

Beyond Art: Graffiti as a Medium of Counterpublics

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ABSTRACT

The use of a variety of art forms to support citizens' dissent and protest is a long-standing tradition in Indonesia. This work aims at investigating the role of artistic, low-technology modes of communication in the form of graffiti for the mediation of interests of counter publics. Therefore, we focus on graffiti and its utilization within the ARAP (People's alliance against eviction) movement in Tamansari, Bandung (Indonesia). Based on Grounded Theory and with the help of interviews with artists and activists as well as observations, and a content analysis of the artworks, different ways graffiti can contribute to the representation of interests of counterpublics are investigated. Our results show that graffiti is not simply a substitute for missing mass media coverage as often indicated. The special quality of graffiti allows not only for the utilization as a means for opposing marginalization tendencies in media and society, but it also bears its own media-specific characteristics that other (communication) media cannot provide: Through its emotional approach and its media-specific characteristics, communicating via graffiti allows for addressing and sensitizing (new) audiences. Additionally, graffiti supports the aims of the movement such as communicating information, framing events, mobilizing, and motivating activists and residents, as well as contesting space. In this regard, the ARAP movement reappropriates the public space for the people they aim to represent through the creative practice of graffiti.

Keywords: *Counterpublic, graffiti, protest movement, street art, social movement.*

INTRODUCTION

Art has always played an important role in Indonesia's protest movements, starting as early as in the struggling phases of independence in the 1940s. As political activism was mostly banned in the 1970s, artists continued to protest through their art and succeeded in finding a more metaphorical and therefore less punishable way to express their political resistance. Seno Gumira Ajidarma, a famous Indonesian writer, described the situation as follows: "When journalism is shut down, art must speak up" (Swastika, 2019). Whilst the art scene at this time merely focused on traditional techniques, contemporary Indonesian artists increasingly use street art and graffiti as their means of expression (Lee, 2013). However, research on (contemporary) graffiti in Indonesia is still in the early stages and there is little published on the phenomenon of graffiti used by protest movements (Hall, 2017). This study aims to make a first step towards filling this research gap by concentrating on an exemplary social movement and its use of graffiti. Whereas multiple international studies on protest movements analyzed the role of graffiti as a means of political protest communication before the emergence of digital media (i.e. Peteet, 1996; Rolston, 1987), contemporary research mainly focuses on movements' usage of new media and online activism. This particularly concerns current research on counterpublics (Cseke, 2018; Freudenthaler, 2020; Lien 2022; Wimmer 2012, 2005; Wonneberger, Hellsten & Jacobs, 2021). Theorists of this field state that

new possibilities of digital media offer a safer, faster, and more effective way for counterpublics for both, expressing political dissent, and mobilization. Engesser and Wimmer (2009) even argue that counterpublics are almost completely based on online communication nowadays.

The widespread existence of graffiti as a means of protest, however, challenges this claim. One striking example is the graffiti in Tamansari, a kampung located in the north of Bandung (Indonesia). The settlement was developed along the Cikapundung river in an informal construction process and is characterized by a high population density, population growth, and residents with a low income (Ekomadyo et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2019).

The local government of West-Java evicted first parts of an area with 197 households in 2017 without any legal basis (this area will in the following be called 'eviction area', its remaining 33 households 'residents'). The eviction was only a first step towards the eviction of the whole area, being part of the governmental program KOTAKU 100-0-100, a national project that seeks to reduce the number of slums in Indonesia to 0 % (KOTAKU, 2017). As the program KOTAKU indicates, the process of governmental land eviction in Tamansari is exemplary for ongoing processes in many Indonesian cities. In Tamansari, as well as elsewhere, the implementation of the program resulted in protest and resistance against the government's plans which were amplified by weak compensations that were often perceived as unable to meet the needs of the residents. After the first eviction, the People's Alliance against Eviction (Aliansi Rakyat Anti Penggusuran – ARAP) was formed to organize resistance and solidary activities for and with the people affected by the evictions in Tamansari (Prasetyo, 2020). ARAP is a collective protest movement of evictees, remaining residents of the eviction area and solidary people (activists). Among them are artists, musicians, lawyers, journalists, and members of other allied organizations such as the Bandung Student Collective, a local football fan club, anarchist and punk collectives and NGOs (ibid.). Since its emergence in 2017, ARAP organized protest activities including land occupations, demonstrations, and events such as concerts, movie screenings, information events, art exhibitions and festivals. Most of the graffiti in the area was created during one of the festivals organized by ARAP: *Kampung Kota* in December 2017.

