

ARTICLE

ABORTION IN PHOTOGRAPHS IN CHILEAN DIGITAL MEDIA:

disputed representations

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ABSTRACT – In September 2017, the Chilean government passed a bill decriminalizing abortion under three circumstances. The Parliament took three years in discussing the reform and the media (re)produced a debate feed by feminist and human rights organizations, pro-life and pro-choice activists, and political players, and congressmen and presidential representatives. This article thematically analyzes the photographs published in ten Chilean online outlets throughout a year. We organized the images into categories in attempt to understand the role that photographs have in influencing public opinion, constituting ideal audiences. Relying upon the material analyzed, we concluded that the images are not neutral, but create truthfulness, and contribute to establishing a social memory that reinforces patriarchal order, which is hegemonic in the national imaginary.

Key words: Abortion. Chile. Photography. Digital media.

O ABORTO NAS FOTOGRAFIAS DAS MÍDIA DIGITAIS CHILENAS: Visualidades em disputa

RESUMO – Em setembro de 2017, o governo chileno aprovou a lei que despenalizou o aborto em três fundamentos. O projeto levou três anos para tramitar e a mídia (re) produziu um debate acalorado, alimentado por organizações feministas e de direitos humanos, ativistas por e contra a reforma, bem como para atores políticos dos poderes Executivo e Legislativo. Este artigo analisa tematicamente as fotografias publicadas em dez mídias digitais chilenas durante um ano em matérias referentes ao aborto. A categorização das fotografias se concentrará no papel desempenhado por elas na tentativa de influenciar a opinião pública, configurando públicos ideais. A partir do

material analisado, verificamos que as imagens utilizadas não são neutras, são criadoras de efeitos de verdade e configuram uma memória social que mantém e reforça a ordem hegemônica patriarcal predominante no imaginário coletivo nacional.

Palavras-chave: Aborto. Chile. Fotografia. Mídias digitais.

EL ABORTO EN LAS FOTOGRAFÍAS DE LOS MEDIOS DIGITALES EN CHILE: visualidades en disputa

RESUMEN – En septiembre de 2017, el gobierno chileno aprobó la ley que despenalizó el aborto en tres causales. El proyecto demoró tres años en tramitarse y los medios (re) produjeron un debate álgido alimentado por organizaciones feministas y de derechos humanos, activistas tanto a favor como en contra de la reforma, y actores políticos tanto en el Congreso como en el poder ejecutivo. El presente trabajo analiza temáticamente las fotografías publicadas en diez medios digitales chilenos durante un año en artículos referentes al aborto, las categorizamos intentando responder a la pregunta sobre el papel jugado por éstas en los intentos por influir en opinión pública, configurando audiencias ideales. A partir del material analizado, constatamos que las imágenes utilizadas no son neutras, son creadoras de efectos de verdad y van configurando una memoria social que mantiene y refuerza el orden hegemónico patriarcal que predomina en el imaginario colectivo nacional.

Palabras clave: Aborto. Chile. Fotografía. Medios digitales.

1 Introduction

The public debate about the decriminalization of abortion in Chile was revived by Michelle Bachelet's State of the Nation speech in May 2014, when she was serving her second term as president of the country (2014 – 2018). On that occasion, Bachelet highlighted the need to fuel a mature discussion about the voluntary interruption of pregnancy on three grounds: risk to the mother's life, fetal pathology that is incompatible with extrauterine life, and case of rape up to 12 or 14 weeks of gestation. She was announcing the introduction of a bill creating exemptions to a rather extended criminal abortion ban. Since then, the topic gained prominence in the public agenda and within journalistic discourses, in particular.

Contemporary legacy media have developed and refined trending strategies to produce multimedia content. These strategies have included establishing and developing their own websites by

either operating newsrooms independent from the main outlet of the company (such as newspapers, radio stations, or broadcastings) or merging them. These media production strategies go along with the media convergence phenomena. Indeed, under this frame, the traditional borders between broadcasted and printed journalism are blurring and the media are under pressure to gain new audiences that have radically changed their media consumption habits.

In fact, the internet is currently one of the main platforms for content consumption in Chile. In 2015, there were more than 13 million internet visits, with almost 80 percent of them being accessed from smartphones (Subtel, 2016). This phenomena goes along with the high penetration rate of mobile phones. According to the Telecommunications Office (Subsecretaría de Telecomunicaciones, SUBTEL), by 2013 there were more than 23 million mobile subscribers, representing a 132 percent market penetration. Therefore, online audiences have also proportionally grown (Antezana & Lagos, 2015).

