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When the Walls Talk: Political Graffiti at *la Universidad Nacional* in Bogotá, Colombia

Abbott Grey Matthews
Colby College

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**When the Walls Talk:
*Political Graffiti at la Universidad Nacional in Bogotá,
Colombia***

“Graffiti represents man’s desire to communicate. When written, his feelings—hopes, desires, fears—give him a certain satisfaction. ... On its [the wall’s] surface, he hurls his hostilities, expresses his fantasies, communicates his triumphs, vents his frustrations, proclaims his rebellion, declares his propaganda.”¹

By: Abbott Grey Matthews

**Colby College
Latin American Studies Department
Senior Honors Thesis
© May 2013**

¹ The Encyclopedia of Graffiti. Reisner and Wechsler (1974): vi.

Signature Page

Abbott G. Matthews has fulfilled the requirements for Honors in Latin American Studies with the completion of this senior honors thesis.

Jennifer Yoder
Primary Advisor

Luis Millones
Department Chair
Latin American Studies



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By: Abbott Grey Matthews

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Abstract:

Graffiti in Latin America is often political. This thesis considers the political graffiti found at *la Universidad Nacional* (UNAL) in Bogotá, Colombia. Unlike many other nations in the region, Colombia has not experienced the same political history of repressive dictatorships. As a result, the current literature on political graffiti does not cover the outlier case of Colombia. This research uses survey responses from and interviews with students at UNAL in order to better understand what the graffiti says and how it impacts students at the university. Moreover, this thesis seeks to answer why political graffiti persists at UNAL despite attempts by the Colombian government to open up the political system to new actors. There are three categories of graffiti – radical, nationalist, and reformist – that are the most dominant on campus. While institutional reforms from 1985 to 2003 serve as a partial explanation for why political graffiti persists, it seems that other explanations such as student culture, public space, protest politics, and identity production are also important to consider.

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Acronyms

There are many different acronyms used in this thesis to refer to political parties, movements, or groups.

UNAL – la Universidad Nacional

PC – el Partido Conservador, the Conservative Party

PL – el Partido Liberal, the Liberal Party

FARC-EP – las Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias – Ejército del Pueblo,
The Revolutionary Armed Forces – Army of the People

M-19 – el Movimiento de 19 de Abril, The April 19th Movement

PR – proportional representation

NFD – Nueva Fuerza Democrática, New Democratic Force

FPE – Federación Popular Estudiantil, Popular Federation of Students

ML – Mentas Libertarias, Free Thinkers

JCC – Juventud Comunista Colombiana, Colombian Communist Youth

BA – Brigadas Antiimperialistas, Anti-imperial Brigade

MRUP – el Movimiento Revolucionario Unificador del Pueblo,
Revolutionary Unifying Movement of the People

UER – Unión Estudiantil Revolucionario, Revolutionary Student Union

UCR – Unión Camilista Revolucionaria, Revolutionary Union of Camilo

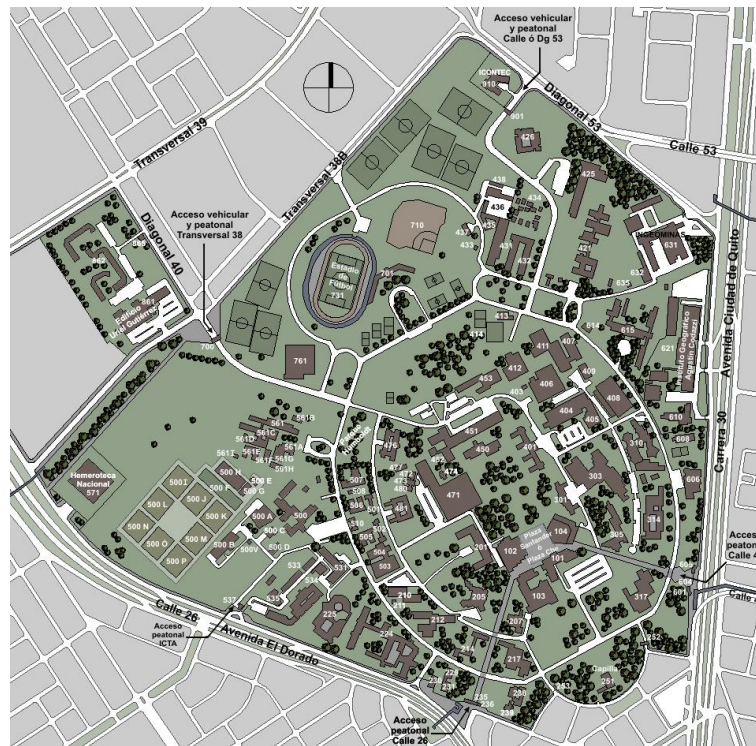
MB – Movimiento Bolivariano, Bolivarian Movement

UPN – Unión Popular Nacional, National Popular Union

UD – Unión Democrático, Democratic Union

Maps

Map of la Universidad Nacional in Bogotá, Colombia.



UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE COLOMBIA SEDE BOGOTÁ CIUDAD UNIVERSITARIA

La Ciudad Universitaria o más conocida como la Ciudad Blanca, es el Campus Principal de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, ubicada en el centro geográfico de la ciudad de Bogotá, al noroccidente del centro histórico. Inicialmente fue diseñada por arquitecto Leopoldo Rother junto con la colaboración del pedagogo Fritz Karsen. Es un conjunto de bloques arquitectónicos, de los cuales 17 han sido declarados Monumento Nacional y junto con otras edificaciones del campus representan los últimos 60 años de la arquitectura colombiana. La superficie de la Ciudad Universitaria son 1.213.500 m² (121,35 hectáreas), de los cuales el 80% del área total son áreas verdes, lo cual la convierte en un pulmón para la ciudad de Bogotá. El campus presenta una agitada vida académica y cultural; y diariamente circulan unas 40 mil personas entre estudiantes, profesores, empleados y público en general.

NOTA: El plano y la numeración de los edificios de la Ciudad Universitaria fueron tomados de varios folletos Universitarios.
La nomenclatura vial fue tomada de planos del Departamento Administrativo de Calles del Distrito de Bogotá.

Timeline

- 1849** – The main parties (PC and PL) founded
- 1861-1885** – Liberal Hegemony
- 1885-1930** – Conservative Hegemony
- 1930** – Liberals win presidency
- 1946** – Conservatives win presidency
- 1948-1957** – Civil War termed *la Violencia* between Conservatives and Liberals
- 1958** – End of civil war with the establishment of *la Frente Nacional* (The National Front) system of power-sharing or coalition-style government
- 1965-1971** – Emergence of several key guerrilla groups: National Liberation Army (ELN), Maoist People's Liberation Army (EPL), FARC, and M-19
- 1985** – Party Politics Reform
- 1991** – Ratification of the new Constitution
- 1994** – Law 130 passed that regulated political parties
- 2003** – Electoral reform law passed

Preface

Graffiti is omnipresent in many Latin American cities, but the impressive amount of graffiti found in Bogotá, Colombia and the budding *grafitero* (graffiti artist) scene in the city captured my attention. When I first walked onto the campus of *la Universidad Nacional* (UNAL) in Bogotá, Colombia, I was shocked by the sheer amount of political graffiti I saw. Hardly a building, blank space, brick wall, or sidewalk went untouched by spray paint, brush marks, or stencils. My first time on the campus was during the university's winter break. Even with few students on campus during January, it seemed like the walls were speaking loud enough. As I circled the large campus, took photos, and studied the variety of messages, I saw a striking similarity in rhetoric that centered on rebellion and revolution. My analysis focuses on the political graffiti found specifically on the campus of UNAL in the heart of Bogotá. The tour of campus elicited several key questions this analysis seeks to better understand: Why are the various authors of graffiti calling for revolution in a country that is considered one of the region's most democratic? Why graffiti? What causes them to choose graffiti as an important tool of political participation? And, most importantly, why does this method persist despite other, more formal avenues of expression?

(1) Introduction

Political graffiti is defined as the expressions, messages, or depictions on public space that make a critical statement, tend to represent marginalized groups and express political views. The history of graffiti in Latin America is often seen as a result of repressive political environments, and much of the literature examines politicized graffiti as an informal, nontraditional outlet for expression especially by marginalized populations. In many nations of Latin America, graffiti has evolved as “an underground or alternative media system for opposition expression,” allowing different groups to become part of the political discourse.² The current literature on graffiti as an expressive method suggests that social, political, and/or economic conditions of Latin and South American regions often affect the way that citizens engage in political discourse.³ Specifically, studies on the use of graffiti as a tool both under repressive regimes and during periods of transition have illustrated the resistant and opposition-based nature of graffiti.

Several nations in Latin America suffered from authoritarian regimes during the 20th century, which then began to transition to democracy while facing the severe regional economic crisis of the 1980s. Most of the region turned to decentralization and neoliberal policies to bring their countries back into the global order, policies that were highly influenced by the United States. For the majority of the region, the economic “crisis of the 1980s had cast doubt over the legitimacy of established political elites, who saw

² Lyman Chaffee, “Political Graffiti and Wall Painting in Greater Buenos Aires: An Alternative Communication System,” *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 8 (1989): 37; 59.

³ For more information on these works, see Lyman Chaffee (1989) and Armando Silva (1987, 1997)

decentralization as a way of redirecting discontent to local arenas.”⁴ The process of decentralization led to increased focus on the role of regional and local governments, and the process attempted to “strengthen democratic governance and improve policy delivery.”⁵ Part of the democratic transitions in the region also resulted in the proliferation of political parties and participation. Scholars refer to this period as “third-wave democratization,” in which regional political systems began to create space for new actors to participate politically.⁶ This movement towards greater inclusion is an important foundation for this research. While the region as a whole experienced a trend of greater political inclusion, Colombia illustrates a country that did not emerge from the 1990s with the same result.

Unlike many of its neighbors, Colombia did not experience the same democratic transition from authoritarianism. Instead, it has been considered one of the most stable democracies in the region despite the high levels of political violence and destabilizing factors such as drug trafficking. Colombia’s economic development was not hindered by the 1980s regional crisis, allowing it to retain relative political stability. In the 1980s and 1990s, Colombia, similar to the rest of the region, instituted neoliberal and decentralizing policies due to a combination of international and internal pressures. Even with these reforms similar to those of other Latin American nations, Colombia’s political system did not appear to allow for greater inclusion of new actors. Colombia’s long history of a two-party political system in which the *Partido Liberal* (PL) and the *Partido Conservador*

⁴ Gavin O’Toole, “Legislatures, parties, the judiciary and public administration,” In *Politics Latin America*, 176-183 (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2011).

⁵ O’Toole, “Legislatures, parties, the judiciary and public administration,” 177.

⁶ For more information on “third-wave democratization” and its implications, see Frances Hagopian and Scott P. Mainwaring, *The Third Wave of Democratization in Latin America: Advances and Setbacks*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

(PC) were the only two permitted parties has significantly influenced the current party system and citizens' feelings towards democratic participation. The seedlings of these two historically entrenched parties are rooted in Colombia's independence in the 1820s. Their rivalry extended for decades and only began to be tempered by the current 1991 Constitution. Following the establishment of a new constitution, several laws attempted to reform the electoral system and ensure greater political inclusion, which will be further detailed in the subsequent chapter.

Political graffiti has truly exploded in Bogotá over the past ten to fifteen years. Part of this explosion in recent history is connected to the legality of street art and graffiti in the city. As the tour guide of Bogotá Graffiti: Walking Tours explained, "Graffiti is not illegal, it is simply prohibited."⁷ Evidently, there are very few clear rules regarding graffiti in the city, which has led to an influx of these artists in Colombia. As the graffiti scene in Colombia grows, tours are offered to show off the most important artists and pieces located in the heart of the city. Only recently, in 2011, was there an attempt at legislation to regulate graffiti. The revision to current law did not pass, as many saw the policy as a limitation on free speech and expression.⁸

University students in many Latin American cities are known for their political activism. For example, student strikes in Chile have dominated their political agenda for several years now.⁹ Political activism is often most clear at universities where students have greater tendencies towards political involvement; UNAL follows the trend of exhibiting serious student political activism. One guide at Bogotá Bike Tours mentioned

⁷ Christian Peterson, quoted on the "Bogotá Walking Graffiti Tour" by author, 15 January 2013.

⁸ Peterson, 15 January 2013.

⁹ In Chile, there are ongoing protests of university students (and even, to some extent, high school students), demanding increased educational equality and opportunity.

that students gather together, play music, and paint murals or slogans on the walls during the day.¹⁰ At the beginning of each semester, the administration repaints the walls white. During the first week of classes, as one student interviewee stated, the students participate in repainting the walls collectively.¹¹ The fact that the administration repaints the walls each semester in anticipation for the coming semester of more graffiti indicates the informal acceptance of graffiti as prominent feature of the campus by not just the students but also the administration. When solicited for a statement on the official response of the administration to graffiti on campus, UNAL administrator responded “the National University of Colombia does not authorize graffiti, but recognizes that it is used anonymously by some people.”¹² UNAL administration maintains that graffiti causes damage to the university property, which is considered a violation of student responsibilities under certain university rules and agreements. Should a student be caught writing graffiti and turned in to the administration, they are supposedly punished in accordance with the Student Statute. Yet, it is difficult for university officials to discover who painted various graffiti and therefore hard to eradicate graffiti on campus. Most significantly, the official response from the university suggests that the main concern with the graffiti is its damaging effect as vandalism rather than its political messaging. Political graffiti persists despite the official university stance against it.

