

Visual resistance in the walls of Santiago: demonstrations in Chile in 2019

Resistencia visual en los muros de Santiago: protestas de Chile en 2019

Resistência Visual nos muros de Santiago: protestos chilenos de 2019

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ABSTRACT | This paper is embedded in the Chilean demonstrations of October 2019, a series of massive protests and riots in different cities of the country that demanded political, economic, social, and cultural changes. Through a photographic recollection (298 photos) of the images (n=1211) displayed on the walls during the first two weeks of the mobilizations in Santiago de Chile, the centre of the demonstrations, and using the content analysis method, this paper aims to define the main themes that were represented in the popular demands and to examine the public participation in this context. The analysis shows that the main themes expressed through the visuals were the rejection of the Chilean political structure and the denunciation of the excessive use of public violence by the police. The ideas expressed can be summarized in four groups: violence, politics, identities, and love. Moreover, in addition to the triggers of the protest, it develops the reproduction of already established signs, and the raise of new imaginaries linked to the popular discourses. Finally, this study shows the role of the visual expressions that, regardless of their quality, contribute to the construction of meaning through visuality in the political contingency.

KEYWORDS: Chile; demonstrations; graffiti; public visuals; social movements; social outburst; visual communication; walls.

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RESUMEN | Este artículo se enmarca en el estallido social de octubre de 2019 en Chile, una serie de protestas masivas en diferentes ciudades del país que demandaban cambios políticos, económicos, sociales y culturales. A través de una recolección fotográfica (298 fotos) de las imágenes (n=1211) plasmadas en los muros del epicentro de las protestas de la ciudad de Santiago de Chile durante las primeras dos semanas de las movilizaciones, y utilizando el método de análisis de contenido, este artículo busca definir los principales temas representados en las demandas populares y explorar la participación pública en este contexto. El análisis evidencia que las principales cuestiones expresadas visualmente por los protestantes fueron el rechazo a la estructura política chilena y la denuncia al excesivo uso de la fuerza pública, y se concentraron principalmente en cuatro grupos: violencia, política, identidades y amor. Asimismo, muestra la adhesión a nuevas temáticas ajenas a los principales detonantes de las protestas, como la defensa de los derechos de minorías identitarias y las denuncias de violencia en la misma protesta, la reproducción de signos preestablecidos y el surgimiento de nuevos imaginarios alineados con los discursos populares. Finalmente, este estudio visibiliza el rol de las expresiones visuales que, independiente de su calidad gráfica, participan de todas formas en la construcción de sentido de la contingencia política.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Chile; comunicación visual; estallido social; grafiti; movimientos sociales; muros; protesta; visualidad pública.

RESUMO | Este artigo faz parte do surto social no Chile em outubro de 2019, uma série de protestos massivos em diferentes cidades do país exigindo mudanças políticas, econômicas, sociais e culturais. Através de um levantamento fotográfico (298 fotos) das imagens (n=1.211) captadas nos muros do epicentro dos protestos na cidade de Santiago do Chile durante as duas primeiras semanas das mobilizações, e utilizando o método de análise de conteúdo, este artigo busca definir as principais questões representadas nas demandas populares e explorar a participação popular nesse contexto. A análise mostra que as principais questões expressas visualmente pelos manifestantes foram a rejeição da estrutura política chilena e a denúncia do uso excessivo da força pública, e se concentraram principalmente em quatro grupos: violência, política, identidades e amor. Além disso, desenvolve a adesão de novos temas alheios aos principais gatilhos dos protestos como a defesa dos direitos identitários das minorias e as denúncias de violência no mesmo protesto, a reprodução de signos pré-estabelecidos e a emergência de novos imaginários alinhados com discursos populares. Por fim, este estudo torna visível o papel das expressões visuais que, independentemente de sua qualidade gráfica, participam de qualquer maneira na construção de sentido da contingência política.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES: Chile; comunicação visual; surto social; grafite; movimentos sociais; muros; protesto; visualidade pública.

