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Street Art and Public Space: Political Dialogue and Contemporary Chilean Culture at the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center

Julia Tallant

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Abstract

Social and political movements frequently employ street art as an activist strategy to further their goals and affect change. Scholars have primarily focused on the role of street art in the construction of political dialogue and how that dialogue is representative of current socio-political attitudes or the role of public space in the construction of political dialogue and how that dialogue is representative of current socio-political attitudes. Few studies have studied the interaction between street art and public space in the construction of political dialogue and how that dialogue is representative of current socio-political attitudes. My analysis centers on the feminist murals created outside the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center at the Huelga Feminista in March 2019 and their evolution over the course of several months. I argue that the political dialogue constructed by the interaction between public space, the original feminist street art, and subsequent interventions reveals the persisting power of the myth of Chilean racial superiority and heteropatriarchal ideals of womanhood and femininity in Chilean society.

Preface

After changing my major from Studio Art to International Studies as a sophomore, I was intent on finding a way to incorporate art into my newfound area of study. I initially planned on researching the street art created by student protesters, but once I got to Santiago, I realized that it was impossible to tell which works were created by students and which were not. I attended the Huelga Feminista (Feminist Strike) on International Women's Day, and I saw groups of artists creating murals outside of where many of the marchers were meeting. I took photos and videos of the murals, but I did not intend on using them for my senior research. I walked past those murals several days a week on my way to class, and I became interested in how they were changing over time as posters and graffiti were placed on top of them. After seeing the evolution of the murals over the course of several months, I decided that I wanted to focus not just on street art, but also on the significance of its transformation over time.

I began to learn more about historic street art brigades while in Santiago through literature, museums and cultural centers, and the streets. Chile has a rich history of street art being used for political purposes beginning with the Brigada Ramona Parra in the 1960s. During the dictatorship, street art was highly censored, but the lack of anti-graffiti laws after the dictatorship has encouraged street art to flourish once again. While I was abroad, I wrote my final research paper for my Women, LGBTI, and Indigenous People in Chile class on the history of street art collectives and the use of street art as an activist strategy in Chile. This research allowed me to analyze street art collectives at a deeper level and helped me find many of the sources I am currently using for my senior research.

Towards the end of my time in Santiago, I started summer research on abortion activism, focusing on the intersections between religion, activism, policy change, and women's health.

Although this research is unrelated to my senior research, the interviews I performed with feminist activist organizations helped me gain a better understanding of Chilean feminism that I would not have been able to achieve on my own. The focus on intersectionality within many of the feminist activist organizations I interviewed gave me valuable insights to the intersectional focuses of the feminist murals outside the GAM.

Introduction

In the hours before the Huelga Feminista in Santiago, Chile, the buzz of anticipation was palpable as throngs of protesters congregated in the courtyard of the historic Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center (GAM) to decorate posters and prepare for the upcoming march. A feminist punk rock band played in the corner while organizers shared the demands of the strike with the crowd to roaring applause. Once the march began, protesters began chanting "y cómo, y cómo, y cómo es la wea, nos matan y nos violan y nadie hace nada"[1] and "alerta, alerta, alerta machista, que todo el territorio se vuelva feminista"[2] as they marched down the main avenue towards the presidential palace.

Over 800,000 people gathered in Santiago and throughout Chile in what leaders called the largest feminist mobilization in the country's history (El Desconcierto, 2019). Throughout the afternoon, artists and collectives collaborated to create figurative feminist murals on construction barriers outside the GAM. As weeks and months passed, anonymous visual interventions gradually began to cover these feminist murals in the continuation of a political dialogue debating Chilean modernity that the GAM has facilitated since its creation in 1972. In this paper, I employ the case study of the feminist murals outside the GAM to examine how the political dialogue created by the interaction between public space and street art functions as a window into current socio-political attitudes.

Scholars have primarily focused on the role of street art in the construction of a political dialogue and how that dialogue is representative of current socio-political attitudes or the role of public space in the construction of a political dialogue and how that dialogue is representative of current socio-political attitudes. Few studies have examined the interaction between street art and

[1] And how, and how, and how is this the thing, they kill us and they rape us, and nobody does anything
[2] Alert, alert, alert misogynists, may all of the territory become feminist

public space in the construction of a political dialogue and how that dialogue is representative of current socio-political attitudes. Additionally, few studies have examined the evolution of street art as various actors intervene upon it. I argue that the political dialogue constructed by the interaction between public space, the original feminist street art, and subsequent interventions demonstrates the persisting power of the myth of Chilean racial superiority and heteropatriarchal ideals of womanhood and femininity in Chilean society.

I begin by outlining the dialogue created by the murals outside the GAM and the space in which they were created. I then visually analyze the murals and the interventions placed on top of them, explicate how they engage in political dialogue with the GAM, and describe the content of that dialogue. Finally, I use visual analysis and theoretical frameworks to demonstrate that the political dialogue created by these murals and the subsequent interventions on top of them is representative of the popular social and political attitudes of Chile.

Literature Review

My present study engages the existing scholarship on the relationship between street art, politics, capitalism, and public space. I use street art and public art interchangeably to define art (murals, graffiti, and posters) created and/or placed in public spaces with the intention of public consumption.

Street Art, Public Space, and Capitalism

The use and occupation of public space is inherent to the function of street art. Public space refers to "all areas that are open and accessible to all members of the public in a society, in principle though not necessarily in practice" (Neal & Orum, 2009, p. 1). Through its accessibility to members of the public, public space provides a site for citizens to participate in democracy and engage in public debate. There are three perspectives on how public space functions: "as a

facilitator of civil order, as a site for power and resistance, and a stage for art, theatre, and performance" (Neal & Orum, 2009, pp. 4-5). In the context of street art, public space functions as a site for power and resistance and as a stage for art, theatre, and performance.