Interestingly, first interviews with activists showed that graffiti has been an important means of the protest movement, contradicting the above mentioned theoretical superiority of digital media. Thus, the question arises why ARAP do not (exclusively) rely on online activism but choose artistic articulation such as graffiti for their work as well. For examining which role graffiti can play in their work, this study uses the framework of counterpublics to answer the following research question:

(RQ) In which ways can graffiti, being an artistic articulation as well as a form of protest communication, contribute to the representation of interests of counterpublics?

We examine the use of graffiti by the ARAP movement to assess the research question. For a more comprehensive elaboration on the subject, three sub-questions, which refer directly to the ARAP movement, will guide this work:

- (1) How are the graffiti in Tamansari an articulation of political protest exceeding artistic-aesthetic expression?
- (2) What further functions do graffiti fulfill in the work of the ARAP movement?

(3) In which way does access to mass media influence the usage of graffiti by the movement?

The first sub-question aims to investigate the political protest dimension inherent in Tamansari's graffiti whereas the second deals with functions of the graffiti exceeding direct articulation of political protest. Finally, the third question evaluates the role of graffiti among other relevant media of and for the movement and to what extent marginalization tendencies encourage the use of graffiti.

The methodological implementation consists of six qualitative in-depth interviews with the artists, which accounts for the main part of the investigation and aims at examining their motivations and attitudes. Additionally, observations from the field which include a qualitative content analysis of the graffiti are used to investigate the context of the artworks.

In the following, the theoretical backgrounds of the topic will be discussed. Then we elaborate on the methodology employed for this study, whereafter the key findings of this research will be evaluated. Finally, we connect our findings with the discussed literature, and summarize the key findings of this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the underlying framework of this paper, the theory of counterpublics (Wimmer, 2007) will be assessed, supplemented by an overview about current research about graffiti in protest.

Counterpublics

Our study adopts Wimmer's (2007) conceptualization of counterpublics deriving from his meta-analysis on the counterpublic sphere. As the term counterpublic sphere already suggests, it is related to the concept of the public sphere, firstly introduced by Habermas in 1965. In his understanding, the public sphere is a domain of social life, a network that mediates between living worlds and other functional subsystems, where public opinion is formed (Habermas, 1991). In the broader sense, counterpublic spheres can be described as partial (alternative) public spheres that are organized around a specific societal issue and directed opposing the hegemonic public sphere (Engesser & Wimmer, 2009; Wimmer, 2007).

These spheres are constituted by counterpublics, which Wimmer characterizes as "specific publics centered around a specific social discourse or point of view aiming to bring their positions – which they feel are being marginalized [...] – to mass media by means of alternative media and actions and therewith gain public attention" (Wimmer, 2012). Through alternative media, counterpublics aim for their (political) position to be covered by the established mass media to assert their goals. The counterpublics emerge because individuals feel that their voice is not being heard in the mainstream media (ibid.). Thus, the subjective perception of those affected is particularly relevant for understanding counterpublics.

Counterpublics do not necessarily provide emancipative, participative or collaborative strategies that serve to strengthen democracy (Wimmer, 2012). However, Engesser and Wimmer (2009) stress their positive potential for political participation and democratic discourses.

Despite its democratic relevance, empirical research on counterpublics and counterpublic spheres is still scarce (Wimmer, 2007). Current research on counterpublics mainly emphasizes the rapid change in media technology, the usage of new alternative media

and online activism (Cseke, 2018; Wonneberger, Hellsten & Jacobs, 2021;). Wimmer (2015) highlights that although the new digital media technologies have not yet changed the fundamental market-dominating position of established media, the use of alternative media strengthens the media representation and communication power of counterpublics. Other recent studies increasingly focus on the role of online media in counterpublic social movements (Choi & Cho, 2017; Clark, 2019; Kavada & Poell 2021; Sills et al., 2016; Thakur, 2020).

Whereas the field has emphasized the changes in media technology, art and graffiti have not yet been sufficiently examined in the context of counterpublics. A first empirical insight into the potential of graffiti as a counterpublic medium was provided by Riebes (2010) and D’Cruz (2016). D’Cruz noted graffiti’s spatiality and embodied materiality as important dimensions of (counter) publics and public space because they shape everyday life by influencing the emotions and behavior of individuals.

Graffiti as Protest Communication

Democracy requires certain forms of public political communication, including political protest (Kneuer, 2017). Protest movements today are increasingly dependent on media communication, for both, reporting about them and the public communication of the movement itself (Wimmer, 2015). Historical but also recent protest movements such as the Arab Spring (Lennon, 2014) illustrate that protestors frequently use artistic expressions such as graffiti as a means of protest communication to draw attention to their concerns. Graffiti are visible elements, applied (e.g. painted, scratched or written) to publicly exposed surfaces, mostly by anonymous individuals or groups (Siegl, 2010).