INTRODUCTION

On October 18, 2019 in Santiago, Chile, the most important series of demonstrations occurred in the country in recent decades began, triggered by students protesting against the increase in the cost of public transportation, inciting payment evasion (Campos, 2020). The so-called social outburst unleashed weeks of demonstrations throughout the country, rallies of hundreds of thousands of people and artistic events, which shaped and reshaped popular slogans, specifically against the neoliberal system, socioeconomic inequality and corruption, but also in favor of the rights of minorities, such as indigenous peoples, women, sexual diversities and environmentalist policies (Garcés, 2019; Somma et al., 2021). The demonstrations generated acts of violence and excessive repression, especially in the first weeks, during which there were fires, looting, injuries and even deaths. The intensity declined when the political parties agreed to hold a referendum to approve the draft of a new Constitution that would replace the current one, enacted during the Pinochet dictatorship and responsible for the country's socioeconomic reality.

In this context, and throughout the weeks that the protests took place, the public and private walls of downtown Santiago were covered with texts and images calling for change and accusing atrocities, transforming the city's urban space into an environment of surfaces saturated with ever-changing visual expressions that attempted to expose different versions of the country's political contingency, solutions to its problems and denunciations of guilt. Thus, the urban environment was transformed into a kilometer-sized and publicly accessible canvas, where different ideas were shared, corrected and debated by anonymous citizens through a wide variety of forms of visual production, such as stains, symbols, drawings, texts, or homemade prints.

The pictorial approach developed by Mitchell (1986), and followed by other authors (Mirzoeff, 2016; Brea, 2010), broadened the conception of the visual and recognized its incidence in different dimensions of social and political life, beyond art and advertising, which generated the inclusion of images in different fields of study. Gradually –and while still considered as little addressed (Brown et al., 2017; Della Porta, 2013; Hansen, 2018)– the visual dimension in the study of contentious politics has been developed in the last decades from different perspectives: e.g., social movements (Doerr et al., 2015; Della Porta, 2013), demonstrations (Doer & Milman, 2014; Sun & Luo, 2022; Veneti, 2017), graffiti (Campos et al., 2021; Drechsel, 2010; Gómez-Abarca, 2014; Mubi Brighenti, 2010), the use of symbols (Olesen, 2015), specific cases of political confrontation such as Spain's Indignados (Rovisco, 2017), Hong Kong's Umbrella movement (Patsiaouras et al., 2018), Argentine expressions during the dictatorship (1976-1983) and the

economic collapse of 2002 (Ryan, 2020), Chile’s student protests (Manzi et al., 2021), or Latin American visual resistance as a cultural unit (Ryan, 2016), and even in the development of methodologies focused on the visual (Doerr & Milman, 2014; Doerr & Teune, 2008; Philipps, 2012).

The research on the intersection between political conflict and its visual expressions as a form of discursive, identity and persuasive dispute has been expanding and attracting interest. In the specific case of the social outburst in Chile in 2019, the approaches to the study of visuality have been mainly framed in analyses of artistic and rhetorical character, selecting to this end cases of specific aesthetic characteristics (Llanos, 2022; Márquez & Guíñez, 2021; Aguilera et al. 2023, Vásquez-Bustos, 2022), or the intervention of the urban environment (Márquez et al., 2020; Campos Medina & Bernasconi Ramírez, 2021). Despite the extent of approaches in the general literature, in the Chilean case it is possible to glimpse the lack of studies of visual expressions as a whole, capable of offering a new discursive dimension that would complement the existing knowledge on, on the one hand, the role of images produced in public environments in the dispute of meaning in contexts of political crisis and, on the other, the popular claims in the specific case of the Chilean demonstrations of 2019.



Image 1. Wall picture, Av. Libertador Bernardo O’Higgins, Santiago de Chile

Source: Picture taken by the author.