Anthony Orum argues that the model of public space as a site for power and resistance "focuses primarily upon the availability and overall structure of such space. It brings into broad relief the whole meaning of public space, questioning how public and how open such space actually is" (Neal & Orum, 2009, p. 77). Orum expands on Marxist thinker Henri Lefebvre's argument that the construction of cities is indicative of the types of societies that construct them (Neal & Orum, 2009, p. 77). He claims that systematic observation of people's activities within public space does not allow for full appreciation of its nature. Instead, he argues that "one must examine and disclose the structural determinants of such public space and how it relates to the dominant activities both of the state—a public institution—and of business and commercial interests—the private interests under modern capitalism" (Neal & Orum, 2009, p. 78). When attempting to understand the function of a public space, its historical, political, and economic determinants are of utmost importance.

Orum's model of public space as a stage for art, theatre, and performance "explores the ways that such space embodies and represents the culture of a community or society, and how those designs themselves provide a way to achieve as well as to sustain the collective identity of people in a public space" (Neal & Orum, 2009, p. 143). The use of art, theatre, and/or performance facilitates the creation and affirmation of a collective identity within a community. Furthermore, "the public space provides opportunities then for residents to tell outsiders who they are…[and] they also tell themselves who they are: they furnish the means through which people can disclose and affirm their own collective identities" (Neal & Orum, 2009, p. 145). The

creation and affirmation of a collective identity has the potential to inform collective memory by accepting or rejecting popular narratives surrounding the identity and history of a community. In this way, public space allows artists the space to share and affirm their collective identities, thereby informing collective memory, through the creation of street art.

Implicit in the conceptions of public space as a site for power and resistance and a stage for art, theatre, and performance is public space's function as an alternative site for political dialogue. As a site for power and resistance, there is a dialogue between public space and its historic, political, and economic determinants. As a stage for art, theatre, and performance, artists engage in a dialogue through their creation and affirmation of collective identities. These collective identities are in dialogue with collective memory as well as popular narratives of a community.

Street art interacts with public space through its use of walls. The wall not only serves as the physical location for street art but also as a facilitator of communication and dialogue. Around the world, walls "have become an arena for contentious dialogue through which social and political resistance is manifest" (Awad and Wagoner, 2017, p. 1). In doing so, public space acts as a facilitator for the dialogue taking place. This dialogue "presupposes change rather than stability, involving the constant negotiation of thoughts and meanings together with the creation of divergent social realities" (Awad and Wagoner, 2017, p. 8). Ephemerality and change are intrinsic to street art and reinforce its role as a form of political dialogue. The word "dialogue" refers to an exchange of opinions and ideas. In the context of street art, this exchange is exemplified by the creation and recreation of street art. It mirrors the back and forth nature of a verbal dialogue, only the conversation takes place visually rather than verbally.

Just as Orum argued that public space could not be separated from its historical, political, and economic determinants, street art cannot be separated from the physical and social context within which it is created. Context contributes to the dialogue created by street art. In the introduction to "Street Art of Resistance", Sarah Awad and Brady Wagoner expound upon the importance of context in street art's creation of dialogue. They argue that:

> "as an image is produced in a certain context, no matter how novel it is, it has a past life and is oriented towards future dialogues. The past life includes the history of the different icons constructing the image, the previous images it is contesting, and the medium it travelled through. Then once introduced in a certain context, it takes a life span if its own, independent of the intentions of the producer; its audience and censors appropriate it differently, assign meanings to it, and physically alter it by modification, reproduction, or destruction" (Awad and Wagoner, 2017, p. 10).

Street art is not static, and the dialogue created by street art is thus not solely informed by the producer. Its relationship with past images, where and when it is created, and how other actors interpret or alter it all influence its contribution to that dialogue. The authors elaborate on what can be learned by examining the evolution of street and claim that "following this social life for certain images tells a story about a contentious dialogue within a certain community. This is a story about arguments, what is tolerated, negotiated, and repressed" (Awad and Wagoner, 2017, p. 10). The ephemerality of public art also "provides a continuity for analysis of the conditions and changing configurations of public life, without mandating the stasis required to express eternal values to a broad audience with different backgrounds and often different verbal and visual imaginations" (Phillips, 1989, p. 335). The dialogue facilitated by street art's relationship with time thus allows it to be used as an analytic tool of social and political values in a society.

The reclamation of public and private space by street art is particularly powerful in neoliberal, capitalist societies where privatization of public space is central to the state's ideology. In these contexts, street artists not only have the power to question and rethink the distinction between private and public space but also challenge popular state ideologies. Political movements have a history of working within the framework of public space as a site for power and resistance by reclaiming public space as their own. Although public space is becoming increasingly scarce in neoliberal societies, "the neoliberalism of public space is neither indomitable nor inevitable, and however much public space is under a clampdown, it is not closed…whatever the deadening weight of heightened repression and control over public space, spontaneous and organized political response always carries with it the capability of remaking and retaking public space and the public sphere" (Low and Smith, 2006, p. 16). In neoliberal contexts where public space is increasingly privatized, political resistance is essential to reforming and retaking the space for the benefit of the public. The reclamation of public spaces by political resistance is vital because of the role it plays in the construction of social identities, such as that of citizen (Zukin, 2018). By acting as a form of political resistance, street art has the power to construct and affirm collective identities and ideas of political citizenship against neoliberal governments.

The relationship between street art, public space, and capitalism stems in part from political and commercial posters. Beginning "in the urban city of the twentieth century, the mural and the wall were anonymous supports of this strategic communication tool that in times of change and social mobilizations it overflowed its strictly commercial functions…the proliferation of political or commercial posters can establish a perspective of the type of community that is being incubated at a given time" (Caselli, 2016, p. 8). Caselli's claim that

commercial and political posters can be representative of the type of community or society in which they are created is reminiscent of the Marxist theorist Henri Lefebvre that Orum draws on to form his conclusion about public space as a site of power and resistance. It also relies heavily on the theoretical and historical frameworks put forth by Susan Sontag in her essay, "Posters: Advertisement, Art, Political Artifact, Commodity".