A vast majority of the graffiti documented at UNAL was signed with a political group’s initials or name. While these groups are often the student branches of larger political associations, they were nearly always on the leftist side of the political spectrum

¹⁰ Peterson, 15 January 2013.

¹¹ Rafael, interview by author, January 21, 2013.

¹² Jimmy Matiz Cuervo, letter to author, “Consulta sobre el Graffiti Político en la Universidad Nacional de Colombia,” 20 March 2013.

with their titles including words such as “revolutionary,” “popular,” and “*el pueblo*.” As will be discussed later in more detail, leftist groups tend to use informal and nontraditional methods to engage in the political dialogue. As graffiti is one of such tactics, the association and movements in Bogotá have seemingly taken over the university walls and established them as appropriate venues for expression. Ultimately, the graffiti appears to suggest that there is still residual dissatisfaction with Colombia’s political system. After reading the messages on UNAL’s campus, it seems notable that graffiti continues to have such a strong presence on campus despite seemingly more efficient methods of communication. What do these messages really say? Do they resonate with the student body and what do students think about it? It seems that graffiti has persisted due to and despite political reforms from 1985-2003 that wanted to achieve greater political inclusion. The institutional changes have not resulted in the more open political system that might make graffiti less appealing to alternative and clandestine groups as they become more incorporated into the formal political sphere. Thus, this analysis will investigate the effect that political reforms have had on the use of graffiti, hypothesizing that political graffiti manifests frustration with the historically dominant two-party political system in Colombia that has failed to create adequate space for new actors.

This research provides a new way through which political systems and institutions may be considered. Instead of focusing on election turnout, polls conducted by policy think tanks, or the type of regime in a country, this thesis analyzes institutional change through the unique lens of graffiti. While analyzing graffiti is unconventional and admittedly difficult, it illustrates that political critique and expression through

nontraditional methods can still produce important contributions. Even as Colombia has attempted to reform the electoral institutions and policies, there has still been graffiti that demonstrates frustration with the system. Furthermore, as more effective and technological methods of mass communication have developed over the years, it seems extraordinary that graffiti continues to be a main method of political expression.

The next section will review the literature in which this analysis is based. The theoretical lenses include a diverse array of academic disciplines, uniting politics, art, anthropology, and history to fully understand the way that political graffiti functions at UNAL. There are certain institutional landmarks in this thesis that serve as concrete points at which the government attempted to fix discontent with the electoral system and party politics. These reforms have not been as successful as they had hoped and can perhaps explain why political graffiti continues to be such a prominent form of communication.

(2) Literature Review

There are many angles from which graffiti can be studied; as a result, there is a large and diverse literature on the subject. The main purpose of this literature review is to present the six different possible explanations for the persistence and impact of political graffiti at UNAL in Bogotá.

First, the historical and political context of Colombia is reviewed since it is essential for understanding the impact of the institutional reforms from 1985-2003. In this first part, literature regarding both the factual information and those scholars analyzing important reforms is reviewed. Second, this thesis considers the nature of the Latin American student as an activist and their contribution to political discourse. Third, this section presents a framework that draws on basic literature concerning social movements, contending that graffiti lies somewhere in the middle of a protest event and a social movement. Fourth, the literature review considers the relevant literature regarding graffiti as an alternative form of communication. Fifth, the lens of “ownership” of space through graffiti is recognized in connection to the messages at UNAL. Sixth, the ownership literature is connected with the important concept of public versus private space in order to make sense of graffiti on the walls of the public university.

All of these categories inherently have overlapping aspects. This research adds to the literature by considering both institutional failures and cultural aspects of UNAL as explanations for the perpetuation of graffiti on campus. By looking at a case where cycles of repression and democracy have not existed to the same extent, this thesis provides an explanation rooted in more than just opposition-based graffiti. Instead of relying on the regime type to explain the use of graffiti as a tool of the oppressed, this analysis

demonstrates that political graffiti may be not just a response to institutional inadequacies but also a cultural tool used to establish an identity, develop a collective feeling of resistance, take part in protest politics, and communicate through informal channels.

a. Institutional Explanations

The Library of Congress published a country study on Colombia that outlines the entirety of Colombian history, economics, society, and politics.¹³ In addition to this extensive research, the Library of Congress has also published a shorter version titled “Country Profile.”¹⁴ These documents provide the factual basis for this section; however, an additional timeline can be found on page xiii. While the complete history of Colombia will not be reviewed extensively here, the historical basis is helpful in understanding the impact of institutional factors on graffiti at UNAL in Bogotá. The most significant aspect is the fact that there has been a historically dominant two-party system in Colombia. Disenfranchised groups often resorted to violence through guerrilla warfare in an attempt to impact political processes.¹⁵ Several reforms from 1985 to 2003 attempted to create more opportunities for new actors in such a closed environment.

The first document that addressed party politics and formation was Law 58 of 1985, codifying citizens’ rights to participate in “political parties, political movements, or groups without any limit whatsoever; freely participate in them and diffuse their ideas and programs.”¹⁶ As guerrilla insurgent groups continued to thwart the consolidation of democracy, Colombian officials looked for a way to pacify the resistance. A new

¹³ Rex A. Hudson, “Colombia: a country study,” (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2010).

¹⁴ Library of Congress, “Country Profile: Colombia,” (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, 2007).

¹⁵ For example, the guerrilla groups FARC-EP and M-19.

¹⁶ Law 58, 1985

constitution was written in 1991 and considered “the most democratic in Colombian history.”¹⁷

With regards to electoral rules, the new constitution attempted to “open the system... and promote citizen participation in politics.”¹⁸ Yet, the constitution maintained the proportional representation (PR) electoral form that uses the Hare quota to determine seats while distributing remaining seats to the candidates with the largest remainders. It failed to establish limits on the number of party lists that officially registered parties could present in a district for congressional elections.¹⁹ Due to the policy of distributing seats proportionally and then to the largest remainder, many candidates saw it as beneficial to run on separate lists instead of as a group on the party list. This became known as *operación avispa* (operation wasp), a process through which candidates would overwhelm voters with single-candidate lists in order to secure seats.²⁰

In 1994, clearer guidelines for political party registration and regulation were passed through Law 130, establishing “the basic statute of parties and political movements, norms regarding financial support and electoral campaigns, and other dispositions.”²¹ If anything, this law established clearer rules regarding the formation of parties and associations, the state financial funding for legally recognized parties, and the standards for maintaining legal recognition. While this law was not geared towards electoral reform, the changes to party politics inevitably affected electoral processes.

Multiple party lists contributed to party fragmentation and exclusivity in the political

¹⁷ Becerra, “Regulación Jurídica,” 336. [author translation]

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Constitution of Colombia (1991).

²⁰ *Operación avispa* (or operation wasp) is a method through which candidates could overwhelm the voters by presenting themselves on single-lists. Through this method, it became more likely that different candidates of the same party would receive seats based on the remainder allocation system.

²¹ Congreso de Colombia, *Ley 130 de 1994*, (Bogotá, Colombia, 1994), <http://www.alcaldiabogota.gov.co/sisjur/normas/Norma1.jsp?i=4814#HojaVida> (accessed December 2012).

process. Therefore, the electoral reform in 2003 changed the way that congressional seats were allocated and impacted party consolidation.

This 2003 reform sought to solve some of the problems that had emerged with party politics as a result of the 1991 Constitution and Law 130 of 1994. After 1991, the electoral system saw an intense increase in the amount of personalistic campaigns and party fragmentation due to the submission of multiple party lists in order to obtain congressional seats through the remainder allocation system. Smaller parties, who were supposed to benefit from party registration laws set forth in the 1991 Constitution and 1994 law, were actually at an even greater disadvantage as larger parties took advantage of using multiple lists. Legislative Act 1 of 2003 addresses party fragmentation by preventing “political parties or movements from present[ing] singular lists and candidates” and by establishing an electoral threshold “that shall not be below two percent (2%) of the votes for the Senate.”²² Moreover, the reform ensures that seats are allotted by quota instead of remainder. As a result, single party lists became less appealing, as it did not enhance the chances of attaining a seat.

The process of reforming the electoral system and party politics has been reviewed in order to emphasize the exclusionary nature of both the electoral and party system. Many of the problems with party fragmentation and underrepresentation have been associated with the electoral system that was in place until 2003. The transformation from the PR system with the remainder allocation scheme to the quotient system resulted in fairer elections with a greater opportunity for smaller parties to win seats. Nevertheless, the 2003 reform has not completely eradicated the problem of third party marginalization.

²² Congreso de Colombia, *Acto Legislativo 1 de 2003: Reforma Política Constitucional*, (Bogotá, Colombia, 2003), art. 12.

There are several scholars that analyze the different reform transitions mentioned in the previous paragraphs. Their work heavily contributes to this thesis' understanding of the institutional changes as inadequate for many third party or alternative political actors.

Eduardo Pizarro and Ana María Bejarano, Olga Scarpetta, Jeff Browitt, and Stella Rouse analyze Colombia's traditional two-party system and specifically argue that the various reforms have perhaps not been as effective as desired.²³ Pizarro and Bejarano recognized "the unexpected consequences of the 1991 Constitution on the political system: the explosion of 'microparties' and party factions that has further fragmented and weakened the party system."²⁴ The 1991 Constitution was unable to deal with the root of the main issue and created different tensions in electoral and party politics as a result.²⁵ Scarpetta discusses the effect that the constitution had on popular participation, arguing that the document actually limited participation instead of increasing it. Browitt contends that the constitution allowed for the further exploitation of politically marginalized peoples. By lowering registration requirements and incentivizing the formation of political parties or ephemeral associations, Law 130 in 1994 did help smaller, third parties become more institutionalized. Nevertheless, the law also led to increased

²³ Eduardo Pizarro and Ana María Bejarano, "Political Reform after 1991," in *Peace, Democracy, and Human Rights in Colombia*, edited by Christopher Welna and Gustavo Gallón Giraldo, 167-201 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007): 169; Olga Scarpetta "Political Traditions and the Limits of Democracy in Colombia," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 5, no. 2 (1991): 143-166; Jeff Browitt, "Capital Punishment: The Fragmentation of Colombia and the Crisis of the Nation-state," *Third World Quarterly* 22, no. 6 (2001): 1063-1078.

²⁴ Pizarro and Bejarano, "Political Reform after 1991," 169.

²⁵ There is evidence of increased apathy towards voting and political participation as a result of this period of pre-determined coalition government. For more, see the U.S. Library of Congress's Country Study of Colombia. The data found on IDEAL International provides an excellent overview of the voter turnout rates throughout the years; for more, see "Voter turnout data for Colombia," at <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=48>).

fragmentation of larger parties, illustrating that Colombia still struggles with expanding political participation.

Rouse focuses on the deinstitutionalization of Colombia's traditionally strong two-party system, contending that it is a result of violence and disillusionment with the government. While it is true that Colombia is exhibiting deinstitutionalization of its dominant two parties, third parties or alternative political actors have still not entered into formal politics with much force.²⁶ Rouse's analysis supports the institutional explanation underlying this thesis: the political system is transforming, but Colombia still faces party fragmentation and political exclusion.

Erika Moreno in an essay written in 2005 contends that the political party system has failed to really change in order to allow for new actors to enter the formal political sphere. At that point in time, she attributes Colombia's inability to include more actors as "largely a function of incomplete reforms that allowed for the 'legalization' of traditional party factions and the persistence of electoral incentives that do not encourage distinct forms of behavior."²⁷ Moreno counted "nearly 80 legally recognized parties and a growing number of 'alternative' parties in the national congress" that emerged after the 2003 reform.²⁸ Her analysis, however, argues that these new actors have not had a dramatic impact on policymaking.²⁹ According to Moreno, alternative and third parties that are able to gain congressional seats are actually not that distinct ideologically from the traditional parties. These smaller parties seem to be branches and factions of the

²⁶ Stella Rouse, "The Effects of Violence on Colombia's Historically Strong Party System," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Political Science Association, January 5, 2006).

²⁷ Moreno, "Whither the Colombian two-party system? An assessment of political reforms and their limits," *Electoral Studies* 24 (2005): 485.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 499.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 501.

larger parties. Therefore, their policy tendencies do not drastically depart from the status quo; truly alternative parties or groups are still marginalized in this system.

Moreno followed up with an essay in 2009 that seems to contradict her previous essay by arguing that the institutional reforms have actually created more space for new political actors.³⁰ Moreno's ultimate question pertains directly to this thesis: "Can the appearance of 'new' actors in Colombia be traced to political (institutional) reforms enacted in the last sixteen years or can their appearance be explained as a function of 'two-party-itis' (exhaustion with the two-party system)?"³¹ Moreno finds that the institutional reforms have been essential in promoting the participation of new parties. Yet, Moreno's argument fails to see the periphery parties that express themselves through informal means such as graffiti. These movements, associations, and parties have had some success in formalized politics, depending on their size. However, more generally, the groups represented through graffiti tend to be anti-establishment and desire to change the system but not work through it. Incorporating Moreno's analysis is important, as this thesis contrarily posits that political graffiti may demonstrate nearly the opposite. As alternative parties find the political system inaccessible, it appears that they use graffiti to reach their audiences and promote their messages.³²

The critiques posited by Pizarro and Bejarano, Scarpetta, Browitt, Rouse, and Moreno demonstrate that the reforms need more work to be truly successful. Political graffiti expresses discontent with the political system and suggests that there may be some form of indirect repression or lack of full citizen participation in democratic processes.

³⁰ Erika Moreno, "Representation and Colombia's 'New Parties': The Effects of Political Reform on the Colombian Party System" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, May 26, 2009).

³¹ Moreno, "Colombia's 'New Parties,'" 12.