This paper therefore explores the visual expressions printed on the walls of the city to investigate, precisely, the main demands expressed visually on public roads and the anonymous collaboration in the production of meaning through visibility. This research focuses on the collaborative character involved in the construction of discourses of political resistance in crisis periods and how different political perspectives were expressed and confronted on the surface of public infrastructure as an expression of the understanding of political reality.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social movements and action

At the beginning of the 20th century, social movements were structured in a class struggle opposition, where workers or peasants demanded, through strikes and demonstrations, changes in working and living conditions to their employers and legislators (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Then, in the 1960s, social movements began to transmute into another structure of opposition, in which the main problem was no longer class, but identity (Touraine, 1985). Thus, while workers' social movements continued their struggles in mining projects, plantations and industries, movements in defense of gender, racial, sexual, and environmental equality began to flourish in the cities.

Later, at the end of the 1990s, but more solidly in the 2000s, the irruption of digital technology generated a new form of protest (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), since its intrinsic characteristics made two fundamental aspects for mobilization –the publication of content and organization– accessible, cheap, and immediate, significantly encouraging participation (Diani, 2000). The latter does not mean that this form of protesting has replaced the former, but rather that they share spaces in social practices and complement each other, in the same way that identity-based social movements did not replace labor movements (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Thanks to this new scenario, large and colorful social protest movements such as the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong, the protests in Catalonia and the Chilean social outburst of 2019 were able to learn of each other's existence despite the distances, as well as share symbols and strategies through digital media and social networks to apply them in physical actions in public spaces (Westcott, 2019).

Walls as political supports

On the other hand, political crisis processes usually generate aesthetic and graphic traces that persist in culture (Ryan, 2016). Indeed, social movements are recognized for their creativity in the generation of visual symbols (Della Porta, 2013) and for their ability to create new codes with which to communicate

their political ideas (Pavoni et al., 2021). Periods of demonstrations leave a great deal of physical and visual evidence of the ideas defended: proposals, victims, problems, and antagonists are engraved in different materials. Among these, walls play a leading role.

Public walls delimit spaces, are large-scale borders open to the gaze, but they are also supports capable of containing visual objects and, in this way, of disputing public attention as part of what is visible in the city (Mubi Brighenti, 2010). Thus, they are surfaces with the potential to be modified through graphic interventions, acting as a field of symbolic disputes. In them, the visual repertoires of protest, understood as the processes and visual elements used in contentious politics (Brown et al., 2017), are capable of grouping different ideas and, even, of replacing arguments to question the sociopolitical reality (Doerr & Teune, 2012) such as, for example, indicating problems, questioning authorities or denouncing facts.

Made up of individual fragments (Della Porta, 2013), but also conceived as a whole, protest visuals can function as a connecting resource, either among demonstrators (Doerr et al., 2015) or with those outside the protest. This, added to the fact that the versatility in the interpretation of symbols makes it easier to concur with them than with complex political discourses (Doerr & Mattoni, 2013), makes political images key elements for mobilization. Moreover, the use of images can facilitate the reuse of symbolic resources among protesters from different places, cultures, and languages (Doerr & Teune, 2008), as could be seen in the dozens of protests that occurred in different continents in 2019. However, it is important to mention that these symbolic disputes are part of larger processes, capable of politicizing objects, charging them with meaning and transforming them into triggers of collective memory (Dreschel, 2010; Márquez et al., 2020). Thus, graffiti function as symbolic inputs in public disputes over meaning and, although they are often considered as a form of disdain towards citizens or a challenge to the authorities, they should also be considered as territorial actions of a political nature (Mubi Brighenti, 2010), as an effective imposition by anonymous citizens to highlight community problems (Fuchs, 2006).