In the essay, Sontag investigates the historical evolution of posters from public announcements to commercial posters to political posters in order to evaluate the emergence and success of Cuban political posters. Along with representations of national identity gleaned from Mexican muralism of the early 20th century, Cuban political posters are one of the primary aesthetic influences of Chilean street art (San Martín, 2018). Sontag concentrates on the relationship between capitalism, public space, and posters. Political posters' roots in commercial posters imbue them with capitalism. They seek to sell political ideologies and value systems much in the same way that commercial posters seek to sell services and commodities. The propaganda techniques put forth by political posters are thus inherently capitalistic, resulting in cognitive dissonance when they are used to sell a communist or anti-capitalist agenda. One of Sontag's primary critiques of political posters, and Cuban political posters specifically, is the ease with which they can be commodified and collected by members of capitalist societies (Sontag, 1970). The seeming inability to separate political posters from capitalism necessitates the use of another form of visual propaganda, such as public art.

Sontag notes that art has a history that is closely linked to capitalism and the elite, which makes public art in and of itself a revolutionary act that breaks the chain of commodification (Sontag, 1970). Thomas Teo takes this postulation further, arguing that the arts are "part of the logic of capitalism" (Teo, 2017, p. 53). He suggests that street art's absence from the capitalist

and neoliberal market can enable it to become a more powerful form of art than commodified art forms by "reclaiming public spaces… [and filling] it with resisting content" (Teo, 2017, p. 58). His argument theorizes public space as both a site of power and resistance and a stage for art, theatre, and performance. The ephemerality of street art serves to combat capitalism because the difficulty of being bought makes it more effective than other forms of visual propaganda like political posters. The lack of commodification of street art allows it to be more representative of the general public's political and social beliefs than works created by artists reliant on the capitalist market (Adams, 2005).

Art and Politics

Art and politics are intricately intertwined in both the public and private spheres. Political establishments have the power to set the cultural agenda, while art has the power to either conform to or diverge from this agenda. When art diverges from the cultural agenda of political establishments, it becomes activist or dissident art. Activist art refers to art created under non-authoritarian regimes and dissident art refers to art created under authoritarian regimes. Shifra Goldman defines dissident art as "art which develops a critical stance within a country through a cryptic language that utilizes symbolism, allegory, and metaphor, or by the use of new materials and techniques which in themselves constitute a visual language able to surmount censorship, but understood by people sharing the same experiences and beliefs" (Goldman, 1994, p. 250).

Street art is an effective activist strategy that "has had demonstrable utility for political activists militating during periods of democratic rule, when a plurality of actors have had free use of the medium to compete for backing and express their opinions; as well as under authoritarian government, where the rule of law has been applied arbitrarily and regular representative channels that have been blocked by corruption, censorship, or threat of brutality" (Ryan, 2013, p.

229). There are many parallels between the function and impact of art created under authoritarian and non-authoritarian regimes. Street art created under non-authoritarian regimes often functions similarly to art created under authoritarian regimes in its aims to provide an alternative narrative to the public and visibilize resistance.

Under authoritarian regimes, dissident art has the power to provide information that counters the misinformation distributed by the government and offers an alternative to mainstream media. The alternative narrative provided by resisting forces sparks a dialogue in a context where only a state-sanctioned monologue is tolerated. The censorship on all forms of media that often occurs during authoritarian regimes represents the state's desire to construct a monologue and eliminate possibilities for dialogue. Therefore, "the clandestine transcriptions in and on the urban space exist in opposition to the censorship of mural art by totalitarian systems, and thus they subvert official codes, and enact the quest for intersection and for silent yet visible dialogue" (Rath, 2011, p. 232). Authoritarian governments aim to censor and prevent dialogue with opposing political and social actors, so the creation of a political dialogue through street art offers an opportunity to challenge the dominant ideology of the regime. In the case of Chile under Pinochet, "public art emerges again and again as a transgressive act, a remnant of past political action and identity whose attempted erasure constitutes a radical political act and whose continued presence speaks to obstinate resistance" (Trumper, 2016, p. 187). Furthermore, "the ephemeral nature of public writing, along with the intersection of textual and visual strategies, helped to set the conditions of possibility for an ongoing, clandestine dialogue" (Trumper, 2016, p. 189).

The presence of a democratic or non-authoritarian government does not necessarily negate the need for an alternative narrative to state or media-sponsored narratives. Although

there may not be official censorship, all states have an ideology or popular narrative that they seek to promote over other narratives and ideologies. Additionally, the reliance of media companies on private capital may result in the prioritization of some narratives over others. In the case of Chile, conservative media conglomerates controlled over 90% of the newspapers and used them to promote their own agenda (Kornbluh, 2017). The prioritization of a narrative, ideology, or agenda by the state and media necessitates the dissemination of an alternative narrative through street art.

Street art created in authoritarian regimes visibilizes the opposition movement to the public. Art has the power to "be the locus of an oppositional voice…convey meaning and values that shape behavior imperceptibly, leading to the erosion of totalitarian regimes…indicate to nonmovement members that there is an active resistance movement…[and] breaks the complicity of silence" (Adams, 2002, pp. 28-29). Unlike non-public forms of art, the public locality of street art allows it to reach a wider portion of the public and do so covertly. During the Pinochet dictatorship, the street art collective Brigada Ramona Parra would paint and encircle the letter "R" for resistance and a star as a symbol of their collective (Long, 2013). Although the graffiti was quickly painted over by the dictatorship, the brief presence of the work reminded the public that support for the dictatorship was far from unanimous.

In non-authoritarian regimes, street art visibilizes alternative political and social movements and creates a sense of community that allows people to recognize that they are not alone in their desires for social and political transformation. In his investigation of the role of creativity and wonder in social change, Vlad Glăveanu argues that:

> "since creative activism deals with issues of collective concern and generally targets groups of people rather than individuals, the experience of wondering it stimulates has a

> collective quality…the experience of wondering itself becomes shared…collective forms of wondering amplify the potential for social transformation first of all by making it thinkable for many instead of a limited few" (Glăveanu, 2017, p. 30).

In this sense, Glăveanu is in agreement with both Ryan and Adams in the argument that the alternative narrative provided by art has the potential to be transformative.

Social movements frequently use art "to carry out framing work, mobilize resources, communicate information about themselves, and finally as a symbol of the movement [because] art arouses emotions in people, useful in all these functions" (Adams, 2002, p. 22). It functions not only as a practical tool for communication and mobilization but also as a visual symbol of the movement itself. As an activist strategy, street art relies heavily on the emotional reaction it provokes from an audience in order to affect change.

