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Mario Álvarez Fuentes & Stephen Coleman

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PERFORMING WHAT IS ABSENT: THE MAKING OF REPRESENTATIVE CLAIMS IN THE 2020 CHILEAN CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Mario Álvarez Fuentes  and Stephen Coleman 

Amid a crisis of political representation, Chile ran an institutional experiment. After a month of riots, looting and human rights violations, in November 2019, the Chilean Parliament proposed the creation of a fully elected convention with the one objective of writing a new Constitution. The 155 members were elected in October 2020 and 62% of them were non-professional politicians but environmental activists, members of indigenous communities or feminist leaders. Inspired by the ideas of representative claim proposed by Saward and performativity coined by Butler, we analysed their inauguration speeches to observe how they attempted to constitute themselves as political representatives. We found that they relied upon four types of speech appeal in their political claims-making. We refer to these as the Agonistic (whereby the claim-maker purported to speak for “us” as opposed to “them”); the Climactic (whereby the claim-maker offered themselves as an embodiment of a historical coming of age for a particular group); the Biographical (the claim-maker focuses upon their personal qualities of identity with empathy towards a group); and the Trustee (whereby, adhering to more conventional rhetoric of representation, a claim-maker sets out their qualification to acknowledge and look after the interests and values of a particular group).

KEYWORDS representative claim; performativity; Chilean convention; performance

Introduction

Rare moments of public contestation about the basic constitution of political power test representation to its limits. Typically, representatives need to arrive at pragmatic compromises with those they claim to represent by appearing to speak for composite aggregations of interests and preferences. But when it comes to establishing (or re-establishing) foundational principles and practices for a polity, deep moral disagreements are likely to be in play and representatives are required to demonstrate not only their commitment to one position but their cultural and biographical right to symbolically embody that position. In short, they must justify that they are fitting vessels for the concerns, fears and longings of the represented.

According to Michael Saward (2006, 301) “representation in politics is at least a two-way street: the represented play a role in choosing representatives, and representatives ‘choose’ their constituents in the sense of portraying them or framing them in particular, contestable ways.” This entails a form of performance in which representatives are

expected to make compelling “claims about themselves and their constituents and the links between the two,” thereby placing an aesthetic burden upon themselves to convince the represented that they are capable of speaking for and as them in their physical absence.

This article focuses upon a specific episode of representative claims-making that took place in Chile as a result of the decision to establish a Convention comprised of elected participants with a view to devising a new constitution. This exercise in popular constitution-making was a pragmatic response to the explosive, but long-simmering protests against government policies that began in October 2019 (Mayol 2012; PNUD 2012). There was widespread popular belief that the still extant 1980 constitution, inaugurated during the brutal Pinochet dictatorship with a fraudulent referendum (Fuentes 2013), was the root of a political culture in which fundamentally unjust policy-making was the norm (Atria 2013). In November 2019, the Chilean Parliament agreed to a referendum asking two questions: should a new Constitution be written? Should this be co-devised by members of Congress and citizens or citizens only? The result of the referendum on 25 October 2020 was for a new constitution to be drafted by an all-citizen convention. It was subsequently agreed that the Convention would be composed equally of men and women, as well as ensuring the representation of native peoples through seventeen reserved seats. As a result, 64% of the elected members were politicians with no experience in institutional politics, but most of them were active leaders of grassroots movements or lay members of political parties. Would-be citizen-representatives found themselves faced with the task of setting out their claims to be the right people to speak for those who could not be physically present in the convention.

The Chilean convention can serve as a study case for other democracies that may experience similar crises (Flinders 2015; Flinders and Hinterleitner 2022; Mauk 2020). The setting of the Chilean crisis consists of elements present in other democracies, such as a history of military dictatorships with a legacy of human rights violations (Atria 2013) or the emergence of social movements from socially excluded groups, such as women, sexual minorities, or indigenous communities (Lamadrid Alvarez and Navarrete 2019). It is also the result of the neoliberal model established after the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, whose individualistic values hinder the construction of collective projects (Álvarez Vallejo 2013; PNUD 2004), demolished institutions of social welfare (Cabezas 2015) and set an institutional framework rendering citizen participation futile (Alvarado E 2015; Contreras, Joignant, and Morales 2016; Varas, Ángel, and Valenzuela 2015). Likewise, it is a case of polarisation and fragmentation where traditional centre parties have lost the strength to independent candidates or marginal parties (Arriagada 2013; Avendaño and Sandoval 2013; De Zárate 2013), along with a widespread perception of elite corruption and distrust in institutions (Cantillana Peña and Morales Quiroga 2008).