Thus, the disputes of meaning on the walls are generated by citizens who frame them with diverse expressions, diverse in terms of discourses, techniques and modes, generating a patchwork of images. In this regard, particularly helpful is the concept of signifying network postulated by Eliseo Verón (1993) as the relations of meaning between signifying objects, their practices of production and recognition, since the walls make visible pieces of the steady construction of this

signifying network. The mixture of visual elements and the relationship generated between them by the mere fact of coexisting in the same context forms a network of images that can be interpreted, independently or together, to understand a part of the reality of that context. However, the meanings will vary according to the interpreters since, although they share the same space, some symbols are intended for the general population, others for specific groups and others are expressions of a personal nature. In turn, this mixture of images generates a combination of aesthetics and meanings that create a code of protest (Lister & Wells, 2008). This can be specific enough to identify a specific demonstration (or period of protests) and thus construct a recognizable demonstration scenario loaded with signifiers (Márquez et al. 2020) that serves as a context for the protest actions and for the publicly deployed messages (Refaie, 2003).

A relevant dimension in this context is the ability to produce signs on public walls. It is not required to be a designer, poet, political scientist, or artist to generate visual expressions of a political nature. The quality of the content and visual form of each image can range widely, from poor reproduction of standardized signs to collages with unique styles and rhetorics. Ezio Manzini (2015) defines diffuse design as that which is developed by people with no professional preparation or experience but who, given advanced technical conditions and their own needs, are able to produce anyway. Regardless of the graphic or communicational quality of the signs marked on the walls, anyone can collaborate with the signifying network and the protest scenario.

Thus, in our societies increasingly dependent on visuality and with wide access to image production tools (Mirzoeff, 2016), the ability to publicly share ideas and personal perspectives on the world through visual representation has been democratized. This can be observed thanks to the collaborative nature of demonstration actions (Patsiaouras et al., 2018), a characteristic that makes protest spaces spread due to the participation of individuals with different motivations and skills (Manzini, 2019) who manage to build, for example, a kilometer-long space of visual expressions of protest in downtown Santiago. In this way, generally ephemeral images, highly charged with cultural referents and deeply innovative (Patsiaouras et al., 2018; Costanza-Chock, 2020), entwine a flow of related meanings that form general notions or perspectives (Rubenstein & Sluis, 2008) on the different ideas communicated that seek, usually, to educate observers about social problematics and justice.

Discourse theory on the walls

In their seminal work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) outline a new way of understanding political action through

discourse. Building on ideas of Antonio Gramsci, they argue that hegemony is the current state of affairs from a political perspective, but also from a cultural perspective, also called status quo. This hegemony is a network of articulations of ideas accepted by society. Hence, at times, these articulations become disarticulated; i.e., certain ideas cease to be so evident and begin to be questioned. Then, around this dislocation, there begins to be an antagonistic situation between hegemony and new ideas, a struggle that will eventually be rearticulated, although never definitively. Political crises and protests are cases of disarticulation, where part of the population demands changes to the status quo.

A relevant point in Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) theory of discourse are the chains of equivalence, which are different ideas grouped in an antagonistic position vis-à-vis hegemony. These may be close or not, but they complement each other and add forces to redefine the disputed articulation. This was seen during the Chilean social outburst in the various demonstrations with the presence of groups against AFPs (retirement system), environmentalists, students in favor of public education and anarchists, among many and very diverse demands, but which converged in the same questioning of the political and legal structure of the country. From this perspective, the walls of Santiago constantly reflected, in the form of visual expressions, the chain of antagonistic equivalence to the hegemony in force at the time. Regardless of the author or the quality of the expression, dissident public voices became effectively public in their questioning of the prevailing structures and openly declared their desire for change.

METHODOLOGY

The photographic recollection was conducted on November 1, 2019, two weeks after the beginning of the demonstrations, and days before the first of many cover ups of the intervened walls, both public and private. The record contemplated the systematic photography of the facades located on the Alameda Avenida Libertador Bernardo O'Higgins, the most important in the country, from San Francisco Street along the south facade and San Antonio Street along the north facade, to Plaza Baquedano, located at the intersection of the same Alameda with Vicuña Mackenna Avenue, the epicenter of the demonstrations. Thus, the photographic corpus, composed of 298 images, covers about 1.4 kilometers of walls intervened on both sides of the avenue. The corpus encapsulates the most active citizen demands from the beginning of the protests.