³² Ibid.

Understanding the history of the two-party system in Colombia and the transformation over time is important to understanding why there are still issues with political inclusion and participation today. Therefore, this thesis considers the inadequate nature of the institutional reforms mentioned in this section as a possible rationalization for explaining why critical graffiti persists at UNAL. While this analysis uses institutional explanations as the main component of the hypothesis, it is necessary to include other aspects of university student culture that may also serve as possible explanations for the appearance of graffiti at the university.

b. The Latin American Student as an Activist

While the transformations of the Latin American university system are not extremely relevant to this thesis, it is important to understand that these changes and movement from an extremely hierarchical structure to a more decentralized university structure has aided in the development of the Latin American student activist. More decentralization has resulted in greater student involvement in both university and national politics and processes. Joseph Maier and Richard Weatherhead describe students of Latin American universities as having a subculture of activism.³³ Latin American students have a long history of reacting to the large, depersonalized structure of the University with opposition and resistance. While the type of protest varies from event to event, tactics often include boycotts, sit-ins, paper bombing, and/or full-scale riots. Students have been and continue to be incredibly involved in political activity and

³³ Joseph Maier and Richard Weatherhead, *The Latin American University*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979).

activist measures. In the introduction of *The Latin American University*, Maier and Weatherhead consider the region's universities "politicized," and as

peculiar institution[s] that [exist] in an already highly politically charged environment. In the nineteenth century, the newly independent states abolished the university and replaced it with academies and institutes. They followed the Napoleonic pattern of creating a more secular, open, progressive, educational system that would slough off the domination of the clergy and scholastic learning. The new educational structures, whatever their designations, were still creatures of the state.³⁴

As a result of the political nature of university settings in Latin America and as the center for academic political discussions, a culture of protest, participation, and politicization has emerged. As Maier and Weatherhead reiterate, the changes in the institutions over the years have been geared towards creating more "progressive" and inherently liberal institutions that seek to provide safe environments for expression. Nevertheless, these institutions are still state-run and generate critical commentaries and resistance from students.

Although Maier and Weatherhead speak of Latin American students in the general sense, Colombian students exhibit similar characteristics of activism and political involvement. In Colombia, not only are there student organizations that are involved in university-specific politics, but there are also student branches of national political associations, movements, and/or parties that serve an integral role in arranging demonstrations, petitions, and other protest events on campus. Graffiti, as student survey respondents affirm, is a form of political activism and constitutes a large presence on UNAL's campus. In contrast to Colombian society as a whole, the atmosphere at UNAL tends to be more open to a variety of participatory methods. While protests and clear

³⁴ Maier and Weatherhead, *The Latin American University*, 5.

disruptions to daily life may not be as welcomed in the city of Bogotá, the UNAL campus seems to welcome these activities with eagerness. The students, as Maier and Weatherhead confirm, tend to have strong political convictions that are just as much a result of their upbringing as it is a result of the culture formed at Latin American universities.

Political activism in the form of graffiti has not always been the first choice of students. Student protests have been (and continue to be) a feature of political activism. According to the U.S. published Country Study of Colombia, “students [especially at UNAL] had a tradition of political activism [and] their protests often centered on university issues but also included domestic concerns.”³⁵ While these instances of student resistance are a result of a combination of student discontent and national political frustrations, they still illustrate the dissatisfaction with the political system and students’ involvement in the expression of these frustrations. The fact remains that political graffiti continues to be a highly impactful form of expression for groups that feel marginalized in the current party system, especially illustrated at UNAL.

Farid Samir Benavides-Vanegas is another scholar who contributes to the literature on student culture by examining the historic icons invoked in graffiti on the campus, such as Camilo Torres and Ché Guevara. In the process of understanding why these two icons are used as representative symbols of resistance, Benavides-Vanegas considers graffiti at UNAL as part of the student culture. Specifically, “students at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia have used graffiti as an alternative form of subaltern

³⁵ Dennis Hanratty and Sandra Meditz, “Colombia: a country study,” (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1988), “Students,” <http://countrystudies.us/colombia/95.htm>.

writing to construct a narrative of resistance.”³⁶ His analysis confirms that while graffiti is prohibited in the city of Bogotá, “the university authorities tolerate and even encourage graffiti, to a point that each semester the university’s walls are painted white, allowing for the creation of new graffiti.”³⁷ In fact, according to UNAL students, it is a common practice to put up *rayados* (graffiti messages) or murals during the day or the night. The university appears to foster extreme and radical political views, as exhibited by the forums, graffiti, and protests that have been historically woven into the fabric of student life at UNAL.

Benavides-Vanegas chooses to focus on UNAL for the same reasons that I have: “All of Colombia’s disputes are manifested on a smaller scale in the basically closed environment of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia.”³⁸ Most importantly, Benavides-Vanegas cites Armando Silva, adopting his concept that “the use of walls and wall paintings are part of a long tradition of resistance in Latin America.”³⁹ This thesis believes that Benavides-Vanegas accurately depicts graffiti as part of UNAL students’ methods of resistance. While he analyzes more deeply the creation of the main Plaza Ché at the heart of UNAL and the impact of using Camilo Torres and Ché Guevara as symbols for change, this research pushes Benavides-Vanegas’ concept further by addressing the *rayados*, phrases, and visual representations tattooed across the campus. It is not just the central Plaza Ché that demands attention; the implication of graffiti scattered across nearly every wall emphasizes the need for further investigation.

³⁶ Farid Samir Benavides-Vanegas, “From Santander to Camilo and Ché,” *Social Justice* 32, no. 1 (2005): 55.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

c. Graffiti as a Social Movement or a Protest Event?

In “The Making of Social Movements in Latin America,” Arturo Escobar and Sonia E. Alvarez consider those members of social movements “to be engaged in a significant political struggle in terms of access to mechanisms of power but also [a] cultural [struggle] in the search for different identities.”⁴⁰ Social movements create the opportunity for groups of similar people to come together and collectively establish their goals and character. Most social movements tend to have goals of policy change and reform or even simply recognition. Graffiti, similarly, can have goals; many messages are written with the hopes of creating a political dialogue that critically comments on pertinent issues of the day. In the case of graffiti, it is difficult to know whether or not a group or an individual put up a certain message. Regardless, the political graffiti messages create an identity generally based on opposition and resistance. Political graffiti, by nature, tends to establish an identity of resistance, as it is an informal method of communication that dominates public or private space with ideologically driven phrases and words. It may be argued that graffiti is a full-fledged social movement; however, the definitions drawn from Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani in their work “Social Movements: An Introduction,” suggest that graffiti does not completely fit into the category of a social movement.⁴¹ Due to graffiti’s continued presence at UNAL, this analysis contends that these messages constitute a “significant political struggle” that push for change or express discontent with the current situation. In contrast with the active form of political activity, such as demonstrations, sit-ins, and protest events,

⁴⁰ Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez, “Introduction,” in *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy*, edited by Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez, 1-15 (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc, 1992): 4.

⁴¹ Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Inc, 1999).

graffiti is a more passive form of expression. Although graffiti is passive in that it does not actively engage in protest, it can demonstrate clear and effective political resistance and can evoke strong reactions by audiences or other artists. Within the context of Colombia's political history, a history that has only recently allowed for more than two political parties, the continued use of graffiti may be explained by students' desires to create a dialogue, promote change, and establish an identity of resistance. This communicative tool especially resonates with previously excluded or marginalized political ideologies, as it provides a space in which and method through which groups are able to participate.

Ron Eyerman makes an important distinction in his chapter "How social movements move." Eyerman understands social movements as driven "by transforming identities and emotions, by focusing attention, and by directing and coordinating action."⁴² Accordingly, many people may engage in "contentious actions ... [and if] ... sufficient numbers turn out, one may call this a "protest event."⁴³ Under this framework, this thesis considers political graffiti as an unorganized "protest event;" that is, the politics expressed in the graffiti suggest "cognitively framed emotions, anger, frustration, shame, [and] guilt" that are expressed by citizens as they attempt to articulate their discontent within the political framework.⁴⁴ These protest events and social movements claim legitimacy: "demonstrations are now accepted forms of political action and in democratic societies are protected by law and even encouraged as important forms of

⁴² Ron Eyerman, "Performing Opposition, or how social movements move," in *Social Performance: Symbolic action, cultural pragmatics, and ritual*, edited by Jeffrey Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast, 193-217 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 194.

⁴³ Ibid, 195.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 194.

political socialization and societal renewal.”⁴⁵ Likewise, political graffiti has become an important tool of political socialization as citizens hurl opinions, critiques, and oppositional statements on the walls with spray paint, markers, or paint in order to encourage change. Graffiti, in the context of a social movement, brings opposing and resistant beliefs into reality.⁴⁶ While Eyerman focuses on the actions of demonstrations or political protests that involve the active, collective movement of people, the act of writing graffiti also exhibits the actualization of opposition and formation of visible political resistance. For the case of graffiti at UNAL, this research argues that the political graffiti is a form of protest. While not an active method of protesting, graffiti still indicates a method of resisting the status quo. Eyerman understands social movements as intrinsically tied to protest events. However, this analysis views political graffiti as illustrative of a cleavage between these two ideas, suggesting a hierarchy of expressions of resistance.

d. Graffiti as a Form of Alternative Communication

Graffiti, as discussed in the previous section, is a way that individuals or groups can establish and promote an identity or certain goals. Through this lens, the specific content of the graffiti message is important and can denote resistance or criticism. Another way of understanding graffiti and its importance is by considering it as a form of alternative communication. Lyman Chaffee’s investigation of graffiti as an “alternative tool of communication” provides a foundational framework for understanding the

⁴⁵ Ibid, 197.

⁴⁶ Eyerman, “Performing Opposition,” 198.

purpose and impact of political graffiti in Latin America.⁴⁷ He considers graffiti as a method of resistance and alternative communication as effective political tools, which is analogous to the Colombian case. This explanation does not focus primarily on the graffiti message; rather, Chaffee suggests that graffiti as a medium indicates resistance and alternative views. His work primarily focuses on graffiti found in Buenos Aires during periods of transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Chaffee's understanding of graffiti as a political response in times of repression has significance even in the outlier case of Colombia. His explanation of why and when graffiti emerges can be applied in Colombia to examine the political and social conditions of the university that may be allowing for graffiti. Colombia does not have the same political history of authoritarianism that Chaffee examines in Argentina; therefore, Chaffee's argument that graffiti is a form of resistance during times of oppression does not account for the political graffiti found in Colombia.⁴⁸ The analysis of Colombian graffiti, specifically in Bogotá, adds to Chaffee's argument by addressing an outlier case.

In addition to Chaffee, Louis Nevaer analyzes protest street art in Oaxaca, Mexico in the context of democratic transitions and policy reforms.⁴⁹ Nevaer's study, while addressing graffiti in the context of democracy versus repression, also views graffiti as a response to policy changes. When traditional methods of media and communication are not available to those who want to express themselves, the walls, according to Nevaer and Chaffee, have often become the selected venue for expression. As in the case of Chaffee's work, Nevaer fails to address the moments when graffiti is employed as political expression during times of democracy. In the case of Colombia, graffiti is not

⁴⁷ Chaffee, "Political Graffiti and Wall Painting," 37.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Louis Nevaer, *Protest Graffiti – Mexico: Oaxaca*, (New York: Mark Batty Publisher, 2009).

used principally as a protest method; rather, graffiti is employed as a method of engaging political dialogue and expressing sentiments not successfully expressed due to the current political system that regulates political parties and elections. While this thesis maintains the idea that graffiti is a tool of political expression during times of repression, it pushes the concept further to look at a new angle beyond the concepts of democratic transitions. Colombia's experience marks a departure from cases studied by Nevaer and Chaffee, which requires that we consider political graffiti in Bogotá through a lens that does not totally rely on democratic transitions or controversial policy reforms. Rather, it appears that Colombian graffiti has been present across the decades and different reforms.

e. Graffiti as an Identity and Method of Ownership

The way that graffiti creates, defines, or reestablishes identity and culture in a political setting is crucial to understanding why graffiti has persisted as a method of political dialogue. Stuart Hall analyzes the representation of the black subject in film. Even though Hall focuses on film representations, his concept of "identity as production, which is never complete, always in process" is applicable to this analysis. Graffiti, like film, is a form of expression.⁵⁰ For this reason, Hall's theories of identity as a process can be extrapolated to the Colombia case, as graffiti can be explained by viewing it as a way of establishing an identity. Graffiti in this thesis refers to both written messages and depictions of certain political, nationalist figures; by decoding what Edward McCaughan refers to as the "symbolic systems of language and visual discourse" that graffiti often presents, the identity behind the message and the resultant impact can be better

⁵⁰ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, edited by Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, 233-246 (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003): 222.

understood.⁵¹ Visually, graffiti can present many interesting metaphors, paradoxes, or illustrations that add meaning to a message. In the graffiti seen at UNAL, there are many visual aspects that enhance the political message itself, whether it is the depiction of a guerrilla revolutionary soldier or a picture of Latin America chained by capitalism. The meanings and content of the messages reveal the ways graffiti attempts to create identity and contribute to the national political discourse. By analyzing the use of graffiti as a method of establishing not only a political stance but also an identity, we can better see how and why Colombians use this method to become involved in political discourse. Specifically, the use of graffiti by political parties in Colombia suggests that the parties are not only trying to present a politically charged statement to the public, but are also establishing a certain identity that characterizes their goals and beliefs.

