance toward authority, refusing the politeness conventions of institutional discourse. In Halliday's (1978) terms, such practices form part of an "anti-language," a parallel register where transgressive words acquire positive value as symbols of authenticity within oppositional subcultures. In Kosovo, movements such as Vetëvendosje *(Self-Determination*) or feminist collectives have strategically mobilized this unfiltered style to resonate with popular anger and present themselves as uncompromisingly authentic, thereby transforming vulgarity into a resource for political credibility. For sympathizers, these linguistic choices reinforce a sense of cultural solidarity with the cause, while for outsiders—whether international observers or unsympathetic locals—their provocative tone communicates defiance and fosters intrigue even when the coded references remain opaque. In this way, unfiltered language in graffiti operates not as random provocation but as a semiotic strategy that simultaneously consolidates ingroup cohesion and amplifies political dissent.

Since graffiti are routinely removed or painted over by authorities (as documented in local media), a cathartic effect emerges: Those of us who remain will carry the message forward. Activists affiliated with Vetëvendosje report urgencies to write slogans quickly and *en masse* before arrests occur, transforming the very act of legal erasure into a spur for greater boldness. Thus, words such as "vdekje," "fuck," and "motherfucker" are not merely insults but provide authors with an irrepressible psychological impetus to transgress taboos and normative constraints. Moreover, when such terms expose the impossibility of dialoguing with authorities (e.g., the state "remains silent" on accusations of violence), they themselves become instruments of civic response against institutional silence

(Fairclough, 1992, p. 43). In summary, at the pragmatic level, the use of vulgar language in Pristina's graffiti accomplishes multiple functions: it protests poverty, patriarchy, policing, and mass-media culture; it fosters group solidarity and projects a rebellious identity; and it demarcates the distance from official institutions. Graffiti authors view their messages as unbound by the conventions governing official journalistic discourse; accordingly, the escalation of language serves a fundamental imperative—to pair radical ideas with an atmosphere of urgency.

7. Sociolinguistic and Legal Context of Graffiti in Pristina

Compared to other Balkan capitals, Pristina developed a distinctive graffiti culture: sanctioned art festivals even commissioned legal murals, yet most works remained illicit. For example, sexist depictions of President Atifete Jahjaga prompted the Kosovo Women's Network to denounce them as "offensive and unacceptable" for public spaces. Such responses demonstrate that civil society in Kosovo reacts critically to both the language and imagery of graffiti. Conversely, resistance groups have regarded graffiti as "the most potent weapon" for communicating directly with citizens.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, these interventions signal shifts in public discourse: some harshly worded pieces have been read as evidence of intolerance or prejudice (e.g., racist or sexist messages), while others have been embraced as acts of rebellion. The impact on public discourse is ambivalent: although certain media outlets condemn the "mandate" of graffiti as vandalism, they nonetheless document protests where offensive slogans draw heightened attention. Herein lies a paradox: while aggressive street language is lauded as an authentic channel of protest, Kosovo's legal system treats it primarily as a violation of public property and order.

Legally, Kosovo's statutes contain no article specifically addressing obscene language in public spaces. Nevertheless, police and prosecutors routinely invoke provisions against disturbing the public peace to penalize even highly offensive messages. Activist Liridona Sijarina reports that Kosovar police justified fines by claiming protesters had "used insulting language with the intent to disturb public order and peace" (Sijarina, 2022). In one 2021 case in Mitrovica, a judge ruled that the slogan "Virginity is a man's invention" was sufficiently offensive to violate moral norms, fining the feminist activists responsible. These instances show that authorities apply broad interpretations of public-order statutes—such as the Law on Public Order and Peace—to sanction the use of strong language in protest. Institutionally, no coherent regulatory framework governs graffiti. Although the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo guarantees freedom of expression, several municipalities have enacted anti-graffiti ordinances that facilitate the removal of unauthorized wall art. The Kosovo Criminal Code punishes damage to public property—under which unsanctioned graffiti may fall as vandalism. *Prishtina Insight* has noted that, despite limited recognition of graffiti as an art form, authorities still treat it as a "criminal act,"