In addition to functioning as an activist strategy for social movements, street art also functions as a political strategy for governments. The relationship between art and politics in Latin America differs from that of other countries and regions. Within Latin America, there is a historical precedent and motivation for the production of street art because "prevailing norms have often given credence to the use of populist tactics; financial patronage and the use of street art in electioneering, measures which lend candidates an aura of egalitarianism and project the understanding that they are somehow "close to ordinary people"" (Ryan, 2013, p. 63). In this case, the author refers to street art created during democratic governments, but Sontag's investigation of Cuban political posters demonstrates that street art is firmly established as a political strategy in authoritarian regimes as well. Contemporary street art in Latin American countries is informed by the historic bond between art and politics popularized during populist governments like that of Allende or Perón.

As an activist strategy, it is clear that street art has demonstrable utility for social and political movements seeking to visibilize resistance and provide an alternative narrative because its ephemerality endows it with the ability to participate in political dialogue. Street art's relationship with public space is portrayed as one-sided: public space is the stable platform that facilitates the political dialogue created by street art. Public space may not be as ephemeral as street art, but it is certainly not static. It is configured and reconfigured as political and cultural values and ideologies shift over time. Scholars acknowledge public space's contribution to the construction of dialogue in its function as a site for power and resistance and as a stage for art, theatre, and performance, but they do not fully consider how it interacts with street art to construct political dialogue or how that dialogue is representative of socio-political attitudes. In my analysis of the evolution of the feminist street art outside the GAM, I will demonstrate how street art interacts with public space in the construction of a political dialogue and how this interaction represents contemporary socio-political attitudes.

Methodology

In my research, I draw on both primary and secondary sources. As part of my research involves a visual analysis of Chilean street art, my primary sources include photos I took of street art created by feminist collectives in March 2019 at the International Women's Day March at the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center and the same street art again in May 2019. I supplement my own photos with ones I have gathered from social media sites, primarily Instagram, of the same murals at different times ranging from their creation in March 2019 to their state in October 2019.

Existing scholarship primarily focuses on the role of street art in the construction of public dialogue and how that dialogue is representative of current socio-political attitudes or the

role of public space in the construction of public dialogue and how that dialogue is representative of current socio-political attitudes. Few studies have examined the evolution of street art as various actors intervene upon it, the interaction between street art and public space in the construction of a political dialogue, or how that dialogue is representative of popular social and political attitudes. By taking into account the transformation of street art over the course of several months and examining how the political dialogue created by the interaction between public space and street art is representative of contemporary social and political attitudes in Chile, I add new information to existing literature on public space, street art, and social change.

A key focus of my research is the significance of the site of the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center to the street art created in March 2019 at the Huelga Feminista and how public space and street art interact to form a cohesive dialogue that is demonstrative of contemporary Chilean political and social attitudes. I analyze primary and secondary sources following the building's origin as UNCTAD, built to host the Third United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in April 1972, to housing parts of the Pinochet regime after the coup, and to the controversies surrounding its destruction in 2006 and subsequent reconstruction.

I analyze primary and secondary sources on the history and theory of street art internationally, as well as in Chile. I intentionally use Spanish and English language sources because I believe that it is important to include influential Chilean and Latin American scholars whose work has not been translated into English. In doing so, I achieve a more nuanced understanding of the conception and evolution of street art in Chile.

Historical Context: Street Art, Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center, and Feminism in Chile

History of Street Art in Chile

The emergence of communist and socialist street art collectives in the 1960s marked the beginning of street art's cultural and political significance in Chile. These collectives drew much of their aesthetic inspiration from Cuban political posters and the Mexican muralism of the early 20th century. Founded in 1968 as the muralist organization of the Communist Youth, Brigada Ramona Parra (Ramona Parra Brigade, BRP) became one of the most influential collectives during the Allende and Pinochet eras with an estimated 130 BRP groups made up of 8-10 members each in Chile by the time of the coup in 1973 (Trumper, 2016). Their namesake, Ramona Parra, was a Chilean member of the Communist Youth when she was killed by police at the Slaughter of Plaza Bulnes in 1946. Most of the other Chilean street art collectives took their names from male martyrs killed in international contexts, so the BRP's memorialization of Ramona Parra "constitutes as an act of resistance that interferes with what hegemonic history has conceived as a masculinist space" (San Martín, 2018).

The BRP utilized posters and murals to mobilize their political base and transform walls into arenas of political debate. Public space acted as a facilitator of political discussion for those traditionally left out of that debate. In doing so, they operated within Orum's framework of public space as a site for power and resistance and a stage for art, theatre, and performance. Stylistically, the BRP's work is characterized by its thick black outlines, use of primary colors, mainly red and yellow, efficient production, and use of simple symbolic imagery, such as doves. For BRP and competing collectives, ephemerality was unavoidable and essential to their work. Collectives created and continued contentious political dialogues through the constant erasure and recreation of politically charged murals (Trumper, 2016). Ephemerality made public art politically significant because it "could be torn down and repainted daily, a metaphor for and a vehicle driving this fluid political process forward. It became even more important after the

coup, when the military's urgent attempt at erasure was effective but not complete" (Trumper, 2016, pp. 186-187).

CADA (Colectivo Acciones de Arte/Art Actions Collective) was an art collective formed by Lotty Rosenfeld, Juan Castillo, Fernando Blacells, Diamela Eltit, and Raul Zurita in 1979 now recognized as part of the Chilean Avanzada. They used art actions as a way to integrate political intervention in everyday life, and "by combining aesthetic innovations with social engagement, they forged a new and radical art that shattered age-old notions of political art" (Calirman, 2012, p. 41). CADA designed and carried out five art actions, and "No+" (No más or no more) is widely considered to be their most influential and important action. In the "No+" action, CADA artists wrote "No+" on the walls at night, and soon afterward anonymous artists and citizens completed the phrase with images or words such as "No + dictatorship" or "No + disappeared" or "No + image of a gun". The influence of "No+" is evident in the title and content of the "No Campaign" that successfully toppled the Chilean dictatorship in the 1988 plebiscite. Even today, protest signs saying "No+" are a common occurrence in Chilean protests.