The potential of graffiti for protest was first stressed by Chaffee (1993) who emphasized that graffiti is capable of influencing human emotions and political opinion. Adams (2002) noted the manifold functions art can fulfill within political protest: Through the evocation of emotions, art is able to support framing, to mobilize resources, to transmit information and to function as a symbol of the movement (Adams, 2002; Ouaras, 2018).

Despite its importance for protest communication, graffiti is primarily observed as a pop-cultural phenomenon of the youth and hip-hop scene (Bodunrin, 2014; Safruddin, 2014). Moreover, communication science is still lacking a comprehensive framework of graffiti as a medium of protest as the literature predominantly consists of exemplary studies.

Furthermore, the question whether graffiti should be considered a medium with an immanent protest dimension is essential for investigating the role of graffiti in a protest context. Authors such as Baeumer (2009) ascribe immanent political attributes to graffiti. Accordingly, through its occupation of public space, graffiti itself is characterized by a genuine protest character, as already the act of spraying graffiti symbolizes the rejection of existing ownership and power relations. Contradicting authors claim that graffiti is merely a visual practice whose potential can be used by those that are powerful within hegemonial structures, for instance, representatives of the state, too (Bogerts, 2016). Following this interpretation, the protest character of graffiti depends on context.

Notwithstanding this controversy, the empirical basis on graffiti as an expression of political protest is broad (e.g. Bogerts, 2016; Peteet, 1996; Rolston, 1987). Several studies have examined graffiti’s relationship to democratic processes and the articulation of opinion as a means of political protest. Chaffee (1993) emphasizes that street art enables a decentralized, democratic form of articulation in which the producers have control over their own messages. That is particularly important in authoritarian systems in which freedom of

expression is restricted, but street art also allows actors in democratic systems to promote their interests (*ibid.*). In this participatory notion of street art, politically themed graffiti can also be characterized as a type of political discourse, a form of contentious politics, and micro-level political activism (Waldner & Dobratz, 2013). Furthermore, street art allows marginalized groups to attract the attention of the public and the mass media, which then potentially spread their messages further (Chaffee, 1993).

Moreover, several authors address graffiti in the context of spatial aspects. Abaza (2013) recognizes street art's potential to preserve collective memories as a physical "memorial space", whereas other authors emphasize the performative qualities of protest graffiti by defining it as means to reclaim public space (Bihr, 2015; Smith, 2020). In the performative act of conquering space, alternative political ideas are inscribed on the city's surface (Tulke, 2019). Both, the content of protest graffiti, and the act of spraying itself are essential in undermining the (governmental) hegemonic power structures by disrupting the previously existing, 'clean' order (Bihr, 2015). This performative expression can be used to symbolically reconquer public space. Graffiti visually occupies public space and thus makes it fruitful for the public at large. Thereby, the public space becomes a political place that is used differently than initially intended (*ibid.*).

There is a long tradition of using art as a means of resistance in Indonesian movements: best-known are paintings, woodcuts, posters, puppetry, and street art (Lee, 2015). In recent decades citizens have become familiar with graffiti and other activist street art of social movements. Their politically themed artworks are not only visible on the streets but also documented and shown on television news, documentaries, exhibitions, and websites (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, research on (contemporary) graffiti in the protest context of Indonesia is still in an initial stage. Existing studies mainly concentrate on individual artistic expression or specific collective artistic projects and their protest character (Hall, 2017; Lee, 2013, 2015). However, a few studies about urban social development in kampung communities in Bandung also touch on the subject of graffiti (e.g. Ekomadyo et al., 2013; Prasetyo & Iverson, 2013; Yuniar & Efendi, 2018). Ekomadyo et al. (2013) recognized both, the graffiti themselves and their collaborative creation initiated by the local community, as parts of the urban and social transformation in Bandung's kampung Dago Pojok. The authors further reflect on the graffiti as a way to brand Dago as a 'creative kampung' for involving the local community, gaining media attention and fostering commercial – especially touristic – activities (*ibid.*). Prasetyo und Iverson (2013) also emphasize the transformational qualities of graffiti in Dago Pojok to create a "new atmosphere of openness, confidence, and solidarity which has transformed social life in the community" (Prasetyo & Iverson, 2013, S. 16). Although they acknowledge the political character of some of the artworks, the authors emphasize that the graffiti's main importance lies in community engagement and economic benefits for the residents and not in protest articulation. Thus, however some authors addressed the use of graffiti in Indonesian kampungs, the research gap regarding the communicational aspects of graffiti as a means of protest of counterpublics in Indonesia becomes apparent.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the research design and the implementation of this study, including the steps of sampling, data collection, and data analysis.