On digital outlets, journalistic coverage about abortion (such as interviews, features, and daily coverage) usually include images that are supposed to illustrate the topic. However, these visual depictions are not innocent. On the contrary, the visual representations of abortion on online press mobilize their own meaning, many times contradicting what the text actually portrays and, eventually, these images do not even represent the editorial outlet's frame.

Therefore, analyzing images about abortion is important because visual representations create a "truth effect" by facilitating social identification and mediation processes, triggering memories and, overall, producing a certain materiality. In other words, the images depict effective and concrete action relationships and deployments. These images, simultaneously, configure a social memory. This is what Landsberg (2004) calls "prosthetic memories", that is, those memories mobilized by media discourses.

There are diverse discourses and images circulating within the contemporary public sphere (Charaudeau, 2005). Indeed, relying upon different technologies and devices, these discourses and images combine unlikely materialities and produce and reproduce common senses that have been hegemonic in our society. Public conversations about highly controversial topics, such as abortion, triggered and reinforced these hegemonic common senses through images that metaphorically and metonymically synthesize the world to make it more intelligible.

Consequently, it has been a while since images are no longer simply an accessory to the written text and have turned into a basic feature to consider while conceptualizing what is “real”. There are several reasons explaining the importance of images: first, they are easily-consumed; second, visual representations are attractive; third, images simplify the world; fourth, they are also emotionally close to audiences, and finally, images provide a “truth” and credibility. Nevertheless, images are not neutral and the meaning they carry spark at the very moment in which an image is framed, even before the moment in which it is photographed (Antezana, 2015, p. 34).

Meanwhile, feminist movements’ agendas have historically included the voluntary interruption of pregnancy as a woman’s right to her body autonomy, sexual freedom, and control over her reproductive processes. But, at the same time, this feminine and feminist self-determination is probably the most resisted frontier because it implies the critique of social control over women’s bodies that also denaturalizes the traditional roles associated with women, such as reproduction, care, and motherhood as the only paths towards women’s development and self-fulfillment. Feminist theory has exposed the role of symbolic production, of which media content and journalistic practices have produced a central and productive knot to unravel. In the Chilean case, this knot has been difficult to untie as well.

Under this umbrella, the lawmaking process of decriminalizing the voluntary interruption of pregnancy triggers the following questions: What images are used to illustrate journalistic content about abortion in Chile, particularly on digital news outlets? what imaginaries are produced and reproduced by digital journalistic discourses about the voluntary interruption of pregnancy under extreme circumstances, such as rape or the mother’s risk of death? And, finally, what are those visual representations telling us about the digital news outlets’ ideal audiences?

This work analyzes ten Chilean digital news outlets sampled according to the following criteria: (1) they published specific web content¹ (no matter whether they also provided print or broadcasted content); and (2) these digital news outlets were the most visited during the period of our research (from May 21th, 2014, to May 21th, 2015) according to Alexa.com². Then, we sampled the stories these outlets published about abortion following these criteria: (1) The articles contained images; (2) they have had impact regarding the

topic; and (3) they covered at least one of the seven most important events³ during the period we conducted the study.

Using grounded theory, we conducted a theoretical and non-statistical sample of photographs until the analytical categories were saturated (Flores & Naranjo, 2014, p. 77). Later, we thematically analyzed the photos. This methodology's strength is its flexibility and the fact that it allows for the identification, analysis, and realization of patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78).

2 Abortion in Chile

In 2014, Chilean president, Michelle Bachelet, announced that her government would push to decriminalize abortion on three grounds: risk to the mother's life, fetal pathology that is incompatible with extra uterine life, and cases of rape up to 12 or 14 weeks of gestation. By then, Chile, along with the Dominican Republic, Malta, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, in addition to The Vatican, was among the 1% of countries that globally criminalized abortion under any circumstance (González, 2011). Indeed, reforming the legal frame of abortion was one of Bachelet's campaign promises when she ran for president. The media coverage of Bachelet's decision to introduce changes to the abortion law resulted in an increase in reactions for and against the executive initiative. Nevertheless, the bill was introduced several months later, in January 2015, and it was finally passed in August 2017 (law number 20.030)

Abortion newsworthiness on the Chilean media agenda has traditionally relied upon three conditions: (1) extreme cases: women facing life-and-death risks due to their pregnancy, carrying embryos incompatible with extrauterine life, and girls or teenagers pregnant because they were raped; (2) public debate and opinions triggered by the lawmaking process, including politicians, public officials, and different organization spokespeople; and (3) walkouts and public expressions supported by both pro-life and pro-choice supporters.