Based on an analysis of the opening speeches that were made by the convention members just before the deliberation started, we explore the grounds upon which the constitutional designers claimed the right to represent the interests, values and experiences of others. We proceeded with the objective of observing the empirical manifestation of the theoretical hypothesis underlying the notion of representative claim coined by Michael Saward, that is to say, we aimed to explore the “situated or contextual dynamics of producing relations of representation” (2014, 725) as it occurs on the ground.

We found that citizen-representatives relied upon four types of speech appeal in their political claims-making characterised by actions performed by the use of language. The four modes of appeal are:

- Drawing boundaries between “them” and “us” whereby the claim-maker purports to speak for “us” as opposed to “them”;
- Appeal to history, making the claim that this is a moment of coming of age for a particular group;
- Presenting biography as an argument in which the claim-maker focuses upon their personal qualities rooted in first-hand experience of social problems and empathy towards a particular group;
- Standing as trustee whereby a claim-maker sets out their qualification to acknowledge and look after the interests and values of a particular group.

As in most cases of typological classification, we are not suggesting that these distinctive speech appeals are mutually exclusive. They are theoretical variations within performances of representative claims-making.

In the next section, we engage with Saward’s notion of “the representative claim” in the context of the Chilean constitutional convention. We then outline our method of analysis. This is followed by illustrative accounts of the four modes of speech appeal. We conclude by reflecting upon the Chilean constitutional convention as a moment of profound moral disagreement in which the discursive construction of the represented and the rights of representatives to speak for them became unusually explicit.

Performance and Performativity in the Representative Claim

Saward’s notion of the representative claim challenged Hanna Pitkin’s definition of representation, which, according to Saward, was more concerned with the representative’s pursuit of democratic legitimacy than with the expectations and needs of the represented, which was taken as being “unproblematically given” (2006, 300). Saward argued that Pitkin’s approach had been “influentially limiting, in that it has encouraged theorists to underplay the subtle processes of constructing the represented, or that which needs to be represented.” In calling for political theorists to move away from the concept of political representation as “a factual product given by elections” and conceive it rather as a continuous process of creating representations, Saward (2006, 304) placed new emphasis on the role of performance in persuading all those involved in the representative relationship to accept at real that which is initially offered as an illocutionary plan of reality. Political representation is not external to the representative’s performance but is something generated by the performative enunciation of claims to be representative (2006, 302)

This reflexion, as proposed by Saward, allows us to understand political representation as the result of acts of communication between a leader and a group of people whereby the leader portrays that group according to certain attributes and then presents himself as the one who can best represent them. We can also think of politicians not as speaking for an ontologically given electorate, but as “creative actors” with an ability to constitute what is represented through “the active making (creating, offering) of symbols or images of what is to be represented” (Saward 2006, 301).

Saward’s conceptual contribution gave rise to a “constructivist turn” whereby the act of representation is thought of as being constructed by a circulation of claims that can be accepted or rejected by a constituency (Disch 2015). This approach has certainly enriched the study of representation but has not yet provided a detailed empirical account of the creative activity carried out by would-be political representatives. Such elaboration is

needed if Saward's theory is to have explanatory force at an empirical level. Political researchers have certainly shown how political representation often takes place beyond institutional arrangements (Watts and Chadwick 2020) or even social discourses (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008). The fundamental idea that "the people" is a discursive construction that emerges from political claims has proved to be enriching for the field (Moffitt 2017; Zicman de Barros 2021), moving political theory beyond essentialised materialities (Guasti and Geissel 2019; Meardi, Simms, and Adam 2021). To better deal with this fluidity of what is represented, politicians tend to constitute them through a characterisation of the assumed interests of that group (Celis et al. 2014; Vermassen, Caluwaerts, and Erzeel 2022).

As Saward gives the notion of performance so much centrality, more needs to be said about what this entails. Goffman (1956, 19) famously argued that performance comprises all the activity of an individual that occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and that has some influence upon them. Whilst in performance, actors are compelled to bring about an "idealization," in Goffman's words (1956, 22), a process that takes place when the individual presents themselves to others in a manner that incorporates and exemplifies expected social norms. To achieve an appropriate idealisation actors must dip into what the sociologist Ann Swidler (1986, 273) refers to as a "tool-kit of symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views" that people set in action to solve problems.

Performance generates performativity. Judith Butler elaborates this insight in the context of her reflections on gender and sexuality, dimensions that, according to her, are constituted through the use of language. Like Saward, Butler sees acts of communication as possessing poietic force, bringing into being what they have in mind as reality by pronouncing it as reality. According to Butler (1997, 19), being the receiver of a linguistic address is not

merely to be recognized for what one is, but rather is to be granted the term by which the recognition of one's existence becomes possible. One comes to 'exist' by virtue of this fundamental dependence on the call of the Other.