Edward McCaughan in “Art and Social Movements” presents a conceptual framework for analyzing the impact of art and visual production on social movements. McCaughan’s interpretation of street art as a producer of identity and as a form of political culture through visual production should be analyzed with respect to Bogotá since the graffiti analyzed in this research is purely political.⁵² The graffiti at UNAL appears to illustrate specific ideologies and political views, necessarily connecting this visual production with a political identity. While McCaughan does provide interesting commentary on street art and social movements, he fails to specifically address why certain groups seek to employ street art or what the connections may be to the historical context. Therefore, this thesis seeks to expand the concept to include an analysis of

⁵¹ Edward McCaughan, *Art and Social Movements: Cultural Politics in Mexico and Aztlán*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 12.

⁵² McCaughan, *Art and Social Movements*.

political graffiti's message, the methods employed to present this message, and the identity developed through the message.

Identity is certainly constructed by the ideological message that is written; however, the analysis of the space that is chosen and the impact of hijacking this space also contribute to the formation of an identity. Ben Lomas, Banksy, and Pierre Bourdieu have all contributed to the literature centering on ownership of public space. By “owning” a wall, this thesis intends to say that a public space is taken over by the message that a street artist chooses to put up. No longer is the wall a facet of institutional control; rather, the *grafitero* has commandeered the space for the exposition of a specific message. Lomas' analysis views graffiti as a way of “owning” a wall or expressing one's self through nontraditional, illegal methods. By exploring the implications of the ownership of public space, Lomas imparts a better understanding of ownership and power hierarchies that are salient when writing on walls. In the same vein, Banksy, a world-renown graffiti and street artist, produced a film, “Exit through the gift shop,” that reveals artist motivations and desires for writing messages or putting up artistic installations in public space. The concept of “owning” a wall and establishing political opinions via graffiti allows artists to feel part of the public conversation.⁵³ While Bourdieu focuses on the specific language invoked and its impact on cultural reproduction in *The Field of Cultural Production*, he too considers language as an important aspect involved in “owning” a wall. More importantly, Bourdieu sees these messages as cultural reproductions and as creating or critiquing society's power

⁵³ *Exit Through the Gift Shop*, DVD, directed by Banksy, (Los Angeles: Paranoid Pictures, Oscilloscope Laboratories, and a Banksy film, 2010).

structures.⁵⁴ Bourdieu views more deeply the power of language and the effect that words actually have within a society. From these three theorists, we can analyze graffiti as a whole, incorporating analysis of the language, humor, audience, identity, and political slant that reveal unique power dynamics that contribute to, critique, or dominate the political discourse. By analyzing the messages that the graffiti sends and their impact, graffiti can begin to be seen as critiques of power and expressions against hierarchies. When considering the graffiti at UNAL, it is important to consider the meaning behind writing on a public wall and how this expresses a critique of the establishment. By “owning” specific spaces, the messages inherently display resistance to the establishment that owns the wall. A significant amount of graffiti at UNAL addresses state-society relations broadly, criticizing the notion of a large, bureaucratic institution and advocating regional, local, and individual representation in politics. When looking at the graffiti at UNAL, the political association or party that creates the message becomes a central feature of understanding why graffiti continues to be so important in Colombia’s political scene. These groups use the *rayados* to critique the current political system and express resistance. Through the lens of ownership, the meaning behind the space becomes more relevant to understanding what the message actually says.

f. Graffiti as (Re)claiming Public Space

Ownership implies that there is a physical space to claim for one’s own purposes. In this same vein, an analysis of public versus private space becomes necessary to understand how graffiti makes certain statements inadvertently through their simple

⁵⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

choice of venue. Significant literature is dedicated to investigations on how public space is established, developed, and engaged through the use of graffiti, murals, posters, and political protest. In his dissertation “*A ganar la calle: The politics of public space and public art in Santiago, Chile*” Camilo Trumper analyzes the impact of political art in the Chilean social movement during the Salvador Allende period, arguing that the political art was significant for recapturing political space.⁵⁵ At UNAL, groups stake a claim on the physical space, which makes a statement of resistance against first, the wall, and second, the owner of the wall. Students associated with political groups move to recapture the public sphere at UNAL and enter into the political dialogue through writing graffiti on university walls.

The distinction between public and private space constitutes an important part of the analysis of political graffiti in Bogotá. Both Jürgen Habermas and Ron Eyerman address the concept of public space as significant to the message delivered. Habermas argues that the use of public space inherently challenges or serves as “a check on government, [and] as the rational basis for government.”⁵⁶ Graffiti in this context is not just oppositional and resistant but also a legitimate part of the political discourse. Political acts in public space, according to Habermas, serve as the link between the private and public spheres; notably, these actions are legitimate and important for the functioning of a liberal democracy. For Habermas, expression in the public sphere became a legitimate and necessary means of countering the government and expressing political views to be accepted as legitimate. While this thesis does not consider political events such as debates

⁵⁵ Camilo Trumper, “*A Ganar la Calle: The politics of public space and public art in Santiago, Chile*,” (PhD diss., University of California: Berkeley, 2009).

⁵⁶ Lasse Thomassen, “Public Sphere,” in *Habermas: a guide for the perplexed*, 33-57 (New York: Continuum, 2010): 39.

or conversations held in the public sphere, it does use graffiti on walls in the public sphere as representative of the same phenomena. Similar to Habermas' concepts, Eyerman's work considers public spaces as "chosen for their particular symbolic significance."⁵⁷ The location where a piece of graffiti is found should be considered significant, as this choice is most often a rational decision on the part of the artist. Thus, the importance of space as public or private contributes to the message of graffiti in addition to the resistance implicit in the choice of space.

In the case of UNAL, a public university, it is clear that the graffiti exists in the public sphere. This choice confronts the administration and institutionalized political system, as students reclaim public space that they believe belongs to all Colombians. In addition to Habermas' concept of political discourse in the public sphere, this thesis adopts Eyerman's view of space as significant. Through these two similar lenses, this research considers the importance of the physical sites that are chosen for expression. Additionally, the concept of reclaiming the public space of the public university for the use of the *pueblo* or common people illustrates a key purpose of graffiti at UNAL.

g. Conclusion

While the literature review is not exhaustive, it does cover an extensive amount of material that contributes theoretical and factual information to this thesis. Beginning with literature on Colombian history and politics, the literature review sets forth an institutional explanation through which graffiti's presence at UNAL can be considered. Specifically, this part suggests that institutional reforms have not been fully successful

⁵⁷ Eyerman, "Performing Opposition," 210.

and have resulted in citizen frustration with the political system. As this thesis hypothesizes, graffiti at UNAL is mainly attributed to unsatisfactory institutional changes; nevertheless, the rest of the literature review provides several other lenses through which graffiti's presence and impact may be viewed. The messages at UNAL may be a result of students' desire to establish an identity of resistance, a form of protest politics, the lack of access to formal communication tools, and/or a method of claiming public space for citizen expression. The subsequent analysis posits that the presence of political graffiti at UNAL results from a combination of the institutional changes in Colombia over the past several decades and the theoretical concepts that give meaning to these seemingly static structural changes.

h. Methods, Purpose, and Structure

Considering the popularity of social media websites that are able to reach a greater number of people, it seems odd that graffiti has continued to be so present in Latin America. The method has remained an important facet of communication for many underrepresented in Latin America. In this analysis, the use of graffiti as an expressive measure not only demonstrates the continuity of student activism at Latin American Universities, but also indicates that graffiti remains an impactful tool of communication.

Investigating the way that politics are expressed through methods such as forums or political conventions is much more quantifiable than what this analysis proposes. Graffiti, as an ephemeral expression, is very difficult to examine, and there is really no adequate way to study the form over a long period of time. Research was mainly

conducted by sending out surveys to students at UNAL.⁵⁸ Responses to the questions have been analyzed and interpreted in order to consider student involvement and activism in politics. Additionally, the survey gauges student perspective on different aspects of political graffiti: the intent, content, and impact. The responses from these different students at UNAL have been labeled Respondents A-X, which will be referred to in the analysis section. In conjunction with the surveys, follow up interviews were conducted to learn more about political groups authoring the graffiti, student perceptions of political graffiti and the importance of graffiti as expression. Various graffiti were captured through photography, specifically emphasizing those messages associated with clearly political groups. Since the art can be put up and removed at any arbitrary time, the photographs taken only represent a small snapshot in time of the continuously changing world of graffiti.

This thesis hypothesizes that the political graffiti at UNAL that expresses clear dissatisfaction with the current political system has persisted due to institutional factors with cultural, identity-based, and protest politics aspects as secondary influences. Despite Colombia's transition from a strict two-party system, dominated by the PC and PL, to a multiparty system, there are still political parties, groups, movements, and/or associations that have not benefitted from these institutional changes. These institutional changes that resulted in a more inaccessible political system may be one explanation for why graffiti persists. However, this research also considers the student culture and attitude towards graffiti as important to the graffiti scene found at UNAL today. Protest politics and a

⁵⁸ See Appendix A for survey questions and the consent form signed by interviewees.

protest culture more generally at UNAL in Colombia may explain why graffiti is still used to express political messages.

i. Looking Forward

The next chapter incorporates the survey responses and interview data collected from students and other actors at UNAL. Student answers form the majority of this thesis' interpretation and research, as their perspectives are crucial to understanding the meaning behind political graffiti and the view on alternative political representation. Finally, this thesis concludes with a final chapter that assesses the contributions of the analysis and further questions for research.

(3) Analysis

a. Reading the Walls

While several interviews of UNAL students contribute to the data referenced in the analysis, a significant amount of information was obtained through surveys. Students' perception of graffiti, its effectiveness, and its typical messages or themes demonstrates the impact of graffiti and the reasoning behind its use. There are three key issue areas that the graffiti at UNAL represents: radical, nationalist, and reformist. The fieldwork conducted in January 2013 supports the notion that these categories are the most dominant, in addition to the information gathered from survey and interview responses. The following section consists of the three categories of graffiti, simultaneously distinct and overlapping. Through visual examples and supportive evidence from Colombian UNAL student respondents, this section analyzes the content and images of graffiti to better understand why graffiti continues to be present at UNAL despite institutional changes. The number of and similarity between the different groups that participate in graffiti creates an alphabet soup of acronyms. There are many groups that share similar titles and pursue similar goals, but there does not seem to be coordination among these groups to make their messages more unified or impactful. It is important to recognize that for the purposes of this thesis, the various members of these groups are not that relevant. Instead, the focus of this analysis is on the fact that these political groups are prominent on campus, continuing to use graffiti as a tool of communication. Ultimately, their presence indicates that they find this method an effective use of time for promoting political messages.

i. Radical

In this section, there are many similarities among the groups writing the graffiti. Most have similar titles that generally include the words “revolutionary”, “liberate,” or “popular.” While the groups are important and emphasize a certain tilt ideologically, simply recognizing the ideological position of a group or even understanding that their name evokes revolutionary action helps situate their messages more easily among the different types of rhetoric. The context and meaning behind the messages in different pieces remains the main focus of the section.

Taking one stroll around UNAL’s campus makes it very clear that the ideological tilt of the university is towards the Left. While there are conservative groups at UNAL, it seems that these groups do not engage in graffiti to the extent that those on the Left do, as the majority of graffiti is sympathetic with communist, socialist, or revolutionary beliefs. In fact, most of the graffiti pushes Leftist ideology even further by encouraging active rebellion and revolution. The messages tend to invoke general and overarching calls for revolution or complete transformation of the political system. Milder solutions of socialism, communism, or reform are invoked in addition to the more aggressive calls for revolution and total transformation.



Figure 1. “Through reason or violence, socialism is our best bet.”

Figure 1 shows graffiti by the *Frente Popular Estudiantil* (Popular Student Front, FPE) citing socialism as the answer: “Through reason or violence, socialism is our best

bet.” For this student group, a popular organization on campus, socialism is directly tied to their interests as students. Subsidized education and other benefits that stem from socialist policies would positively impact most students. While the FPE does not actively invoke an armed revolution, it does suggest that socialism must be attained – through reason or violence.

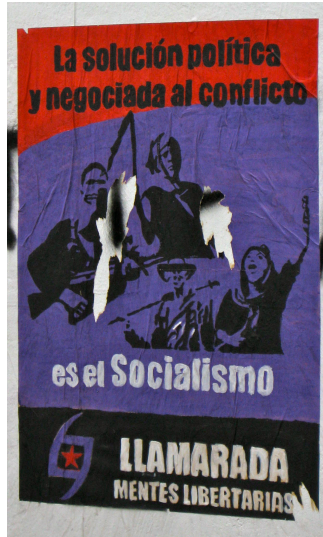


Figure 2. “The political and negotiated solution to the conflict is socialism.”

In Figure 2, the *Mentes Libertarias* (Free/Liberated Thinkers, ML) post a similar message: “The political and negotiated solution to the conflict is socialism.” The message specifically refers to the armed conflict continuing to occur in the rural parts of Colombia. According to this view, socialism represents the answer to the violence in the nation. By calling for total transformation of the political system to that of a socialist government, these messages inherently view the political system as flawed. The use of graffiti, on one hand, demonstrates the inability to access or perhaps the mistrust of formal methods of dialogue in the nation. The images in the graffiti of Figure 2 illustrate four characters that represent a variety of Colombians. There seems to be a peasant farmer, an indigenous man, a guerrilla insurgent, and a women crying out presumably

against inequality. These figures, representing a range of Colombians, suggest that many sectors of society desire change.

Socialist rhetoric constitutes the more passive messages on campus. Most of the leftist rhetoric, however, centers on active rebellion and revolution. While the less intense socialist messages call for a total transformation of the system, the revolutionary rhetoric demands the participation of *el pueblo* (the people) in the reformation of the state, sometimes with encouragement of violence and sometimes without. Many of these messages indicate that unity or joining together is an important facet of revolution and rebellion.