Each one of these conditions sparks a legal, ethical, and symbolic public debate. Mass media (re)produce the voices of some of the protagonists involved, the clashing arguments, and the images usually depicting abortion as the "[...] figurative speech used in order to script public debates as well as street demonstrations which, in this context of partisan dispute, is also part of a cultural fight over

collective imaginaries” (Palma, Moreno, & Alvarez, 2015, p. 44). This production and reproduction of content uncovering abortion refers to (or also challenges) audiences that, at the same time, build their own interpretation. Thus, the production and circulation of newsworthy journalistic material via digital news outlets demand not only writing discourses, but also visual ones. To do so, media outlets usually include images aiming to make connections to topics, such as abortion.

Ironically, and at least until 2015, mainstream media and digital news outlets used to illustrate stories about abortion with images of healthy and beautiful newborns (*guaguas*⁵), happy pregnant women in their third trimester, and ultrasound images of highly developed fetuses (Gerber, 2015), as several activists and organizations pointed out in an open letter addressed to Chilean media outlets criticizing their coverage about abortion.

Although it is unclear that the changes observed later regarding the news coverage about abortion by the Chilean media were actually a response to this criticism, digital news outlets started to include different images and, consequently, relatively augmented the visual representation of abortion in journalistic discourses. Therefore, the visual repertoire included images about protests and walkouts backed by both pro-choice and pro-life movements; photographs of girls and boys, lawmakers, spokespeople from different institutions somehow participating in the lawmaking process, and experts addressing controversies. Indeed, as long as abortion has been a hot topic on the Chilean public agenda, controversy has been a chronic feature of the lawmaking process of decriminalizing it on three grounds.

In fact, unfolding a rather narrow repertoire of visual representations about abortion in Chile, a repertoire that has relatively expanded only since 2015, requires that the economy of digital journalism and its specific conditions of production are taken into account. In particular, these types of media outlets do not have their own photographers due to different reasons: first, hiring part-time or by assignment photographers is a strategy to minimize the fixed costs of production; second, it is also explained by the multitasking media worker reporting, shooting, and editing, journalistic performances that have been shaped by technological and managerial changes; and finally, digital media rely largely upon outsourced photo-shooting services, such as subscribers of external companies. In the Chilean case, the photo agencies are Agencia UNO (Berndt, Soto, & Venegas, 2015) and Agencia ATON. These three

conditions of digital news production significantly narrow the portfolio of available images and reinforce the control over the production of visual images about abortion in the Chilean digital sphere.

Chilean media news outlets also rely upon international wire services, such as Agence France Presse (AFP), Reuters Group Limited (REUTERS), Associated Press (AP), and EFE, the Spanish Wire Services. All these companies provide their subscribers with photo-journalistic material about Chilean current affairs and they also hold banks of images that could eventually be published in articles produced on a non-daily basis. There are a very few number of Chilean news outlets that still have their own photo department and they tend to belong to the big national media holdings, such as COPESA and El Mercurio. In the end, most Chilean digital news outlets rely upon photo wire services.

Due to this, it is possible to conclude that editing images for publishing purposes on digital news outlets and the images themselves are not a central part of the decision-making process of editing and publishing articles about abortion in Chile. On the contrary, it is rather a visual *collage* decorating and, eventually, complementing the written discourse (Ibañez, 2016). But, overall, the images' purpose is to produce *clicks*. Therefore, the journalistic coverage about abortion in Chilean digital news outlets is not framed under the crime beat or the legal debate, but under social problems. Meanwhile, online coverage of the topic incorporate spokespeople from the Catholic Church as a moral background. Thus, for instance, digital news outlets uncover abortion by creating so-called pro-life arguments, that is, they reject the voluntary interruption of pregnancy under every circumstance and those discourses are produced and reinforced by images that follow that discursive path (Ibañez, 2016).

This article does not consider images depicting players that are official representatives or experts because in the former case, their speeches, their visibility, and the consequential media coverage can be explained by their position as spokespeople and, in the latter, their media coverage is due to their knowledge and expertise on the topic. We focused, rather, on all other sources and subjects of digital media coverage and we propose to read them under two large umbrellas: motherhood/maternity and fears/threats. To our understanding, both categories are related to the fears that are at the base of the consecrated conservative common senses or, in other words, they are at the foundations of a "traditional society of Christian morality" (Araya, 2015, p. 7), such as the Chilean one.