Butler argues that language possesses agency; that not only do people have the capacity to carry out actions, but language itself is capable of producing illocutionary effects. For her, performativity entails the capacity of language to constitute what is said by the act of its enunciation. For this reason, what is constituted by language has the characteristics of the language that constitutes it. Since language has its own agency, the social actors who use it are reduced to ventriloquists who iterate speech acts that preceded them and can be contingently re-signified (Hall 1999). Performativity consists exactly in this dialectic of iteration and continuous resignification that seeks to constitute ideas, but whose "materialization is never complete" (Jenkins and Finneman 2018, 160). Performativity is a permanent state of becoming, of constituting oneself as such, but not necessarily of being (Geinger, Vandenbroeck, and Roets 2014; Huey and Berndt 2008).

So understood, the notion of representative claim has stimulated an enriching theoretical debate on political representation as a process of mutual construction between representatives and represented by virtue of the use of language (Aiolfi 2022; Hayat 2022; Sorensen 2021). This article offers an empirically grounded contribution to this ongoing debate by observing how the fundamental assumptions of Saward's formulation occur in political speeches. The research question to be answered How do would-be representatives use language to constitute their claims to representative legitimacy? In the next section, we outline the methodological strategy that we adopted in order to approach this question.

A Method for Analysing Claims of Representation

Establishing a Constitutional Convention emerged as an institutional solution for the social unrest that exploded in Santiago de Chile on October 18, 2019, and spread across the country in the next few days. Riots, demonstrations, looting, strikes and human rights violations occurred in every Chilean city for weeks cornering the political system (Rodríguez et al. 2021). On November 15, the most important political parties signed an agreement to organise a referendum so that citizens could decide if they wanted a new Constitution and whether members of the Chilean Parliament should take part in the Convention process. The referendum was held in October 2020 and 78% voted to write a new Constitution and 79% to keep politicians away from the process, thus confirming a long-lasting trend of political disaffection in Chile (Fuentes 2019; PNUD 2004).

The 155 members of the convention were elected in May 2021, with full gender parity and an unprecedented figure of 65% of them being non-professional politicians. Most were leaders of grassroots organisations related to environmental protection, indigenous communities or feminism. The first three months of the convention, from July to September 2021, they focused on elaborating its internal rules. There then followed “opening speeches in which each member could express their diverse visions about ideas, values and principles that should inspire the political constitution” (Convención Constitucional 2021). Each member of the convention had a limit of five minutes to say whatever they wished. This study focuses on these opening speeches. This whole constitution writing process can be regarded as an attempt to reconstruct political representation from scratch within the basic rules of a democratic framework. It shows an experiment to reset the institutional framework but also to renew the political cast so that the Convention members had to start by constituting their political representation.

We began by reading all 155 speeches in order to familiarise ourselves with the material. We realised the unusual breadth of political actors present in this Convention that made this instance a unique place to observe the display of different performances. In order to capture this amplitude we designed a sampling technique based on a study by Mascareño et al. (2022) which used roll-call analysis (Morales-Bader et al. 2023) to sort all the members according to their votes in the Convention. We classified all 155 speeches into 22 groups of seven to pick one from each cluster in successive rounds. We wanted the sample to be distributed across the entire political spectrum, whatever the final number of texts analysed. Figure 1 shows the positioning of the 155 convention members and Figure 2 shows the positioning of our sample, drawing a fairly similar distribution.

The very first stage of the analysis consisted of a qualitative content analysis looking for descriptions of claims that were (a) the representative, (b) the represented and the connection between the two (De Wilde 2013; Vermassen, Caluwaerts, and Erzeel 2022; Zicman de Barros 2021). However, this preliminary analysis resulted in claims becoming too splintered in their apparent purpose. For example, use of statements such as (a) “I speak for,” “son of a worker and a single mother,” “proud offspring of immigrants” (b) “the people,” “the minority,” “our peoples,” “the dispossessed” (c) “we have fought with solidarity,” “I got to know him personally,” “people I know for real” were too disparate and failed to capture the overall thrust of the claim being made. In other words, we discovered elements of the representative claims but not the overall rhetorical relation between them being sought by the claim-makers. Following the principle of reflexive analysis of qualitative approaches (Srivastava and Hopwood 2009), this stage allowed us to narrow down the