prompting activists to work covertly in teams. In the absence of specific legislation, enforcement is left to officers' discretion: offensive language in graffiti may not automatically constitute a hate crime but can incur penalties for public misconduct or national-ethnic insult if directed at a protected group. Thus, on one hand, graffiti portray themselves as harbingers of a liberated postmodern public sphere; on the other, they provoke legal repercussions. (Republika e Kosovës, 2009). Kosovar law includes no dedicated article on "graffiti with unverified words," but existing statutes address the penalization of unauthorized inscriptions under property-damage provisions (Criminal Code 06/L-074) and the Law on Public Order and Peace (03/L-142), which proscribes "indecent behavior" or "public insults" that cause disturbance, though without enumerating prohibited words. Recent practice indicates that "the use of offensive language" in protests constitutes an offense (Republic of Kosovo,2019). The lack of precise statutory definitions leaves interpretation to law-enforcement officials, who have charged graffiti artists under broad public-order offenses. Although no law explicitly states, "Anyone who writes unacceptable words in public shall be punished," case law has seen arrests and fines for those whose slogans "disturb public tranquility" (Xërxa, 2014).

Few studies focus explicitly on harsh language in Kosovo's graffiti. However, global research on urban vernacular underscores its critical role. Krasniqi and Haxhiu (2024) offer a comprehensive analysis of feminist graffiti in Kosovo, highlighting how activists employ murals to call attention to economic and gender injustices, reminding institutions of their duty to protect women. Similarly, Vetëvendosje's graffiti have been documented as transitioning from protest slogans to street art—for instance, the 2005 inscription "No Negotiations – Vetëvendosje" on the UNMIK building wall signified sustained resistance (Xërxa, 2014). Other scholarship (Vayrynen et al., 2021) shows that transgressive wall-writing worldwide channels marginalized voices when mainstream media fail. Sociological literature on urban art also notes that bold colors and overt inscriptions enable individuals to inscribe their cultural and political narratives onto the public realm. In the absence of Pristina-specific studies, we draw on comparative Balkan and international sources to conclude that inappropriate language in graffiti emerges from a drive to confront and inform the public on sensitive issues. These theoretical underpinnings support our claim that the analyzed slogans function not merely as outbursts of profanity but as strategic protest tools that disrupt and engage their audience.

8. Harsh Language and Public Discourse in Kosovo

Graffiti in Pristina that employ harsh and vulgar language constitute a tangible form of urban protest by inserting lexemes into public space that are typically deemed taboo or derogatory. These inscriptions sometimes originate from organized activists—such as feminist collectives who plastered slogans advocating for the rights of women workers in public institutions—and at other times from anonymous individuals aiming to provoke state leaders. Recent

examples demonstrate the appearance of insults like “Hashimi o legen” (“Hashim, you trash”) or “Kadria o fullirant” (“Kadria, you pig farmer”) on the walls of governmental buildings, while other tags such as “Shka i biri i shkinës” (You son of a Serb bitch) target specific public figures. Such instances receive extensive media coverage, amplifying the concerns they express; for example, graffiti directed at the prime minister or other politicians have drawn both media and public attention. In doing so, these murals shape public discourse by forcing terminological debates outside official channels and encouraging discussion of the issues they raise.

From a sociolinguistic standpoint, the use of coarse language in these graffiti reflects a conflict between the “legitimate language” of the elites and the everyday vernacular of the populace. (Bourdieu,1991, p. 57) argues that the forms of language deemed proper (elevated, regulated) are perpetuated through educational and state institutions, whereas more widespread modes of speech—often labeled “popular,” “vulgar,” or “free”—are situated lower in the social hierarchy. Pristina’s graffiti seek to transcend this binary: epithets such as “legen” (trash) and “fullirant” (pig farmer) demonstrate a deliberate embrace of vulgarity. Grammatically, the graffiti lack sophisticated structures; they are brief, often incomplete phrases (e.g., noun plus insult), with essential sentence constituents omitted or replaced by the simple vocative particle “o” (e.g., “Hashimi o legen”). Semantically, each term carries a potent, overtly negative connotation, employing straightforward figurative allusions—such as metaphors of filth or degradation—to immediately vilify the targeted subject. Pragmatically, these pithy declarations are addressed to the broad public, designed to jolt the public consciousness and heighten the tension between citizens and power. These wall-sites become, in (Foucault, 1986, p. 22) terms, “heterotopias”—places “outside of all places” that nonetheless reflect how power relations coexist with their resistances. In a Foucauldian reading, these graffiti function as a distilled counter-discourse—isolated yet directly opposing authority, perpetuating a figurative quest for “hidden freedom” (Foucault, 1986, p. 57).