3 Motherhood/Maternity Questioned

Image 1 – The photograph illustrates the article “Sename lamenta caso de joven que abortó en su casa con misotrol y reconoce que es algo que ocurre”



Source: La Tercera online (www.latercera.com), May 14, 2014

Image 2 – The photograph depicts a walkout against abortion at the Plaza de la Constitución (Constitution Square) in Santiago, March 23, 2015



Source: www.elmorrocotudo.cl

*The Chilean Catholic Church contributed to organizing several groups of children and teenagers to join the protest. Several Chilean outlets published the photographs from Agencia UNO and from the walkout’s organizers, too.

Image 3 – Photograph by Agencia UNO photograph. “Grupos se manifiestan contra el aborto frente a La Moneda”, May 26, 2015.



Source: Fotos2013.cloud.noticias24.com

Using the images above, decriminalizing abortion, even in very restricted circumstances, would undermine the key role women play in Chilean society, that is, motherhood itself. Indeed, this is a social construction strongly related to the conceptualization of reproduction as the main role of a woman's body. In that sense, all women should respond to a maternal instinct that will drive them to want to reproduce and become pregnant. Thus, a woman, who despite her potential ability of becoming a mother, decides against it and, by doing so, rejects a biological and social mandate, she undermines the social and symbolic foundations of the structure. In other words, there is no free will regarding motherhood because it is a social duty and due to this physicians who perform abortions receive harsher critiques (Araya, 2015, p. 12).

Some of the most repeated images are those depicting pregnant women in their third trimester or late pregnant women (image 1); this was especially true before the open letter from activists that criticized media coverage of abortion that we mentioned above. These photographs tend to not show women's faces. By doing this, it seems that the most important thing is what is inside (*the fruit of the womb*) rather than the woman herself. Indeed, by hiding her face and identity, the image suggests that she is eventually socially ashamed or scared because she did or will do something wrong; she has broken something socially and morally sacred, which is social reproduction.

The first image we included here is considered a documentary photograph, not a journalistic one, because it is thematic. It shows

metonymically not only a late pregnant woman, but a highschooler, wearing her school uniform. Those are the two imaginaries that this photograph triggers: the first one links abortion to an advanced pregnancy and, therefore, abortion would impede a baby – a person – from being born and, the second one, demonstrates a pregnant teenager, that is, an unwanted pregnancy, a “mistake” that could be avoided. In other words, it is not about a woman wishing to interrupt her pregnancy, but a teenager – a minor – that could not make decisions by herself because she would not be able to do so. Thus, other people – adults – should make decisions about her and for her. Abortion would be a decision that somebody else – better suited to make decisions – should make for her and for all women. We will return to this theme later.

Some other repeated images (image 2) are those of boys and girls representing the proof of what abortion is trying to erase or deny. This photograph is also a thematic documentary photograph rather than a journalistic one. The link here is simple: a body's attack – a woman's body – on something sacred – the existence of those boys and girls and childhood in general. This visual reading triggers the idea of taking care and saving the innocence and purity of childhood. It is not the women, but the nation's future under siege.

In particular, this second image shows three children carrying red balloons and signs. It represents life, foremost. Boys and girls in a park, smiling and happy. Boys and girls in nature, free, but also safe. They are here because their mothers did not interrupt their pregnancies or, by default, society did not allow for that to happen. Therefore, it is society's duty to protect them, independent of the will of women. There is, indeed, a higher good to protect, and it is a social duty to do so. Children represent the future, not only metaphorically, but in “reality”. The fact that the device used is photographic in nature gives plausibility to this idea.

Image 3 portrays women as fragile or weak human beings, when reading it romantically, as beings that should be protected even from themselves. The picture illustrates a pro-life public demonstration and it depicts mostly men and one of them holds a sign with red letters that says, “No to abortion”. Men express themselves, provide their opinions, occupy the public space, the streets, symbolically cornering women to the private and domestic space. Men are actually overwhelmingly deciding, writing, and talking about abortion. Indeed, it is not about their bodies, it is about their society, about their potential

sons and daughters; it is about their legacy, in the end. Thus, a legal reform such as the one decriminalizing abortion shakes the foundations of patriarchy even though it recognizes only very specific cases in which abortion could be performed. They are men occupying the public space, the one they have been traditionally and historically dominating, the same one denied to women, their bodies, and their choices.