THE WHOLE CONVENTION

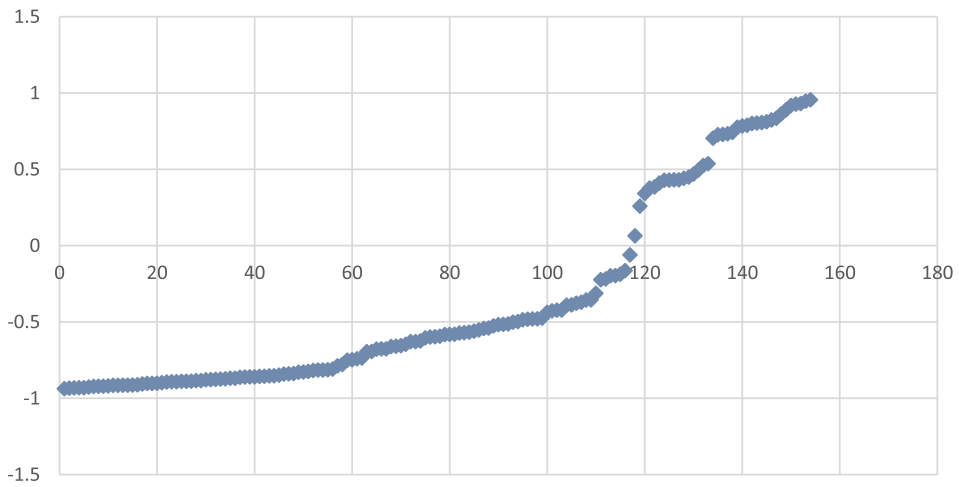


FIGURE 1. Distribution of all Convention members according to their vote (Mascareño et al. 2022).

THE SELECTED SAMPLE

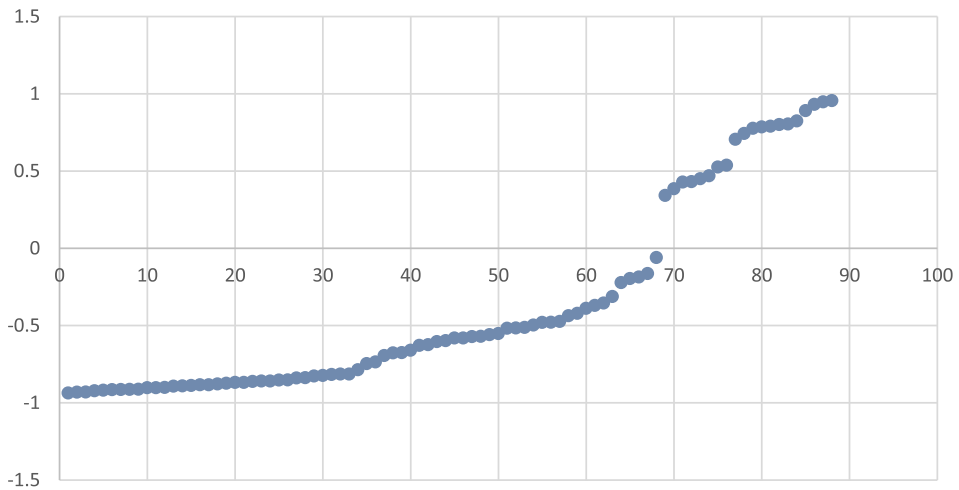


FIGURE 2. Distribution of the 88 Convention members included in our sample according to their vote.

focus of our search. Our original question mutated from *How do would-be representatives use language to constitute their claims to representative legitimacy?* into *How do convention members use language to constitute relationships among elements of their representative claims?*

With this new research question in mind, the coding strategy now focused on places where the claim-makers drew relations among elements. By reading back and forth across data while discarding initial categories and grouping and regrouping elements, we obtained the first two well-differentiated themes after reading the first 23 speeches. Then, we moved back to the first speech of the sample to track down the presence of these two themes with more depth. We did the same with the third theme, which consolidated after 36 speeches, and the fourth theme, which was clear after reading 51 texts. After that, no new theme emerged, but we continued up to 88 to secure an even number of four speeches taken from each cluster. The whole process was conducted manually assisted by the software Nvivo.

The four categories were interpreted as modes of speech appeal intended to perform the illocutionary effect of constituting relationships. That is to say, our reading of the speech texts was informed by the concepts of performance and performativity as discussed in the previous section. We sought to unveil the speech appeals made by speakers with a view to showing how they performed their representative claim to speak for and as the represented. The four distinctive categories were consistently present across the sample, although some speeches contained elements of all the categories, while in others there were fewer of them.