The work of Brigada Ramona Parra and CADA represents the historical precedent of public art having a significant influence on Chilean politics. The BRP successfully employed street art to campaign for the election of Allende and later in the dictatorship to resist the new regime. CADA designed, created, and performed several art actions that directly critiqued the dictatorship. Their "No+" action elicited such a strong response from the public that it served as part of the aesthetic and intellectual inspiration for the subsequent anti-dictatorship movement. The BRP and CADA provided the historic foundation for the work of contemporary Chilean street art collectives, and it is imperative to acknowledge and consider their influence when examining contemporary Chilean street art.

History of the GAM

Organizers of the Huelga Feminista chose the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center (GAM) as one of the starting points of the march. Feminist artists and collectives painted a variety of murals on the bordering construction walls outside of the center at the beginning of the march. Using Orum's framework of public space as a site of power and resistance, public space cannot be separated from its economic, historic, and political determinants, and therefore the historical significance of the GAM as a site of cultural resistance is imperative to the understanding of the murals outside its walls.

The Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center was first constructed to house the Third United Nations Congress on Trade and Development (UNCTAD III) in April 1972 and briefly took on the name UNCTAD building before being renamed the GAM after the conference ended. It was designed in the modernist architectural style with permanent art installations by prominent local artists built directly onto the structure and throughout the building. The UNCTAD building/the GAM was also part of a "larger, nascent plan to engineer a 'modern' socialist city center and a modern socialist experience and interaction" (Trumper, 2016, p. 18). In its everyday functionality, the UNCTAD building was designed to be a gathering point for everyone regardless of social differences, thus physically exemplifying socialist ideology.

After the military coup, the GAM was radically altered by the military regime. The presidential palace was bombed during the 1973 coup that brought Augusto Pinochet to power, so the GAM was transformed into the headquarters for the executive branch and the Ministry of Defense. It was renamed "Diego Portales" as part of a larger effort to "write a nationalist military history that included 'heroes' of independence struggles and the early republic in the urban landscape" (Trumper, 2016, p. 19). The regime fortified the building with metal grates in the

windows, guards at every entrance, and erected fences. They removed or destroyed artworks and replaced them with nationalist and military figures. After the executive branch returned to the presidential palace in 1981, the structure continued to house the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Defense. UNCTAD's "monumental nature, its symbolic weight, and the flexibility and adaptability built into its design made it a perfect target for a regime intent on the reinvention and legitimation of tradition" (Trumper, 2016, p. 20). Pinochet's regime understood the social, cultural and political significance of the building, and they appropriated the UNCTAD building because they wanted to erase its legacy as a monument to socialist politics.

Following the dictatorship, the GAM was used as a press hub for the plebiscite and a convention center in the 1990s. After a fire in 2006, the National Council of Culture moderated a competition for its design and reconstruction, which was completed in 2010. The competition incited a debate over the relationship between architecture, politics, and design in which the aesthetic and architectural value of the GAM was questioned. Ultimately, it was rebuilt to house an independent cultural center and museum that regularly hosts cultural events open to the public.

The GAM regularly features exhibits and events highlighting marginalized groups and creators, such as disabled people, people of color, indigenous people, and LGBTQ people. Although they receive funding from the Chilean government, the GAM has remained in solidarity with Chilean protesters in the fall and winter of 2019. Similarly, the GAM also actively supported feminist protesters at the Huelga Feminista. In light of the 2019 political protests, the GAM issued a statement stating that they would remain open as a space for meeting, reflection, and culture for everyone with programming for the current social context (Alameda Abierta, 2019). They have also hosted public conversations about topics of importance to

protesters, such as public education, equality, human rights, Chile as a plurinational state, and constitutional change (Alameda Abierta, 2019). In doing so, they have become a symbol for the Chile and Chilean modernity the protesters are fighting for.

The GAM functions as a representation of Chilean modernity. In its initial years as the UNCTAD building, it was the most significant public space in Santiago because it represented the socialist version of Chilean modernity. The Pinochet regime recognized its significance and reshaped it to represent its nationalist version of Chilean modernity. Whereas the GAM previously functioned as a representation of the Chilean modernity desired by the government, the current GAM has come to symbolize the Chilean modernity desired by the Chilean people. The creation and recreation of the legacy and significance of the GAM mirrors the creation and recreation of public art on the streets of Chile. The street art placed outside of it is thus in conversation with this version of Chilean modernity and citizenship.

Feminism in Chile

The feminist movement began in the early 20th century in Chile, but it was significantly weakened during the dictatorship. During this time, feminist activists were either killed or decided to prioritize anti-dictatorial activism over feminist activism. In the 1990s, many women-led anti-dictatorial organizations became feminist organizations. However, the Chilean feminist movement has only recently gained a significant amount of momentum and mainstream support exemplified by the Ni Una Menos (Not One [Woman] Less) marches beginning in 2016 (Comandini, 2018).

The feminist movement in Chile publicized ten demands leading up to the Huelga Feminista. The demands that are most relevant to the feminist street art are the first, fourth, eighth, and ninth demands: “1. An end to political, sexual, and economic violence to women,

sexual dissidents, racialized bodies, migrants and communities. We denounce patriarchal and racist justice. No more femicides in impunity! 4. New migration law with a focus on rights and gender. Free organization and unionization of migrant women. Mainstream antiracism in feminism. 8. End to the extraction of natural resources: no more zones of sacrifice. Sovereignty and auto-determination of towns and territories in resistance. Demilitarization in Wallmapu. Justice for Macarena Valdés, Camilo Catrillanca and everyone who fought. 9. Feminist and queer activism in all of the territories. Social recognition and classification of incitement and hate crimes. Education programs about dissident sexualities and gender in public and private education and health"[3] (Leighton, 2019). One of the most striking aspects of these demands is their intersectionality. The inclusion and prioritization of the rights of migrants, LGBTQ people, indigenous people, and people of color in the mainstream feminist platform is represented in the feminist art outside the GAM.