This photograph is journalistic, portraying a street manifestation in which those men, as fathers, husbands, brothers, must take care of their daughters, wives, and sisters. They must educate them, protect their honor, calm their tempers so they can be docile, good women and, overall, good mothers. The chance that women could eventually decide over themselves broke tradition, taking away men's role as the protector. This reading is consistent with the historical representations of women. In fact, women have embodied sin, weakness, and dirtiness. Because of that, the argument states that women must be purified. Then, women "are classified according to their moral behavior" (Melhuus & Stolen, 2007, p. 37), as "the good woman (the mother) and the bad woman (the whore)" (Nencel, 2007, p. 71). Under that frame, abortion constitutes a symptom of women's sexual liberty and "[...] the bill would be the wrong message to Chilean society" (Palma, Moreno, & Alvarez, 2015, p. 57).

Although the media have gradually reduced the use of late-pregnancy photographs as illustrations for articles covering abortion, these representations are already consecrated into social perceptions and they function even in the stimuli's absence. In other words, images have settled in our memory and have left footprints upon which other images are used. This visual repertoire is socially framed. It belongs to mental schemes that provide a frame to better understand the world and provide a coherent context in which to navigate. Therefore, images provide certainties that are feed by information, experiences, and knowledge of an unlikely nature. Imaginaries are "sense-making matrices in our minds, providing an interpretive system of the world within a specific society" (Randazzo, 2012, p. 82).

In that vein, it is very difficult to not be moved or to not be sympathetic to images of boys and girls. Indeed, images trigger emotions, are subjectively rather than rationally decoded, and are persuasive regarding their trustworthiness because they are very likely to say what we think or feel as real. Images, in particular

photographs, are evidence. In this case, the children are proof of what embryos would be if they are not dismissed. Abortion, in the end, puts the certainty of children's existence on hold. What "is" could have "not been".

Therefore, images organize themselves within different mental schemes by similitude or by difference, which is the basic way in which human beings learn. In that vein, images simplify the world and, they also organize themselves in a comprehensive scheme in a social matrix. Goodness is the opposite of evil; life is good; children are nice; death is a bad thing; abortion equals death; therefore, abortion is evil and so are women that have one. On the contrary, women-mothers are virtuous because they allow life to continue on its path. This practice of endless symbolic reproduction creates a false dichotomy in the social imaginary: the decriminalization of abortion versus babies.

4 Chilean Society's Fears

Image 4 – The photograph illustrates the op-ed piece “Aborto, Libertad de escoger”



Source: Daniel Sánchez, El Morrocotudo online (www.elmorrocotudo.cl), August 10, 2015

Image 5 – This photograph is included in visual material advocating against abortion. It depicts a three-months' embryo. The image has been published several times by different Chilean outlets, both print and online.



A los 3 meses mide 8 cm y pesa unos 25 g.

Source: www.elboyaldia.cl

Image 6 – This photograph has illustrated different articles about walkouts and public protests against abortion. The image has been produced and shared by “pro-life” organizations, such as www.hazteoir.org



Source: www.hazteoir.org

There is another sample of images under this section. In all the cases, there are images grouped under a certain category. In other words, regardless of the nature of the images, their sources, or their features, they are easily recognizable and can be identified under a certain sub-group.

Then, the first of this serie's images (image 4) is a very well-known visual strategy deployed by women advocating for the decriminalizing abortion during walkouts and public marches that have taken place in Chile over the past few years. In this example, the writing on the woman's stomach states, "The state does not make decisions here", claiming her right over her own body. This argument has been historically at the core of feminist movements that advocate for the decriminalization of abortion. Image 4 is a journalistic photograph.

Therefore, images portraying flat stomachs are opposite of the previous set of images of late-pregnant women of the previous section in this article. Still, flat stomachs can also be read as empty wombs, an absence replaced by the writing and the literate or, in other words, by cultural capital. Indeed, the right to education and to vote have been central pieces of women's rights movements, historically and on a global scale. Fighting for schooling and voting for girls and women has mobilized several achievements across fields, such as political, economic, professional, and laboral ones. However, as part of women's struggles over public spaces, the fight over education and its consequences has also been interpreted as undermining family structures. In fact, motherhood postponement or even childlessness in order to pursue other achievements besides a family is one of the symptoms of the fears women's rights struggles trigger. Decreasing birth rates as a consequence also reinforce that social anxiety in Chile, as Araya states: "Abortion as a way for women to control their own reproductive health triggers a social panic that turns into their rejection fueled by traditional morality" (Araya, 2015, p. 12).

This type of image also brings up questions regarding social mobilizations, in particular, walkouts that are linked to a social perception of violence, destruction, and a lack of control. Under that frame, these images trigger both personal and social memories about the climate of conflict during the civic-military dictatorship (1973 – 1990). In other words, this visual environment spawns and invigorates fear, reminding people of the angst cultivated and ingrained in collective experiences during the past decades.