Results: The Representative Claim in Four Acts

We set out to demonstrate how the construction of speech appeals through linguistic art amounted to a construction of political representation. As we mentioned in the previous section, categories are differentiated according to the elements related by the speaker. Even though the next subsections present them in an incremental order, starting with two elements put together up to four elements, they do not appear this way in the speeches. Each speaker strung together appeals in different orders, but our main interest was in the sewing together of persuasive claims resting upon overriding appeals. This section presents the results emerging out of our analysis including illustrative quotations to help readers who are not familiar with the studied case.

Drawing Boundaries Between Them and Us

Building an “us” and a “them” as two categorically different groups is consubstantial to politics. Several convention members focused on the performance of this act of drawing boundaries between two imagined communities by employing an array of linguistic strategies. In some cases, the nature of “them” is implicitly suggested. Here, speakers construct a relationship between two groups, and the nature of that relation and the distance between them can be of different sorts. Aurora Delgado, a leftist activist and public health worker, said “we were told that prosperity would emanate from tearing apart the land, air, and sea; from competing among peers to stop being so and deny otherness and the periphery, as if otherness and the periphery were not the majority.” She never reveals who told people to live this way but implies through her reference to the periphery and a majority that the message had emanated from a minority at the national centre. Elisa Giustinianovich, a far left activist positions herself “from this sidewalk and from this stage” as being present in order “to praise the ancestral struggles of those who have carried on their

backs and have paid with their lives the costs of a colonial, patriarchal, capitalist, classist, adult—centric and anthropocentric elite.” The metaphor of the sidewalk invokes again the notion of the majority—us—being side-lined to the periphery while elites—them—to which she refers occupy the central space.

As mentioned earlier, the Constitutional Convention emerged as an institutional response to a massive social outburst materialised in weeks of looting, riot, arson attacks on public and private property and confrontation with the police and armed forces. Convention members from right and far right positions used their appreciation of political violence to constitute a law-abiding “us” in contradistinction to an anarchistic “them.” Bárbara Rebolledo, a conservative former television host, told the story of a meeting with her voters.

People asked me not to give up, never to give up, for they affirmed their confidence and the hopes they have for us to be able to make a change for the better—a peaceful change, but without violence—without stirring violence.

The nuance use of the qualification “but” was present in other speeches as well, seeking to mark a linguistic boundary between a pacific “us” and a brutal “them.” Some speakers employed this nuanced qualification in expressing support for economic growth, *but* with respect for the environment, while others called for environmental protection, *but* with economic growth. The linguistic ordering of these dichotomies and caveats served to substantiate binary distinctions between representable “us” and recalcitrant “them” groups.

As previously mentioned, performativity, in Judith Butler’s conception (1997), suggests that what is constituted by language inherits the characteristics of the language that constitutes it. The analysed speeches reveal not only the formation of alterity but also that the language employed in this process frames the actions of the other as fundamentally antagonistic. Some speakers sought to constitute an imagined “us” by claiming higher moral ground for the people they represented than for an implied “them.” César Valenzuela, a lawyer and member of the Socialist Party, said in his speech that “we cannot commit the same barbarity as those who violently imposed the Constitution. We must create a Constitution that does not hold back the development of other political projects.” For him, right-wing politicians who defended Augusto Pinochet’s constitutional legacy supported a barbarity, from whom distance moral must be clearly established. On the opposite side, the far right lawyer, Carol Bown, refused to accept the moral categories used by leftists against her “us”: the traditional elite. She stated that.

Many here have said that some of us have had more opportunities. At times it seems that we should apologise for being born where we were born (...) their speeches seemed like a championship of who has suffered the most.

She went on to argue that those in the Convention who are complaining against inequalities are proof that “it is possible to get ahead; that not everything in Chile has been so bad; that there are opportunities—that you can, of course, you can.” The aspiring representative establishes a locus of enunciation, as well as a perspective towards the other, and each resource drawn from the tool-kit of symbols and strategies (Swidler 1986) forms a stained glass window meant to colour the actions of the constituted alterity. For example, the far right activist, Teresa Marinovic, contested the leftists’ claim to higher moral ground and asked them to “stop pretending that the difference between the good

and the bad is given by opinions declared from an armchair with a whiskey in your hand." In employing such rhetoric, she was attempting to create a distinction between the unworthy "them" whose bleating against inequality was hypocritical and a more honestly motivated "us." For Marinovic, leftist Convention members cannot claim to represent impoverished Chileans until "the day you compete with illegals for a place in nurseries (...); the day your neighbourhoods are cram-full of foreigners, some of them violent." If the audience were to accept the linguistic repertoires these politicians use to describe themselves and the other, they would have no choice but to perceive that alterity's actions as those of an enemy (Del Valle Rojas 2021).