Study Design

This study seeks to explore the role of artistic articulation in political protest by investigating the artists' positions and their artworks on a micro-level. In order to examine the different perspectives of the participants, a qualitative, exploratory design will be applied. That allows for the required in-depth investigation and does justice to the complexity of the subjects' views (Boxill et al., 1997). For this, the study is based on Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in which theory generation is drawn from the analysis of patterns, topics, and general categories of observational data (Babbie, 2008). Accordingly, an inductive approach is implemented to derive theory from data (Tarozzi, 2020). Furthermore, the processes of data generation and data analysis are performed concurrently. Thus, they enable a constant adaptation of instruments and theory (Birks & Mills, 2015). 'All is data', one of the central promises of Grounded Theory, allows to combine findings of interview transcriptions, observations of the field, and a visual content analysis. The inclusion of visual data is based on the Visual Grounded Theory initially outlined by Konecky (2011). Field observation and meetings with activists engaging in Tamansari preceded the process of systematic data collection using qualitative semi-structured interviews and content analysis.

Recruitment and Sampling Strategy

The interviews were conducted in 2019 and 2020, two years after the first eviction in Tamansari. We interviewed artists who have created graffiti in Tamansari and one leading activist to obtain general information about the movement and the current situation in Tamansari. After the first contact with an artist from Tamansari was made with the help of the organization School of Peace Bandung, a nonprobability-sampling technique, the snowball-method, was used (Babbie, 2008). The snowball method was considered suitable given the fact that the target group was relatively small and difficult to locate but well-connected (ibid.). Six out of seven contacted persons agreed to be interviewed. To guarantee the safety of the participants, their names and personal backgrounds are not disclosed.

For the content analysis, a sample of the interviewed artists' artworks was generated containing one graffiti per artist.

Data Collection

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted to assess the artists' attitudes and knowledge. This enabled a flexible but detailed investigation of the issue (Boxill et al., 1997). The developed interview guide was structured into different thematic parts and adapted to the new findings after each interview.

The final number of participants was reached when repetitive answers indicated data saturation after six interviews (Grady, 1998). The interviewer, not a native speaker of Indonesian, was assisted by a translator so participants could choose between English and Indonesian language for the interviews. The interviews took place in Tamansari to ensure a relaxed and familiar dialogue. They were recorded. Since two artists were living outside of Bandung at the time the interviews were conducted, one interview took place in the artist's studio in Sanur, whereas one artist was interviewed via telephone.

In addition to the data collected in the interviews, observational data was gathered during several visits of the area, including the authors' participation in different informal as well as formal gatherings in Tamansari such as art exhibitions, film screenings, concerts, information events, and informal gatherings. Besides the field notes of these observations, the murals were inspected and documented as photographs.

Data Analysis

According to Grounded Theory, after conducting the initial interview, the generated data was immediately coded and analyzed before additional data was collected and coded likewise. The recorded conversations were transcribed according to Dresing and Pehl (2018) and analyzed with the software *F4transcript* and *F4analysis*.

For the analysis of the murals, the procedure was adapted to the specific requirements of pictorial representations of Visual Grounded Theory as outlined by Mey and Dietrich (2016). Thus, elements of visual methods based on objective hermeneutics, the documentary method, and a segment analysis were applied. Following Mey and Dietrich's procedure, the steps of the data evaluation included

- (1) contextualization and description of the graffiti;
- (2) segmentation;
- (3) memo writing and coding as an interwoven process;
- (4) interpretation of the image and the integration of knowledge;
- (5) formation of categories that reflect the conceptual concept of the image; and
- (6) the integration of further image and text categories (ibid.).

Finally, the findings were interwoven with the interview data and the information gathered by observations and integrated as continuous text into the results section of this paper in order to allow for comprehensive answers to the research questions.

RESULTS

In the following we examine the relationship between art and political protest in Tamansari, characterizing this symbiosis in more detail. Subsequently, the role of graffiti within the media representation of the movement will be evaluated.

Graffiti as a Means of Protest in Tamansari

Our examination shows that the dividing-line between artists, activists, and residents is blurred: Some of the 15 artists who painted graffiti in Tamansari were already part of the movement (e.g. P1, P3, P4), others such as P5 joined during the process. Only P6, an external professional graffiti artist who was invited by a friend, was not active in the movement (Interview 4, Paragraph 6). However, following P4, all artists who created graffiti in Tamansari can also be considered activists because of the context of their art (Interview 2, Paragraph 96). Although those who painted graffiti in Tamansari were involved in activist activities to varying degrees as well, they will be referred to as 'artists' in this text to allow for a differentiation between the different stakeholders. Similar to the connection between artists and activists, the artists also were in close and mutual relationships with the residents, as P4 and P5 emphasized: They spent a lot of time together, supported and influenced each other and learned from one another (Interview 2, Paragraph 78, 80; Interview 3, Paragraph 77 - 79). Some of the artists (e.g. P3) have also been affected by the eviction themselves or have lived in the area at some point of the eviction process (P2, P1). Those who are both residents and artists, will also be referred to as 'artists' to differentiate them from residents who have not been involved in the graffiti painting.