Of the 298 photographs, a corpus of 1,211 images was gathered, excluding those that were not painted directly on the walls (such as posters and homemade prints) for two reasons: to limit the corpus in terms of quantity and to eliminate

inaccuracies related to authorship and production and their relationship to public expression. Likewise, graffiti with linguistic messages were excluded, since the study seeks to focus on the visual representation of citizen demands. This is also why the elements analyzed are referred to as images, scribbles or visual expressions and not as graffiti, to evidence an approach from the visuality and isolate the study from the discussions on the complexity of the phenomenon (Pavoni et al., 2021). Two exceptions were made in this regard: first, the acronym ACAB (All Cops are Bastards) and the number 1312 (which alludes to the same meaning by relating each number to the position of the letter in the alphabet), since its use transcended its linguistic meaning to become a de facto symbol.

A content analysis (Berelson, 1971; Krippendorff, 2016) of the corpus was performed to evidence the number of images related to the different ideas and popular claims, consisting in the categorization of each visual expression. It was of great importance to quantitatively count the visual expressions to have an idea of the weight of each of the demands. The categories were defined inductively in the course of the coding process. The content analysis revealed two types of images that are impossible to compare with each other, but key to the corpus interpretation. On the one hand, those of simple construction and symbolic character, which we will call symbols, capable of quickly representing a pre-established idea without (necessarily) sharing physical/visual features with the represented object (Hartshorne & Weiss, 1974), and of reproduction close to systematicity; on the other hand, images of rhetorical character, which we will call illustrations, of complex design and manufacture and, therefore, practically unique. Given the obvious differences between the two groups, they were coded separately, so they show different but complementary results. The next section will detail the results of the content analysis of both groups.

RESULTS

Of the 1,211 images, 6.35% were illustrations, while 93.64% were symbols (table 1). The large difference in the number of both types is attributable to the difficulty, time, and risk involved in making an illustration compared to a symbol.

Type	Number	Percentage
Illustrations	77	6.35%
Symbols	1,134	93.64%

Table 1. Number and percentages of images by type

Source: Own elaboration.

The 1,134 symbolic visual expressions are distributed in 18 types, organized in four themes: violence (49.91%), politics (33.68%), love (8.9%), and identities (7.49%). Symbols referring to the theme of violence include the symbols ACAB and 1312, mentioned above, red hands, symbolizing bloody hands as a rhetorical figure of State responsibility for repression, hand bomb and flames, symbolizing incitement to violence by demonstrators, probably both as an act of protest and as a response to State repression. There are also angry faces, as a symbol of social unrest, and eyes, as a symbol of the State violence of these protests, where eye damage to protesters by Carabineros (one of the two Chilean police forces) reached more than 400 victims, including two people who were completely blinded (Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos, 2019).

The symbols related to politics are the historical symbols of anarchy and communism, referring to their respective ideologies. However, in the latter there are cases in which the symbol is intervened, seeking its annulment or correction, while declaring that the protests are not ascribed to that ideology. There is also the peso sign, in reference to the importance of money and the repercussion of economic power in society, which can even be attributed to allegations of corruption in the political, legislative, and judicial power, and the star, as a sign of Chile, unique in the flag and traditionally used to represent it. There is also the inverted Chilean flag, a criticism of the Chilean reality and the need for reconfiguration.

There are three identity symbols and they are aligned with the ideas of new social movements that seek to defend identity diversity and new ways of living in the world (Touraine, 1985). Veganarchy, a fusion between veganism as a lifestyle without prejudice to animal life and anarchism is the most represented. There is also the *cultrun* (percussion instrument used in Mapuche rituals¹), as a sign of the Mapuche culture; given its preponderance in indigenous discussions, it is likely that it also acts as a representation of the different pre-Hispanic cultures present in the country. The feminine sign represents a vindication of the role of women in society.

Finally, the group of symbols on love is composed of a single symbol, the heart, opening the political discussion to empathy and consideration.