Figure 3. "Unity is our flag, while revolution is our fight."

The *Juventud Comunista Colombiana* (Colombian Communist Youth, JCC) emphasizes the need for unity and revolution, illustrated in Figure 3: "Unity is our flag, while revolution is our fight/struggle." This message emphasizes the collective nature of revolution by claiming that unity is the flag of their revolution. By moving in solidarity, the people can struggle together to help transform the system. In addition to the concept of unifying to fix Colombia's problems, this message also implies that the people must retake their government from the hands of those steering it in the wrong direction.



Figure 4. “To study and fight for national liberation.”

Students survey respondents especially seemed to remember “To study and fight for national liberation,” as portrayed in Figure 4. This phrase, as evident from survey responses and from the fieldwork, was a commonly repeated piece throughout the campus. Calling for national liberation, Figure 4 suggests that education is necessary in addition to the actual fighting in order to bring about a revolution. While there is no specific author connected with this piece, it can be assumed that the group has a leftist tilt and encourages liberation through revolutionary behavior similar to other groups discussed in this section. Some survey respondents that did not cite specific graffiti did maintain that there were many messages concerning the “rising up of the people,” an invitation for revolution and leftist sympathies, or the importance and force of the people united.⁵⁹



Figure 5. “Rebellion is justified. Revolution is necessary.” [green background]
 “Forum: Another world is possible, together we will be liberated. Location: Universidad Pedagógica, 6 December.” [red background]

⁵⁹ Survey Respondents I, H, and V, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

In Figure 5, the *Brigadas Antiimperialistas* (Anti-imperialists Brigade, BA) write, “Rebellion is justified, revolution is necessary,” once again reaffirming an ideological tilt on the campus towards radical rhetoric and transformative policies. The BA, according to their website, support a variety of issues.⁶⁰ Mainly, the organization promotes women’s rights and the liberation of women. There were several pieces across campus that acknowledged the violence against women and attacked the implicit support in the world for prostitution and human trafficking. For example, Figure 6 below illustrates quite clearly these views:



Figure 6. “Women as slaves, no more! Stop with the pornography, prostitution, and patriarchy: put an end to the slavery and denigration of women.”

Returning to Figure 5, we can see another piece of graffiti visible with a red background on top of the piece by the BA. This piece announces the time and date for a forum but also claims “Another world is possible, together we will be liberated.” In fact this phrasing is unique to the Zapatistas in Mexico (EZLN or *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*).⁶¹ The EZLN put out a documentary entitled “Autonomía Zapatista: otro mundo es posible.”⁶² The rhetoric invoked in this documentary, and of the Zapatista

⁶⁰ Brigadas Antiimperialistas, http://www.brigadasantiimperialistas.net/Brigadas_Antiimperialistas.htm

⁶¹ For more information on Zapatista language, see Jeff Juris, *Insurgent Encounters: Transnational Activism, Ethnography, and the Political*, Durham: Duke University Press (2013).

⁶² EZLN, “Autonomía Zapatista: Otro Mundo es Posible,” Producción AMV: Mexico (2008).

movement more generally, uses similar phrasing to Figure 5. Again, like many graffiti messages at UNAL, the central point of the message is the expression of a preference for liberation and a transformed world. It seems that the authors of this message, the *Movimiento Revolucionario Unificador del Pueblo* (MRUP, Revolutionary Unifying Movement of the People) looks towards the Zapatista movement and specifically Subcomandante Marcos as inspiration for their own revolutionary movement in Colombia. The MRUP is one of the *capuchos* or hooded groups that conceal their identity during protests, forums, or demonstrations, identical to the way that the Zapatistas cover their faces. According to the MRUP manifesto, this group stands by the motto “The people, for the people and through the people.”⁶³ Their platform calls for revolution and they heavily rely on Marxist thought. Their main goal is the unification of the people to bring forth a revolution, which they believe is the apex of human action. The figure in illustrated beside the message in Figure 5 is a hooded revolutionary. Due to the rhetoric of the message, it is clearer that the figure is actually a representation of Subcomandante Marcos, the leader of the Zapatista Movement. The uniform displays a military quality, which corroborates the claim that it is the revolutionary leader. Marcos is often photographed smoking a pipe, which makes the connection between these two even stronger. The smoke emitting from the pipe forms the figures of Latin and South America, seeming to suggest that the Zapatista revolutionary movement does not belong to just Mexico and the Zapatistas. Rather, the revolutionary spirit can be spread across all of Latin and South America to achieve the goals of transformation.

⁶³ Manifesto of MRUP, <http://mrup.jimdo.com/plataforma-1/>.

Much of the graffiti that references socialism or revolution implicitly and explicitly reveals discontent with the way in which the established government manages the guerrilla insurgency and resulting violence. For many Colombians that have tired of seeing such violence and have even experienced it firsthand, a revolution represents the ability to move beyond the present and enter into an ideal, almost perfect and nonviolent future. In fact, one survey respondent referred to the leftist sympathies and ideologies as utopist.⁶⁴



Figure 7. "Pass from resistance to revolution."

In Figure 7, the *Guardias Rojas* (Red Guard), a communist group active at UNAL, wrote a message encouraging movement from a more passive resistance to an active revolution. This message clearly states that Colombians must move from resistance to revolution, which indirectly asserts that these parties and groups are currently resisting the present system.



Figure 8. "Conscious and armed people, imminent revolution!"

⁶⁴ Survey Respondent J, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

In Figure 8, the *Unión Estudiantil Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Student Union, UER) indicates that an armed popular revolution is forthcoming. While UER is one of the few groups on campus to explicitly state the preference for an armed revolution, the foundational understanding of revolution as the answer remains the same among most groups expressing themselves through graffiti.

These messages consider revolution and drastic governance transformations as the best solution for the current problems in Colombian society. While some graffiti provide a more explicit representation of the political context and issue that is being critiqued, most of the messages tend to rely on generic revolutionary or socialism phrases that do not cite specific grievances. This lack of specificity regarding the reasoning behind these ideological messages often makes it difficult to understand what the message may be critiquing other than the broad concept of the political system. For example, the message from Figure 10 requires interpretation by the reader of the context that may have driven such a statement. Nevertheless, the messages continue to critique the current political system, institutions, and leaders indirectly by calling for rebellion and revolution.



Figure 9. “Neither Uribe nor Santos. The option: Revolution.”

Yet, it should be recognized that there are some messages, such as that in Figure 2 and 9, which clearly denote a political context or issue that it is critiquing. The message in Figure 9 claims, “Neither Uribe nor Santos. The option: Revolution.” The current political context in Colombia allows us to make certain inferences about the message’s meaning. Former President Uribe and the current administration of President Juan Manuel Santos have tried to end the violence perpetuated by guerrilla groups and

paramilitaries in Colombia. While Uribe's tactic was tough and heavily militaristic, Santos has engaged in more negotiations and attempts at peace talks and ceasefires. These messages signal that regardless of the president and his preferences, revolution is still preferable. Most importantly, this seems to be a critique not necessarily just on Uribe and Santos; rather, the message serves as a critique on the democratic system itself.

There are then graffiti messages that rely on the clever turn of phrases to emphasize the need for revolution or change. In Figures 10-13, crucial messages are conveyed through the use of hyperbole or metaphor.

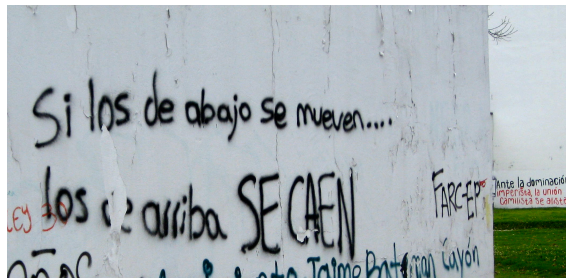


Figure 10. "If those below move, those above fall."

In Figure 10, the artist writes, "If those from below move, those from above will fall." This message calls for the revolution of the, presumably, oppressed people at the bottom of society. On the same wall, in similar writing, is the acronym FARC-EP, which is the acronym for the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas-Ejército del Pueblo* (Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia – Army of the People), which seems to be the author of this message. This revolutionary group is known for its Marxist-Leninist views and demand for the people's revolution against, what they feel is, a corrupt and unequal government.

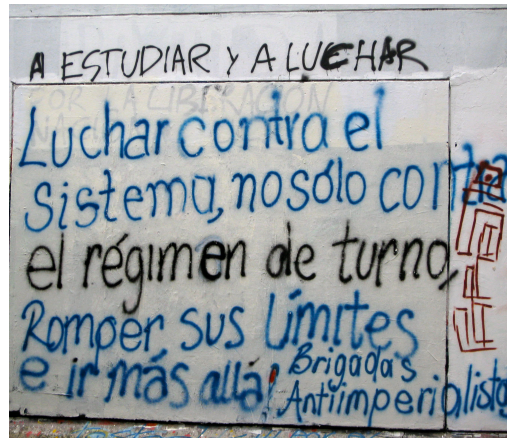


Figure 11. “Fight against the system, not only against the current regime; Break its limits and go even further.”

In Figure 11, we again see the *Brigadas Antiimperialistas*. This message calls for a fight against not just the current administration, but also against the system as a whole. The graffiti here illustrates the most explicit example of messaging intended to fight against the political system that they believe is unfair, unequal, and damaging to the liberty of the people. The limits mentioned in this piece refer to the political and legal rules and regulations that repress the rights of Colombians and, in their view, prevent the emergence of a more equal political system. While there are no specific references to overthrowing democracy, the message implies the “breaking” of the system in favor a new, limitless regime.

Using a metaphor to present a message allows the graffiti to be both more effective and less direct than those messages that clearly respond to a grievance. In the next two cases, groups encourage rebellion and recognize the seriousness of problems facing Colombians.



Figure 12. “If they do not let us dream, we will not let them sleep!”

In Figure 12, the group exclaims, “If they do not let us dream, we will not let them sleep!” Figure 13 declares, “The rebel struggle for health, not calmed by ibuprofen.” Both of these messages refer to the rebellion or fight that is occurring between the government and the citizens, creating a dichotomy of “us against them.” Figure 12 criticizes oppression that the group feels is present in the current political context, analogizing the government and oppressive institutions with those who do not permit dreaming. In effect, this message points out the repressive nature of the political institutions that disallows the simple freedom to dream or think outside of the current system.



Figure 13. “The rebel struggle for health, not calmed with ibuprofen.”

Figure 13 most likely critiques the government’s treatment of healthcare in Colombia, stating, “The rebel struggle for health, not calmed with ibuprofen.” In this piece, the graffiti comments on the government’s ability to deal with the (according to this graffiti) inadequate healthcare system in Colombia. It appears that the *Klandestinos* consider the

government's response as weak, akin to a mere dose of ibuprofen. The authors of this message demand a greater response from the government; a more powerful medicine must be administered to fix Colombia's issues. This call for greater reform and action by the government is a feature found in many of the other examples provided in this section.

Analysis

Survey responses and documentation from January 2013 confirm that messages sympathetic with the Left are highly visible on the campus at UNAL. It is not only the communist and socialist parties and student appendages of these parties or associations that partake in these types of messages; student groups and federations that have no direct connection to the official leftist parties also contribute to this leftist dialogue. The revolutionary and rebellious rhetoric speaks most directly to dissatisfaction with the current political system. It should be noted that these messages tend to represent the most extreme views; those putting up messages and taking the time to express their views are generally the most active students. As a result, the messages often express the most ideologically driven concerns. Nevertheless, the messages are important contributions that receive attention at UNAL.

When survey respondents were asked if they read the graffiti messages at UNAL and what these messages said, many referred to the socialist, communist, and revolutionary characteristics of the messages. Two respondents used the same wording, considering many messages as apologías (apologies) to leftist ideologies.⁶⁵ Several other respondents cited specific pieces that dealt with liberation, revolution, and socialist

⁶⁵ Survey Respondents M and U, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

rhetoric. During one interview, first-year student Laura responded that much of the leftist and revolutionary graffiti manifested frustrations with the fact that “those who run the country have always been the same [people]” and the reality that “the university has always been associated with those who want to transform the reality.”⁶⁶ Her rhetoric touched on those “above” (upper class) and those “below,” (lower class) recreating the antagonistic dichotomy found throughout campus. In an interview with Anthropology student Cristian, it became evident that graffiti was not important solely for the words that were written, but it was also significant for the implicit and indirect message that it sent. In other words, Cristian, in addition to several survey responses, views graffiti as a necessary tool of expression in Colombian society.

Surveys and interviews also revealed a tension between public space and expression, connecting more directly to Habermas’s theories on expression in the public sphere.⁶⁷ Students at UNAL feel that the university provided the appropriate space to express the desire for change, transformation, and even revolution of the system. For Habermas, the use of the public sphere for expression and political discourse is important for creating a dialogue between the institutions and citizens.⁶⁸ Students at UNAL have seemingly incorporated these beliefs in their justification for using the walls as their message boards. Interviewee Marcela contributed that “graffiti is a form of expressing one’s self, but more than this, it is like a revolution of ideas ... that present facts [for consideration].” In accordance with Eyerman’s theories on protest events, the political graffiti that expresses revolutionary and socialist messages constitute a tool of political socialization that encourages change in the system. The repetitiveness of the messages

⁶⁶ Marcela, interview by author, January 25, 2013.