Analyzing the graffiti that were painted on the ruins and the remaining houses of the area, the context of their creation must be considered: Most of the graffiti were created up to three days before and during the festival Kampung Kota as a group event (Interview 1_ Part

1, Paragraph 61). The festival was one of the protest activities organized by ARAP to activate the area and to show solidarity with the evictees. Since the movement is not organized in hierarchies, the decision to create the graffiti event was made collectively with evictees and residents (Interview 1_Teil 2, Paragraph 68 - 71). Besides the large graffiti of the artists, a myriad of smaller graffiti was created by evictees, residents, and activists, containing political slogans against the eviction, drawings from children, and decorative elements, many of them dealing with the eviction.

Most of the artists (P2, P3, P4, P5) painted in Tamansari out of solidarity with the residents to show their protest against the eviction. One common trait of all artists is their aim of helping the residents and improving their lives (e.g.; P4 Interview 2, Paragraph 76; P5, Interview 3, Paragraph 171; P6, Interview 4, Paragraph 155).

Deducing from the interviews, three main functions of the graffiti could be identified that will be outlined in the following:

- (1) articulation of political messages
- (2) contestation of public space
- (3) mobilization efforts

a. Articulation of Political Messages

A first observation of the area showed that although all artists were free in their choice of motif (Interview 4, Paragraph 6) many of the graffiti express political themes of resistance. This impression is further supported by the interviews which highlight the importance of communicating political messages for the artists. Artist P2 emphasized their aims of “making art for the people” (Interview 1_ Part 2, Paragraph 54), a direct reference to the principles of the *Institute of People’s Culture (Lekra)* which promotes an understanding of art as a way to achieve socio-political transformation (Prasetyo & Iverson, 2013). Such political connotation was reflected by almost all artists, positioning them on the side of the resistance against the state-imposed eviction. Participant P6 is the only exception from this. He said he attempts to avoid any political positioning (Interview 4, Paragraph 4), but recognizes the highly political context of his graffiti and its creation. Although he was still sympathizing with the movement, it seemed as if tried to avoid possible negative effects of being associated with the protest movement on the economic success of his new projects in Sanur, Bali, where he recently moved to.

In contrast to that, artists P1 and P5 regarded the political content of graffiti as being salient. They believed in influencing people with strong political messages communicated through graffiti (e.g. P5, Interview 3, Paragraph 156 – 157). Participant P1 characterized graffiti as one of several communication media of the movement, indicating the recognition of graffiti as an established medium for expressing political protest (Interview 1_ Part 1, Paragraph 39). However, P1 also emphasized how limited the transportation of messages can be because of the subjective perception of graffiti:

But, because perception is subjective, if I want to tell something through my graffiti, usually people understand it differently. I cannot set the limits for peoples’ interpretation of this graffiti. (Interview 1_ Part 1, Paragraph 62).



Figure 1: Artwork A1 by Artist P1, source: own photograph (13.10.2019)



Figure 2: Artwork A3 by Artist P3, source: own photograph (13.10.2019)



Figure 3: Artwork A5 by Artist P5, source: provided by the ARAP movement

The content analysis of the five artworks supports the argument about the political dimension of the graffiti: three of them include political content (A1, A3, A5). These politically-themed graffiti all focus on the situation in Tamansari and express their support for the political aims of ARAP. Another artwork (A6) can mainly be interpreted as a (solely) artistic expression, whereas A4 aims at actively improving the mental state of the residents.

Since the main element of mural A5 directly postulates a political slogan, it is the most obvious example of the usage of graffiti for expressing political protest. The piece features a lettering in Indonesian language that can be translated as 'vote of no confidence'. According to the artist, this graffiti addresses the movement's distrust regarding the government's promises, especially in terms of the eviction and the promised housing opportunities for the residents (Interview 3, paragraph 66).

Another protest graffiti is the mural of artist P1 who took a more symbolic and pictorial approach. Activist P2 summarized her interpretation of this mural: "For me personally, it shows the resistance against the planned apartments" (Interview 1_Teil 2, Paragraph 69). Hence, he shared the artist's intention, who, in an analogy of nature and resistance, portrayed a tree as a persistent, and supposedly weak but eventually successful fighter against the government's housing project. In the sense of a memorial space, the mural displays the concerns of the movement and at the same time shows how the movement is perceived by the artist. Thus, he exploits the possibility to visually frame (Geise & Lobinger, 2015) the eviction process through his artwork.