Bringing a Group to Historical Presence

Several speakers attempted to rhetorically present the Constitutional Convention as a climactic moment in which the inclusion or exclusion of the people they claimed to represent was at stake. It was, in this sense, a moment of historical reckoning; a political catharsis in the making. In this category, speakers relate the convention with the larger historical context. In doing so, the time span of that context and the political actors that were—or will be—present or absent became a contentious matter. Generally speaking, leftists claimed that they were standing for a historically excluded constituency. Chile's institutional arrangements had been based on radical exclusions and the Convention was the moment to change that once and for all. On the other hand, other speakers expressed fears that certain groups within Chilean society were in danger of being excluded from the future constitutional arrangement. These fears were direct responses to the composition of the Convention. The parties that ruled the country after Pinochet, including the centre-left, made up roughly one-third of the convention members so that newcomer political forces were technically capable of out-voting them in the drafting of the new Constitution.

César Valenzuela asked, "who would have thought that a child from a poor district, son of a worker and a single mother, would be drafting the proposal to provide us with a new political Constitution of the Republic?" This led him to assert that "this convention is the most representative and democratic institution in the history of Chile." Elisa Loncon, a linguistic scholar and a centre-left representative of Mapuche, the bigger indigenous people in Chile, gave her speech in Mapudungun, her native language, dressed in traditional attire. She asked:

Have you seen the sculptures supporting the lanterns in the gardens of this building? They are figures of women, indigenous, Afro-descendants, everything but white men. Of course, elite men don't hold lanterns, elite men should be in here making the decisions. And so it was for centuries. Within these walls, the great men built the country in their image and likeness. We have good news, those of us who previously only had to hold the lanterns, today we can illuminate the future of Chile

Loncon was here performing a speech appeal for the inclusion of the long-excluded theme that was particularly relevant to indigenous communities. Loncon and others aimed to embody the collective "us" entering the Convention by implying that "My presence is our presence." This represents an attempt at what Alexander (2004) refers to as fusion, arguing that a successful performance is one where the social actor, in this case, the politician, becomes indistinguishable from their audience. They use language with the intent of

becoming the walking, living representation (Rauer 2006) of a group and their experiences of inclusion/exclusion (Goodman 2006). Felix Galleguillos, claiming to speak for the Atacameño people, presented himself as the “voice of 13,000 years of history. Today I will be the voice of my ancestors, of the territory, of those who were never heard, of those persecuted and murdered, of those whose official history was made totally invisible.” Similar speeches were performed by representatives of feminist organisations, for example, by repeating the slogan “never again without us,” to summarise the history of political exclusion of women.

My Biography as an Argument

While the two previous categories refer to groups that speakers are claiming to represent, this one has more to do with the speakers themselves. It resembles the Aristotelian rhetorical appeal of *ethos*. These speakers refer to their personal biographies as paths to authentically experiential knowledge. Several convention members narrated moments of intense emotional awakening which led them to personally appreciate the nature of socio-political reality. This is the moment when speakers relate themselves with the groups described in the first theme and the historical context that appeared in the second one.

Alex Caiguán, a rural schoolteacher in one of the poorest areas of Chile and the farthest left member of the Convention, occupied one of the reserved seats for the Mapuche community. His entire speech comprised a first-person narrative in which he placed himself as a personal symbol of the indigenous peoples in Chile and other countries.

I bring with me the experience of a life of sacrifice, together with my family, who, because we were dispossessed of our land, since we were children, we migrated to the city (...) we were forced to live in overcrowded places, just like thousands who live in these conditions today.

Carolina Vilches came from a region where severe drought and over-exploitation by big agriculture companies have left people with no access to clean water. Her speech narrated the solidarity they had to create to cope with this situation, in particular amongst the women. In doing so, she turned her personal biography into a path to political awareness:

We have cried dry tears of outrage. This (neoliberal) model has meant overexploitation, pollution and environmental suffering, as well as the blatant and unpunished theft of water (...) A situation we have battled with solidarity campaigns and *mingas* (working together) for water in Petorca, and this way we will be able to menstruate with dignity, be able to wash clothes, be able to bathe

Vilches' speech illustrates the case of someone who is a direct victim of a devastating social problem. In these excerpts, politicians continue to seek unity with their audience, but find it crucial to substantiate their statements with evidence. As Goffman (1956, 23) suggests, “when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values.” For this “idealisation” to occur, as Goffman calls it, the social actor must demonstrate “consistency” in their actions (1956, 26); otherwise, the audience may perceive the performance as false. Our reading is that biographical aspects add consistency to support the idealisation of the performance.