Viewed through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis, Pristina’s graffiti are intentional communicative acts loaded with ideology. Fairclough (1995, p. 12) reminds us that language is a social practice and that discourse constructs the nexus between language and power structures in society. Graffiti bearing insults are prime examples of language that “intervenes” directly in the political reality: they do more than convey information—they seek to transform social relations. From a Faircloughian perspective, such inscriptions are not mere vandalism; they embody a latent revolutionary ideology. Linguistically, they employ elementary devices—repetition of a politician’s name, strings of epithets, absence of full clause elements—to orchestrate a disciplined use of language that creates what Fairclough calls “synthetic proximity,” making the target feel intimately exposed and legitimating the marginalized citizen’s voice. In this way, the graffiti utilize language “beyond official discourse,” giving form to concerns that the mainstream political system ignores.

In the sphere of public opinion, graffiti featuring abrasive language generate a tension between civic freedoms and state controls. Urban-critical activists interpret the intensity of wall language as a signal of revolt; for instance, a feminist collective's mural on the government building warned that "the dismissal of 1,500 pregnant workers… calls for the organization and revolt of working women." (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 35). In this case, exclusion from public norms manifests as symbolic violence, countered by the mural's "fiery language." The state responded forcefully: police violently interrupted the initial graffiti at the government edifice, highlighting the clash between freedom of expression and public order. Bourdieu would characterize this as a collision between the symbolic power of the state—upholding institutional language as "legitimate"—and the raw vernacular dialogue of the street (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 36). From a Foucauldian "heterotopic" perspective, harsh graffiti forge an alternative network of spaces where the "truth" of the populace is woven differently—a subversive "power game" that can redraw the boundaries of political representation (Foucault, 1986, p. 23).

Ultimately, the use of vulgar language on city walls serves as an articulation of urban revolt, reflecting a deeply conflicted relationship between citizen and authority. As Foucault 1986, Bourdieu (1991), and Fairclough (1995), theorize, this relationship is revealed through linguistic strategies that carve out alternative discursive spaces: graffiti texts legitimize divisions of power in language and open public venues of resistance that challenge them. In critical-analytical terms, strong-worded Kosovar graffiti function as forms of civic interpellation that confront and undermine the power and integrity of official discourses, while heralding radical shifts in local narratives of consumption and political communication.

9. Conclusions

The vulgar graffiti of Prishtina represent a complex phenomenon that brings into focus the contradictions between freedom of expression, social protest, and legal constraints. A linguistic analysis of the included phrases—from *"Death to oligarchs"* to *"Adios mother fucker"*—reveals the consistent use of intense and often imperative vocabulary to convey anger and criticism. Their lexicon is characterized by explicit violence, personal insults, and expressions of social hatred, combining protest and defiance within a single message. Syntactically, the phrases are short and devoid of formal context, which renders the communication even more unsuitable for the public domain. The connotations of these phrases are closely aligned with radical political slogans: they either assert resistance to bourgeois dominance and systemic violence or accuse institutional injustice. From a critical perspective, the pragmatic stance of this language underscores a deep need to be heard: these expressions are intended to capture attention and exert public influence in the context of protest and rebellious identity. This direct and aggressive style unfolds as part of the struggle over public space—graffiti of this

nature currently serve more as symbolic acts than as practical political initiatives (e.g., proposing legislation).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the phenomenon reveals that citizens—particularly youth and activist groups—resort to radical messages when they feel excluded from institutional representation. There are clear links between offensive language and expressions of frustration toward state structures. Yet, despite its symbolic power, the institutional response often reactivates a rhetoric of censorship: Kosovar authorities interpret public offensiveness through existing laws on public order and property. What remains is a persistent tension between urban art and official politics: vulgar graffiti challenge the social order and provoke public debate, but they also elicit repressive responses.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that the use of inappropriate language in Prishtina's graffiti is a multifunctional phenomenon: it serves as a *"language of revolt"* against social and institutional hierarchies, a vehicle for articulating marginalized identities, and a form of conscious political action. However, it also highlights the limitations of freedom of expression in Kosovo, where unsanctioned words frequently result in legal intervention. This underscores the need for a broader public dialogue on the significance of these voices and for legal frameworks that better respond to the challenges of street art. Including graffiti in public discourse may foster a deeper understanding of how young people cope with injustice and how a culture of protest takes shape within the urban landscape.

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