The political content of P3's graffiti is less obvious than the murals discussed above. The piece portrays the head of a woman with long hair looking out of a sea of leaves. According to the artist, the artwork expresses her own feelings as a resident in the district, inviting the viewer to identify with the locals and their feelings, and hence to experience the latter (Interview 1_Part 2, Paragraph 83). The graffiti represents the residents of the eviction area, giving a voice to their feelings and fears. It can thus strengthen the sense of community and the identity of the people. Her approach simultaneously aims at the internal solidarity of the residents and attempts to make the situation of the residents experienceable for visitors to eventually motivate them to participate.

As portrayed in this section, the graffiti in Tamansari served as an articulation of political messages. Exceeding this, P4 suggested that graffiti not only is a mere articulation as the act of graffiti painting itself already inheres a profound meaning: "We did the graffiti as a message, and we did the event itself as a message too" (Interview 2, Paragraph 62). Therefore, also the following functions imply a political dimension.

b. Contestation of Public Space

The contestation of public space by the movement in Tamansari is defined by three elements which will be elaborated on in the following: space activation, aesthetical improvement, and symbolic appropriation of public space.

First, the graffiti project can be understood as an important means of the movement to counter governmental objectives by reviving the site and reestablishing the area as a "public space" (P1, Interview 1_Part 1, Paragraph 31), a process that started with the joint creation of the artworks.

Second, graffiti is central for upgrading the area by increasing its attractiveness through aesthetic improvement. The art was used to counter the framing of the kampung as a 'dirty slum' that was spread by the government and used as a justification for the eviction (P1, Interview 1_ Part 1, Paragraph 11). In the narrative of the artists, the eviction itself would become obsolete because the graffiti transformed the area into a pleasant residential neighborhood. P2 added: "We wanted to change this place, to make it nice to look at, with these graffiti" (Interview 1_ Part 1, Paragraph 61). Moreover, the artworks should increase the acceptance of the place and its residents in the population (Interview 3, Paragraph 153).

The third aspect of contestation of public space derives from the symbolic appropriation of the graffiti. This becomes apparent firstly when evaluating the spatial location of the graffiti which influences their message and how they are perceived. The graffiti was painted on the ruins and the partly demolished houses on the central square of Tamansari in the heart of Bandung. Thus, the colorful and large-scale murals shaped the appearance of the area significantly and made them visible to the general public. Secondly, the joint process of the graffiti's creation can also be regarded as an act of symbolic appropriation of public space. The artists symbolically 'conquered' the buildings and the square that were previously declared demolition sites, transforming the area into a place of art and community. As the graffiti remained in the physical space and thus continuously served as a means of artistic (political) expression, an appropriation of space proceeded. This allowed for a longer-lasting impact than short-term protest actions such as demonstrations or social media postings. The performative character of the contestation of space through graffiti is reflected in A1, which shows how the movement, embodied in a tree, destroys the government's plans by displacing the new houses through its growth. In this way the graffiti illustrates the tactic of contesting space and simultaneously implements this contestation through its physical presence in a performative act.

c. Mobilization: Internal Motivation and the Attraction of Outsiders

The mobilizational potential of graffiti unfolds in two ways: by supporting and motivating residents and activists and by attracting the attention and interest of outsiders.

Four of the participants (P1, P2, P5, P6) stated that they want to motivate the community through their graffiti. For some artists, the primary aim was to "ignite the spirit" (P5, Interview 3, Paragraph 14) of residents, activists, and the public. In P5's understanding, graffiti is also used to invite more residents to be an active part of the protest: "I am very sure, when people see my graffiti, people there will not lose their motivation, even if they lost their home. It's kind of inviting them (...)" (Interview 3, Paragraph 157). Participants P6 and P3 especially emphasized the importance of supporting the mental health of the residents. P6 – whose artwork shows a fantasy creature – is particularly interested in motivating and inspiring the children living in Tamansari: "Children must have more imagination and more happiness. Yeah, so they will grow up with good references, maybe. Yeah. It's hard, it's hard there" (Interview 4, Paragraph 155). The graffiti of P3 aimed at the mental well-being of the residents too. By representing their feelings and fears, she wanted to give them hope and a sense of not being alone (Interview 1_ Part 2, Paragraph 83).

All participants further addressed the outwardly directed functions of their graffiti. The graffiti raised interest and attracted visitors, especially due to their permanent visibility (Interview 1_ Part 1, Paragraph 34 – 39; Interview 2, Paragraph 58). Additionally, the act of creating the graffiti was considered one of many "activation activities" as well (Interview 1_

Part 1, Paragraph 11), to attract new people and to arouse first interest in the community. Raising awareness through graffiti is central to the movement as even people living nearby were not aware of the circumstances: “It’s right, people around us [...] rarely come here” (P1, Interview 1_ Part 1, Paragraph 44). The movement used graffiti, because of its reputation in Bandung, a city famous for its art scene, as P2 highlights: “Why graffiti? Because in Bandung, art is a good way to draw people’s attention” (Interview 1_ Part 1, Paragraph 61).