⁶⁷ Thomassen, “Public Sphere,” in *Habermas: a guide for the perplexed*, 33-57.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

confronts students every day at UNAL and creates an environment critical of the established government. In addition, the use of the public sphere by these groups to express their political views depicts a method of ownership over what is considered public. As Lomas, Banksy and Bourdieu discuss in their respective works, owning part of the public sphere allows groups or individuals to become involved in the political arena. The radical graffiti at UNAL further expresses critiques of the current political system, inherent in their messages for total change. As a result of putting messages up on the walls pertaining to the public sphere, these revolutionary groups critique the current system and show disregard for the power hierarchies of the public, and specifically political, arena.

ii. Nationalist

The second category of graffiti messages that are most prevalent on UNAL's campus includes those messages that exalt important, national political figures. Essentially, many groups invoke key nationalist figures in their graffiti as a way of not just remembering their contributions to society but also as a method of co-opting their respective ideological messages for their own group's benefit. Ché Guevara and Camilo Torres are two of the most mentioned figures, due to their contributions as revolutionary figures in Colombia's history. An important study by Benavides-Vargas examined the importance of the use of iconic figures in the central plaza of UNAL, but this section considers the repetitive use of associated phrases and nationalist depictions,

demonstrating how these messages or depictions result in the co-optation of certain identities by political groups to establish their identity based on such a key figure.⁶⁹

The central plaza at UNAL contains the impressive and large depictions of Ché and Camilo (Figures 14 and 15). According to Benavides-Vanegas, the prime location in the center of the bustling university of these representations emphasizes their significance to university student culture and ideology. According to students in interviews, the Ché and Camilo depictions are repainted when they begin to fade, but they are never covered up by the administration or painted over by other graffiti. And yet, the administration at UNAL wrote in a letter addressing graffiti on campus that graffiti is not authorized.⁷⁰ The use of Ché and Camilo, one visually represented as an armed guerrilla and the other in his revolutionary uniform, suggest that the university possesses and even espouses a left-leaning ideology. By invoking these very revolutionary figures, university students are attaching themselves to the revolutionary, anti-state, and critical spirit that characterize these icons. While these two figures do not technically constitute a *rayado*, this thesis does consider them political graffiti since they evoke a certain political sentiment through their illustrations. Therefore, this analysis looks more deeply at the use of phrases invoking historically or politically important figures.

⁶⁹ For more on this, see Benavides-Vargas, "From Camilo to Ché."

⁷⁰ Jimmy Matiz Cuervo to author, "Consulta sobre el Graffiti Político en la Universidad Nacional de Colombia," 20 March 2013.



Figure 14. *Ché Guevara.*



Figure 15. *Camilo Torres*

The visual representations of these two famous figures are complemented by the large amount of graffiti using the formula “¡X Vive!” or “X lives [on],” where X may be Ché, Camilo, or a number of other important political figures.



Figure 16. “*Camilo lives!*”

According to survey respondents, these references are intended to memorialize a person and ensure that their presence is forever felt at the university. One student specifically said that there is graffiti “in honor of important figures of history.”⁷¹ Yet another student believed that these types of messages “exalt figures of grand importance in the country,” and even referred to the specific example “¡Camilo torres sigue vivo!” (Camilo Torres continues living/remains alive).⁷² In the cases where graffiti references these figures, it appears that many students identify with the revolutionary spirit and goals. Implicit in the students’ responses is the idea that the graffiti is justified; in fact, there are no concerns

⁷¹ Survey Respondent U, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

⁷² Survey Respondent W, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

brought up about the legality of graffiti in any conversations with students or survey responses. While the university administration itself neither condones graffiti on campus nor promotes a mission founded solely on Ché or Camilo's ideals, many students look at these figures as inspirations of liberty and expression. As discussed in the section on student culture at universities and specifically at UNAL, utopist and idealistic ideologies that call for action and transformation are typical among university students as they live in the academic setting.



Figure 17. "Never forgiven, never forgotten."

Other important figures are remembered through pieces like that of Figure 17. While there is no clear author to the message, the graffiti is located on the wall directly in front of any person that enters through the main entryway. "NI PERDÓN, NI OLVIDO" or "Never forgiven, never forgotten," depicts the faces of some of the most important political figures throughout the late 1980s, 1990s and even closer to the present that died or had been killed for their political beliefs and/or actions. The message emphasizes the impactful nature of these men upon Colombian society; specifically, it seems that through graffiti messages and murals, students and political groups seek to invoke the characteristics and memory identified with heroic or national figures.

Analysis

Part of the logic behind this method of using historical figures centers on reaching out to citizens and groups that may find the current political system disillusioning. By invoking the spirit of Ché, Camilo, or other historical figures, political activists, associations, movements, or groups co-opt the heroism and honor of these men for their platforms. In the case of iconic figures in graffiti, there is a clear attempt to establish a specific identity associated with the different figures. The use of Ché, for example, produces a certain identity that is associated with the histories and ideologies of his time period and legacy. In accordance with Stuart Halls' theory on identity as production, graffiti that invokes a certain visual discourse of Ché or Camilo, for example, allows political groups to organize themselves around an established core of values that the figure espouses.⁷³ The constant invocation of the great men of history points to the continuous nature of identity production; Hall emphasizes that the process of creating an identity is never complete. In the case of graffiti, many groups constantly engage in a process of establishing their identity as they write graffiti. Putting up messages that invoke iconic figures is one of such ways; by adopting certain figures, different groups are able to co-opt messages and fuse them with their own identity that displays a mix of the historical and present contexts.

Another way of analyzing the prevalence of messages invoking historical and honorary persons is by viewing these depictions as critical of the current Colombian political system. The many references to the ideologies and identities of historically

⁷³ Hall, "Cultural Production."

important political figures can perhaps be seen as a respectful action of paying homage to certain honorable and historical persons. However, the same messages can also be read as nostalgic for the “good old days.” Thus, in effect, it seems that these messages highlighting the persistence of Ché or Camilo’s ideologies demonstrate the perseverance of revolutionary rhetoric. Moreover, the messages suggest dissatisfaction with the variety of political ideologies, persons, and parties available today. The repetitive use of phrases such as “¡Ché Vive!” dominates UNAL. While the phrases are undeniably prominent, one survey respondent noted that these phrases have lost their true meaning and have lost the ability to truly invoke the images and belief systems of Ché, Camilo or other famous figures.⁷⁴ Instead, they have become part of the landscape of UNAL, phrases that are repetitively written in order to maintain the consciousness throughout the campus of nationalist sentiments and critical commentaries.

iii. Reformist

This group of graffiti considers the messages that comment on domestic issues such as healthcare, education, and inequality. Many of the groups that are prominent in this category are the clandestine ones. While the two – reformist messages and clandestine groups – may not seem tied very tightly together, it is important to recognize that several guerilla groups (such as FARC-EP and M-19) emerged in rebellion against societal inequality, neoliberal policies, and even political isolation and persecution. These groups are some of the forerunners in critiquing the government’s ability to manage

⁷⁴ Survey Respondent F, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

national issues and certainly tend to use the most specific language when putting up critical graffiti.

With regards to the use of graffiti by clandestine groups, it should be understood that this is not a new concept: formal methods of communication are not available to these actors, on the one hand, and they often do not want to engage in formal methods because they are anti-establishment and anti-state, on the other hand. By engaging in informal and rather controversial types of communication, such as violent demonstrations, open forums, boycotts, and graffiti, these groups are able to promote their ideologies without relying on the formal system that they desperately seek to change.



Figure 18. "Klanes ... M-19 lives. Welcome to the fight."

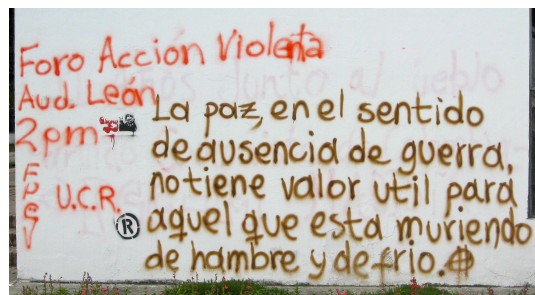


Figure 19. "Peace, as the absence of war, means nothing for those still suffering from hunger and the cold."

Concerns with specific domestic issues are evident in Figure 19, highlighting the connection between *capuchos* and these types of critiques. In their message, the Unión

Camilista Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Union of Camilo [Torres], UCR) announces a forum for violent action. Tied with this message is a critique on the irrelevance of peace if social problems of hunger and homelessness are not addressed: “Peace, as in the absence of war, means nothing for those still suffering from hunger and the cold.”

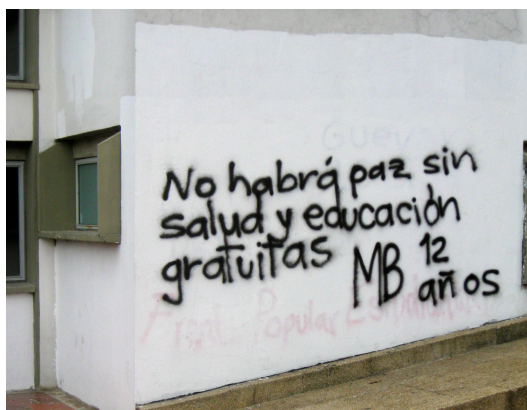


Figure 20. “There shall be no peace without free healthcare and education.”

Figure 20 presents a message that similarly critiques Colombian society, specifically citing the issues of healthcare and education. While the author of the message, MB (Movimiento Bolivariano, Bolivarian Movement) is not considered a strict *capuchos* group, the group does appear to have ties with the FARC-EP and shares the same revolutionary messages.⁷⁵ The message itself focuses on the irrelevance of ending the armed conflict and peace if societal issues, in this case free health and education, are not dealt with. This group sees peace as tied not only to the cessation of armed conflict between the guerrillas and paramilitaries, but also to the betterment of societal problems of inequality and social program deficiencies.

⁷⁵ Movimiento Bolivariano, “Documentos,” <http://www.resistencia-colombia.org/mb/documentos>.



Figure 21. “Private armies, leave! We will bring the revolution against you!” [black writing]
 “Against the neoliberal government, rebellion anti-state.” [blue writing]

In Figure 21, the *Klanes* (abbreviated version of *Klandestinos*) use this wall to demand the expulsion of foreign and national armed forces from Colombia and to express their anti-state views. Again, in both Figure 20 and 21, domestic issues of hunger, displacement, and the presence of armed security are confronted and criticized by the *capuchos* groups. In addition to the *Klanes* represented in Figure 21, there are clearly several other groups that have agreed with the message – UPN (Unión Popular Nacional, National Popular Union), UN (Unión Nacional, National Union), and UD (Unión Democrática, Democratic Union). Additionally, groups have clearly written “anti-estatal” or anti-state, solidifying their stance as anti-establishment and against those government actions, such as neoliberalism, that continues to create social and economic inequality.

Analysis

Societal issues as a result of inequality emerging from neoliberal policies and of political targeting constituted part of the reason for the formation of several guerrilla insurgency groups throughout the 1960s and 1970s. While reforms in the 1990s and 2000s have sought to temper the violence and bring the groups back into the formal

political arena, there still exist many clandestine groups that rely on graffiti (and a variety of other informal tools) to express their beliefs and even advertise their events. The beliefs that these groups espouse extend beyond just radical rhetoric and tend to incorporate critiques of certain aspects of society. For example, graffiti that demands the eradication of poverty and provision of more expansive social services for citizens indicate dissatisfaction with the current administration. Yet, there is also implied discontent with the political system as a whole in Colombia. The push for a governmental transformation is intrinsically tied to a lack of confidence in the present system.

While clandestine groups are not the only to attack societal problems, they tend to be more specific with their messages by clearly establishing the issue. As previously mentioned, there are parties or movements that call for revolution or invoke the spirit of Ché, for example, without really connecting this rhetoric to a concrete issue. The insurgent or clandestine groups, in contrast, point more directly to national issues that must be addressed first in order to eradicate violence second. For these groups, violence has emerged as a result of the government's inability to rectify inequalities and exclusion. In fact, many of these groups feel that the government's inadequacy has forced them to take up arms and defend themselves. Until these issues are fixed, the clandestine groups will continue to participate in violence to ensure that their message is heard.

Graffiti is an important way in which groups that feel politically excluded from formal, and in this case congressional, politics participate from the outside. Through graffiti, clandestine groups are able to reach a larger number of people since they are unable to gain traction through formal avenues such as periodicals or major news outlets. In a way, these groups seem to exhibit characteristics of social movements, as they are

groups that “engage in a significant political struggle in terms of access to mechanisms of power” according to Escobar and Alvarez.⁷⁶ Graffiti poses an interesting challenge to the conceptual understanding of social movements: graffiti that is put up by different politicized groups and on the one hand represents a collective establishing an identity and illustrating their goals vividly through spray paint. On the other hand, it is hard to pinpoint the members of these different groups due to their fluid, ephemeral, and secretive nature. These clandestine groups and those that cover their faces while participating in political activities (whether these are demonstrations or graffiti) create ambiguities about whether or not these collective political groups are considered social movements. Instead, it seems more appropriate to classify graffiti as a protest event, a concept attributed to Eyerman. In this view, graffiti is not necessarily impacting change directly as social movements might and is not performed with a clear goal of toppling the current system. Instead, it seems more logical to consider these messages as contributions to a political discourse that voices frustration with a closed system and that expresses “cognitively framed emotions, anger, frustration, shame, [and] guilt” with an issue.⁷⁷

Student survey responses recognized the prevalence of graffiti by clandestine or *capuchos* groups; however, they often implied that these groups were less than effective and repetitive in their messaging. From fieldwork on campus, it was clear that some clandestine groups were more prevalent than others; more importantly, it appeared that some groups had a graffiti presence but real formal political presence. These groups, such as the *Klandestinos*, are considered major actors in the sub-category of *capuchos* within

⁷⁶ Escobar and Alvarez, “Introduction,” in *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America: Identity, Strategy, and Democracy*, edited by Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez, 1-15 (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc, 1992).