The required consistency can be sustained by personal experiences as victims, political militancy or a professional career that constitutes themselves as direct witnesses of the suffering of the “us” they claim to represent. Gaspar Dominguez worked as a doctor in general practice in Palena, a small town in the Chilean Patagonia located 400 kilometres/240 miles away from a hospital, which can only be reached by aeroplane. He narrated the story of a child he treated as part of the Healthy Child programme.

When the child needed urgent treatment (...) in conditions of absolute precariousness of supplies and equipment, my good grades were useless. The plane is not an easy resource to get. He left us in our arms. Centralism kills. I don't say it as a catchphrase, I say it because of people I know for real.

Politicians craft narratives about themselves that aim to showcase their enduring and steadfast commitment to the values important to a particular group. As previously mentioned, performativity is a state of becoming rather than being (Geinger, Vandebroek, and Roets 2014; Huey and Berndt 2008), which explains the emphasis on providing evidence. Politicians seem to recognise that these speeches are merely illocutionary acts, which do not ensure the perlocutionary effect of constituting representation. Therefore, they strive to prevent the audience from perceiving any discrepancy in the role they are attempting to perform (Goffman 1956, 87).

Offering Myself as a Trustee

Members of the Convention repeatedly invoked other people they had met while walking the path of knowledge explained in the previous category. These persons, however, are not only mentioned as part of a story but are presented as inspiring role models for the ideas, principles and values that they espoused at the Convention. In this sense, speakers attempted to constitute themselves as trustees of these other people's experiences. These represented others might be parents, colleagues, peers or comrades, all of them characterised by having left a mark upon them and thereby moulding their representative impulses. So far, the speakers have suggested relations between groups, the convention and the historical context and between themselves and the “us” they claim to have had a first-hand experience with. In this theme, they offer themselves as the living materialisation of all the relations: convention, history, ourselves, and myself. In doing so, they suggest that their “front-stage performance” will be consistent with the back-stage activities they will conduct in the deliberations which started days after the speeches were pronounced. The relevance of the front stage and the back stage is present in Erving Goffman's studies on how personal presentation changes from public roles to behind-the-scenes interactions (1956, 74). Thus, while acknowledging the distinction between frontstage and backstage, politicians assert that their character and actions will remain consistent throughout the transition.

The right-wing Convention member and former leader of small businesses in the hospitality sector, Maria Angélica Tepper, mentioned her parents as a source of such inspiration:

I am the proud offspring of German immigrants who arrived in La Araucanía in 1885 to contribute to the development of Temuco and the whole region. Always ensuring good coexistence and respect for the Mapuche people, for the nature of our region.

These values and customs that were instilled in me since I was little I continue to practice day by day.

Alondra Carrillo, a feminist activist and former leader of the university student union, cited historic struggles for women's rights. Using metaphor of "voice" to constitute herself as a living echo of women's historic struggles, she stated that "Our voice is the result of the rebellious women workers of the *pampas* (desert), who were the first to declare themselves feminists in our country at the beginning of the twentieth century." The farthest right member of the Convention, the lawyer Constanza Hube, referred to the arson attacks against farmers by politically violent activists sent by organisations fighting for the restitution of land claimed by Mapuche communities in the south of Chile. Hube claimed to speak for those who were the direct victims of this violence, condemning the perpetrators as if they had committed a personal assault against her. In her speech, she spoke of having met with a victim of that violence:

Héctor, a farmer who lives in Ercilla, father of two children aged 12 and 14. In Héctor's house, where I got to know him personally, there are more bulletproof vests on the table, on the chairs in his dining room, than plates on the table. Héctor has been shot seven times, seven times to date at his home, with his children inside. Héctor told me that he lives in fear; fear of permanently losing his job, fear of losing his life and that of his family.

Hube claimed that people like Héctor were absent from the Convention and went on to present herself as the one who would fight to change that situation: "I will defend with all my might a Constitution that puts the human person at the centre (...) Only this way will we ensure that Héctor and Karen's children live in a fair, prosperous and happy country."

Politicians stress personal integrity to reassure constituents that their actions will match their promises, avoiding any sense of betrayal during the debates that were about to start. Following Hanna Pitkin (1967, 115), politicians are promising that they will perform substantive representation, that is to say, in their backstage activity they will act to look after the interests of the represented.

In these ways, Convention members used other people's experiences as vicarious foundations for making the absent present. Carolina Vilches, a feminist and environmental activist mentioned the story of her mother as inspiration.

I take this exciting opportunity to greet and thank my mother, Mónica Fuenzalida Peña, a woman, a survivor of sexist violence, the same one that has been practiced for so long as one of the most recurrent human rights violations in the world. To you, humble and hard-working mother, to you and to all the mothers who do the work of caring for others, thank you. We are here to represent our voices.