The Role of Graffiti within the Media Representation of the Movement

Although the eviction was at least partly covered by local news outlets, this coverage is considered as biased towards the government’s perspective, according to most of the participants (P1, P2, P3, and P4). National mass media, however, barely cover the issue at all (P1, Interview 1_ Part 1, Paragraph 74). According to the participants, people can access information about the situation in Tamansari through alternative media on social networks (e.g. P5, Interview 3, Paragraph 114) on which the movement aims to make the situation in Tamansari more visible (P1, Interview 1_ Part 1, Paragraph 44). According to P1, this aim is only partly achieved as neither social media content nor traditional mass media adequately inform the public about the situation (Interview 1_ Part 1, Paragraph 44). P4 also identified the low information degree as a problem but regarded the lack of sensitization of the public as the main issue: “Maybe they are in the news but it’s not like headlines, it’s not a really big thing. And people just forget it.” (Interview 2, Paragraph 64). She distinguished between the knowledge about the issue and the actual willingness to act (Interview 2, Paragraph 224; Interview 2, Paragraph 226). According to P1, the main challenge in this regard is a large number of similar cases of state arbitrariness, injustice, and illegal evictions, which leads to a normalization of situations like in Tamansari (Interview 2, Paragraph 68). Participant 6 added the hopelessness of the situation as another reason for the low solidarity among the population: “It’s not about not caring or anything, it’s about: ‘If I join, it’s still happening. [...] It [the eviction] still will happen’” (Interview 4, Paragraph 102). Apart from this compassion fatigue, P4 stressed that the resistance is expressed mainly by those affected by the situation, while most other people are not involved at all (Interview 2, Paragraph 166). Experiencing the place can serve as a means to counteract this emotional distance: “For example, when you see an eviction area, that’s probably something that touches your heart, and when evictions also happen in another place, you will feel solidarity” (P3, Interview 1_ Part 2, Paragraph 31 – 32). As P1 highlighted, graffiti is important in experiencing the space and becoming aware of the situation of the residents: “I think it’s easier to catch the meaning. It’s different to articles, etc. The meaning of these symbols will attract people.” (Interview 1_ Part 1, Paragraph 62) In this understanding, graffiti is a promising way to let outsiders connect to Tamansari. P4 added, that even the people unaware of the situation might change their attitude because of the graffiti: “I’m sorry, but I can say there are still many college students who are still apathetic, they are visiting the event just for watching their favorite bands. When they see my graffiti, I hope they realize ‘oh, now we are in bad condition’” (Interview 3, Paragraph 14).

DISCUSSION

The ARAP movement meets the premises of counterpublics as defined by Wimmer (2012): the movement is a marginalized public, centered around the public discourse about ‘slum’ evictions, resisting the eviction of the neighborhood, and countering the public discourse. It does not have sufficient access to mass media and is lacking influence on the political system

as shown in the results section. Most participants accordingly perceive the movement's position as marginalized in society. In this context and considering the ties of the artists to the movement and the residents of the area, the artists and their artworks can be described as a part and relevant voice of the counterpublic.

Following the findings of this paper, the research question can be answered as follows: graffiti contributes to the representation of the interests of counterpublics through its emotional approach by articulating political messages, contesting public space, and internal and external mobilization. Our results are therefore confirming but also expanding the body of literature (e.g. Ekomadyo et al., 2013; Yuniar & Efendi, 2018) by providing deeper insights into the emotional approach of graffiti and their importance for counterpublics. The elaboration on the three sub-questions of the research in the following offers further in-depth information on that:

(1) *How Are The Graffiti in Tamansari An Articulation of Political Protest Exceeding Artistic-Aesthetic Expression?*

The content analysis of the graffiti and the investigation of the background and motivations of the artists illustrated that graffiti is used to articulate protest of the counterpublic and to frame the issue of the eviction of Tamansari from the movement's perspective.

The protest dimensions of graffiti in Tamansari go beyond their political content. In order to assess this dimension, the interpretation patterns of graffiti are worth elaborating. Whereas the narrative of 'smearings' and illegal damage to property are popular interpretations of graffiti (Olteanu, 2013), all participants characterized them as a recognized art form. This seems to be a distinctive feature in dealing with graffiti, which was already implied in Lee's (2013) work on Indonesian street art. It contradicts the rationale that graffiti *per se* has a protest character inherently by countering power relations (Baeumer, 2009). If graffiti is considered a respected medium of expression, there is no inherent challenge of power relations. This result supports Bogert's (2016) assessment that a protest function is not immanent to graffiti. Nonetheless, the production of the graffiti in the context of protest and their location in Tamansari demonstrate shared attitudes, namely challenging governmental positions. Thus, even graffiti without explicit political messages (e.g. artwork 6) can represent a form of political protest.