⁷⁷ Eyerman, *Social Performance*, 194.

the larger group of political activists. In fact, their logo (a large K with the M-19 flag symbol attached) was posted on nearly every wall at the university. The graffiti tagged by these groups is not only as a reminder of their existence (albeit on an informal level), but also as a demonstration that graffiti and informal methods of involvement are typical of the clandestine groups. Some students in their survey responses focused more on the fact that graffiti messages are signed or tagged by different clandestine groups, while others indicated that these messages stemmed from “insurgents.”⁷⁸ Despite the differences in terminology used, the implication was the same: these groups were popular on campus and actively participated in the graffiti scene. Notably, the graffiti done by these groups are not popular among students. In fact, most students that did comment on clandestine messages also criticized them for their irrelevance or repetitiveness – neither of which respondents believed was effective or provoking.

Even though the graffiti by clandestine groups is prevalent on campus, their impact is not nearly as effective as the messages with revolutionary rhetoric. Due to the repetitive nature of these groups and the lack of knowledge surrounding their purposes, it seems that students are less attracted to their beliefs. Graffiti, therefore, in the case of clandestine groups has lost its impact. Today in Colombia, the government is working to reduce guerrilla violence and offer an environment more open to these alternative groups. Yet, the prominence of graffiti on campus – especially the high number of messages tagged by groups that are not involved in the political scene formally – seemingly suggests that the political environment is not as readily accessible for smaller and more alternative groups. While the semi-closed political environment cannot be the only reason

⁷⁸ Survey Respondents E, F, and G, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

for graffiti at UNAL by these groups, it certainly seems to contribute. Without formal avenues for expression, many of these groups return to the informal and inherently resistant methods. This is certainly part of the nature of these groups as anti-state; however, it is also a factor of the system's inability to create opportunities for such alternative thinkers.

The presence of specific types of graffiti – such as the radical rhetoric and nationalist figures – illustrates a popular desire to reform, change, or transform. While student survey responses see graffiti as an important facet of student culture of expression, they tend to express ambivalence towards these groups and their messages, indicating that they have lost their political weight and are regarded more as extremist views that do not have a strong hold on many Colombians.

b. Review

The graffiti discussed in these three sections cover the majority of messages seen at UNAL: radical rhetoric, nationalist figures, and reformist messages. In the case of radical rhetoric, it is clear that this theme overlaps with several of the other categories. Graffiti in general at UNAL has a revolutionary, or at least leftist, leaning. It should be understood that graffiti, often like interest groups, represent the “loudest voices in the room,” and could potentially overstate certain views. Yet, from interviews with students, the leftist leaning of many students and of the active political scene on campus was confirmed. Iconic and important nationalist figures are depicted to bring history to the present by invoking specific ideologies and values. Clandestine groups' messages calling for violent revolution, strike, or demonstrations prove that there are still politicized

groups that feel unable to act through formal institutions. It is notable that these groups feel that informal messaging through graffiti is more appropriate for expressing their views and speaks to the fact that the political system may be less open to these types of groups. While the revolutionary guerrilla group M-19 was able to lay down its arms and become incorporated into formal politics as a political party, other revolutionary and/or clandestine groups are encountering challenges to do the same. Or, perhaps, these groups feel that the formal political system is ineffective and working through this avenue would subject them to an environment that they completely oppose. Regardless, there is a disconnect between the formal political system and the underrepresented, clandestine, and generally alternative groups. Political graffiti illustrates, quite literally, the way in which frustrations with institutional inadequacies is manifested.

By analyzing the content of graffiti and the dominant messages, it is clear that graffiti has a purpose and aims to influence its viewers. As political groups or student associations put up messages, they establish a collective identity of resistance against the current system. The repetitive nature of many of these messages and the dominance of several groups over others suggests that graffiti could be moving towards to realm of social movements. As previously mentioned, graffiti constitutes a protest event as opposed to a full-fledged social movement. Graffiti presents excluded groups an opportunity to contribute to communication about political ideology and current events. While they are not actively marching or protesting, groups writing messages via graffiti exhibit clear resistance to the status quo. Using Habermas' concepts of public versus private space, graffiti has become another form of connecting the private and public

spheres.⁷⁹ Students use the public sphere because they consider themselves part owners of any property that is public. This concept ties directly to the understanding of “ownership” over public space that artists such as Banksy champion. Students consider the university their canvas for expression, as it belongs to *el pueblo* (the people). For many of the alternative political groups, graffiti is a method through which they can exhibit their participation in the political arena. Additionally, graffiti shows that even the smallest and most underrepresented groups can participate in some form, albeit informally. Claiming public space as a personal message board has created an environment in which nearly every alternative ideology is illustrated and promoted. Graffiti is, thus, intrinsically tied to the idea that Colombian students and citizens are part owners of anything that is part of the public sphere. The impact of the messages on the public – and in this specific case, on the students at UNAL – becomes an integral part of this discussion. In the next section, this thesis moves from analysis of the graffiti messages and the result of such messages to the impact on students and their views of the method.

c. From the Messages to the Impact: Student Responses

When asked whether or not graffiti was an effective tool for promoting a political message, the majority (approximately 75%) of the survey respondents said yes. Among nearly all responses, the importance of graffiti as a form of free expression could not be denied. Allusions to the public sphere as the appropriate space to challenge the status quo and engage in politics reveal an important assumption held by many UNAL students. One student survey response considered graffiti as “a form of presenting ideas with the

⁷⁹ Thomassen, “Public Sphere,” in *Habermas: a guide for the perplexed*.

capability of reaching a determined audience.”⁸⁰ Respondent G believed that graffiti constituted “a form of expression for different people,” advocating the fact that graffiti is an important way in which people communicate politically on campus.⁸¹ In addition to those students that believe graffiti is an important form of expression, there were students that commented on the space of the public university as an adequate location for this type of communication. Respondent S recognized graffiti’s effectiveness as directly tied to its visibility on UNAL’s campus: “it is something that is visible to everyone, and that questions or reinforces an ideology with a forceful message.”⁸² During an interview with Anthropology student Cristian and friend Gabriella, it became clear that the university’s public nature made it an ideal and necessary spot for this type of expression. Gabriella makes less direct references, commenting, “It is very pretty seeing the walls full of phrases, it seems to me very rough. I don’t know... I like it a lot.” Cristian provides a more direct commentary, and he is quoted at length here:

It’s just that—I’m more of an anthropologist. UNAL is public and also is categorized as a university of dreams and of critical thinking ... When the university began to open its doors to the public, to those who did not have many resources, these new students entered the university, ... and their way of persevering and participating politically was through their expression on the walls. ... Now, it is young Colombian students that express their critical views through *pintas* [graffiti] regarding a current problem in Colombia. ... For me, graffiti is a form of expression, of feeling, of the students at UNAL.⁸³

When asked further about the effectiveness of graffiti, Cristian reveals that he had participated in painting graffiti on walls at UNAL. He asserts that graffiti artists write messages not just for personal satisfaction but also for the satisfaction of impacting a passerby. Specifically, Cristian believes that graffiti is effective for its ability “to open the

⁸⁰ Survey Respondent A, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

⁸¹ Survey Respondent G, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

⁸² Survey Respondents S, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

⁸³ Cristian, interview by author, January 25, 2013, la Universidad Nacional de Bogotá.

doors to political debate.” In another interview, first-year student Marcela posits that graffiti “is a form of creating reflections among the people, but they do not guarantee that the people remain committed [to the cause]... because, realistically, what are the people doing to actually change [things]?”⁸⁴ Her comments reveal that graffiti is effective in expressing ideologies and a desire for change, but she questions its ability to actually inspire change and encourage others to take action. The next section comments on the implication behind Marcela’s statement. While graffiti is generally considered effective for the students at UNAL, there are many students who qualify their responses with ideas about the most effective type of graffiti.

Sentiments expressed in the survey responses, although mostly supportive of graffiti as expression, suggested exhaustion with the repetitive and unoriginal messages. Often, responses issued a caveat that detailed conditions of what would make for better or more effective graffiti. Inherent in these statements regarding the nature and characteristics of graffiti was the belief that it should be aesthetically pleasing, creative, and original. Significant numbers of the respondents considered political propaganda, specifically of the clandestine groups and *capuchos* as illegitimate, ugly, and repetitive. Respondent F declared “the graffiti of the *capuchos* are ignored because they say nothing new and are aesthetically repulsive.”⁸⁵ In another survey response, respondent T believes those graffiti that “promote any activity that generates violence, intolerance, or terrorism” are not legitimate. While there are many messages that promote violence and revolutionary action, it seems that students are not nearly as consumed by these thoughts as the prevalence of the messages may indicate. Moreover, students overwhelmingly

⁸⁴ Marcela, interview.

⁸⁵ Survey Respondent F, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

considered graffiti by certain groups – especially those of the *capuchos* – as aesthetically unpleasing or ugly. As a result, students were impacted by the appearance, tending to respond negatively to rudimentary expressions.

The same feeling of discontent that many survey respondents expressed with the graffiti that incite violence or are repetitive political plugs by the *capuchos* extends to the repetitive nature of iconic figures and phrases. The constant use of specific (and iconic) phrases, such as “¡Ché Vive!”, does not possess the same potency and relevance today as they did in the past. Repetition of tags or phrases elicits a negative response from most respondents. Many respondents cited the old and uninformative phrases of “¡Ché Vive!” or “Luchar y estudiar por la liberación nacional” (Fight and study for national liberation), complaining that they had lost their influence and relevance. A paradox emerged in the responses of many students to the survey and the interviews: most consider graffiti as an important expressive tool, yet many still considered certain graffiti as vandalism and harmful to the aesthetic. During the interview with Cristian, he noted the importance of Ché and leftist ideology on the direction of the university; in fact, Cristian felt that the university’s nature is one that emphasizes critical commentary. Despite the nature of the university to be more aligned with the Left, disillusionment emerged among respondents regarding the impact of such rhetoric. Respondent E bluntly states, “The Marxist credo as interpreted literally has stopped having a [significant] impact or social validity.”⁸⁶ The deterioration of this revolutionary and radical side of the Left has resulted in some disillusionment of students with the repetitive revolutionary phrases tattooed across campus. Despite the decline of the far Left, it still seems that transformative graffiti

⁸⁶ Survey Respondent E, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

remains an important tool in students' toolboxes of protest and expression when they feel voiceless or undervalued.

The qualifying statements that describe the types of graffiti students believe are most effective included references to originality, aesthetic appeal, and ingenuity. During several interviews, UNAL students were asked what they thought of graffiti on campus upon first glance. All of the students responded with similar answers that emphasized the beauty of graffiti and its importance as an expressive tool. Moreover, their answers tended to suggest that they had not ever thought of graffiti in a critical way before. Graffiti had been part of UNAL's culture for years; Cristian, UNAL anthropology student, references photographs from the 1920s and 1930s that exhibit graffiti at the university. Graffiti seems engrained into student culture, as students seek to find avenues for expression during their formative period at the university. Furthermore, graffiti has long been considered a tool of the oppressed or of those at the bottom of society according to works by Chaffee and Silva.⁸⁷ Thus, graffiti is tied to different historical experiences with repression; yet, as mentioned, Colombia has not experienced these same repressive periods. Nevertheless, graffiti has been a part of student culture at UNAL for many years, according to Cristian. Notably, the lack of awareness of many students about the amount of graffiti and how odd it seemed in comparison to, for example, the United States reiterates that graffiti has been engrained into the culture in Colombia and specifically at UNAL.

While interviewees stated their attraction to graffiti and their understanding of its effectiveness, survey respondents seemed to be less affirming. Respondent Q provided

⁸⁷ For more, see Lyman Chaffee (1989) and Armando Silva (1986).

the most cryptic answer, suggesting that graffiti “could use more efficient methods” to express its message and be effective.”⁸⁸ Student R provides greater detail to explain why graffiti may not be so effective for the majority of students at UNAL, stating “it is effective only when the form and message are not political propaganda and have an artistic style.” Respondent D echoes this preference for an artistic style: “Graffiti is effective if it presents a message and is pretty to look at.”⁸⁹ Therefore, it is clear that aesthetically appealing graffiti enhances its effectiveness, regardless of the wit, humor, or ideology. It is this aesthetic appeal that, according to respondent E, is most able to “have more positive repercussions ... and [able to] provoke the imagination.”⁹⁰ Several other students consider the effectiveness of graffiti as largely part of a message’s uniqueness. Student F responded in his/her survey that graffiti should be *llamativo* (attention-grabbing) and original, especially since it must fight against “the sea of visual stimulants” present at UNAL to reach its audience.⁹¹ The students referenced in this paragraph find that aesthetics are an important part of graffiti and its impact. When applying this to the graffiti documented during my fieldwork, it is evident that many of the “senseless *rayados*” that respondent S mentions are no longer creating an impact.⁹² Instead, students yearn for even more original, alternative, and perhaps controversial graffiti to spark the political debate once more. As political associations, movements, and parties have expanded in the past 20 years in Colombia, there have been more and more groups that participate in graffiti at UNAL. As a result, it seems that the students express exhaustion with the rhetoric used in much of the graffiti, despite its prevalence.