Despite the fact that symbols related to violence are the most present, with almost half of the corpus (49.91%), the most reiterated symbol is that of anarchy (21.78%), which politicizes the visual discourse and evidences a distrust in the country's public structures, and institutions. It is followed by the symbols ACAB (20.72%)

1. <https://dle.rae.es/cultrún>

and red hands (15.8%) in number of appearances. The fourth most frequent symbol is the heart (8.9%), and the fifth is 1312 (7.4%), a numerical variation of the ACAB symbol. These five symbols, the most reiterated (all over 5% of presence), show the distrust of the protesters towards the State and its institutions, as well as the need to make public the denunciations of police violence and to call for the recovery of good manners and affection.

Symbol	Number	Percentage	Topic
Anarquía	247	21.78%	Politics
ACAB	235	20.72%	Violence
Manos rojas	180	15.87%	Violence
Corazón	101	8.9%	Love
1312	84	7.4%	Violence
Veganarquía	51	4.49%	Identities
Peso	44	3.88%	Politics
Estrella	40	3.52%	Politics
Bomba de mano	29	2.55%	Violence
Cultrún	21	1.85%	Identities
Cara enojada	16	1.41%	Violence
Caos	14	1.23%	Politics
Comunismo	14	1.23%	Politics
Mujer	13	1.14%	Identities
Bandera chilena invertida	13	1.14%	Politics
Ojo	11	0.97%	Violence
Llamas	11	0.97%	Violence
Total	1134	100%	

Table 2. Number and percentages of images by type

Source: Own elaboration.



First line, from left to right: anarchy, ACAB, red hands, heart. Second line: 1312, Veganarchy, peso, star. Third line: hand bomb, cultrun, angry face, chaos. Fourth line: communism (modified), woman, inverted flag, eye. Last line: flames.

Image 2. Examples of signs

Source: Picture taken by the author.

The complexity of the 77 illustrations in the corpus allows them to convey more developed messages than symbols, so that when they were categorized, new themes emerged (table 3). In the first place, it is not possible to group 23.38% of the illustrations in a thematic category because, although they are almost mostly faces, they are images of very different natures, such as internationally known caricatures or profiles of Latin American left-wing aesthetics. Many do not show any specific discourse or intention beyond their presence. These illustrations are

difficult to understand, even within the Chilean political and cultural context, so it is not possible to rule out that their intentions point to the contingency from reduced and specific contexts.

On the other hand, symbols about violence (19.48%) still have a high presence, with multimodal images representing fires, calls to provoke them, and denunciations of the brutality in the actions of Carabineros. Regarding them, not directly about violence but about their reputation (16.88%), the corpus presents a series of images of different complexity representing them as pigs, in reference to the worldwide insult used for the police, and also as cocaine consumers, in reference to a series of media accusations that arose during that period against Carabineros officers (Pastor & Quezada, 2020).

Likewise, the theme of a possible extraterrestrial invasion is persistent (14.29%), and its simple aesthetic development was constantly reproduced. It stems from a leaked audio, dated from the same day of the social outburst, in which the first lady of the time, Cecilia Morel, explains to a third person the seriousness of the events of October 18, emphasizing that they will be forced to share their privileges and that the situation looks like an alien invasion (“Protestas en Chile...”, 2019).

On the other hand, many television channels were constantly criticized during that period due to the impartiality of their approach, mainly because of the excessive coverage of the violence exercised by the protesters to the detriment of other issues, such as police repression or the substantive issues of the protests (Grassau et al., 2019). This issue (7.79%) is added to the criticisms of the institutional framework in the country and indicates the degree of multidimensionality of the crisis.

Topic	Number	Percentage
Other	18	23.38%
Violence	15	19.48%
Reputation of Carabineros de Chile	13	16.88%
Extraterrestrials	11	14.29%
Media	6	7.79%
Identities	5	6.49%
Politics	5	6.49%
Love	4	5.19%
Total	77	100%

Table 3. Number and percentages of illustrations by topic

Source: Own elaboration.



Above left: others. Top right: violence. Bottom left: reputation of Carabineros. Bottom center: extraterrestrials. Bottom right: media.