César Uribe stated that

I'm here for Pedro Lican, my five-month-old son who was born in San Fabián, at home, in a respected delivery. Surrounded by the affections of his family, his aunts who guided and protected his brave mother, so that he could come to this world and thus begin his earthly life with love and nature. I am for all children like Pedro, so that it does not matter where they are born or you live, so that this is not a determining factor in its future.

Carolina's mother and Pedro's son are presented as expressions of a collectively experienced past that must be recognised before it can be changed. The speakers appoint themselves as the conduits of recognition; the symbols of a trustee duty.

Conclusion

We have examined a series of representative claims made in the opening speeches of the Chilean Constitutional Convention of October 2021. In this unusual political context, where traditional political intermediaries and cultural symbols were largely absent, these claims had to be made explicit. While focused on Chile, our study may benefit other instances where citizens express political disaffection as that exemplifies how neoliberal reforms drive social groups to demand political inclusion.

Our empirical analysis points to the themes that underlay the rhetorical construction of their representative claims. The four categories we have outlined do correspond to the main elements of the representative claim as theorised by Michael Saward, but they also add others that need to be included in future analyses. As per Saward, a representative claim basically consists of what representatives say about their constituents, themselves and the link between the two. Speakers in the Chilean convention offered descriptions about their addressees, but we have learned in this study that it seems rather difficult, if not impossible, to delineate an *us* without reference to a *them*. The interplay between these two collectives can take different forms, but what is clear is that representative claims typically include the constitution of an otherness as part of the constitution of the *us*.

We have also observed that representatives; descriptions of themselves and the link they claim with the collective they aim to represent tend to be categorically indistinguishable. Would-be representatives describe their own lived pathways as the story of how this link has been formed. Either as activists, victims or professionals, they describe their lives as a first-hand experience through which they are linked to the sorrows of the *us*. As grandiloquent as it sounds, would-be representatives examined in this article described acting for their constituency in the Convention as a process of giving up their own individuality (or merging it) in order to stand for the *us*.

An element that is not mentioned in Saward's original account of the representative claim, but emerges in our analysis, is the notion of representation as a historically climactic. By describing the Convention as a moment where the country's political destiny will change once and for all, speakers were bringing about a sense of context that should be included in the future analysis of the representative claim. Paraphrasing Saward's formulation, the context does not exist as something ontologically given but is a matter of debate and contestation. Are the injustices against indigenous peoples to be traced back to the arrival of the Spanish Empire in 1492 or the agrarian reform in the 60's or the arrival of big international mining companies in the 80's? The very definition of this contextual framework will confirm or deny the significance of any attempt to perform a representative claim.

We reflect that these claims were based upon strikingly moral categories. When Saward (2006, 301) refers to "claims about themselves and their constituents and the links between the two" he does not sufficiently emphasise the moral nature of this linkage. While the claimed descriptions of the represented and representative are politically contrived, the link that binds them tends to be based upon deep moral resonances that transcend conventional political discourse. These moral categories appeal to visceral experience. They frame political communication in ways that can easily be overlooked but become

apparent in moments like the Chilean Constitutional Convention in which representative claims-making is from scratch, so to speak. One conclusion from our study is to suggest that political communication scholars attend more closely to the production of moral linkage—“fusion” in Alexander’s (2004) terms—upon which representative claims depend.

In the interest of historical accuracy, we should note of course that, while the Convention started the constitution-drafting process on 4 July 2021 and delivered a proposal after a year to be voted on in a referendum, the new constitution was rejected by the Chilean citizens, for reasons beyond the scope of this article.

The emphasis on opening speeches and reliance on Michael Saward’s framework are both limitations of this study and areas for refinement. Future research could expand the framework by incorporating the interplay between “us” and “them” and the moral nature of representative claims. A longitudinal analysis of the entire constitutional process, including the eventual rejection of the new constitution, would offer a more comprehensive understanding. Given that references to popular culture were important in the composition of representative claims, comparative studies across different countries could identify universal and idiosyncratic aspects of these claims. Additionally, understanding the reception of these claims by the citizen-audience is necessary to comprehend the full life cycle of a representative claim. We argue that the process remains a fascinating case for observing how political representation constitutes itself.

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ORCID

Mario Álvarez Fuentes  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1825-9868>

Stephen Coleman  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9571-4759>

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Mario Álvarez Fuentes (corresponding author) is a researcher in Political Communication in Núcleo en Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, Universidad de La Frontera, Temuco, Chile. E-mail: mario.alvarez@ufrontera.cl

Stephen Coleman is a professor of Political Communication in the School of Media and Communication, University of Leeds, UK.