Indeed, social movements, political players, and government representatives avoided conflict as a mechanism to solve differences in the early 1990s, when the political consensus became the political transition's cornerstone (Garretón, 1994; Godoy, 1999; Hite, 2007). At the same time, fear was rebuilt through public discourses that portrayed certain crimes and criminals, especially those involving private property, as the new domestic enemy. This new public enemy replaced left-wing "terrorists" as the main threat to national security, as it was during the dictatorship. Therefore, crime and internal security became two of the top three problems for Chileans and these issues transformed into a threat to the stability and the sense of social safety Chileans had during the 1990s (Guzmán & Ramos, 2000; Salinas, 2008). Mainstream media have contributed to settle and reinforce the frame of crime as a key topic during the Chilean political transition.

Therefore, symbolically and strategically, today's political space of struggle must be the opposite of a violent, "old-fashion", form of solving differences. On the contrary, it must be more "civilized"; that is, conflict should be solved through formal institutions, such as congress. Accordingly, street chaos must be controlled.

So, the flat, illustrated, stomach elicits an image of chaos under which the symbolic and visual aspiration of social commitment in a post-authoritarian time explodes. The literal written message on women's stomachs interpellates the state and lawmakers, but also citizens in general. Indeed, the message ("The state does not make decisions here") visually reinforces the disputed and banned political option about women's right over their own bodies. Then, we go from collective and public outrage and walkouts to a personal discourse and an individual action. This frame could also be understood as an expression of selfish and individualistic women.

There are several fallacious arguments in this particular reading, for sure. One of them, regarding the flat, open stomach, is what Mañalich calls "an upside-down analogy [in which] the relationship between a person and his or her own 'body' could be understood as a link of ownership upon an object [and] a person does not *have* a body, but he or she *is* a body, too" (Mañalich, 2015, p. 26, italics are ours). Nonetheless, the argument is strategically played by both pro-choice and pro-life movements and spokespeople. By doing so, the perspective against decriminalizing abortion is reinforced.

The visual analysis is fueled by association. Therefore, the “encounter” with a text does not occur in a vacuum; it is not a unique or isolated experience. It is quite the opposite. Indeed, “reading” an image requires mobilizing experiences, such as those with other images, other mediums, and other contents. Understanding our environment visually goes along with a daily-based rhythm, within the daily-life flow and, of course, emotions. Making sense of an image is intertwined with a second image and a third one, and in this way, there are certain visual interpretations that are consecrated and considered as “correct” and “appropriate”. As a result of this, the hegemonic visual frame is sedimented.

On the other hand, the image is also simplified, stereotypical, and its interpretation concentrates on a limited number of features and properties – such as a player, a specific phenomenon, or a conflict –, reducing its range of interpretations. There is a simple example that illustrates this mechanism: the experience of reading a book and its film version. So, in reading a novel, the reader imagines the characters combining the book’s description, but also the reader’s previous memories of similar topics or players. On the contrary, if a spectator watches a movie in which the players impersonate the same characters from the book, it is much more difficult to create an image different from the visual narrative framed by the movie. In fact, a visual proposal is stronger than a linguistic one and it tends to replace it.

So, let’s return to this section’s images. Image 5 shows an embryo and its caption states that it corresponds to a three-month embryo with an obvious human-shape. The photo corresponds with an ultrasound examination; that is, an image captured through a technology that allows us to visualize the inside of a womb. In that sense, it is clearly a non-journalistic photograph. The caption states the embryo’s stage of intrauterine development is three months, the most widely accepted legal deadline to interrupt a pregnancy around the world. Abortion means, then, killing something human-like. So, these types of images “represent abortion as infanticide [...]. Although the ultrasound’s goal is to serve medical purposes, it has been turned into a tool for public discourses by “showing” what is being eliminated” (Palma, Moreno, & Alvarez, 2015, p. 44). The image, again, shapes the reading (Fiske, 1984). It is, indeed, exposed as a piece of evidence.

Meanwhile, image 6 portrays a smiling toddler holding a colorful sign saying “we were embryos”. The boy represents the “present” time,

the “right here and right now”, and that he could have not been if an abortion had been performed, ending a “natural” process. The poster’s colors are those of the rainbow, the sun, the light, life. These colors are open to the world, to everybody. The boy is the concrete evidence, the proof of life, and the text involves all of us, as readers, because “we were all embryos”. Anybody could be absent today. Therefore, the photo, the poster, the boy, all of those signs, reinforce the requirement of not making individual decisions, but collective ones, because abortion and its consequences are topics with social implications.