(2) *What Further Functions Do Graffiti Fulfill in the Work of the ARAP Movement?*

The analysis showed that the graffiti fulfilled two other predominant functions in the movement. Firstly, they contributed to the contestation of space, secondly, the graffiti served for mobilization by drawing attention to the movement and attracting outsiders. Eventually, they contributed to motivating and mobilizing residents and activists. Hence, the results are in accordance with the functions that art can perform within political protest as listed by Adams (2002) and Ouaras (2018). This shows that graffiti is not simply another mouthpiece of the movement; instead, its media-immanent characteristics are consciously used to support the interests of the movement. The graffiti, visible from afar, became both a symbol and a means of identification for the movement, emphasizing its claims by permanently occupying public space. This supports the claim of space contestation through graffiti (Bihr, 2015; Smith, 2020). Another function related to the space-changing qualities of the graffiti in Tamansari is to oppose the government's narrative of the 'dirty slum' by reviving the space

and beautifying the neighborhood. Very importantly however, all functions mentioned are heavily dependent on the high status and positive connotation of graffiti in Bandung.

(3) *In Which Way Does Access to Mass Media Influence the Usage of Graffiti by the Movement?*

The interviews with artists and activists demonstrated that mass media provide biased information about the movement. However, the participants did not perceive this as the major problem. Rather, they stressed the lack of emotionalization and the population's unwillingness to act, which derives from collective compassion fatigue that mere information cannot counteract. Graffiti is an essential element for countering this by enabling outsiders to experience the residents' situation and the interests of the movement. According to the interviews and in accordance with Chaffee's (1993) findings, graffiti can convey the concerns of the movement particularly well on an emotional level.

Graffiti facilitates access to the political issues of protest, but also appeals to an artistically interested yet hardly politicized audience. Hence, they exceed solely counteracting marginalization through classical mass media as indicated by Waldner and Dobratz (2013) and Wimmer (2012). Graffiti is used in Tamansari because of its unique characteristics, located at the intersection of political communication media and artistic modes of expression which were left out in previous works that exclusively emphasized the communication aspect (e.g. Chaffee 1993). This also reveals a discrepancy to Wimmer's (2012) understanding of placing the counterpublics' agenda in the mass media as their driving force. In ARAP's case, the media-immanent artistic characteristics of graffiti, that mass media do not have, are intentionally used to achieve the substantive goals of the movement.

The results indicate that counterpublics do not simply aim for placing their topics in the mass media but increasingly rely on owned media for external communication. In Tamansari, this can be detected in the creation of graffiti, but also in the movement's own social media channels. Interestingly, the connection between social media and graffiti through the digitalization of the artworks associated with the expansion of their sphere of influence was not addressed by any of the participants. This strengthens the proposition that the artworks' relevance is bound to its locality.

In addition to the results discussed above, several limitations need to be outlined. Firstly, it should be noted that the main part of this study was based on self-reported data of activists and artists, whilst other perspectives such as the evictees' view in general were considered to a lesser extent. Secondly, language barriers occasionally became apparent in the interviews, however, this could be minimized with research assistants who helped with translations. Thirdly, as an explorative study, the study at hand gives a first impression of counterpublics' use of graffiti by analyzing a specific case. This considerably limits the generalizability of the findings. Investigating other protest movements and their use of artistic media and examining the relevance of protest art in Indonesia would thus be of particular relevance for future research.

CONCLUSION

We aimed at investigating which role artistic, low-technology modes of communication in the form of graffiti play in the mediation of interests of counterpublics.

The results show that graffiti are not simply a substitute for missing mass media coverage but fulfill further functions and thereby exceed Wimmer's (2012) understanding of counterpublics' communication efforts. Due to their emotional approach, graffiti can

transcend the effect of mass media. They can address and sensitize (new) audiences and support further aims of movements such as communicating information, framing events (e.g. the eviction), mobilizing and motivating activists as well as residents, and contesting space. The ARAP movement attempts to reappropriate public space for the people through the creative practice of graffiti. Therefore, the movement works in the imagining of conceptual space and the physical contestation of concrete space. Graffiti should hence not only be examined as a makeshift solution in repressive systems, in times of crises, or when counterpublics are marginalized in the public sphere. Instead, graffiti must be considered equally as one of many media of counterpublics. Additionally, we could show that contrary to the current research focus, counterpublics do not necessarily articulate themselves predominantly in the online world. The consideration of offline artistic articulations in the context of protest and counterpublics are worth further attention.

Final Note: The remaining residents in the area were finally and violently evicted by military and police forces on 12th December 2019, thwarting the goals of the movement. The government destroyed all remaining buildings and thus ended ARAP's public political articulation through graffiti.

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