Visual Analysis

In my visual analysis, I will analyze three specific murals I refer to as "Nicole Saavedra", "Three Women", and "Niña en Resistencia". They were created by artists and/or collectives at the Huelga Feminista on March 8, 2019 on construction barriers outside of the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center. I use the argument that "space is not static or natural but instead made and remade through social and political struggle" to contextualize these murals and their placement at the GAM as representative of and participative in a larger political dialogue (Trumper, 2016,

[3] Original version: 1. Fin a la violencia política, sexual y económica hacia mujeres, disidencias sexuales, cuerpos racializados, migrantes y comunidades. Denunciamos la justiciar patriarcal y racista. !No más femicidios en la impunidad! 4. Nueva ley de migración con enfoque de derechos y género. Libre organización y sindicalización de mujeres migrantes. Transversalizar el antirracismo en el feminismo. 8. Fin al extractivismo: No más zonas de sacrificio. Soberanía y autodeterminación de pueblos y territorios en resistencia. Desmilitarización en Wallmapu. Justicia para Macarena Valdés, Camilo Catrillanca y todxs los que luchan. 9. Activismo feminista y queer en todos los territorios. Reconocimiento social y tipificación de incitación y crímenes de odio. Programas educativos sobre disidencias sexuales y género en educación y salud pública y privada.

p. 7). I argue that the initial content of these murals combined with the way they are perceived and acted upon by unnamed actors in the following months are part of an ongoing political dialogue and demonstrates how the Chilean public perceives and reacts to different aspects of the feminist movement. I argue that the interventions upon the murals are a continuation of a contentious political dialogue. I interpret the original feminist street art and the subsequent interventions as part of a larger dialogue facilitated by the GAM debating conceptions of Chilean modernity. The GAM's representation of Chilean modernity across time refers to an aspirational vision for Chilean modernity that may or may not be fully realized. Given the ephemeral nature of street art, it is likely that these interventions will repeatedly be covered, thereby continuing this dialogue. Following the evolution of these murals over the course of several months reveals "what is tolerated, negotiated, and repressed" in this contentious political dialogue at the GAM (Awad and Wagoner, 2017, p. 10).

Three Women

"Three Women" by artist Palta Pinta[4] is towards the beginning of a series of figurative murals on the construction barriers outside the Gabriela Mistral Cultural Center. The mural depicts three women: Angela Davis, Nina Simone, and an unidentified woman presumably in a

[4] Translation: Avocado Paints

hijab. The Angela Davis quote below the first woman translates to “feminism will be anti-racist, or it won’t be.” The quote by the third woman translates to “fight like a girl.” The staunch antiracist content of these murals, especially in the first figure and quote, is demonstrative of the antiracist platform of the Chilean feminist movement. The inclusion and prioritization of women of color in the Chilean feminist movement is reflected in the figures as well.

The Nina Simone quote below the middle figure is particularly noticeable because it is in English instead of Spanish. One possible explanation for the inclusion of an English quote in this piece is to attract media attention. Street artists often “cater to the major media for access in an indirect way. They intentionally utilize street art to attract the major media to give greater dissemination to their messages” (Chaffee, 1993, p. 12). The coverage of street art by major media outlets functions as a continuation of the political dialogue. Furthermore, “in non-English speaking countries many placards, wallposters, and graffiti are written in English to attract international media and generate worldwide exposure through wire services and networks” (Chaffee, 1993, p. 13). The Huelga Feminista attracted hundreds of thousands of marchers, so the inclusion of an English-language quote might be intended to attract international media who would in turn share the Chilean feminist platform with their viewers.

The placement of the word “Hulk” on the woman with the darkest skin tone of the three points to prevalent racist and xenophobic sentiments in Chilean society.[5] Historically, the myth of Chilean racial superiority over its Latin American neighbors has been used to justify neocolonial Chilean interests, specifically in regard to the War of the Pacific and continued aggressions against the Mapuche people (Beckman, 2009). In the context of the War of the

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[5] In addition to the word Hulk, there are also paper scraps from posters left behind on the murals. Based on observations during my time in Santiago, people tended to put up posters for events and then take them down shortly after the events took place. Although they may have also made a contribution to the political dialogue, it is impossible for me to articulate that contribution without knowing the original content of the posters.

Pacific, Chile used the strategy of imperial impersonation, understood "as the will to occupy the discursive space of the European colonizer vis-à-vis neighboring nations", to justify their expansion into the territory of Perú and Bolivia (Beckman, 2009). The nationalist project of the Pinochet dictatorship glorified Chile's neocolonial history of expansion, and thus reinforced this myth of Chilean racial superiority.

The myth of Chilean racial superiority has troubling implications for the increasing number of black migrants. Unlike other Latin American countries, Chile has a very small Afro-Chilean population clustered in small areas in northern Chile. Before the arrival of Afro-Peruvians and Afro-Colombians in the late 1990s to early 2000s, most Chileans had never interacted or even seen a black person. In less than ten years, the Haitian population in Chile has grown from 5,000 in 2010 to more than 100,000 in 2018. Chile's economic stability has attracted migrants from all over Latin America, but Haitian migrants are treated vastly different than Venezuelan or Peruvian migrants (Charles, 2018).

The original artists affirm the current representations of Chilean modernity by the GAM, whose function and values as a cultural center are in line with the feminist movement. Subsequent anonymous actors reject this representation of Chilean modernity and instead affirmed that of the dictatorship through their perpetuation of the myth of Chilean racial superiority. Although "Hulk" is just one word, it is representative of the micro-aggressions black migrants face in Chile on a regular basis. By upholding the myth of Chilean racial superiority, the anonymous actors affirm the dictatorship's conception of Chilean modernity as one based in Chilean nationalism and the myth of Chilean racial superiority. Furthermore, the anonymous intervention reinforces the importance of the anti-racist and pro-migrant platform of the feminist movement.

Nicole Saavedra

"Nicole Saavedra" follows "Three Women" and block lettering declaring "Somos la Cordillera[6]" (We are the Mountain Range). The figure on the left is an unnamed woman painted by Estefania Leighton. The figure on the right is Nicole Saavedra and was painted by Telly Gacitúa in collaboration with Brigada Negotropika. As seen in the first photo, the Nicole Saavedra mural was created on top of an existing mural on the construction barriers. The thick outlines and geometric shapes of the previous mural are stylistically reminiscent of BRP murals. The mural translates to: "Nicole Saavedra (1993-2016) murdered for being a butch lesbian." The use of "asesinado" (murdered) instead of "matado" (killed) emphasizes the brutal way in which

[6] Cordillera doesn't translate well into English. In this context, cordillera is referring to the Andes mountain range between Chile and Argentina that runs from Colombia to the tip of Chile.

she was murdered. "Camiona" is traditionally a derogatory word used to describe butch lesbians, but it has begun to become reclaimed by lesbians in recent years.