Then, the flat-stomach image is understood in relationship to the other two images. In fact, abortion means something that was present and is currently gone, removed. Image 6 reinforces this interpretation. In other words, what was erased is (was) a child, a boy or a girl, and society must protect him or her. Consequently, it is society’s fault if it fails to protect the child.

In the media, women tend to be overwhelmingly portrayed as victims, as sensitive and delicate and, by doing so, they are considered fragile people. Then, if women are incorporated as sources within journalistic discourses, those discourses are likely to correspond to victims, witnesses, and not holding powerful positions or knowledge. This discursive portrayal has been widely spread and it is quite consecrated in society. Thus, it is easy to link the image of women as victims to the representation of a good woman. When a good woman turns into an evil one, the responsibility tends to be blamed on her environment. In that vein, regarding the public debate about decriminalizing abortion, “the woman is [also] depicted as a victim of her own abortion, a victim of self-inflicted damage” (Palma, Moreno, & Alvarez, 2015, p. 42). Symbolically, her decision is linked to suffering and pain.

To a lesser extent, women are also portrayed as offenders, such as the so-called “La Quintrala” (in reference to a colonial woman who was considered merciless with servants, slaves, and men) or the “Geisha”. Indeed, María del Pilar Pérez López, “la Quintrala”, hired an assassin to kill her ex-husband, his new partner, his mother, and his sister’s family (2011), while Anita Alvarado Muñoz, better known as “the Chilean Geisha”, worked as a professional escort in Japan where she was involved in financial fraud. When she returned to Chile, she became a celebrity figure. Both cases resulted in punishment where the former was declared legally guilty by the court and the latter socially guilty through exclusion. The symbolic lesson was clear in both cases.

Generally speaking, “evil” women are presented with their names and last names and with a nickname, too, highlighting their exceptional nature. There are actually only a few. Regarding abortion, a woman brave enough to share her personal experience is clearly named and, as such, she could eventually be portrayed as “evil” or as a “bad woman”, but she rarely appears on public media like television (Ibañez, 2016). This lack of media representation is because the power of speaking out “is banned for those women who have interrupted their pregnancies because of their personal choices about motherhood, without being forced, abandoned, or helpless” (Palma, Moreno, & Alvarez, 2015, p. 13). A woman who aborts for personal reasons is a situation that goes beyond the restricted circumstances included in the legal reform that, somehow, established the boundaries of what is possible in the public agenda about the voluntary interruption of pregnancy.

The images of feminine bodies (late-pregnancy or flat stomachs) pertain to young women, women that represent sexual activity and who are in their full reproductive cycle. Previous works have demonstrated that the mainstream media simplify and reduce young subjects depicting them as either excessively positive or excessively negative (Antezana, 2007). By doing so, the media position youth in two opposite categories: (1) as an individual subject linked to positive archetypes, mostly related to sports events, and (2) as a collective or social subject associated with negative archetypes and linked to crime. Regarding abortion, visual representations are organized within this same scheme. Although “the link between women, abortion, and dishonor is not new” (Palma, Moreno, & Alvarez, 2015, p. 21), it is necessary to include a new feature: youthfulness.

In summary, images published by the media to illustrate the abortion decriminalization debate highlight some fundamental social anxieties in Chile, like: (a) the reluctance to socially change (Antezana, 2015, p. 36) that is triggered by the complex relationship people have with Chilean contemporary history in which political partisans continues to use conflict as a prohibited way of solving differences; (b) the unsolved tension between the neoliberal economic model and traditional society, where the first one empowers the individual and the latter, the family as the organizing principle of social relations (Araujo & Martuccelli, 2012), and (c) the independent woman’s sexual life as a symbol of emancipation forcing men to rethink their roles. In the end, all these circumstances undermine and stress power.

5 Conclusions

The visual representations about abortion and its decriminalization under three circumstances was carried out by Chilean news media in the digital sphere to maintain and reinforce the hegemonic, patriarchal order dominating the national and social imagination. Under that frame, it is more understandable that common sense about abortion comes from a traditional, Christian, frame that associates abortion with infanticide, despite the public debate and the gender equality achievements that have been achieved in Chile.

The discourses accompanying the visual representations about abortion can vary. They can advocate for the decriminalization of abortion or they can reject it. The text could eventually support women's rights to decide about their motherhood, about their sexual lives, and similar issues. However, images still reinforce traditional interpretations. Although they do not portray late-pregnant women, smiling newborns, or tiny babies' feet anymore, images depicting abortion are those already embedded in mental schemes, reinforced by the media, regardless of their format, and tend to stabilize interpretations about abortion and its implications.