Image 3. Examples of illustrations

Source: Picture taken by the author.

It is also important to note that the transversal presence of diffuse design is evident, especially in the illustrations. This is evident when observing the proportions and the handling of the visual expressions' lines. However, despite the fact that the symbols are, in general, simple and relatively easy to reproduce, their formal characteristics also show different levels of experience in their authors' production. Thus, the corpus is composed of varied monochrome cases of asymmetrical hearts, humanoids drawn with basic lines and simple flying saucers, along with complex images developed by expert graffiti artists, or artists.

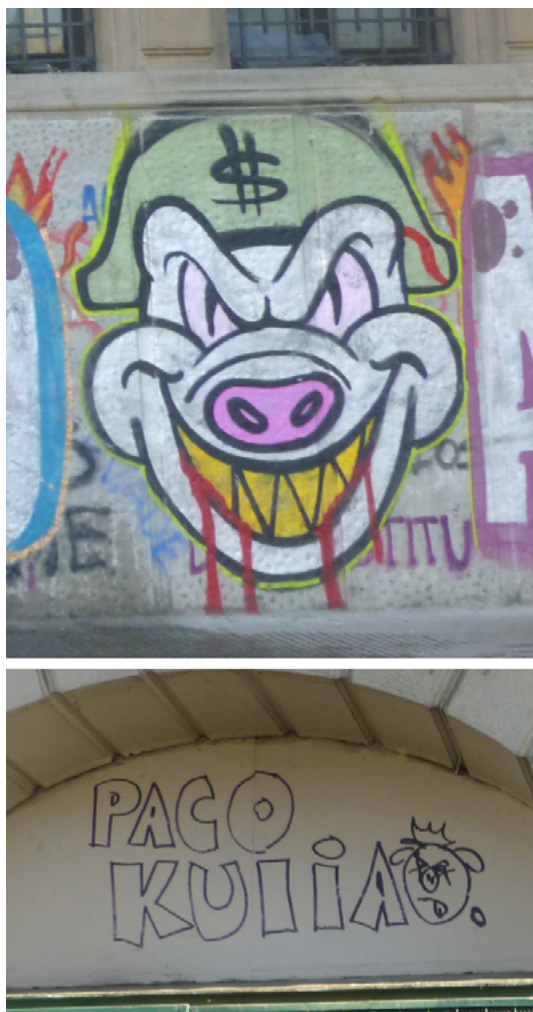


Image 4. Different quality images

Source: Picture taken by the author.

DISCUSSION

According to the analysis, the equivalence chain of the Chilean social outburst present on the walls mainly presented ideas around anarchy and the rejection of public force, as well as the recognition of the independence of animals, the rejection of the economic system, the valuation of indigenous groups and women, and dissent as a general idea. In other words, the questioning of national institutions profoundly marked the actions of the demonstrators. However, the main slogans on the walls do not match perfectly with the initial demands of the protests – those concerning inequality and the socioeconomic system–, but point, firstly, to the disconnection with the political structure, secondly, to the facts of the protest itself and, thirdly, to identity and economic issues. A gap between the initial reasons and the subsequent demands can be deduced from this, where

the main political disarticulation, of a socioeconomic nature, was joined by ideas related to the demonstration (and its repression), and to identity diversities. This gap can also be considered as a dialogue, since some of the visible ideas were later considered by the authorities, such as the accusations of excessive violence and the, still modest at the time, demands for a new Constitution, which ended up being incorporated as a solution to the social unrest.

On the other hand, violence was a very important part of the social outburst imaginary, as it covers almost half of the signs collected (49.91%) and more than a third of the illustrations if we add violence with Carabineros' reputation (36.36%), and focuses on three main discursive axes: incitement to violence (e.g., incentive to arson), visibilization of the victims (e.g., eyes) and denunciation of the actions of the public force, such as the representation of Carabineros consuming drugs. Thus, anonymous citizens articulate their messages, whether murals or simple scribbles, around specific ideas. We cannot know where these ideas come from, whether they are transferred from other media to the public walls or whether they emerge from the public walls. What we can see is a significant network of images attributable to different authors, sometimes reproduced serially and sometimes uniquely, but linked to specific ideas.