Nicole Saavedra has become a symbolic figure for lesbian women, often camionas, murdered and attacked in Chile for their sexual orientation and gender presentation. Since 2015, the murders of lesbian women in Chile have more than doubled, from 44 in 2015 to 93 in 2018 (Movilh, 2018). Most of the queer women murdered and attacked are camionas like Saavedra because of their open defiance of gender norms (Mohan, 2019). The dictatorship instituted strict and highly gendered norms on dress and self-presentation that still hold considerable power in Chilean society today. The body-territory concept introduces the duality between women's bodies as territories that are fought over and women defending their own bodily autonomy (Segato, 2005). Within the body-territory framework, camionas' subversion of heteropatriarchal norms through their self-presentation represents an unacceptable form of womanhood that is seen as an infringement upon the territory of men.

Feminist strikes are a way of politicizing violence against women (Gago, 2019). The 2019 Chilean feminist strike memorialized several victims of femicidal violence against women in recent years, including Nicole Saavedra. In addition to memorializing her on banners and posters carried by protesters, she was also memorialized in this work of public art. "Nicole Saavedra" clearly responds to the Huelga Feminista's first demand for an end to sexual, political, and economic violence against women and sexual dissidents, patriarchal justice, and femicides in impunity. In this mural, public art has become not only a space for memorialization but also collective memory formation. The artists challenge state and media-sponsored narratives of Nicole Saavedra and construct a new collective memory. In the absence of government support and fair media coverage, the mural of Nicole Saavedra prompts Chileans to examine the ways in

which lesbian women, specifically camionas, are treated in their society. Much of the violence against camionas has occurred in the fifth region of Chile, where the coastal city Valparaíso is located, so this mural also exposes the people of Santiago to violence outside of their city and region that they may not be aware of due to biased media coverage (Mohan, 2019).

In the context of the Huelga Feminista as a whole, "Nicole Saavedra" also encourages viewers to consider the role of the state in the continued impunity of the perpetrators of femicidal violence. Latin American feminists have begun to view femicides not as sexual violence, but as political violence (Gago, 2018). In her study of the trend of femicides in Ciudad Juárez, Rita Segato asserts that they are connected to the rise of neoliberalism (Segato, 2005). Chilean feminists expand the geography of Ciudad Juárez and implicate heteropatriarchal institutions that sustain capitalism and neoliberalism in femicides committed with impunity through the performance of chants decrying femicidal violence and public art installations like "Nicole Saavedra" memorializing the victims and combatting state-sponsored narratives about their murders. Although the attacks and femicides of lesbian women in Chile have more than doubled since 2015, they are committed with impunity due to the unwillingness of the Chilean police force, the Carabineros, to investigate them fully. Additionally, they are not even categorized as femicides because they are not committed by current or former partners of the women (Mohan, 2019). The Carabineros' failure to fully investigate and acknowledge violence against lesbian women constitutes an act of political violence and erasure on the part of the state and prompts the politicization of femicidal violence on the part of Chilean feminists at the Huelga Feminista.

Out of the three murals, "Nicole Saavedra" was the most visibly defaced over the course of several months. The original mural challenges the heteropatriarchal system and affirms the current GAM's conception of Chilean modernity as diverse and inclusive. However, the

subsequent intervention and obscural of the mural rejects the current GAM's version of Chilean modernity and affirms the version of Chilean modernity propagated by the GAM during its time as a center of the Pinochet dictatorship. Graffiti block lettering completely obscures the face of Nicole Saavedra and partially obscures the face of the woman on her right. Graffiti as an artistic medium continues to exclude female artists resulting in the creation of a highly male-centric culture. Graffiti is also "an important site for the performance of masculinity" where men are in constant competition with each other to prove who is the better artists and who takes the most risks (Latorre, 2019, p. 142). In doing so they aim to prove that "they can confront risk, dominate fear and validate themselves as men" (Latorre, 2008, p. 108). The graffiti placed on top of "Nicole Saavedra" is thus representative of the heteropatriarchal culture that is seen as directly responsible for the murders of camionas like Saavedra by the artists who painted the mural. Regardless of whether its intent was malicious or not, the graffiti is a continuation of the political dialogue by affirming a conception of Chilean modernity propagated by the dictatorship that prioritizes traditional family values and conservative social policies.

Niña en Resistencia

"Niña en Resistencia" by artist Ara Xilos marks the end of the series of murals. The quote roughly translates to, "I am the landscape, body, territory in resistance." The emergence of

the figure from the land and abundance of yellow flowers evokes images of Mother Earth. The green covering over the bottom half of her face is a continuation of the land in the mural and places her firmly as part of it. The girl is clearly in resistance, but the subject of that resistance remains unclear. Given the context of the ten demands of the feminist movement, it is likely that this mural relates to the eighth demand of the feminist movement, which calls for respect of and demilitarization in Mapuche lands, sovereignty for communities in resistance, and justice for murdered Mapuche activists.

The language "territorios en resistencia" (territories in resistance) of the demand is echoed in the language of the mural "territorio en resistencia" (territory in resistance). Furthermore, the inclusion of "cuerpo" (body) makes a connection to the concept of body-territory. In recent years, indigenous activists around the world have begun to invoke this concept of body-territory in defense of their indigenous lands, seeing decolonization and depatriarcalization as inseparable processes (Vargas, 2016, p. 303). For indigenous women, the political struggle for land territory goes hand in hand with the political struggle for the territory of their own bodies (Vargas, 2016, p. 303).