⁸⁸ Survey Respondent Q, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

⁸⁹ Survey Respondent D, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

⁹⁰ Survey Respondent E, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

⁹¹ Survey Respondents F and T, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

⁹² Survey Respondent S, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

In addition to an increasing apathy towards the types of messages and the methods of certain *grafiteros*, the surveys revealed student concerns regarding vandalism and public space. Respondent R spoke directly to the graffiti found in places other than the outside walls of buildings: “I don’t like graffiti on classroom desks, tables, blinds, or other sites that, when written on, lose their usefulness.”⁹³ Specifically referring to the concept of public space, respondent W sees graffiti as a disrespect of public space and the creation of visual contamination in the environment. In an interview with UNAL student Andrés, he discusses his work with graffiti on the campus.⁹⁴ He works with a group that is attempting to make graffiti on campus not just more aesthetic (*estética*) but more ethical (*ética*) as well. Clearly, the group uses a play on the word *estética* to derive *ética* as a second characteristic. This movement to create “better” graffiti on campus has included developing a character “*RayadoMan*” or “*Señor Rayón*,” who is a human depiction of a graffiti covered wall. His body serves as the “wall” that is covered in paint, and he roams around campus spray painting, or tagging, ® (registered) marks by different graffiti messages on campus.⁹⁵



Figure 22. *RayadoMan* putting up a ® mark by the same graffiti shown in Figure 19.

⁹³ Survey Respondent R, via Survey Monkey, November 2012 – January 2013.

⁹⁴ Andrés, interview by author, January 19, 2013.

⁹⁵ For more on this group’s work, visit their Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/SrRayon>.

The ® symbol is used, on the one hand, to emphasize the repetitiveness of different groups' graffiti; it also represents a way of further legitimizing graffiti on campus by "registering" it. While the concept of *RayadoMan* is a way in which the students are becoming more aware of graffiti on campus, this topic should be studied in several years after it has had years to create more of an impact. While people are shown in pictures watching the character around campus, he does not yet seem to have a great enough following to have a strong enough impact on campus to change the culture of graffiti. Andrés, when explaining *RayadoMan*, invoked the concept of the public sphere to explain that graffiti can either be visual contamination or can significantly contribute to the political dialogue. On the one hand, Andrés recognizes that many people justify graffiti by saying "the walls talk for the people" and that the university walls constitute a great location upon which students may speak (write) freely. On the other hand, Andrés views graffiti as a method of claiming or physically dominating public space, co-opting it for one's own uses. He clearly struggled to pick one side or the other, indicating in the interview that there was a very fine line between free expression and visual contamination. There is a point, he declares, at which free expression goes beyond its capacity and becomes vandalism. While Andrés clearly has a deeper understanding of the nuances of graffiti on UNAL's campus than many of the other students interviewed or those that filled out surveys, his responses contributed an additional perspective on the way that Colombian students view expression and public space.

As mentioned before in the section on graffiti as a method of claiming public space, Habermas' theories on the public sphere are an integral part of understanding what graffiti may mean when put up on the walls of a public university. Habermas recognized

that the public sphere serves as a linkage point between the private (family) sphere and the public (government/institutional) sphere. Graffiti, in many instances at UNAL, illustrates an interesting use of the public sphere; instead of convening in different spaces and holding conversations or debates on political topics, graffiti puts the messages and critiques directly on the walls of public spaces, directly challenging the administration, government, or (more generally) the establishment. Through this type of expression, those parties, movements, or associations are able to contribute to the political dialogue and engage in politics, albeit informally. Until these groups gather substantial numbers to become a real political force or until they are able to work within the establishment to change the system, it seems that they are reduced to using informal means (especially graffiti) as their preferred method for political expression. Thus, it is not only institutional constraints that lead different groups and associations to engage in political graffiti; it is also the culture of protest and identity of resistance of students at UNAL and of the Latin American student more generally that informs how they contribute to politics from the outside of the formal system of congressional representation.

V. Conclusion

First, changes from a dominant two-party system that historically marked Colombia through the National Front period until the 1970s did allow for a few new actors to voice their opinions. Still, it seems that the system has not created enough space to allow for the plurality of voices that we see expressed on the walls of UNAL. Second, there are explanations for graffiti rooted in culture, identity, protest politics, and the public sphere. While this thesis had originally hypothesized that institutional factors were sufficient for explaining why political graffiti and its authors have persisted despite an increasingly open political system, the research and analysis has proven that a combination of the political changes through important reforms and cultural aspects of student identity, public space, and protest politics truly explains why political graffiti remains such a prominent feature of UNAL's campus.

Since institutional and structural changes that failed to create adequate space for new actors are not sufficient explanations for the persistence of political graffiti at UNAL, this thesis turned to cultural and identity-based explanations. Understanding graffiti as an impactful part of the public sphere and as an alternative form of communication for underrepresented groups illustrates that graffiti at UNAL seeks to contribute to political dialogue and enter into politics, albeit informally. Through surveys and interviews with students at UNAL, it is clear that they not only consider graffiti as legal and legitimate, but they also see it as an integral part of the university's student culture. While not constituting a social movement per se, graffiti at UNAL can amount to protest politics. Just as Eyerman considers "cognitively framed emotions, anger, frustration, shame, [and] guilt" as characteristic of a protest event, this thesis too

considers political graffiti as a protest event – the analogous illustration of these emotions through messages on walls.⁹⁶ An identity of resistance and revolution is cultivated through the repetitive rhetoric and nearly religious invocation of nationalist idols such as Ché and Camilo. The messages written by clandestine groups contribute more explicit emotions of exclusion from and dissatisfaction with the current political system. Ultimately, the graffiti speaks loudly against the malfunctioning political system and represents the traditional means of communication by groups that cannot find their way into formal arenas.

Graffiti at UNAL is used to express views, call for change, and organize grassroots movements or forums on different issues. Nearly all of the messages, however, had strong political leanings. When speaking with Cristian, it became clear that graffiti at UNAL is not just a static message. There are expectations at the university that students remain actively engaged in the current events and contribute to the dialogue; as a result, graffiti is one of the ways to engage in politics on campus, in addition to attending forums, participating in boycotts and marches, and handing out pamphlets. The use of graffiti as political expression can reveal citizen opinion towards certain ideologies, parties, and even the overall political system.

In the case of UNAL, a public university, the use of graffiti on these walls illustrates the student perception of the public sphere. Inherently, as Habermas notes, using the public sphere as a place of demonstration or expression critiques the government or establishment and provides a balance to the traditional political institutions.⁹⁷ If we consider the public sphere as Habermas does, it would seem that the

⁹⁶ Eyerman, 110.

⁹⁷ Thomassen, “Public Sphere,” in *Habermas: a guide for the perplexed*, 33-57.

political graffiti constitutes a critique on the government and an attempt at resistance through the “ownership” of public space. While the graffiti at UNAL does, in a way, just this through its location on public walls and its nature as resistant and critical, it is important to note a significant difference in the perception of public space in Colombia as opposed to, for example, the United States. Some respondents stated that graffiti was an important and good way to express one’s self politically. Implicit in their statements was the concept that students reserved the right to use university walls as their message boards. Due to the ambiguous nature of legality concerning graffiti in Colombia, students seem to believe that the public sphere is the space of *el pueblo*, a space that permits any expression or use by any citizen. It is notable that university students did not consider the fact that the walls at the university belonged to, perhaps, the administration. Instead, it appears that students do not believe that they have to “own” the wall in order to put up a message and involve themselves in the political dialogue. In fact, they seem to believe that they already do own the wall and have the capacity to use the space accordingly.

The majority of students at UNAL consider this method of ownership and alternative communication as legitimate. The creation of *RayadoMan*, the previously mentioned character that puts ® marks by graffiti on campus, is an example of how students on campus have begun legitimizing graffiti. First, by recognizing the graffiti and, second, by “registering” the graffiti, *RayadoMan* provides the legitimization for the messages on campus.

Political graffiti constitutes a form of communication that has important implications for politics. In the case of Colombia, graffiti at UNAL has specific trends of leftist and radical ideology, references to specific historical figures, and reformist

messages by clandestine or insurgent groups. The first two categories show the creation of an identity resistant to the status quo or centered around key political figures. The last group considers messages by politically excluded groups that seek to enter politics through other means. Regardless of these distinctions, the fact remains that there are new actors attempting to express themselves politically in Colombia. For some, institutional factors have prevented them from fully engaging in the political structure. And, for others, ideology, identity, and the nature of protest politics have ensured that they continue expressing themselves through the informal and alternative method of graffiti.

While students did express some exhaustion towards the repetitive phrases and icons, they still emphasize the importance of graffiti as a form of expression – especially appropriate in a public space such as on the campus of UNAL. In the future, as the political system continues to accommodate more and more political actors, it would seem that graffiti would begin to be less important as a form of informal expression. However, considering the student culture at UNAL as resistant and critical of the establishment, it appears more likely that graffiti will continue to have a presence at the university. An important study that may result from this analysis could be a comparative study between Colombia and other nations in Latin America to analyze the use of graffiti within different political-historical contexts. An area for further research would be research on the differences in public space between Latin American countries and those Western, industrialized and democratic nations. The types of graffiti found in these two realms are distinct and it seems that the concept of public space differs greatly between these two. Whereas graffiti in Bogotá, Colombia has suggested that student culture tends towards the use of public space as a personal message board, graffiti in other nations might not

reflect this same understanding. If further research is done to understand the distinctions among students (or citizens) regarding their use of the public sphere, we would be able to better understand how graffiti in Bogotá works through an even more specific lens.

From this analysis of graffiti at UNAL in Bogotá, Colombia, we can see how expression through this communicative tool reveals notable features of Colombia's political system. Graffiti itself signifies a subaltern method of expression that inherently contains anti-establishment sentiments. A significant portion of the graffiti at the university is radical in rhetoric, illustrating the fact that student culture tendencies towards activism and protest inform the way in which students contribute to the political dialogue. As a result of the cultural tendencies and the legitimization of graffiti in the university scene, in addition to institutional changes to electoral and party politics, graffiti has become a significant feature of political expression on UNAL's campus. Therefore, it appears that political graffiti at UNAL was, is, and will continue to be an accepted form of political expression.

Appendix A

Survey Questions (Spanish version) via Survey Monkey.

Antes que todo, muchas gracias por participar en esta encuesta. Sus respuestas serán muy importantes para mi estudio.

Esta encuesta forma parte integral del trabajo final para terminar mi licenciatura. En términos de confidencialidad, su nombre no será divulgado y no incluiré rasgos personales o de su título profesional que pudieran exponer su identidad.

Si tiene alguna duda sobre la confidencialidad de este proyecto, puede contactar a Thane Pittman, profesor de Colby College (tpittman@colby.edu).

Estaré en Bogotá durante el mes de enero de 2013 y me gustaría mucho hablar más a fondo con usted sobre mi tema de investigación si es que así lo determina. En caso afirmativo, por favor mándeme un correo electrónico con su información de contacto. Mi correo es: agmatthe@colby.edu.

Por favor, conteste las preguntas que a continuación se presentan sin sentir algún tipo de limitación al hacerlo. Siéntase libre en proveer cualquier tipo de información adicional con respecto a la última pregunta.

1. ¿Cuál puesto de la lista representa de manera más adecuada su postura?
2. ¿En que tipo de universidad asiste o trabaja?
3. ¿Cuál es su género?
4. ¿Cuántos años tiene?
5. ¿De qué parte de Colombia es?
6. ¿Se ve a sí mismo como un activista político o como una persona involucrada en la escena política de la universidad? ¿Por qué y de qué forma?
7. ¿Lee los mensajes de graffiti que se encuentran sobre las paredes de la universidad?
8. ¿Existe un trabajo de graffiti que usted recuerde como significativo o importante? Si la respuesta es sí, ¿por qué?
9. ¿Cree que el graffiti es efectivo o no con respecto a la capacidad de promover un mensaje político?
10. En este espacio, por favor añada cualquier otra información que usted considere pertinente.

Appendix B

La Forma de Consentimiento

Estoy haciendo un estudio sobre el graffiti político y la representación formal en las universidades. Específicamente, me interesan la Universidad Nacional y la Universidad de los Andes. Tengo el permiso de Colby College, una universidad en los estados unidos, para perseguir estas investigaciones bajo la dirección del departamento de los estudios de Latinoamérica.

En esta encuesta, le voy a preguntar a Ud. sobre sus actividades políticas, su involucramiento en la política de las universidades, su perspectiva de la misma, y su perspectiva del graffiti político sobre los muros de las universidades. En el producto final, no voy a usar su nombre en ninguna manera, ni voy a usar cualquiera características que pueden ser identificadas. Voy a poner la forma de consentimiento con su nombre en un lugar separado de mis apuntes sobre la entrevista. También, no voy a recordar su nombre con las repuestas si estoy grabando la entrevista.

De vuelta, quiero asegurarle a Ud. que va a tener plena confidencialidad. Si tiene Ud. preguntas sobre esta forma y/o las medidas de confidencialidad, por favor, no se espere en contactar el presidente del Comité Institucional de Revisión de los Protocolos en Colby College. Se llama Thane Pittman y se puede ser contactado a (tpittman@colby.edu).

Cuando terminemos con la entrevista, le voy a preguntar a Ud. si estaría dispuesto(a) darme su información de contacto en el caso de que yo tenga más preguntas en el futuro. Si estaría dispuesto(a), voy a marcar esta forma de consentimiento (la cual no está adjunta a sus respuestas de la entrevista).

Entiendo lo que dice la forma y doy mi consentimiento por la entrevista:

También doy mi consentimiento para ser grabado(a):

Mi información de contacto

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