The symbols and concepts used can be related to an international cultural heritage of visual protest, such as the ACAB and 1312 symbols, which have their origin in the English language, or to specific subcultures such as the sign of anarchy that, in a certain way, would contribute to the construction of the protest scenarios developed by Márquez and colleagues (2020). In this way, the authors would be executing a double function; on the one hand, reproducing signs that may or may not strictly align with their context and, on the other, collaborating with the construction of a visual and physical protest scenario. Thus, the cooperative construction of a protest scenario could be considered as a consequence of the individual actions of the protesters who, intentionally or not, are able to exert political pressure not thanks to individual messages but rather thanks to the total result of the city as an object of protest.

Continuing with the idea of a signifying network, it is possible to assume that the symbols and illustrations displayed in the street are not necessarily understood by all observers. This point is relevant if we consider Rubenstein and Sluis' (2008) idea about the notions of a flow of images. There are so many images displayed on the walls, with so many regular changes, that reading and understanding them all becomes impossible for an observer, even for its research. In addition, the decoding of certain symbols is complex, even more so in the case of those who are part of small groups of the population, such as, for

example, the 1312 or veganarchy signs. In other words, they are independent productions, many of them from and for specific cultural niches, but deployed in a broad and transversal medium.

The images collected also show the emergence of new imaginaries in the Chilean social outburst, created in the contingency and directly linked to the context, such as the eye sign in reference to eye damage and the extraterrestrial invasion, linked to the metaphorical sayings of the first lady. As Doerr and Teune (2012) explain, these new imaginaries have the capacity to replace the original arguments. In this case, repression, its consequences and punishments, under the symbol of eye damage, became an important political discussion about institutional responsibility and reparations after the demonstrations.

The emergence of this type of images does not necessarily respond to the quality of the technique of their reproduction; in other words, the signs that manage to get a foothold are not necessarily those developed by expert graffiti artists. It is possible that their simplicity, which implies that they are easy to remember and, above all, to reproduce, helps basic signs to achieve greater popular acceptance. In any case, this simplicity generates inclusion in practice and enhances collaboration in their reproduction. Technically, any citizen can expose his or her perspective and adhere to the demands or generate his or her own without having any experience as an image creator.



Left: extraterrestrials. Right: new Constitution with eye sign.

Figure 5. New signs emerged in the protests

Source: Picture taken by the author.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper explored the construction of meaning of Chile's 2019 protests through visual expressions printed on the walls of its capital city. Through a content analysis, it was found that the main public demands focused on the rejection of the national political structure, the excessive use of public force, and the defense of the rights of identity minorities. This represents a gap with the main reasons for the social outburst, incorporating struggles into the protest after its beginning, as well as allegations of events caused in their context.

Likewise, the creation of a visual protest scenario on the physical structure could be observed, with the reproduction of diverse signs aligned with the main claims and expanded to other areas, such as the defense of different collective identities or the accusation against traditional media. The above, with a significant number of signs related to violence: its incitement, visibilization and denunciation, but also with the emergence of new signs that complement the Chilean protest imaginary, such as mutilated eyes and invading aliens. Connected to this, this article shows the coexistence of visual expressions of different quality in their production: precarious scribbles and professional murals share the space and help building political discourses of antagonism against the country's political and social reality.

This article intends to contribute to the discussions on contentious politics and its visual expressions, exposing the Chilean case and its specific evolution from student protests to a potential constitutional change. It also seeks to focus on the characteristics that political visual communication can provide in the processes of dispute of meaning and in the study of political processes. Finally, this article does leave some unresolved issues to be addressed in the future, such as an in-depth characterization of the diffuse design of visibility in political protests or the description of the emergence and flow of the new imaginaries and their reproduction on the walls by protestors/amateur artists.

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