Therefore, visual representations, photographs, and images about abortion nurture memories built through and by the media. These images settle in social memories in the medium – and long-term and are reinforced by different mediums, unlikely formats, and types of gadgets, which could eventually explain resistance to social change. Indeed, a new common sense about abortion will imply a deep transformation of certain cultural features rather ignored in the analysis: the images.

Indeed, images are linked to certain basic and structural assumptions that contribute to making sense of the world and eventually understanding it. In that vein, new images are organized by and under the same old-fashion schemes. Regarding dominant imaginaries, the Catholic Church has been in the vanguard because it understood very early in history how powerful images are to evangelize (Freedberg, 2010), since images mobilize emotion and eliminate distance that a written text can generate.

It is important to point out that the first social training of the human brain is learning to see, to distinguish the figure from the background, and to hierarchically organize visual stimuli (Bozal, 1987). In that way, images are the first thing registered as visual footprints that, later, will be reinforced. Language acquisition, on the other hand, will allow us to

organize those images in a basic structure, like foundations, in a dual way: that is, by similarity and by opposition. Throughout our lifetime, human beings will acquire time, individual experiences, and new knowledge to modify, enrich, and reorganize our primary, visual organization of our environment (Varela, 1998). However, to do so, new stimuli are required.

Thus, there are three “realities” that overlap when “viewing” a photograph: the event photographed, the photographer’s gaze, and the spectator’s interpretation. Each one of these circumstances are uneven and are influenced by the photographer’s and the viewer’s social background, intelligence, sensibility, or unconsciousness (Antezana, 2012).

Among others, the Chilean media’s ecosystem features include a media ownership that is highly concentrated and that lacks pluralism. The lack of diversity regarding interpretive frames and narrow narratives circulating in the public sphere implies that there are just a few cultural and social imaginaries, producing and reproducing themselves in an endless spiral of hegemonic discourses. Under such rough conditions, finding refreshing, new interpretive perspectives, different from the traditional ones, is rather difficult (Pintos, 2005). Therefore, media discourses feed a conventional and conservative public opinion fueled by Christian values that visually translate into “pro-life” arguments: smiling and happy toddlers or violent walkouts. It is a binary frame that does not allow for grey areas.

Given these points, it is possible to suggest courses of action in order to contribute to new forms of understanding and of organizing narratives about abortion in Chile. Indeed, part of that effort should include moving linguistic and rhetorical arguments to the visual field. This is key because the problem is not only journalists, but the lack of alternatives. What images can be used when portraying abortion? (Antezana, 2015b, p. 36). Under these conditions it is necessary: (1) to give new meanings to images and come up with new readings; (2) to offer different images to replace those already in place; (3) to raise awareness about the images’ importance when spreading new concepts and cultural changes; and (4) to better understand changes in the field of visual production, the key role of news wire agencies, and the role photo editors, news editors, and journalists play in choosing images.

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NOTES

- 1 Currently, there are three types of media on the web: 1) Websites that are created from existing media and that replicate the content of their printed versions: for example, LaCuarta.com - Lun.com. 2) Sites created from traditional media but that replicate content from the mother medium as well as create new content for the web: for example, LaTercera.com - 24horas.cl. 3) Finally, there are media that only exist in digital form, such as ElMostrador.cl - ElCiudadano.cl. Our sample was taken from categories two and three.
- 2 Company owned by Amazon.com that provides traffic data and global classifications, among other information for 30 million websites.
- 3 The most important news milestones of the period were: (1) The May 21, 2014 speech made by President Michelle Bachelet, where she calls for the parliamentary discussion about therapeutic abortion; (2) The case of a 13-year-old girl who, in November 2014, presented two of the causes that were presented in the president's speech, these were rape and the unfeasibility of the fetus; (3) On January 31, 2015, President Michelle Bachelet presented the draft of the law on the decriminalization of abortion and sent it to parliament; (4) A complaint that was made in March of that year in the city of Calama, about a 25-year-old woman who would have had an abortion, who was reported to the police by the doctor who saw her; (5) Ignacio Sánchez's (the rector of the Universidad Católica) refusal to perform abortions in the university's clinical network in case of the law's approval; (6) The controversial statements of former Health Minister Helia Molina in which she stated that abortions were performed in high-class clinics; (7) The controversial statements of Deputy Pablo Lorenzini in which he questioned the cause of rape as a reason for the decriminalization of abortion.
- 4 A total of 427 news reports were reviewed, which were subsequently filtered according to the selection criteria until reaching a total of 21 reports.
- 5 *Guagua* is a Chilean word used to refer to a baby.

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