The Mapuche people have been resisting and fighting for their land and territory since the beginning of Spanish colonization in Chile. According to Mapuche culture, they are all connected to Ñuke Mapu or Mother Earth. "Mapu" means "land" and "che" means "people", so Mapuche literally translates to land people. Mapuche culture revolves around respect for Ñuke Mapu. Like many other indigenous cultures, the Mapuche's "socio-cultural and political relations have always been shaped and complemented by their spirituality, their religious beliefs, and the strong relationship between man, land, and nature" (UNPO, 2018).

Within Latin American street art, there is a long tradition of female artists embracing "ancient and pre-colonial goddess figures in their work…while feminists have long dismissed this "goddess worship" as essentialist, reductive, and overly idealized, such a phenomenon reflected a desire to seek non-patriarchal forms of spirituality and creative expression on the part of feminist artists and cultural producers" (Latorre, 2017, p. 101). Additionally, the artists' "heightened consciousness about the colonial history of the Americas and the imposition of patriarchal social systems ushered in by conquest made their interest in indigenous and, in some cases, African-descent spiritualities all the more subversive" (Latorre, 2017, p. 101). The representation of a Ñuke Mapu figure in the mural can be seen as a subversive decision to challenge heteropatriarchal social and religious systems enforced upon the Chilean people during colonization. Therefore, the colonial legacy of heteropatriarchal social systems may be the object of the Ñuke Mapu figure's declaration of resistance.

In the months following the creation of the murals, several layers of the construction barrier were ripped off, constituting a physical act of violence. Using the body-territory concept, the body of the Ñuke Mapu figure becomes representative of the conflict over Mapuche territory. The artists affirm the current GAM's conception of Chilean modernity as a plurinational state that recognizes the sovereignty of indigenous people. The anonymous actors challenge this conception and affirm the conception of Chilean modernity promoted by the dictatorship that sees the Mapuche as a population to be exterminated. Although the state-sponsored war against the Mapuches was present long before Pinochet took power, anti-Mapuche sentiment was readily encouraged by the government during and after the regime.

What do these murals say about Chilean society?

The style, content, level of sophistication, and authorship of street art can indicate the socio-political context in which the street art is produced. All three of these murals are time-consuming and highly stylized, which demonstrates that there is a "high level of societal tolerance for the medium" (Ryan, 2013, p. 66). They also all have signatures that publicly identify the participating artists. The willingness of artists to openly sign their name next to these works of feminist street art demonstrates that they were created in a context in which the artists do not fear retribution for the creation of these murals. The use of signatures associated with Instagram accounts rather than full legal names can also be seen as self-promotion of their personal brand. It is also representative of the increasing commodification of public art because these artists may see this as a potential business opportunity to reach new clients. Although some of the murals were subsequently covered up and painted over by unknown actors, the openness with which the artists painted and claimed these murals is indicative of a socio-political context that is tolerant, if not accepting, of the themes touched on in their works.

Whether intentional or unintentional, the street art outside the GAM is in conversation with the history of the GAM. By placing the murals outside a site that functions as a representation of Chilean modernity and acts as a facilitator for the political dialogue debating what Chilean modernity represents, artists and anonymous actors challenge or affirm past and current representations of Chilean modernity. In doing so, they demonstrate the socio-political attitudes on some aspects of the Chilean feminist movement and their relationship to Chilean modernity.

Although many of the anonymous interventions obscured and covered up the previous murals, I argue that they are still a continuation of a political dialogue and not acts of silencing. Intrinsic to the nature of street art is its ephemerality. A view that these interventions are acts of

silencing presupposes that rejection of a claim is synonymous with silencing. The debate on what Chilean modernity should be is a contentious one, and the controversial and highly politically charged nature of this debate is represented in the nature of the interventions. There is no doubt that they are aggressive and may even border on silencing, but I argue that is to be expected in such a contentious dialogue. Both rejecting and affirming representations of Chilean modernity are acts of dialogue. By rejecting the version of Chilean modernity represented by the muralists and affirming their own, anonymous actors are still engaging in dialogue with them, albeit a highly contentious one.

An analysis of the feminist murals outside the GAM over the course of several months is crucial to obtaining an accurate representation of their place in the political dialogue at the GAM. Chaffee argues that "street art must be seen as part of a process, not as a single event, slogan, or expression analyzed in isolation. It should be viewed as a series of events with possible long-term implications and as an indicator of political discourse and group conflict in a society" (Chaffee, 1993, pp. 24-25). By examining the initial content of the murals, the subsequent interventions, and the contribution of public space to their significance as a political dialogue, I have demonstrated that the myth of Chilean racial superiority and heteropatriarchal ideals of womanhood and femininity continue to influence contemporary socio-political attitudes and public perception of the demands of the Chilean feminist movement.

Conclusion

The feminist art at the GAM functions as a window into modern Chilean society. Street art has been an important political tool for Chilean activists and a means of political and social dialogue since the creation of communist collective like Brigada Ramona Parra (BRP) in the 1960s and CADA in the late 1970s and 1980s. The BRP and CADA not only serve as artistic

precedents of contemporary Chilean street art, but the contentious dialogues they engaged in have been continued in murals like those created outside of the GAM. The street art outside the GAM is in conversation with the history of the GAM. In its function as a site for power and resistance and as a stage for art, theatre, and performance, the public space outside the GAM informs the dialogue created by the feminist street art. The GAM functions as a representation of Chilean modernity, so artists and anonymous actors articulate their conceptions of Chilean modernity through the reclamation of this historically significant public space.

The original content and the ways in which unknown public actors visually interacted with that content is representative of prevailing social and political attitudes in contemporary Chilean society. The feminist street art visibilizes feminist resistance and provides an alternative narrative to the public. However, the subsequent interventions upon it demonstrate that visibilizing resistance and providing an alternative narrative is not always accepted. The dialogue created by the interaction between the original street art, public space, and the subsequent interventions is a continuation of a larger contentious political dialogue facilitated by the GAM and demonstrates the continued influence of dictatorship-era ideology on contemporary socio-political attitudes.

This research provides valuable information on the interactive role of public space in the construction of a political dialogue. Expanding on the research presented here by examining other works of contemporary street art in Chile and other parts of the world over the course of several years would provide a more fully developed and comprehensive window into attitudes of contemporary societies than the analysis of how one collection of murals changed over the course of several months.

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